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ABSTRACT

International research has consistently found that good school-parent relationships benefit children, staff and parents. The real involvement and participation of families, staff and communities helps programs to set appropriate standards, function effectively and adjust to local conditions and needs as they improve their attention to young children. The result of this project, which looked at people’s understanding of “effective collaboration,” is the development of a guide on effective parent-school collaboration.

This work made use of extensive interviews, observations, and focus group discussions to understand parent-school collaborative activities as well as prescribing through a cooperative action what makes for effective collaboration. The findings show that despite being excluded in curriculum issues, parents have a lot to offer in their contexts, as reflected in the two communities in which the investigations were carried out.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Working together in a cooperative endeavour results in positive outcomes toward meeting communities’ needs and goals in early childhood care and education. Cooperation involves people coming together through a shared vision and mutual respect for one another in a group action that addresses their needs. Against these backdrops, many communities now embrace collaboration, knowing that effective collaboration will help weed out the blight of poverty, childhood diseases, poor infrastructure and non-contextual programs for children.

However, working together also requires developing protocols which help to realize the set goals. Evidence shows that when school staff and parents interact on a regular basis around specific activities, mutual fears and reservations are transformed by positive results (Groak & McCall, 1996, in Pianta et al., 2001). Most achievements of the future will demand that historically adversarial relations be replaced by harmonious ones. In light of the above, this project was undertaken in two phases: first, finding out what people think “effective collaboration” means and second, developing a guide to help them achieve effective collaboration in their own contexts.

Project Statement

This project is aimed at understanding what people think effective collaboration means and developing a guide on collaborative activities between parents and schools in support of early childhood programs. The essential idea is to help equip, educate and encourage parents and school staff regarding practices which are both affordable and culturally appropriate in addressing the developmental needs of children, especially those
from rural and poor families. The project addresses the indices of holistic development of children within their eco-cultural context. It will encourage the participation of parents and schools in all phases of the design, implementation, development and delivery of a training manual on effective and affordable ECD programming.

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and Participatory Learning Action (PLA) were used as methods for development and delivery. These approaches help parents and schools discover, learn and agree on effective collaborative actions through the use of affordable, low-cost, formal and non-formal community-based approaches to care, development, stimulation and education of children less than five years of age. To make this project culturally relevant, communities’ existing ECD-supportive cultural strengths were harnessed through PRA. The process involves community members experienced in indigenous knowledge as well as teachers who take care of children at school. This helps to build on local cultures which can then inform the curriculum, learning materials, learning/teaching process and program structure for school and home, since local knowledge can serve as a curricular resource for appropriate materials, as a resource for creating accessible and culturally relevant messages, and as a basis for combining familiar habits with new technical knowledge.

It is expected that this project will bring about increased partnerships in collaborative activities between parents and schools because of the activities they were involved in during the design, development and delivery of this project. Furthermore, it is expected that this project may help to regenerate traditional childrearing practices which have been neglected as a result of urbanization and promote the inclusion of parents in the design and delivery of ECD programs.
Project Objectives

Project objectives include:

- Development of a culturally relevant ECD guide for effective parent-staff collaboration in communities.
- Encouragement of the provision of learning materials and supplies from local raw materials.
- Encouragement of partnerships and the ownership of programs between community and school, thereby mobilizing community support and involvement.
- Identification and harnessing of favourable cultural childrearing practices within the communities.
- Education of parents and teachers on the need for improved service delivery.
- Introduction and promotion of parent and teacher education.
- Education of parents and teachers on the need for healthy nutrition and the value of harnessing local food materials needed for children’s development.
- Elimination of gender biases, which are inimical to all gender groups.
- Encouragement of the realization that the early years of the child are a very important stage of development, thereby assuring a return on investment in later years.
- Emphasis of the importance of protecting children through culturally appropriate services, by attending to maternal and child health, by providing appropriate early childhood education, and by making high-quality childcare available.
• Restatement of the family’s role in nurturing young children.

Project Rationale

Woodhead (1996) contends that programs of early childhood care and education are part of the process of change, serving in varying degrees as cause, catalyst, antidote and remedy in any given context. Colleta and Reinhold (1997) recognise that the needs of young children and their families are diverse because of the variety of social and cultural contexts across communities and regions. Since schools and families are important units of society economically, socially and culturally, this project will help to address some inadequacies through the collaborative activities of parents and schools in service delivery on ECD.

This project is undertaken with the recognition that ECD programs in Nigeria and particularly in Imo State tend to ignore parents’ roles and responsibilities in providing instructions and activities aimed at holistic child development, despite parents’ primary role in the care, socialization and education of their children, as revealed by a study of effective partnership through improved PTA participation in 200 schools in Imo State (Ibetoh, 2002). That study revealed that only one in every 20 schools had a functional PTA. The schools in most cases have failed to properly integrate parental participation into the management and delivery of ECD programs, thereby creating a vacuum for parent’s partnership roles on ECD delivery.

In Nigeria the traditional mode of living in the society is the togetherness of family members and the whole community collectively bringing up the child to the age of maturity, hence this project, which is intended to reinforce collaborative parent-school
activities on ECD delivery to address the holistic development of the child through the
tips provided in the guide.

Myers (1993) contends that the basic needs of children’s development go beyond
protection, food and healthcare to include the need for affection interaction and play in a
supportive environment in which the family and school are central. ECD programs
should have an integrated, holistic approach within a rights-based perspective to ensure
proper childcare leading not only to survival, but to maximum development and
protection of the child in his or her eco-cultural setting with regards to physical, mental,
nutritional and psychosocial development (Amang & Bassey, 2001; Colleta & Reinhold,
1997). The fact that there are unique strengths in each culture makes this project a useful
endeavour to improve the situation of children and their families through understanding
what they think effective collaboration means and developing a guide for collaboration so
that culturally relevant and affordable ECD programs may be created.

A UNICEF (2002) study in Nigeria showed an Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) of
114/1000 births, an Under Five Mortality Rate (U5MR) of 187/1000. Under Five
nutrition indices reveal that 34 percent of children are stunted, 16 percent wasted, and 31
percent underweight, with malaria and dysentery accounting for about 700,000 and
500,000 infant deaths respectively per annum. These indicators do not reflect a good
level on ECD bearing in mind that communities’ actions through a cooperative endeavour
can help to address these risk situation of children in any given environment (Amar,
1996). Timyan (1998) observes that there are associated parameters which, taken
together, can be effectively used to predict the environment in which the high-risk child
might be found. These include low per-capita income, unequal income distribution, low
literacy rates, high infant mortality rates, low parental educational levels and high maternal mortality ratio, among others (p.5). Although these issues remain a challenge, as observed at Obi Orodo Community, they may be addressed in this project by providing useful training and information from collaborative action of schools and families.

Reflecting cultural values, the best ECD programs are deeply rooted within families and communities’, blending what is known about the best environment for optimal child development with an understanding of traditional childrearing practices (Berk, 1999, p.117). Quality ECD is the key to a full and productive life for a child and progress for a nation. Healthy children are basic to a country’s development. Hunger, disease and ignorance have never been the foundation for sustained economic growth. Giving children a good start in life helps weed out these blights choking human development (UNICEF, 2001). ECD programs have saved millions of lives and improved millions more; hence there is a need for a planned program of action through collaborative parent-school activities aimed at improving ECD delivery. There is little dispute that early health and nutrition in a child’s life or in the life of the mother make a significant difference in a child’s long-term survival, growth and development.

Therefore, this project aims at providing a good information guide to equip parents and caregivers to improve the quality of care delivery at minimal cost through collaborative action. Moreover, since my study of 200 schools in Imo State in 2002 revealed that 80 percent of children aged 2-5 years lack access to formal care due to poverty or to the fact that parents may be ignorant or uneducated to the needs of children, this guide is expected to foster parents’ inclusion through its recommendations in planning, management and provision of sustainable culturally relevant ECD programs for
children aged 0-5 years. It will also help provide necessary information about material
development and safe home and school practices in communities.

Prior to the commencement of this project, previous work undertaken in one of
the communities had helped create a partnership association of class teachers and parents
which looked at valuable traditional ECD and practices in relation to existing school
curriculum from which acceptable amalgamation was achieved and agreed upon.

Furthermore, as an educationist and Chief Monitoring Officer in Imo State
Primary Education Board, it is my duty to ensure the implementation of ECD programs
using a holistic approach.

A situation and policy analysis of basic education data in 1993 showed
deficiencies in the quality of most pre-primary facilities (Government of
Nigeria/UNICEF/UNESCO, 1993). For example, although the government has provided
guidelines for the establishment, organization, delivery and management of pre-primary
care centres, only 15 percent of the centres sampled apply those guidelines. Parents in
most cases were excluded from the design of most program delivery despite their primary
role in the holistic development of the child.

The project is also pertinent because my work responsibilities include reflecting
on ECD programs and finding ways to improve the quality of programs and
infrastructure. Therefore, the cooperative development and delivery approach utilized in
this project will be of immense benefit to ECD programming in Imo State in particular
and Nigeria in general. Moreover, the need to harness local materials which otherwise
would have been wasted is a motivation towards this project.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Contextual Voices in Support of Parent-School Collaborative Partnership

Many researchers have advocated that effective parent-school collaboration is key in addressing the issues of care, development and socialization of the child bearing in mind such benefits it holds for children and communities (Cochran 1988; Cook, 1993; Jette, 1993; Riggan & Kemble, 1994). Bronfenbrenner’s (1989 in Berk, 1999) ecological systems theory supports the idea of collaboration, recognizing the influence of nature and nurture in human development. It is believed that conditions under which individuals live have powerful influences on their future development. Vygotsky’s (1987, in Berk, 1999) sociocultural theories, which describe how culture – the values, beliefs, customs and skills of a social group – is transmitted to the next generation, conclude that the culture of a society in which home (parents) and school (teachers and caregivers) are primary remains an important influence. Berk (1999) argued that in power and breadth of influence, no context equals the family. She points out that schools (Bronfenbrenner’s mesosystem level) are formal institutions designed to transmit knowledge and skills that children need to become productive adult members of their society. While the home (Bronfenbrenner’s microsystem level) is the pedestal for future development, schools are complex social systems bringing together a wide variety of factors that affect many aspects of development. The invaluable roles played by both parents and schools in the development of the child makes a case for collaborations or partnerships between them. Arguments in support of collaboration recognize that engaging local people and reflecting on local traditions puts the most basic elements of children’s socialization to work for ECD (Colleta & Reinhold, 1997), as local cultures can inform the development
of care, curriculum, learning materials, teaching learning/teaching processes and program structure when harnessed by schools and parents (Cochran, 1988).

The need for collaboration that is culturally grounded and meets the needs of children and people in the program has been demonstrated through the Generative Curriculum Model (Ball & Pence, 1999; Ball & Pence, 2000; Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999). The Generative Curriculum Model (GCM) is an approach Ball & Pence (2000) applied in partnership programs with seven Canadian aboriginal communities in elaborating curricular for training early childhood educators. The model allowed tribal Elders harness indigenous experiences considered culturally relevant to early childhood care and development in their context alongside mainstream research and theories about child development and care. This approach allowed communities’ construct of childhood and care, and mainstream research and theories to form the basis of curricular for training.

Arnold (1998, in Evans, Myers & Ilfeld, 2000), regarding non-cultural programs designed outside contextual collaborations, argues that:

. . . the plethora of parent education programs developed around the world have tended to disregard parents’ and caregivers’ knowledge and achievements and use a deficit model. The need is for dialogue and processes which respect different views and allow different voices to be heard while valuing diversity and with an openness to creating new knowledge and new ideas. The challenge is to find the right balance. On the other hand, to recognize, respect and build on existing strengths and traditions; to build confidence; to offer opportunities to share experiences and generate solutions – while at the same time acknowledging and
respecting the need for access to information, building understanding of fundamental principles for effective support of children’s development, and addressing the fact that sometimes, these fundamental principles are in conflict with dominant ideas (p. 37).

Myers (1993) in further recognition of the exclusion of parents and the development of non-culturally relevant approaches in program as a result of non-collaboration, notes: “If one had to guess, the guess would be that early childhood programs are more often taking their cues from imported models that reinforce a value shift towards the individualistic, production-oriented cultures of the West. Is that what we want to be” (p. 19)? Myers (1993) argues that in ECD, parents should play equal if not more important roles than teachers.

Woodhead (1996) advocates strengthening existing community programs and contextualizing child care and early childhood education, analyzing parents’ exclusion from program planning this way: “Vast numbers of children, families and communities are caught between the relative stability of tradition and the promise of modernity. Intergenerational continuities are breaking down in the face of rapid social change” (p. 13). Woodhead’s (1996) argument in favour of contextually and culturally relevant programs with parents included in their provision is consistent with Arnold (1998, in Evans et al., 2000) who writes:

Worldwide there is an emphasis on ensuring that Early Childhood Development programs are firmly family- and community-based. The stress on the importance of the family is hardly surprising if we consider a few simple questions. For example, who knows the child best? Where is the young child most of the time?
For whom is it important that the child develops well? Children learn who they are and what life is all about from the people they are with. For the vast majority of children, it is the family, in its many and varied forms, which is the most important influence on the child’s perception of self and others (p. 85).

It is believed that children reproduce the culture of their primary caregivers and peers in the earliest years, during which time caregivers and teachers are continuously engaged in the perpetuation and modification of their own culture of origin through modeling, encouragement and direct instruction of particular response styles, forms of interaction, ways of understanding events and enactment of implicit beliefs (Cole, 1985, Greenfield, 1994 and Rogoff, 1990, all cited in Ball & Pence, 1999). Against this backdrop are favoured arguments that programs be culturally grounded, which to a great extent can be achieved only through collaborations with parents and schools. The argument for culturally grounded programs is further favoured by the observation that traditional African childrearing practices have undergone some changes due to a number of factors such as Christianity, schooling, Westernization, urbanization and unequal distribution of resources resulting in poverty (van der Vliet, 1994, Durojaye, 1976, Oman, 1982, all cited in Mwamwenda, 1996). As Timyan (1988) observes, “African villages whether defined as nuclear, extended family, community or nation have valuable childrearing practices in the major domains of development – cognitive, emotional, physical or social domains” (p. 22) for which he urges for much more culturally relevant programs through greater involvement of the communities in program delivery and development.
Amar (1996) also supports the need for collaborations, stating: “Improving the quality of life is based on a people’s capacity for action, their deeds and ideals for themselves and their community. It means that groups recognize and take their situation in their own hands to transform and enrich it” (p. 4). These words remain a driving force for the need to develop parents and teacher’s collaborative action.

Using a systems theory lens, collaborations have been used to emphasize relationships such as children’s transition process from home to preschools (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1997, Pianta & Walsh, 1996, and Sameroff, 1995, all in Pianta, Kraft-Sayre, Rimm-Kaufman, Gercke & Higgins, 2001). Collaborations have also been employed in determining the process of change in partnership based inquiries (Ramey & Ramey, 1999, in Pianta et al., 2001).

**Benefits of Parent-School Collaborations**

Collaborative activities between parents and schools have been useful in Kenya, where trainers, teachers, parents and local communities routinely cooperate in developing early childhood curriculum and teaching materials. They collect stories, riddles, poems and games which are produced to serve the local communities. Such joint efforts enhance the quality of teaching materials available and increase community satisfaction (Kipkorir, 1993). As observed by researchers, many communities have adopted the establishment of a collaborative partnership involving all the relevant partners (home, school, service providers) in planning and monitoring services for children as a solution to addressing a host of problems that threaten the health and well-being of children and families (Kagan, 1992; Hoffman, 1991). Community collaborative partnerships represent one of the most
effective means for creating flexible, comprehensive systems that meet the needs of children and families.

Collaborations and partnerships involving parents and staff result in better communication, which is a necessary condition for better parental involvement in program delivery and success, particularly in early childhood care (Hughes & MacNaughton, 2001); it is a prerequisite for high-quality care and education of young children (Doherty-Derkowski, 1995, in Hughes & MacNaughton, 2001). Furthermore, collaborations involving school staff and parents allows parents’ involvement, hence their better understanding of appropriate educational practices, which helps to improve children’s cognitive and social development (Gelfer, 1991, in Hughes & MacNaughton, 2001). Collaboration positively influences children’s cognitive and social development as well as increasing their educational success (Laloumi-Vidali, 1997, Studer, 1993/94, all in Hughes & MacNaughton, 2001). Parental commitment to schooling is also improved through staff-parent collaboration (Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow & Fendrich, 1993, in Hughes & MacNaughton, 2001).

Given that collaboration is aimed at providing a good pedestal for improved childhood care and development of children, it is said to contribute to national development (Cone, 1993, Hannon, 1995, and Cairney, 1997, all in Hughes & MacNaughton, 2001). At the same time, it benefits business through creating a more literate and productive workforce (Partnership for Family Involvement in Education (PFIE; 1997, in Hughes & MacNaughton 2001).
Problems and Challenges of Parent-School Collaborations

Many common difficulties occur in collaboration involving parents and schools, such as differences in prior knowledge, training or experience that make it difficult for members to communicate and work together, and lack of time to meet and plan together (Melaville, Blank & Asayesh, 1996).

Much as collaborations are expected to bring about positive developments, diverse problems have been identified with it, particularly in regard to staff-parent communication in Greece (Laloumi-Vidali, 1997 in Hughes & MacNaughton, 2001), the United States of America (Rescorla, 1991, in Hughes & MacNaughton, 2001) and Japan (Huira, 1996, in Hughes & MacNaughton, 2001).

The myriad problems of collaborations involving parents and staff include the following: staff struggle to know how best to communicate with parents (Wright-Sexton, 1996, in Hughes & MacNaughton, 2001) because of inadequate staff training in staff-parent communication (Laloumi-Vidali, 1997, in Hughes & MacNaughton, 2001); staff and parents disagree on what is appropriate education for young children (Hyson, 1991, Rescorla, 1991, and Liu & Chien, 1998, all in Hughes & MacNaughton, 2001) leading to belief by staff that parents need education to improve their capacity to help children’s learning (Gelfer, 1991, Moore & Klass, 1995, and Laloumi-Vidali, 1997, all in Hughes & MacNaughton, 2001). Some other problems emanate from cultural differences between staff and parents (Gonzalez-Mena, 1992, Coleman & Churchill, 1997, both in Hughes & MacNaughton, 2001).
Review of Resources in the Development of this Guide

Several efforts have been made towards the provision of programming or training guides, the reasons being that there is a need to document a set of standard principles on activities given through instructions over a particular discipline.

Evans, Myers and Ilfeld (2000), in their influential book *Early Childhood Counts: A Programming Guide on Early Childhood Care for Development* developed their guide in recognition of the context under which the guide is developed, illustrating with varied contextual examples the benefits of ECD programming and how it can be delivered in some countries. They advocate for a generative curriculum which is culturally grounded and meets the needs of children and people in the program (Ball & Pence, 1999, 2000; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999). The guide opens with the definition and details of Early Childhood Care for Development, presenting arguments in support of investment in ECCD through a rights perspective to ECD. This aspect is important and critical to the development of this project. The needs assessment section is an important aspect which will enable the development of this guide, given that so many problems stand against programming. Evans, Myers, and Ilfeld (2000) advise that programs should be feasible to implement and serve the intended population, given the resources within the context. These criteria inform the approach to be utilized in this project. Other areas of interest include detailed information on nutrition, health, and education with their indicators, which will help to assess and ascertain the development indices of children in a given setting. They recommend an integrated and holistic approach to programming, illustrating with many examples how parents’ participation has helped in effective ECD; a particular example from Kenya illustrates where such programs had been successful. These are
valued tools which will be carried over to this project. Their hints on evaluation and financial costs of ECD-related projects will be used in developing concrete plans.

The Federal Government of Nigeria/UNICEF (1996a) handbook *Caring for the African Child* approaches programming by recognizing the need for collaborative agreement in programming. It suggests a holistic approach to education, health, and nutrition while emphasizing the importance of psychosocial, emotional, cognitive and physical development of children. The handbook recognizes the need for the use of local materials in constructing instructional materials. It offers some useful tips on childhood and community diseases and ways of preventing some of these diseases. The basic needs of children are enumerated, as well as what caregivers need to know. Important areas in the guide include the emphasis on child health and the need for immunization. The use of care facilities by children under formal school age as a way of preparing them for the future is key information provided in the handbook. The handbook has a set of activities, outlined for parents and teachers in support of children’s development and care. The development and delivery of this handbook was articulated and developed at the ‘top’ by professionals without the participation of the local or indigenous people, but the cooperative development and delivery model will emphasize the integration of the local people and the school, thereby making it a generative model. Some information provided in the handbook, for example, language development, took a Western perspective, neglecting the immediate environment of the child.

The Cooperative Development and Delivery Guide by parents will be different, since it will have parent and school collaborative action at its heart.
The Federal Government of Nigeria/UNICEF (1996b) *Training Guide for Lead Trainers*, however, has much more grounding on culturally relevant approaches to program delivery, as it emphasized the need for communities’ involvement in program design and delivery for which attention is being focused. It defines the concept of Early Child Care in the context of the child and reiterates to lead trainers the need to design training to meet the local needs of the people. This approach to programming is a valuable tool, which will be transferred into the production of this training guide. The guide for lead trainers recognizes parental education as a key ingredient to improved ECD delivery. It advocates for needs assessment to be carried out in any context so as to know the strengths and weaknesses of the given setting.

Further information provided in the UNICEF guide includes the need for community mobilization to foster sustainability of programs; the use of locally sourced materials in the instruction of children; and toy construction which could be a collaborative activity between parents and teachers. These areas will be utilized in the development of the Cooperative Development and Delivery Guide, realizing that children’s cognitive and psychomotor domains improve with the provision of manipulative objects. The guide discusses categories of skills and describes the expected responses of children. This aspect will be utilized in my training guide also. The UNICEF guide equally recognizes the need for new ECC approaches and initiatives, development of educational materials, reading and mathematical skills.

Amang and Bassey’s (2001) *Early Child Care Handbook* presents information from history, philosophy, and practice in 10 states of Nigeria. It looks at ECD from a perspective of the rights of the child. It gives insight on the early stimulation activities of
children, taking cognizance of milestones children are expected to accomplish within a certain stage. This is an important aspect this project will utilize. Story telling, which is a common educational approach in Nigerian society, is encouraged. Amang and Bassey’s (2001) handbook looks at childhood diseases, their causative agent(s), modes of transmission, and prevention. The role of family and teachers in the child’s development discussed in this guide is a considered tool in the development and delivery of my training guide, realizing that parents and teachers are important partners in the care of the child.

Amang and Bassey’s (2001) handbook provides information on the importance of environment and sanitation in the healthy development of children, and describes a series of activities to be carried out by parents, teachers, pupils, and community. These hints can be utilized in the development of this guide since ECD takes cognizance of the development of children at home and school environment.

However, Amang and Bassey’s (2001) handbook did not utilize teachers and parents in its content development. Therefore, it has a top-down prescriptive approach to the development and delivery of information. The content of my guide will be generative rather than prescriptive – parents and teachers shall develop it through dialogue so as to make it culturally and contextually relevant.

The moral development of children is given attention in the Amang and Bassey (2001) handbook. Parents and teachers in this project can harness this with a particular attention to the cultural setting of children, since each society has defined values and moral expectations of children. Amang and Bassey’s handbook addresses gender-related issues by advocating that girls should be given equal opportunities in life. This is against
the backdrop of son preference, which in some circumstances denies girls’ rights like equal access to education. This project will develop upon all that affects children (0-5 years), as emphasized in their handbook. The handbook equally makes a strong case for breastfeeding, which is important in the nutrition and health of the child. This is an important area, which will receive attention in the cooperative development and delivery model, realizing that all other forms of development are realizable when children are healthy, well-fed, and in a supportive environment.

The WHO/UNICEF (1999) handbook *Nutrition Essentials: A Guide For Health Managers* is a valued tool in the development of this project since health and nutrition are important components of ECD. It has much information supportive of good ECD programming in relation to health and nutrition. Maternal and child health are given attention through in-depth information regarding the role of good nutrition on health. It emphasizes the need for breastfeeding, which this guide intends to build upon by encouraging breastfeeding, adequate nutritional care for sick and malnourished children, vitamin A and other essential mineral intake, and community partnership in effective program delivery or intervention, most especially as it concerns health and nutrition. The communication tips provided in the WHO/UNICEF (1999) guide are very important and will be utilized in the development of this project, which is expected to carry a communication component. Generally, the WHO/UNICEF handbook provides guidelines for assessing and dealing with care for women, breastfeeding, psychosocial care, food preparation, hygiene, and home health care practices. Indicators of child health are extensively discussed while serious reasons are adduced for community health. It recognizes the need for good community health as a condition to improving the status of
children in a setting. The use of the WHO/UNICEF guide in the development of this project is very important, as it is a complete health and nutrition information resource. The guide recognizes the need for collaborative activities, which this project also takes as a fundamental premise.

The *Madrasa Preschool Curriculum* (Madrasa Resource Centre, 2000) and *Early Child Care Development and Education Curriculum Guide* (Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council; NERDC/UNICEF, 1999) both recognize the importance of a developmentally active learning approach to educating young children. These handbooks recognize that development occurs in stages and set out to provide active and participatory learning opportunities to match with children’s developmental stages. While the Madrasa school curriculum reflects in detail the role of teachers and parents and communities’ strengths in the development of their children, the NERDC/UNICEF Early Child Care and Education Curriculum (1999) fails to emphasize this important point. It does, however, set out to define the physical development, food and nutrition, harmful practices, health and diseases, and safety measures that are important in the development of children. Though these are important areas in ECD which can be used in this work, they have to be situated to the context of the child, unlike the Western approach the guide adopted.

Unlike the NERDC/UNICEF (1999) curriculum guide, which approached the development of its content from a Western perspective where a child’s milestone accomplishment are tied to a specific time, the Madrasa school curriculum built on the strength that children are expected to accomplish achievements in milestones and develop instructions on language and literacy, mathematical ability, science, song and physical
education from the home before preschool. The Madrasa approach to providing games for psychomotor development from locally sourced materials are areas this guide will build upon while making recommendations on effective collaboration. This is because children need to be provided with enough stimulation for physical development since it is an indicator of good ECD provision. Despite this useful information, this guide has only the formal school in mind. But ECD is not only about good education. Rather, it is closely linked to the home environment and the child’s entire community as supportive of health, good nutrition and stimulation. As Myers (2001) argues:

> Early Childhood data collected by countries’ Education Ministries are mostly focused on what has been defined by International Standard Classification of Education, or ISCED, as pre-primary education. Pre-primary education constitutes only a fraction of Early Childhood programs, and the definition shows considerable conceptual gaps relative to Early Childhood programs, as understood by the professional community and implemented and practiced in the field (p. 8).

> Myers argues that in ECD, parents play equal if not more important roles than teachers (Myers, 2001, p.10). These words go further to make a case for parents’ participation in the development of curriculum for children.

**Summary**

This section started with review of literature of key concepts and previous studies considered quite relevant to the present work – collaborative partnership. It recognized that there has been a general support of parent-school collaboration/partnership in the care development and socialization of the child, bearing in mind such benefits it holds for the child. The literature quoted extensively such theories as Bronfenbrenner’s (1989, in
Berk, 1999) ecological systems theory, Vygotsky’s (in Berk, 1999) sociocultural theory, Ball and Pence’s (1999, 2000) Generative Curriculum Model, and Berk’s (1999) argument that in power and breadth of influence, no context equals the family; all highlight the need for partnership/collaboration in meeting the needs of children.

The section also took a look at the benefits of collaborations involving parents and schools. Under this context, collaborative activities between parents and schools has had its usefulness in Kenya, where trainers, teachers, parents and communities routinely cooperate in developing early childhood curriculum and teaching materials. Several earlier works (Cone, 1993, Hannon, 1995, and Cairney, 1997, all in Hughes & MacNaughton, 2001) further buttress the significance of collaborations and confirm the usefulness of parental involvement to national development. This section equally highlighted the challenges and problems of collaborations involving parents and schools, such as differences in prior knowledge, training or experiences and lack of time to meet and plan together.

This section concluded with an extensive review of resources in the development of the guide for effective collaboration. Information was drawn from such materials as *Early Childhood Counts: A Programming Guide On Early Childhood Care For Development*, which illustrated with varied contextual examples the benefit ECD programming and how it could be achieved in some countries. Other works reviewed include the Federal Government of Nigeria/UNICEF(1996) handbook *Caring for the African Child* and the WHO/UNICEF(1999) handbook *Nutrition Essentials: A Guide for Health Managers*. 
CHAPTER 3: PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Introduction

This project is aimed at understanding what people think effective collaboration means and developing a guide in collaborative activities between parents and schools in support of early childhood programs.

In the first phase, extensive interviews, observations, record review and focus group discussions were utilised to understanding what effective collaboration means to parents and school staff. The second phase is the development of a guide on collaborative activities between parents and school through a generative process using focus group discussions.

Methods

Sample, sample frame and participants’ characteristics.

The target sample in the project was 30 participants drawn from two communities using purposive sampling techniques. Umuguma is a semi-urban area in Owerri West Local Government Area of New Owerri and Obi-Orodo is a rural environment in Mbaitol Local Government Area. Participants consisted mainly of parents and teachers drawn from Parents Teachers Association (PTA), an umbrella body that supports parent-school collaborative activities in the two communities.

Purposive sampling techniques were employed in the study. Parents, teachers and schools were non-randomly picked on the basis that the schools have PTA in place, that parents and teachers have been involved in parent-school collaborative activities for at least two years, such that their experiences can be harnessed with a view to providing
some valued information useful to the development of a guide for effective collaboration, and that parents are members of the communities under focus who possess good indigenous knowledge that will help in realising culturally relevant and appropriate programs. Participants were given two weeks to make up their minds if they wished to participate in the project.

Two schools, Model Primary School New Owerri and Community School Odunmara in Obi-Orodo, were selected for the study on the basis of two criteria: their location in a rural or semi-urban environment, and having a functional PTA with a measure of effective collaboration, yet a weak one measured by what schools and parents have been able to achieve and their level of integration with other agencies. These two schools that contrasted were important to this project for several reasons. They provided the basis through which the meaning of effective collaboration as constructed in the different contexts could be understood. Moreover, since participants were to develop a guide about effective collaboration through a generative process, these contrasting schools helped participants during the PRA to appreciate the different problems they have encountered in collaborative activities, their achievements, and a better way forward to effective collaboration, which the guide is expected to address.

Model Primary School New Owerri, in a semi-urban area, depicts a school with effective collaboration based on the fact that the PTA had been able to put infrastructures such as toilets, school buildings potable water, and indoor and outdoor games facilities into the school. They have also developed networks with integrating agencies such as Health, Water and Environment, and Nutrition. Moreover, parents are involved in management and program delivery. These conditions and activities are not present at
Community School Odunmara in Obi-Orodo. Visitor and activity notebooks of the two schools, which revealed patterns of parents’ and visitors’ interaction with the schools, were included in documents meant for review. The minutes books of the two PTAs, which recorded decisions and detailed meeting patterns, were included in the materials for review. The information contained in these documents helped in informing on what the PTAs and schools have done, how they did it, constraints, ways decision were taken, what had helped them in their decisions, leadership styles, and networks. This information will help in making recommendations and useful inputs to the guide, which is expected to help communities achieve effective collaborations.

The PTA secretaries of both communities, who by policy must be the head teacher of schools, were included in the sample. The chairpersons of the PTA, who usually must be a community leader, were also in the sample. The participants, made up of both sexes, cut across the educated, illiterate, poor and middle-income groups.

The 30 participants were slated for interviews of 30 minutes each over a period of one month. These 30 participants also participated in focus group discussions.

Techniques and procedures.

This project used triangulation or multiple data sources that included interviews, observation, focus group discussions, and record reviews to generate the necessary data gathered from our PRA and PLA involvements. Chambers (2000) defines Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) as “a growing family of approaches, methods and behaviours to enable people to share and analyze their knowledge of life and conditions to plan, act, monitor and evaluate their course of action” (p. 102). It is a process of accessing and analyzing local conditions by the people themselves. It goes further by sharing
information with a thorough analysis and understanding of the local situation by villagers themselves. Participatory Learning Action (PLA), on the other hand, is an evolution of PRA. It allows people (insiders and outsiders) to gain an understanding of the general conditions and supports within the community. PLA encourages engaging in a learning process together with the community and defining the kinds of programs they wish to introduce (Evans, Myers, & Ilfeld, 2000). PLA involves mapping the community, gathering information from people through meetings, focus group discussions, timelines, matrices, and ranking variables. The goal of the process is to help the invisible to become visible to all involved. These approaches helped in generating the necessary information to understand what effective collaboration means to people as well as providing the data needed to develop a guide for effective parent-school collaboration.

*Interviews.*

According to Kvale (1996), interviews are the knowledge created between the point of view of the interviewer and the interviewee. Semi-structured interview questions, which emphasized the initial briefing and debriefing of the project, were utilized. As suggested by Kvale (1996), interviews help to gather qualitative descriptions of the life world of the subjects with respect to interpretation of their meanings in response to issues raised (p. 124).

To capture a deeper understanding of parents’ and teachers’ understanding of effective collaboration as a means of promoting ECD in their contexts, some open-ended questions were utilized. Interviews were conducted in serene environments, with initial briefing and debriefing to ensure the validity of information given by subjects. Each participant enjoyed a degree of privacy because some considered some of the issues
raised, particularly on leadership, as sensitive. Notes were taken and responses recorded on tape to ensure that information was not lost. The interviews were cordial and took the form of a conversation because of initial familiarization with participants. The interview conditions were the same for all participants. See Appendix I for a list of the questions.

*Focus group discussion.*

This was adopted at the seminar session to discuss issues on the areas of interest as well as articulate a way forward on issues raised, observed and a reflection on the topics covered. It was a valued tool used in group works which afforded the participants equal and unfettered participation and expression.

*Record review.*

This involved looking at the different records of the schools and PTAs to obtain data about the nature of their activities so as to corroborate information given through oral interviews. Moreover, secondary data could give detailed insight along patterns of meetings and decisions taken, activities undertaken and the results of such activities, and issues of leadership and how the collaboration was built. These are important in making recommendations on how collaboration can be made effective so as to meet expectations in program delivery and development, particularly for children aged 0-5 years and their families.

*Observation.*

The participant as observer technique was used in this project. As implied by Denzin and Lincoln (2000), to the qualitative researcher, inquiry is properly
conceptualized as a civic, participatory process. This, they say, joins the researcher and the research in an ongoing moral dialogue.

Mason (1996) defines participant observation as a method of generating data which involves the researcher immersing himself or herself in a given setting and systematically observing dimensions of that setting, interactions, relationships, actions, events, and so on within it. Observations were conducted in the two schools and in homes. In homes, observation focused on finding out what key cultural and childrearing practices there are that support the development of children in line with the objectives of collaboration, what parents do with children at home, whether caregivers or teachers followed up with home visits to monitor the progress of children outside the formal school environment, what relationships existed between parents and school staff, the type of stimulation given to children in homes, and what supportive environments there are in the areas of health, nutrition, education and sanitation. In schools, observation focused on what parents and schools have provided for children in areas such as games, the condition of school building, instructional materials, the hygienic conditions of schools, patterns of interaction between staff and parents, and how often collaborators met to discuss issues that might sustain their collaboration. These observations helped to give insight to understanding the level of effectiveness in collaboration.

**Steps Taken in Project Study and Development**

**Information and approval from concerned agencies and stakeholders.**

In Imo state, the administration control and implementation of programs aimed at promoting effective program implementation of ECD rests upon the Ministries of Education, Women’s Affairs and Social Development. Although collaborative efforts are
encouraged, it is done under strict supervision to ensure that stated guidelines of the Ministries are not compromised. In this regard, the briefing of the Commissioners of Education, Health, Women’s Affairs, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education, and the Chair of Imo State Primary Education Board, under whose jurisdiction the administration of pre-primary education in Imo States is rested upon, was imperative to obtaining permission to carry out this work. Initial briefing and debriefing was carried out to inform them of the details of the project. With consent obtained from these groups, focus was shifted to the traditional rulers of the two communities under focus, namely Umuguma in Owerri West and Obi-Orodo in Mbaitoli Local Government Areas of Imo State, who equally gave their consent to the project. Contact with these groups took the form of advocacy visits and official correspondences. This process was started and completed in May 2003.

Project cost and sources of funds.

Realizing that little can be achieved without proper funding, the cost of the research was estimated and presented to the Chair of Imo State Primary Education Board and other agencies concerned with children’s welfare through strongly worded proposals and presentations in favour of the rights of children to a holistic development.

The financial insolvency of the Board could not allow for funds to be released. I looked inwards to my family and friends, who raised funds for this noble project. Though this delayed the timeframe allotted to the project, the result is the successful completion of this work aimed at developing a guide for effective collaboration.
Identification and training of research assistants.

This process involved reaching out to individuals who offered assistance in areas such as taking notes from observations, interviews and focus group discussions. Integrating agency staff of Health, Nutrition, Education, Water and Environmental Sanitation was considered relevant. They were properly briefed for a period of three days on their expected assistance and given two weeks to give their consent. Their consent was obtained through verbal and written processes. Two experienced community members, one from each community, were taken after consenting to help strengthen our work in the communities, since it was ascertained through my interview with them that they possessed highly valued indigenous knowledge in childrearing and community traditions.

Continued contact with project coordinator.

The project coordinator was kept in touch with progress made at every point. This was key to further development of the project, which started with the module 28 draft of CYC 543, matured into project proposal and finally the project report.

Fulfilling the University of Victoria ethics requirement.

Completion and submission of the University of Victoria ethics form (see Appendix III) as required took place from June through July 2003, when the University Human Research Ethics Committee approved the consent form for the project to commence as well as the consent form developed for the participants. This landmark enabled me to commence work in the communities.
Contact with community leaders, parents and schools.

Community leaders in whose domain this project was situated were reached through official correspondences and advocacy visits.

The traditional rulers in every community have a certain degree of control over schools and families in their environment, hence there was a need to meet with them and brief them of the project, which is expected to be culturally sensitive and relevant (Arnold, 1998, in Evans, Myers & Ilfeld, 2000; Colleta & Reinhold, 1997) while serving communities’ needs (Kipkorir, 1993) Letters were written to the PTA, which is the body that holds parents and teachers in a collaborative partnership of the different schools in the two communities we studied. Through the traditional rulers, I established contact with the head teachers, community-based organizations, associations, and chairs of the PTAs in the two communities. These groups were properly briefed of the project. I asked them to invite their members to a meeting for me to address them and formally explain the objectives of the project to them.

During the meeting, I appealed to the PTAs and schools about the need to study some of their documents. They were also informed of the need for needs assessment of their communities to look at their achievements, problems, and a way forward. This they obliged.

I returned to the communities after one week and addressed members of the PTA and made formal visits to a school in each of the two communities. A school was selected from each of the two communities for review of their documents and visitor notes. Consent forms were given to participants, and they were given two weeks to think about their participation and return their forms.
The participants’ characteristics are explained in the method section. Other contacts with the communities were during interviews of participants and my scheduled observations.

*Three-day seminar with participants.*

This seminar was a follow-up of the collaborative PRA of schools and parents. The seminar used PLA to address some of the gaps identified during the needs assessment of the communities, bearing in mind the objectives of this project. A focus group discussion was used to address some of the key issues raised. It allowed for open and equal participation among participants since, in a truly collaborative effort, partners relate to each other on a non-hierarchal basis, regardless of organizational structure. Moreover, each participant brings unique perspectives and skills to partnerships and is knowledgeable about their community’s cultures and languages. By allowing equal participation in the process, collaborations may find strategies that elude professional staff, thereby helping to provide necessary information and strategies for effective collaborations.

Topics covered included the following:

- The role of parents and schools in developing effective collaboration aimed at culturally relevant ECD.
- Materials development and utilization: a necessary approach to effective collaboration.
- Community mobilization: a key to program sustainability and ownership in effective collaboration.
The role of parent and teacher education in effective collaboration aimed at improving services for children 0-5 years.

Benefits and constraints of collaborations and a way forward for improved ECD delivery.

The need for integration and networking in effective collaboration.

Group work was encouraged at the seminar to gather participants’ views, understanding of the topics covered, and recommendations.

The participants were divided into six groups for the topics covered. Each group was given relevant handouts that contained information on parent-school collaboration and asked to review these materials. Each group was asked to select one of their members to record their activities and their answers to the group activity. As a facilitator, I moved from one group to the other raising questions while making sure that they stayed on task with issues of concern in the project – building effective collaborations with a view to meeting communities’, families’ and children’s needs in collaborative endeavours. At the end of time allotted for the exercise, the recorder of each group read out their reactions. The large group listened to each group’s reactions and critiqued them. Participants made recommendations and additions before adopting each group’s work for the guide’s development.

At the seminar session, each group resolved to allow the secretary of the group to represent them in the reporting session, which was scheduled at a later date. They produced a committee that worked closely with me in reporting the work. Each group gave a communiqué at the end of the focus group session.
Reporting the project.

Before the final development of the project report, there was an analysis of findings based on observations, interviews, PRA, and documents of schools and PTAs for necessary data. Representatives of schools and parents in the two communities agreed upon a date and a venue where we collected our data and pieced them together.

Resources developed were re-evaluated. The draft report was read to the representatives who critiqued it, and recommendations were made to include some omissions. Draft copies were set aside for the project coordinator, Faculty of Graduate Studies member and in-country member. Representatives adopted the draft and took copies, which they will read to fellow participants.

Development of the guide.

Development of the guide spanned a period of three weeks with the representatives of the groups. Staff of the integrating agencies such as Education, Health, Water and Environmental Sanitation, and Nutrition, and parent and school representatives participated.

A careful examination of the observations, interviews, document review and group work findings was undertaken to ensure that the identified gaps in collaborations in the two communities (lack of time to plan for meetings as observed in Odunmara Community School, poor attendance at meetings by staff and parents, and limited involvement of parents in program management and implementation) were addressed.

The objectives of the project were reviewed and contents of the guide determined. The organization of the guide was agreed upon and participants brought in their wealth of experience in developing its contents. The first draft was critiqued, and recommendations
were made and finally adopted. The draft was presented once more to the respective parties/partners involved in its development and a draft sent to the project coordinator, Faculty of Graduate Studies member and in-country member for inputs.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Analyses of data were based on the techniques utilized. The data collected gave an insight on what the parents and schools had done, the level of collaboration, and their strengths with a view to building or improving on them.

Document Review

The results of the document review showed divergent involvements in collaboration and its effectiveness in the two communities. At Model Primary School Umuguma, New Owerri, which depicts effective collaborations, their minutes book revealed regular meetings between school and parents. A minimum of 20 parents and 15 teachers attended each monthly meeting. Parents and teachers peaked at 50 in some monthly PTA meetings. Issues of promoting preschool linkage and program sustainability were extensively discussed in each meeting session. Records of decisions taken and how these decisions had been put into practice could be assessed from the minutes taken at each meeting. Investigations revealed that each partner involved in the PTA had equal access to speaking their mind on a way forward to program effectiveness, especially as it concerned contextually appropriate ECD development and delivery. Some achievements recorded in the minutes book included the provision of potable water through the construction of a borehole, erection of a four-room compartment for a preschool building, introduction of a mid-day meal in school for preschoolers, inclusion of parents and knowledgeable members of the community in storytelling sessions, an established means of communicating to parents on the progress or problems of each child, and the use of the school as an immunization centre for children aged 0-5 years.
Other information derived from the minutes book included the networking activities the school and parents had achieved with agencies such as Education, Water and Environmental Sanitation, Health, and Nutrition and prominent members of the community and outside agencies. These were possible because the collaboration had been consistent with their stated goals. Records showed that the PTA had been having regular meetings for three years and there were times when emergency meetings had been convened based on developments that could not wait until the next monthly meeting. Parents had actively participated in training for constructing toys from local materials as given by some NGOs.

Other valuable information in the visitors’ notebook in the head teacher’s office are remarkable visits by parents to school to find out the progress of their children and visits made by integrating agencies of Health, Water and Environmental Sanitation and Education, UNICEF representatives and other members of the public within and outside the community.

On the other hand, at Community Primary School, Obo-Orodo, the PTA seldom met for meetings. In a two-year period, only four meetings had been held. Attendance to such meetings never exceeded 8 parents and 6 teachers, and the PTA chair was not officially present at two of the meetings. Few records of achievement could be ascertained from the minute book, despite the school having problem areas that needed to be addressed, such as renovation of existing structures, provision of potable water, a healthy learning and play environment for preschoolers, and toilet facilities. Parents hardly visited the preschoolers to tell stories.
Networking activities, which were given priority attention at Model Primary School Umuguma, lacked in this community’s PTA. The school’s visitor notebook was scarcely signed by parents or other external visitors such as those from the integrating agencies and beyond. Moreover, not much has been put in place through parent-staff collaborative activities.

*Observation Results*

Observations in the two communities were conducted around the two schools and in several homes. At Umuguma, where Model Primary School is located, about 60 parents brought their children to school daily and made some efforts to reach caregivers (teachers) to find out about their ward’s progress in school in line with the goals of collaboration. A few food vendors, which consisted of pupils’ parents, could be seen around the school. They complement the school meal provided for the children with food, which they sell at prices agreed upon by the school authority. A few parents and teachers routinely carry out inspections of the food these parents sell. If they don’t meet the required hygienic and nutritional standards, the meals are not sold in the school.

Other revelations during my stay in the school include the availability of VIP latrines, which had been constructed by the PTA. There could be seen a borehole which serves as alternative water supply for children when the Utility Boards’ water runs dry. The VIP borehole was accomplished through proper networking activities by integrating the water and environmental sanitation agencies. The PTA had done renovation work on some school buildings. A preschool block of four large rooms is currently under construction.
It was observed that two nurses were at hand in the school. The PTA had arranged these nurses from a nearby health centre. The nurses attend to injuries sustained while children are at play. The PTA, in collaboration with the integrating agency of health, made this arrangement as a way forward to ECD provision in the community. Also visible in the school are indoor and outdoor game facilities, which had been provided by the PTA in collaboration with the Ministry of Education. Instructional materials that were locally made by parents and staff from materials in the community could be seen in the preschool section of the school. These materials had been produced by parents and staff during a routine workshop held for the PTA by NGOs and other agencies such as UNICEF.

Teachers conducted regular inspections on children as their parents dropped them off for school. Parents who brought their children in dirty or non-convenient clothes were advised not to bring the children in such clothing next time. A few parents came around to tell children stories from traditional folklore. These stories are seen as stimulating cognitive and moral development. However, observations conducted around the preschool section revealed that caregivers placed more emphasis on the teaching of foreign nursery rhymes in the English language. This is counter-productive when the expectation of the collaboration is that children adapt to learning relevant to their cultural milieu. Learning through play and discovery was not the order of the day. The children had a regimented pattern of instruction, as their curriculum was fashioned towards a formal school learning pattern. Although teachers conduct home visits as agreed upon by the PTA, these visits were not regular, since only one in every five children benefit over a school term that lasts for three months.
At Obi-Orodo, observation revealed that there were no home visits by teachers after their interactions with children at school. The progress or problems of children are reported through their report cards. Parents are contacted by mail at the end of every school term. However, when there is a need for parents to come to school, children are asked to relay such to their parents. In Obi-Orodo community, not much could be seen on the ground as the gains of the collaborative effort of school and parents. The projects the PTA had embarked upon had remained uncompleted for a long time.

During the needs assessment, which was conducted using PRA, parents and teachers in the two communities observed changing patterns of child rearing, interactions, relationships, and actions in their different settings, which the collaboration had failed to address. It was noted that teachers were not giving the children contextually appropriate instructions as earlier recorded by my personal observation, that parents had no access to education as this was necessary for improved partnership and care delivery, that infrastructure provision was inadequate for children in schools even when parents and teachers could make the difference through direct engagement, that teachers had helped in promoting gender stereotypes in schools by assigning cleaning responsibilities to girls alone, that their communities could do better by having more parents become a better part of a defined parent-school collaboration involving every partner, and that the parents and schools have not done much to provide a clean and conducive environment, even when that could be organized through direct labour without financial constraints.
Interview Results

Interview results portrayed a wide range of diversity in assessing collaboration effectiveness. When asked if their collaborations had been inclusive and effective, one teacher from Umuguma responded in these words:

I think the collaboration had been effective, realizing that it had been able to address some needs of children by providing a borehole, VIP toilets, instructional materials, school meals, and parents inclusion in school activities such as coming to tell the children stories as well as play with them.

However, I think the parents owe much to this collaboration, considering that their children stand to benefit in the long run. Most of them do not come to meetings where decisions are taken. Moreover, they run away from meetings because they feel each meeting must be centred on making financial contributions. You know times are hard and most parents do not want to be stressed further.

Another teacher from Obi-Orodo in these words further confirmed this information:

The collaboration has not been very effective because parents have failed to live up to our expectation. Most of them are more involved in their farm work and have little or no time to come for meetings. They have abandoned their civic responsibilities for teachers. I believe their poor level of education is a hindrance to appreciating that every effort made in collaborative activities are for the interest of their community and children. They believe that the essence of meetings is to involve them into another financial stress.
On whether the leadership had been able to bring about greater integration of agencies outside their immediate environment, a parent from Obi-Orodo complained of weak leadership which had not been able to bring about such integration:

The leadership hardly calls for meetings so that we may have a forum to discuss issues concerning our children. I believe it’s only through meaningful interaction that we may address properly problems militating against our PTA and children too. Improved communication between partners through effective leadership will make the collaboration effective.

However, a parent from Umuguma agreed that the collaboration had been able to reach out to integrating agencies through effective leadership which, in other words, had been able to bring about shared responsibilities and better project realization: “Our leadership had really been wonderful. Most of our project targets had been realized through a shared vision with the integrating agencies. This has given us a greater sense of sustainability.”

On the effectiveness and the inclusiveness of their collaboration, a parent from Umuguma summed it in these words:

Judging from what the association had done, one can say that the PTA had done well. They have provided the children with safe water, school meals, toilets, play and instructional materials. Although parents are not adequately included in curriculum development, I can say that our involvement had been that of providing funds for renovation of structures. In most of our meetings, teachers impose on us what they feel is right for the children. In this regard, we are not valued as members who can reason out what the children need. At home, we face
problems of children not embracing some of our traditional values. They hold strongly to what their aunties (teachers) tell them at school. These are areas the collaboration has to do something so as to see them as effective.

Another parent from Obi-Orodo gave her reasons in these words: “The collaboration had been very weak. There are lots of problem areas they need to address. Our children study in a very dilapidated environment. Parents are not carried along in decision making. Meetings are seldom summoned and attended. The leadership has failed to mobilize the people for action.”

The PTA chair of Model Primary School Umuguma had this to say on effectiveness and inclusiveness:

I can say the collaboration had been effective, taking cognizance of the fact that we are operating with very slim finances. We have been able to put some structures in place for the preschool, provided play and instructional materials, potable water, and a safe environment, and conducted immunization exercises while making the school a central point of immunization for the community. We realized that these achievements couldn’t be carried out alone. In that regard, we reached out to outsiders and integrating agencies so that implementation of some of these projects can be shared. As for parents and community inclusion, the association is open to them. We tried to reach them formally, and I’m happy some of them responded. We’ve always held meetings to discuss issues of primary importance to ECD development. Some parents do not have time to attend to meetings to discuss issues of primary importance to ECD development. Some feel they are not educated enough to be part of this association, despite we conduct some of our meetings in our local
dialect. We meet to create awareness and mobilize on parental education. I think most of their problems are on finance. This has in a way weakened the effectiveness of the collaboration.

The headmaster of Community School Obi-Orodo summed up the situation in these words:

We’ve had a very weak collaboration. The parents are not interested in what we do here. The association is open to every one of them but they are not responding to our invitation to be a part of it. Collaborations are effective when people are a part of it. In our case, parents are more interested in their farm work. They have little or no time to attend to meetings. They feel this is another way of imposing financial responsibilities on them. I think there is need for parental education, community mobilization and sensitization. I’ve had to come for meetings without parents attending. The collaboration can do better when the parents show sincere interest in the affairs of their children.

On whether they appreciated the fact that integration of some agencies through effective networking would make the desired impact on effectiveness, one parent summed it in these words:

Quite all right the integrating agencies had helped make the collaboration somehow effective. Remember the integration agencies do not work without the community or a constituted organization. You must have some sort of structure already in place. Their role is to complement whatever you are able to provide. You must show the readiness to bear the greater cost of any project you intend to implement. However, they make the task much simpler! In fact, you need them,
but you must show some seriousness and commitment. You must have a base in your immediate community, and your projects should be relevant to the needs of your community.

Focus Group Discussion Results

Focus group discussions with teachers and parents corroborated some of the answers given during the interviews. Teachers were of the view that parents can do more in contributing to the effectiveness of collaboration by attending meetings and having more time for their children’s welfare.

They made several suggestions to effectiveness including development of materials, in-kind contributions, and time for children as being better than cash. They concluded that parental education in the communities was important in raising awareness of collaborations aimed at their children’s welfare. The group agreed that improved communication with integrating agencies would be necessary and key to greater achievements, since effectiveness is measured with achievements and sustainability. This means that parents can on their own make contributions of food materials, since a majority of them are farmers. This they believe could help the school meal program. They observed that parents could be a part of direct labour for projects in the community. They can tell stories, take turns playing with the children, clean up the environment of the community schools, and be a part of the decision-making process on issues concerning their children’s well-being. Those who are professionals, like nurses, doctors, and actors, can come to give services based on the focus of the collaboration. Services aimed at the development of children 0-5 years should equally be inclusive of their mothers. Teachers agreed that parents should be an indispensable part of any collaboration for it to be
effective, but noted that parents may be hindered in developing a curriculum for their children since the curriculum is handed over to schools by the Ministry of Education.

Regarding the ways that leadership can promote effectiveness, teachers believed that good leadership is key, but argued that without a willingness of partners to support it, even the best leadership could be rendered ineffective. To this effect, they submitted that mobilization and sensitization could be necessary tools to reconscientization of partners, which in the long run will bring about effectiveness in collaboration where the people concerned willingly and diligently follow the leadership. The teachers urged for more inclusion in decision-making processes, and advocated that supporting parents and caregivers through dialogue-based programs while strengthening existing parenting programs was necessary for collaboration effectiveness. Developing a participatory dialogue course for child development, education and child rights will open partners’ minds on the need for effective collaboration and provide capacity-building support for the development of effective delivery mechanisms and advocacy voices for all partners. The group observed that collaboration should be critical about where family and community support systems are stretched to the breaking point, whether by poverty, rapid social change, or women’s workloads, and mobilize to address such handicaps.

On the other hand, the parents’ focus group observed that they should be given more opportunity to participate in the decision-making process, as they are primary in making collaborations effective. They further demanded that collaboration should be built around their traditional rulers since their subjects listen and adhere to whatever they tell them to do. Good record keeping and accountability were seen as key to collaboration
effectiveness. They observed that transparency and accountability should be primary in collaboration.

Parents submitted that time and money were the biggest constraints and asked for opportunities that will alleviate these constraints. When asked to list their greatest constraints, they suggested parental education, provision of micro-credit facilities and advocacy visits to more integrating agencies and other stakeholders outside the community. They demanded better treatment, respect and understanding from teachers.

Summary

This section has highlighted what effective collaboration means to people in two different environments. Document review and observation provided great insight on the achievements of PTAs and schools as well as the constraints faced. Through interviews and observation, patterns of interaction and relationships of parents and school staff as a key tool of effective collaboration were appraised.

Furthermore, this section has revealed that a vibrant, innovative and focused leadership is central to effective collaboration. It went further to reiterate the place of networking in effective collaboration. This chapter also highlighted the need for parental education and community mobilization and sensitization in bringing about effective collaboration.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSIONS

Although the results of this project are not intended to generalize on the causes of weak collaborations in other contexts because of our sample size, level of education, economic status of the people in the communities and the status of the schools involved in the collaborations, it can go a long way to making recommendations to communities that share common characteristics with these communities where the study was carried out.

The results of this study provide detailed insights on what could make collaborations effective as well as the constraints encountered in collaborations. The results agree with research conducted in other contexts of the world. The study opened up an opportunity for parent-staff interaction in a wide array, through which it could be concluded that effective collaborations could help to address some problems militating against communities, especially for children 0-5 years. Voices arose for greater participation of parents as a prerequisite for effective collaboration as parents are central to the socialization, education and care of the child as submitted by previous researchers (Berk, 1999). It also brought to bear the fact that effective collaborations could help communities to foster their culture, values and norms which children are expected to carry on with (Vygotsky, 1987, and Bronfenbrenner, 1989, both in Berk, 1999). The study demonstrated that effective parent-school collaboration helped to recognise that engaging local people and reflecting on local traditions puts the most basic elements of children’s socialization to work in ECD (Colleta & Reinhold, 1997). The study further informed that local cultures could inform the development of care, curriculum, learning materials and program structure in an effective collaboration (Cochran, 1988). Through
effective parent-school collaboration, learning materials which support children’s learning were produced through the direct engagement of collaborators. This addressed the paucity of teaching/learning materials. It suggests that parents and school staff can help develop such materials, which their collaboration would have spent money on. In this regard, they contribute to efficiency of service delivery aimed at children aged 0-5 years while making some of the goals of their partnership realizable. This as a matter of fact can promote effectiveness in their collaboration (Kipkorir, 1993).

This study also provided an opening to appreciating the fact that parent and staff communications significantly contributed toward achieving effective collaborations through improved interaction. This interaction between parents and staff helped them with opportunities to actualize some targets in ECD programs. Such benefits had earlier been acknowledged by previous studies (Doherty-Derkowski, 1995, in Hughes & MacNaughton, 2001). Through this improved interactions, parents and staff were able to meet the needs of children, especially in their stimulation. Children had better opportunities of positive cognitive and social development as recognised by previous works (Studer 1993/94, and Minish & Zhou, 1993, both in Hughes & MacNaughton, 2001). Home and school visits by teachers and parents made collaboration effective in that it further addressed the issue of stimulation for children who are targeted in the collaborative endeavour. This fact, corroborated by observation and interview results, projected other benefits associated with effective collaboration which could be characterized as resource gains that are evident in the production of instructional materials and outdoor and indoor game facilities provided by the joint action of parents and teachers during the seminar.
Effective collaboration between staff and parents provided an opportunity to increase their expertise, knowledge and skills through sharing educational problems of children and understanding what problems collaborations faced. When collaborations are effective, parents and staff see the need for improving children’s educational outcomes, especially literacy (Bryant, Peisner-Feinberg & Miller-Johnson, 2000). This is evident in parents’ participation in learning and teaching. Moreover, through effective collaboration, parental commitment to schooling increases. Observation results of Model Primary School, where parent-staff relationships could be rated as cordial, revealed that parents more often brought their children to school, told them stories on an out-turn basis, cooked school meals, and used the schools as immunization centres. These activities supported better services for children targeted in the collaborative endeavour. This fact has long been revealed by other studies, which posited that effective collaborations brought about positive changes for children, parents and staff (Gelfer, 1996, and Izzo, Weisberg, Kasprow & Fendrich, 1999, both in Hughes & MacNaughton, 2001). In this study, parental education was seen as a necessary tool in effective collaboration. It provided opportunities for increased parental education in communities. It resulted in higher empowerment for parents as their improved skills and knowledge brought about higher gains which contributed to collaborative effectiveness. Through parent education and mobilization, collaborations become more effective. Parents become more aware of the issues of holistic development and ways of translating knowledge acquired in the process. It is believed that through interaction, parent and teachers can agree on which issues children need to appreciate and grow up with, since they reproduce their own culture of origin through modelling, encouragement and direct instruction of particular response
styles, forms of interactions, ways of understanding events, and enactment of implicit beliefs. (Cole, 1985, and Greenfield, 1994, both in Ball & Pence, 1999). Effective collaborations confirmed that strengthening existing programs and contextualizing childcare and early education through parent-school collaboration will help communities to maintain their valued traditions by introducing and strengthening contextual and culturally relevant programs. In this process, parents will understand the appropriate educational practice as well as promote children’s development (Gelfer, 1991, in Hughes & MacNaughton, 2001). When parent and staff knowledge are improved, collaborations become more effective as they utilize the gains of such training and education in addressing the needs of children. Through this, children have opportunities of having contextually appropriate care and education. This idea of harnessing appropriate local knowledge, culture, and materials as a prerequisite to making programs contextually effective has been demonstrated by previous researches (Arnold, 1998, in Evans, Myers & Ilfeld, 2000; Myers, 1993; Woodhead, 1996)

Another area this study highlighted is the issue of time and financial constraints as expressed by parents in effective collaboration. Time to plan and attend meetings was problematic, as shown in the interview results. This had been reported in other studies on effective parent-school collaboration (Melaville, Blank & Asayesh, 1996). This study particularly discovered that parents could contribute to collaboration effectiveness through direct labour provision, in-kind contribution as in the school meal program at Umuguma, and telling children stories. Collaborators should be cognisant that every member in a collaborative endeavour has different ways of making collaboration effective. Effectiveness should not be measured by parent and staff provision of money
for programs, but should be seen from the perspective that people can contribute to effectiveness in different ways. Again, collaborations should consider the time constraints of each partner before scheduling meetings. In most local and traditional communities, such meetings could be scheduled on community rest days.

Leadership in collaboration was one primary area the study exposed. Through credible and effective leadership, collaboration effectiveness can be achieved. In Umuguma Community, the collaboration achieved greater feats because of credible and dynamic leadership, unlike Obi-Orodo where the leadership could be said to be weak. This suggests that effective collaborations rest to some extent on effective leadership. In other words, communities that aim at effective collaborations should have effective leadership, as it is sequel to effectiveness in collaborative endeavours. Through effective leadership, meetings are more likely to be convened and attended. Through this process, collaborators would have better opportunities to share opinions, which is an ingredient of healthy collaborations. Effective leadership will provide more opportunities for networking, which brings about greater integration. Increased networking certainly results in greater integration, as seen in the case of Umuguma community, who through integration achieved more accomplishments.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study show that once parents and schools interact on a regular basis around specific activities, mutual fears and reservations become transformed into positive results. Moreover, no partnership can succeed when decisions are not collectively taken. People whose lives are affected must be part of arriving at decisions taken for better services for children. Establishing an effective partnership requires listening, creating a climate of respect, and understanding the mutual benefits that will ensue if the partnership relationship is firmly established. In this regard, trust is essential to collaboration. When partners respect equally the viewpoints and priorities of each individual and the group they represent, trust grows. Collaborators should be able to become a team, agree upon ground rules, and draw up their team vision, statement of beliefs, and action plan.

It is believed that when the above issues are addressed, communities would be in a better position to address issues affecting their lives. The study results further emphasize the importance of participatory processes by finding out the need and relevance of including parents and schools in the implementation of programs as ascertained through the needs assessment conducted in the communities. This project has demonstrated that parent-school collaboration may be compromised by costs or inefficiencies; therefore, collaborative programs should give serious consideration to organizing structures and processes that minimize costs. These include eliminating unclear goals and expectations, unproductive meetings, complicated communication patterns, and unnecessary partners.
Parents and schools must realize that collaborations are key to achieving some of the necessities that programs demand. This could be achieved through increased networking and integration in their collaborations. In most circumstances, it was observed and demonstrated through parent-school cooperative initiatives that collaborations are key to addressing some problems of children in communities, since participants were able to explore different areas in which they can make their contribution towards effective collaborations.

Through the collective action resulting from collaborations, parents and schools demonstrated that exercises such as growth monitoring; storytelling and play can help foster collaborative effectiveness. Moreover, the use of culturally relevant curriculum approaches for children aged 0-5 years was appreciated during the seminar period and should be the primary concern of further collaborations.

Through collaborations, schools and parents were able to reinstate their commitment, which goes beyond protection, food and health care to include the need for affection, interaction, and a supportive environment. It equally afforded participants privileged information on the responsibilities and the dynamics of school-parent collaboration in developing a culturally relevant program for children aged 0-5 years, and how the collaborators can produce learning materials for children’s use.

Collaborations between school and parents recognized that there always would be need to for dialogue which allows voices to be heard. This will allow for openness to create new ideas as well as finding the right balance while permitting communities to build on existing strengths and traditions. Community members are the best source of information about many factors that affect their and their children’s lives and well-being,
hence the development of this guide is firmly family- and community-focused, developed and delivered with a view to addressing some problems of collaborations in their contexts.
CHAPTER 7: RECOMMENDATIONS

The elements which are critical in the development of effective and comprehensive school-parent collaboration include effective communication, engaging families of diverse backgrounds in contributing to children’s needs, facilitating time and access for families and school to work together, effective school and community leadership, professional development, parental education, and increasing access to integration of services through improved networking to reach a larger audience. These elements when addressed can bring about improved and effective collaborations. Against these backdrops, it is necessary that the following steps be recognized and adopted for more effective collaboration:

- There is an increasing awareness that what happens within the home has the most significant influence for young children. Family members are a child’s first teachers, providers of needs and caregivers; therefore, improving the lives of families is key to a successful partnership. In this regard, there is a need for improved education and empowerment for families. It is equally important that existing strengths within communities be harnessed and integrated into programs for children.

- Developing effective communication between partners can help to make collaborations very effective. This can be achieved when the media (radio, TV bulletins) are properly used to spread the gains of collaborations. School and parents can create a convenient communication where partners are updated on goings on within a particular collaborative effort.
• Collaborations can be more effective when opportunities are created for parents and teachers to collectively articulate, discuss and reflect on their beliefs and practices through organized workshops and seminars. Equally important is building parents’ confidence in the huge role they already play in supporting their children’s development, by recognizing and respecting what they know and do and drawing out this knowledge. Along this line of action there is a need for increased sensitization and mobilization of the partners in collaboration.

• In order to develop an effective collaboration, there is a need to free up parents’ time while providing them with micro-credit facilities as well as parental education.

• Collaborations require effective leadership which is cognizant of the fact that planning a major event before partners are used to working together is an invitation to disaster. The leadership should not be negligent of the fact that it is important to share both positive and negative impressions and ideas for improving an activity, so that the next event can run more smoothly. These ideas were well-utilized at Model Primary School Umuguma, hence the achievements.

• The need for improved networking must be recognized for effective collaboration. Networking facilitates the level of achievements in a collaborative endeavour. It is important to understand that the broader the network of committed partners, the better for collaborations, as demonstrated by Model Primary School. NGOs are very valuable in collaborations as there are myriad opportunities open to them. Their expertise and skills can be harnessed to obtain a more supportive partnership.
• Above all, there is a need for mutual respect for all partners involved in collaborative endeavours. This a prerequisite to more effective collaborations.
REFERENCES


Cook, P. (1993). *Curriculum evaluation for the Meadow Lake Tribal Council/School of Child and Youth Care career ladder project*. Unpublished typescript, School of Child and Youth Care, University of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada.


APPENDIX I: FOCUS GROUP WORK

GROUP 1: Articulate ways of achieving effective collaboration

GROUP 2: Make recommendations of what you consider necessary for effective school staff and parent collaboration.

GROUP 3: In which ways do you think integrating agencies can help achieve effective parent and school collaboration?

GROUP 4: How can local materials use in ECD foster effective parent-school collaboration.

Group 5: Make a list of activities you consider necessary in bringing about effective parent school collaboration.
APPENDIX II: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Could you please tell me what you might consider as problems militating against your collaboration?

- How has leadership style affected your collaborations?

- In your opinion, do you think that integration of some agencies can bring about effective collaboration and how can this be achieved?

- How has the use of local materials helped in the effectiveness of your collaboration?

- In your opinion, do you think parents are duly respected and valued in your collaboration?

- Apart from financial contributions, in what other ways do you think partners can make collaboration effective?
APPENDIX III: ECDVU: Achieving Informed Consent-Waiver Category

Name: IBETOH CELESTINA .A. (MRS.)

1. Participants (teachers, parents, community leaders and other stakeholders) will be brought together for a three-day session to prepare the training guide cooperatively. An invitation will be given to each participant ahead of the general information session, which will contain information on the project and assist in gaining informed consent. The text of this invitation is included below. At the beginning of the three-day session, there will be an information session to ensure that everyone has understood the invitation and the issue of informed consent.

2. The considered methods for data collection include interviews, focus group discussions, and observation.

   All the categories involved (i.e., parents; community leaders, mostly elders who are custodians of the people’s culture; school teachers; nutritionists and program planners) will be interviewed on the present situation of children as related to this project and the considered good options. Interviews will continue after the workshop.

   During the dialogue meeting, members of the PTA, community leaders, educationists, nutritionists, health, environmental and sanitation officers will be grouped to discuss a way forward as it concerns the situation of children. Children will be interviewed to find out about their satisfaction in the present care, education and developmental issues in the environment.

   We shall observe children, parents and the environment as regards the situation of care, education and other developmental issues.

3. Copy of the text that will be communicated to the participants:
Harriet A. Nwabukwu

State Primary Education Board,
P. M. B 1500
Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria

Sir or Madam,

INVITATION TO INFORMATION/DIALOGUE SESSION WITH PARENTS-TEACHERS’ ASSOCIATION, COMMUNITY LEADERS, WOMEN’S GROUPS, EDUCATIONISTS, NUTRITIONISTS, SPIRITUAL/TRADITIONAL LEADERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT.

I have the pleasure to invite you for an information/dialogue session for the purpose of discussing issues of practical importance towards developing a training guide on Early Childhood Care and Development Programming on the 5th to 8th of July, 2003 at the State Primary Education Board Auditorium between 10.00 am to 3.00 pm each day. The training guide is a part of a course requirement development in my ECDVU participation, but it will also go a long way to addressing some issues of great importance as it relates to our immediate environment. Your contributions will be used in the development of this training guide on best practices supportive to ECD programming in our immediate environment, since every child is supported by its environment. We
shall have the opportunity of looking at present traditional childrearing practices and the school support systems to **Early Childhood Care and Development.**

The guide will be developed and delivered cooperatively. We will work on preparing it as a group, with the equal participation of everyone. All contributions will be highly valued in the development of this guide.

In addition to the group meeting, we shall hold smaller group discussion sessions to gain your views on the upbringing and education of young children.

This will help us to understand the rich cultural environment of the child both at home and the school environment. I will take notes during these sessions. Your contribution will be recorded by me and used in the writing of the training guide, and also in the writing up of my Major Project for the ECDVU. Your name will not be used unless you indicate during the session that you are happy to be quoted, so anonymity is assured.

Considering that this 3-day information/dialogue meeting may be too short for us to exhaust all the issues relating to this project, I shall appreciate we have focus group discussions with parents, teachers and educationists outside what we are able to achieve at this meeting. I shall be very appreciative of your permitting we observe your children in your settings as well as interviewing them on key issues of childrearing and education both at home and school by the 3\textsuperscript{rd} week of July. I shall communicate with you in due course to tell you of the exact date.

A copy of the final report shall be made available to you on request. Please note that you are not bound by any obligation in being a part of this noble project. We hope you will wish to participate based on your love of children and their future. If you wish to withdraw at any time during the meetings or discussions, you are free to simply leave. You may also ask questions of the researcher prior to deciding on whether to participate.
or not. If you wish to withdraw at any time after the sessions have been held, I will be available and can be contacted at the above address.

Thanking you for your anticipated cooperation.

Ibetoh Celestina A. (Mrs.)
APPENDIX IV: A GUIDE FOR EFFECTIVE PARENT-SCHOOL
COLLABORATION: A COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT AND DELIVERY
APPROACH
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Introduction

Collaborations stems from partnerships based on mutual benefits, respect and accountability. By forming partnership through the engagement of schools and parents, communities are making an important investment in the fortune of their young ones as well as strengthening themselves.

The well being of children, families and schools depends upon the capacity of communities and supports around them to work together. There is no doubt saying that most programs fashioned around children’s development must be firmly family focused and based. In this regard schools and parents being primary part of the process of socialization and development have come together to proffer a generate understanding and conclusion that effective collaborations are key to achieving most of the problems that plague them and their children. The content of this guide is a summation of what parents and schools consider valuable tools and information to effective collaboration.

Objectives

This document addresses the following objectives.

General objectives:

- To provide parents and schools involved in collaboration a definition of collaboration and how it gets started with an information instrument on the way forward.
- To equip various partners with common reference tools that will enable them to build an effective working relationship.
Specific objectives:

- To enable parents and schools to become more quickly familiar with the community resources that meet their needs.
- To enable communities and schools to develop a network of partners that could offer additional support and resources.
- To suggest ways that each partner can use to identify the needs of the other partner so that they can adjust their mutual expectations and choose action plans that support ECD success.
UNIT 1: GETTING STARTED.

How do collaborative efforts get started?

Comprehensive partnership or collaborations begin when individuals (staff and parents) reach out to like-minded people and groups to address issues that affect children and families. Myriad catalysts align for comprehensive partnership. This include when school leaders and parents initiate collaborations. It could begin when communities become aware of an urgent need for change or when funds becomes available to respond to conditions in the community.

*Focus group definition of partnership or collaboration*

*Definition:* Partnership is an amalgamation or alliance aimed at testing, promoting and developing means of actualizing contextually appropriate holistic development success of children and their families. This alliance involves pooling efforts, resources and know-how within schools, homes and communities. Concretely these initiatives translate into projects, services and activities designed to identify, prevent and counter economic, social, psychosocial and environmental difficulties that cause children to drop out of school.

*NOTE:* Understand that effective collaboration involves an alliance against a common enemy, an exchange and an association aimed at achieving a common goal. A partnership cannot, therefore, be based solely on good intensions. If intensions are not combined with a specific goal shared by all the partners there is a risk that partnership will not be
solidified and that partners will lose their sense of purpose as interest wanes and differences in opinion arise.

Steps to forming a strong collaboration:

• Identify the interested people that are likely to be involved in collaboration.
• Write a letter or visit various neighbourhood/business organizations to invite them for a meeting in a school or community hall to determine interest.
• Define the focus or context of the collaborations.
• Produce a statement of understanding among partners. Understand that effective collaboration is built on mutual trust and voluntary participation. Important is the fact that a statement of understanding can be a useful tool, particularly as it allows various partners to clearly define their respective expectations, objectives, and roles

Principles or common values of effective collaboration:

• Mutual respect between partners.
• Equality between all partners, regardless of their socioeconomic situation level of schooling, social status, knowledge of care, systems, jobs, etc.
• Recognition of the latent skills of each partner by all individuals concerned (parents, school staff and community workers).
• Common social and educational concerns.
• Concern for the interest of children 0-5 years. Partners must always have this focus.
• Openness to accountability.

Guidelines to achieving effective collaboration:
• Objectives of collaboration must be clearly formulated: objectives must be specific to provide meaningful guidelines are broad enough to encompass all educational, developmental concerns and skills of parents, community organization and school staff.

• Identify designated representatives most especially those mandated by the school and the community.

• Establish effective mechanisms designated to promote communication between partners while taking into account questions of protecting personal information, relations with parents. Increased media component and school parent bulletin is an invaluable tool to establishing communication.

• Ensure that various interventions complement one another while avoiding duplications, which wastes financial resources.

• Analyze the focus of the collaboration and make efforts to draw up a yearly plan of activities to be conducted within the communities involved in collaboration. This involves who does what? When? How? As well as what evaluations and follow up mechanism are in place.

• Yearly evaluations of the results of activities conducted within the partnership and develop alternate measures, rethink means and objectives if necessary.

• Informing everyone involved in collaboration about difficulties encountered by partners are key such that mechanisms could be designed to emphasize successful initiatives.

• At the start of each school year make sure that all partners are aware of the content of the collaboration and its history. Publicize and make changes to the process so
that new parents and other partners can take part in the collaboration, given that school and community representatives move or get new jobs outside the context of the collaboration.

*NOTE:* Once an individual or small group of people begins a collaboration, school staff join with families, community leaders and representatives of health and essential services providers such as nutrition, education, water and environmental sanitation to forge individual programs into comprehensive strategies. This core group evolve into an effective collaboration by:

- Understanding the context for collaboration
- Expanding to include more parents and teachers
- Forming a partnership with diverse service providers
- Establishing an effective governance structure

*Planning for action*

New collaboration often struggle between taking immediate actions and the need to plan for a sustained effort. There is no specific formula for how much time and energy to initially allocate for building effective relationships or for planning strategies but partners agree both activities are essential to long term success.

*Planning for actions involves:*

- Establishing guidelines for partner relationships
- Defining a target community, its needs and resources available
- Creating trust and shared vision among members and groups
- Building cultural awareness
Establishing guidelines for partner relationship

Since putting collaboration into action raises many practical issues, the important questions to consider should address the following issues:

- Where and when will partners meet to conduct business? Will one agency’s facilities be used or will meetings rotate among several facilities?
- What time of the day or week will be convenient for them and how long will meetings last? How will children’s overall need be provided?
- How regularly will partners meet? Will they meet for the same purpose every time? How would the agenda of each meeting be determined?
- Will the chairperson rotate or be stable? Who will record and communicate the minutes of each meeting? How can the meeting format best accommodate communication styles and preferences within the community?

*NOTE:* Guidelines are an important part of team building and collaborations; the process of working together will challenge diverse stakeholders and bring them together.

Guidelines should be on the unique context of the community. Remember that decisions made by consensus require input from each member and agreement that he or she understands, supports, and is willing to implement the group decision. This is an essential ingredient to effective collaboration because through discussion of alternatives, voices are heard which foster commitment.

*Creating trust and a shared vision.*

Diversity among partners gives multiple stakeholders a voice in the comprehensive partnership, it can also mean differences of opinion about issues
involving children, families and the best strategies for addressing them. For there to be an
effective group partnership, there is need to find a common ground and develop a unified
vision for success.

Summary

The process of building a collaborative partnership is multidimensional. It involves:

• Recognizing opportunities for change
• Developing a vision of long-term change
• Mobilizing people and resources from diverse partners
• Choosing an effective group structure
• Building trust among collaborators
• Developing learning opportunities for partners
A needs assessment is a process that sets the tone, direction and subsequent steps in the development of a program. The well-being of children and families is predicated upon two assumptions, which are:

- That every community has its own problems which, when neglected or undiscovered, hinder problem identification and solution.
- That for there to be a meaningful approach to understanding a particular community, there is a need to identify problems within the community while looking at the level of community resources in addressing such problems.

The capacity of collaboration to work together in any context depends on the resources available. However, for there to be any meaningful investment in any particular context, the problems for the community must be known so as to know how and where resources must be channelled.

In order to make collaborations effective, partners and communities should conduct a comprehensive needs assessment to assure that services are based upon documented needs, fill gaps in services and draw from community strengths and available resources. Needs assessments should be targeted to evaluate short- and long-term impacts. This community-based collaborative approach to determining what needs to be done is very important to communities. Needs assessment addresses these important questions: What do we have? What do we need? What must be done? What options are there for us?

*The Role of Needs Assessment and Program Evaluation*
• Needs assessment program development and evaluation should be part of an ongoing process.

• Needs assessment and program evaluation should give the collaborating partners the information they need about their communities and ways of meeting their objectives.

• Needs assessment and program evaluation should be tailored to each community and shaped by collaborative members.

• Needs assessment should focus on a community’s strengths and available resources as well as service gaps.

• Funding from all levels and sources, private as well as public, should balance accountability with a need to encourage service innovations.

• Participating partners should establish uniform reporting requirements and standardize their data definition.

• Communities should endeavour to receive technical and financial support in assessing needs and measuring progress through increased integration and networking.

**Basic principles**

Needs assessments involving parents and schools in ECD programming should be open-minded in defining the problems and working toward appropriate solutions. This involves understanding the context of their communities with its peculiarities. The culture of the communities must be appreciated and their weakness addressed. Parents should be more inclined to this process. Expertise and resources should be sincerely appraised.
Foster participation by establishing a participatory process. It must be realized that fostering participation is crucial to the process of respecting cultural differences and makes it possible to begin where people are (Evans, Myers & Ilfeld, 2000, p. 34). Participation in its truest sense means active involvement with others in a process. It builds a base for sustainability which is critical to a sense of ownership and empowerment (Bosnjak, (1982) in Evans, Myers & Ilfeld, 2000. Korton, 1980; Pantin, 1983). Take a constructive rather than a compensatory approach. This involves beginning by identifying positive practices within our communities. Opportunities should be open to identify what is being done well, even circumstances of poverty. So that the power in local indigenous knowledge and key cultural practices can be harnessed

Focus of needs assessment

Needs assessment aimed at providing effective collaborative services on ECD should explore these areas:

Economic, social, political and demographic indicators of the community

- Population distribution and change by age levels and gender
- Form of government (democratic, communal, socialist, etc.)
- Policies and legal framework
- Employment and income, disaggregated by gender
- Literacy and level of program access to children 0-5 years
- Roles and status of women

Resources

- Human resources
• Financial resources
• Current ECD or child/family-related projects and programs

**Community and schools**
• Availability and distribution of services
• Infrastructure and facilities

**Family characteristics**
• Type of family
• Household composition
• Stability
• Income and its usage
• Educational level of adults in households
• Parental expectations
• Childrearing beliefs and values
• Childrearing practices which schools can build upon in provision of care
• Language(s) spoken at home and school
• Household and school environment

**Status of children**
• Survival, health and nutrition
• Progress and performance at preschool and primary schools

(culled from Early Childhood Care for Development by Evans, Myers & Ilfeld, 2000)
NOTE: Needs assessment should be conducted by schools, parents and integrated agencies within any given context.
UNIT 3: THE ROLE OF PARENTS/TEACHERS IN EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION

Parents as Partners

The place of parents in creating effective collaboration cannot be over-emphasized. It is believed that in power and breadth of influence, no context equals the family (Berk, 1999, p.73). Parents are their child’s first teachers. When they help build the child’s speaking, listening and other skills through daily interaction with the child, they provide emotional, physical, and intellectual stimulation necessary for the child’s development. Furthermore, parents have expectations for their children’s future development and hold the basic childrearing and care techniques within any ecocultural setting.

Parents continue to be involved in their children’s learning through communication with the school while still providing a positive learning environment in the home. Research studies have shown that children of parents who take an active interest in their children’s care and education are more successful in learning than other students.

Further context of research has shown that when parents are involved in ECD and school, its programs are more successful and the school more effective. In light of the above, parents should:

• See themselves as active partners in their children’s care and educational success rather than clients or service users.
• Have access to information and basic tools that will enable them to become more actively involved in collaborative and decision-making activities with full knowledge of the facts of the collaboration so that they don’t feel excluded.

• Endeavour having access to resources and tools that enable them to participate in their children’s education which may seem impenetrable because they feel they do not have the education to do so.

• Ensure that the rights of every child irrespective of gender or disability are protected. See themselves as invaluable partners, facilitators and educators since they have the community’s culture, value, norms as a right, regardless of their difficulties in expressing their needs and opinions.

• Be aware of resources available within the community and the ability to harness these resources toward the needs of their children.

• Have an opportunity to share their questions and opinions about their children’s welfare at care centres and schools and participate in activities aimed at strengthening collaborations.

• Be able to offer support to the collaboration based on the skills they possess.

• Be able to detect learning problems and communicate same to the school for further action. Be able to improve communication with their children.

Ways parents can make collaboration with schools effective.

Parents have myriad ways of helping to make collaborations more effective. Most parents are already involved in schools in a lot of ways and can do more to make collaborations more effective. Although, the general notion of most parents about making collaboration effective is through funding which are used for school renovation,
construction and materials acquisition. This need not be the standard rule. Parents can bring other skills depending on the focus of the collaboration. For improved care, stimulation and physical development aimed at ECD programming, they can help in a variety of ways which include:

- Telling stories to children about their communities and for cognitive development
- Serving as volunteers in the classrooms or preschool sections
- Bathing, massaging children and wash their dirty clothes at the school
- Organizing school meals for children with contributed food materials from their farms
- Constructing play and instructional materials needed for children’s physical and cognitive development from available materials
- Establishing a school farm with lands contributed by community. This will help augment what supplies they make from their homes
- Being a part of clearing the environment of the school to achieve good hygiene and sanitation
- Being a part of monitoring, evaluation and other learning concerns
- Providing security to oversee the safety and security of school property
- Being a part of growth monitoring group
- Being a part of decision-making team on issues concerning improved service delivery
- Reporting the progress of the child at home to school so as for the school staff to know what appropriate intervention the child requires
- Serving as members of a board of trustee at schools in the community
• Sharing observations with staff concerning children’s developmental patterns and
  behaviour, to help individualize the approach in the home visit and in the program
  setting
• Endeavouring to be part of curriculum reforms for children
• Assisting in development and implementation of curricula which for infants and
toddlers is based on relationships, routines and daily experience

Teachers as Partners

Teachers as staff of the school have a lot of responsibilities in making
collaborations effective. It is a truism that schools at the meso-system are formal
institutions designed to transmit knowledge and skills children need to become
productive adult members of the society. Teachers are believed to be involved in the
perpetuation and modification of their own cultures of origin through modeling ways of
understanding events and particular response styles, forms of interaction, ways of
understanding events and enactment of implicit beliefs. These areas are primary in
children’s development and should be the areas of great focus in developing effective
collaborations aimed at holistic development of the child in ECD programming.

In light of the above, school staff should be aware and be involved in the
following:

• Make use of local materials with parents to provide play and instructional material
  needs of children through direct involvement.
• Introduce formal and informal communication with parents so as to give the
  progress of the child at school.
• Be involved and present in the organization and attendance of parent-teacher association meetings.

• Discover individual needs of children and provide the necessary assistance.

• Know the resources available in the community, particularly the services, projects and programs geared towards educational and case successes.

• Act as members of the board of trustees when elected to do so.

• Be aware of other possible collaborative bodies and consultative bodies in the community.

• Understand the way some parents behave (e.g., why some parents not attend meetings with staff).

• Team up with various partners to share responsibilities for children’s success and socialization.

• Establish regular home visits to monitor development of children as well as foster better understanding and communication with parents.

• Recognize parents as indispensable partners as well as respecting their views or childrearing practices available within the community.

• Mobilize the community towards achieving the objectives of the collaboration.

• Undertake capacity-building opportunities provided by the collaboration.

• Supply a variety of materials and planned activities designed to encourage individual and group play.

• Observe children carefully to identify their preferred ways of interacting with the environment.
• Support the efforts of parent in the holistic development of their children at home.

*NOTE:* Activity aimed at effective collaboration should look at the expectation of both home and school and draw up such programs that are broadly based on the teachers/parents as effective parties.
UNIT 4: THE PLACE OF NETWORKING AND INTEGRATED SERVICES IN EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION.

Most communities have started to realize the need for more inclusive programming through improved networking, integration and communication in order to make collaborations effective with a view to realizing a holistic programs for children. Few among the communities can solely finance as well as provide the needed finances and materials that help to address their needs. In this regard, there is a need to look into alternatives that can help alleviate the burdens of most collaborations, which in most cases render them ineffective. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs) like age grade, mothers clubs, and churches, have a lot of support which they can offer to make collaborations effective. These range from materials, human and capacity-building inputs. However, care must be taken in choosing agencies, which parents and schools consider as being necessary in making their collaboration effective. In choosing agencies, they must choose those that enable school staff and parents to help children function effectively in a rapidly changing society while retaining a clear cultural identity and sense of values.

- Develop the capacity of parents (especially mothers) to articulate to local and development agencies their need for support for their children.
- Assist families and school staff to increase their knowledge, skills and confidence in their abilities to support their children’s development and ensure their rights.
- Have an impact on the lives of children below 6 years of age where influences are so critical.
Create an opportunity for parents to articulate, discuss and reflect on their beliefs and practices.

_The Place of Networking in Effective Collaboration_

Networking involves reaching out, being involved and putting the experiences gained into useful outcomes.

Parents and school staff who intend to achieve an effective collaboration must be ready to reach out, experience and turn the experiences gained into meaningful outcomes for the children. When parents and school staff understand the bases of their collaborations, there will be a need to reach out to some agencies or organizations whose services are primary to their focus of intervention.

In these regards parents and staff should be able to attend organized workshops, that are expected to improve their knowledge and bring about program success, since effectiveness can be measured with the level of efficiency and success of the program focus. Parents and school staff should be able to work at communities with proven records of effective collaboration, liaise with them, and learn from them. This helps in cross-fertilization of ideas and learning, which can be internalized and utilized in their particular communities.

Apart from the health agency, water and environmental sanitation agencies are key to providing services for children’s holistic development. Safe water, clean and safe toilet facilities, and a safe environment are key to achieving children’s holistic development for which this agency has a lot of role to play. Their involvement will help parents and school staff meet their program target, thereby making collaboration more effective.
Although some of the agency’s projects are counter partly funded, the most important thing is to liaise.

*Integrating Agencies in Effective Collaboration*

The need for integrating agencies in making collaborations effective cannot be over-emphasized. As earlier mentioned, no community achieves all they want about their children’s development single-handedly. For collaborations aimed at service delivery for the holistic development of children 0-5 years, such agencies such as health, education, water and environmental sanitation, and nutrition should be involved in providing such needed services, which are vital for families with young children.

The state of health of children 0-5 years and their well-being is key in judging how effective a collaboration involving parents and school staff may have been. In this regard, bringing in the health agency to provide or complement the available indigenous health knowledge is key. This agency can help to provide the necessary materials and child health needs at little or no cost when brought into services aimed at improving collaborations. They will undertake to provide the routine immunization for mother’s pre- and postnatal periods. This will help to reduce maternal and infant death rates in communities, thereby making the focus of collaboration realistic.

In effective parent-school collaboration, endeavour should be put into liaising with the health agency to make the school or a designated place in the community a health post which will serve the needs of the rural communities since such facilities sometimes lack. The agency under good understanding with parents and schools can carry out workshops and seminars for parents and school staff to be equipped with the right information needed to handle maternal and child diseases in their communities.
Apart from the health agency, water and environmental sanitation agency are key in providing for services for children’s holistic development. Safe water, clean and safe toilet facilities and a safe environment are key to achieving children’s holistic development for which these agencies have a lot of roles to play. Their involvement will help parents and school staff to meet their program target, thereby making collaboration more effective.

Although, some of the agency’s projects are counter partly funded, the most important thing is to liaise and get started. The education ministry is an important one in all of its ramifications. They draw the curriculum and provide necessary educational support for communities. They have the manpower for training and establishment of school or continuing education centres. They are key to making collaborations effective. Efforts should be directed at reaching this agency.

In very rural communities where the literacy level of parents is dismal, they provide assistance and the necessary logistics required to establish outreach centres. Parental education can be fostered with their assistance. It is important to understand that parental education is key to bringing about collaboration effectiveness. They equally provide on the job training for staff which is necessary to program effectiveness.

Apart from the above, the nutrition agency, which is important in ECD delivery, should be brought in to foster effective collaborations. They will be of immense help in helping school and parents before demonstrating to them how local food materials can be used to bring about healthy development of children when appropriately prepared.
NOTE: In bringing in integrated services that are school linked, understand that what works effectively are those programs that address the issues of families and children in the context of implementation. In that case, the following should be observed:

- Services should be community based and community delivered.
- Services should be family-centred, driven by needs of children and families and on the strengths of the community.
- Services should be culturally competent.
- Services should focus on primary prevention, early intervention, and strengthening the ability of children and families to help themselves.
- Services should be of quality and developmentally appropriate.
- Services should be cost-effective.
UNIT 5: THE PLACE OF COMMUNICATION IN EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION.

Communication can be used to bring about effective collaboration in a variety of ways. This varies from personal to development communication. Communication is essential in reporting to parent of their children’s welfare. Its use can further stretch to organizations that are integrated into collaborations.

Most agencies and parents who are involved in partnerships would want to have reports on how far a particular project under focus had progressed. With unfettered communication, agencies involved in collaboration will have to evaluate the projects they are involved in as well as appraise how funds or materials they put in had been utilized. This gives agencies leverage on how far they have gone with the collaboration and how much they still have to be involved in.

Communication can further be used in disseminating information about meetings, workshops, and seminars. When there is an unfettered information flow, partners involved in collaboration are informed about developments. This strengthens collaborations.

Ways parents and staff can utilize communication in making collaborations effective:

- **Media:** The media can be used to strengthen collaboration through adverts, phone-in programs, sensitization and mobilization of the people. Through radio and television programs, schools and parents can sell ideas to the general public about their collaborative endeavours. This involves stating unequivocally about
issues concerning children 0-5 years. The town criers are valued instruments of media.

- **Letters**: Parents and staff can make collaboration effective through letters informing of meetings and reports on children when necessary. This breaks the ice in communication and brings about improved relationships and services for children 0-5 years.

*Basic Techniques for Promoting Information Exchange*

- Home visits and phone calls from staff.
- School contact through open days, parent-teacher conferences, parents’ meetings.
- Parent library or room with resources such as school documents, books on parenting and other topics, or where school volunteers can keep informed about school activities.
- Parent survey or needs assessment.
- Written communication such as flyers or newsletters

*Basic Techniques for Promoting Interpersonal Relationships*

- Luncheon for school staff and parents organized with local food materials available.
- Weekend retreat for staff and/or field trip to provide parental education.
- Performance by children aimed in the intervention program followed by opportunities for staff and parents to talk informally.

Vital ingredients for successful parental involvement:

- Provide coordination for activities.
• Assess needs and resources.
• Specify and communicate parent role.
• Train parent and staff.
UNIT 6: THE ROLE OF FINANCING

One of the greatest influences in effective collaborations is finance. It strongly influences the scope, characteristics and effectiveness of service and support available to collaborators in responding to the needs of children and families. School-parent collaborations can raise some of the finances they require by taking inventory of the communities’ resources. They could lease out school halls for receptions and other social functions in order to raise funds. These funds will be helpful in meeting some of their financial obligations. Financing patterns erect major barriers to coherent and comprehensive services. Accountability must be ensured. In other words, effective collaboration should ensure that:

- Money received form each individual is appropriately receipted.
- Money expended should be receipted.
REFERENCES

