Investing in the Future of Youth:
Parent Training

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This article is designed for educators, program planners, and trainers in educational and community agencies with responsibilities for parent training and parent empowerment. The article describes a process and a model which have been proven successful by the Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE), a nonprofit organization formed to integrate low-income parents into the educational arena. For every one hundred families who attend the first training session of a PIQE parent program, 70% complete the entire series of training workshops. This statistic is impressive when one considers that the majority of parents trained by PIQE have not completed high school. In fact, a large number have not completed primary education. Evaluation data are discussed, and organizational tensions are examined for strengthening parent participation in our schools.

Background of School Communities

Inner-city schools have a dismal track record in providing ethnically diverse (Hispanic/Latino, African American, Asian and Pacific Islander, American Indian) and low-income (all racial backgrounds) youth with skills necessary for access to the world of work. Over 40% of ethnically diverse and low-income youth drop out of school before completing high school; another 40% receive high school diplomas in spite of academic deficiencies that leave them under-skilled and underemployed. Of the remaining 20%, only 10% enter college, and fewer than 5% eventually receive a Bachelor's degree (Guthrie & Kirst, 1989).

Nationally, the school attrition rate for ethnically diverse students is 45% in comparison with 21% for EuroAmerican students (Action Council on Minority Education, 1990). Forty percent of all Latino students who leave school do so before reaching the 10th grade. In California, the attrition rate for ethnically diverse students is estimated to be 45% to 50%, but it goes as high as 70% in "some of the more racially segregated and economically impacted communities" (San Diego County Chicano Federation, 1990, p.3).

Under-skilled youth become dependent on social and economic assistance, and this disempowers them as contributors in our society. Social disempowerment is a condition that is visible in at-risk educational achievement in the areas of reading and math for 80% of Latino and African American students as early as the third grade (Espinosa & Ochoa, 1986, 1992). Although our schools have responded with socially and
academically promising practices to arrest the underachievement of low-income students at the junior high
and high school level, unfortunately that has been six to eight years too late after the problem of
underachievement has been created and entrenched (Ochoa, Hurtado, Espinosa, & Zachman, 1987). As a
community, we need to empower parents and youth to succeed in the earliest stages of education. The
empowerment of youth is not a process that begins at the junior or high school level but one that must begin
before kindergarten with home-school-community interventions and public commitment.

A lack of home and school accountability contributes to student disempowerment and blurs the possibility
that school/parent collaboration can do much to empower children to achieve. Presently, our school
communities justify the low performance of children and schools through expectancy bands, expecting
schools to perform only to the level assumed to be probable for their students and calling that success
The cost of underachievement is extremely high. Considering the tragic circumstances of underskilled youth
and a 45% dropout rate, preventive action within our school communities is not only desirable but
imperative for our economic survival and democracy (Weston, 1989).

The Parent Institute for Quality Education

Convinced that the often-heard charge that poor and linguistically diverse parents are apathetic about their
children's education is wrong, PIQE formed in San Diego County as a nonprofit organization on the basic
premise that no force on earth is as strong as that of a parent determined to get a fair break for his or her
child. PIQE sees the family structure and the parents as primary forces for the creation and maintenance of
the values, skills, and disciplines with which children improve their opportunities for educational excellence.

Due to the absence of parent education programs PIQE was established in 1987 to address the concerns of
parents, to assist low-income parents of any racial background and limited English speaking families, to
translate concern for their children's education into effective work, and to encourage and assist school
success. PIQE trains parents from any racial background to work on behalf of their children and to transform
their educational, social, and economic opportunities to assist in empowering the improvement of their
quality of life. In its work with school districts PIQE has four goals: (a) to empower parents to be teachers
of their children, (b) to connect low-income parents with their community schools, (c) to increase home-
school communication and collaboration, and (d) to establish an effective home/school-support team.

Since the greatest need to empower parents is in the large urban centers in our nation, PIQE's work has been
concentrated in Southern California's large urban centers where ethnically and linguistically diverse low-
income families form majorities in their school communities; more than 60% of students in these urban
schools are ethnically diverse predominantly Latino, Native American, African American, and Asian
American. As many as 50% of the homes have only one parent, over 50% of households are eligible for Aid
to Families with Dependent Children, and 80% of the children are below grade level. In such communities,
also, are found the largest proportion of recent immigrant families. The children of these urban communities
are served in elementary schools that are structurally large, over-crowded, and post low scores on
standardized tests.

Most schools that invite PIQE have histories of low parent participation, with a low expectation of parental
interest that generally matches their low expectations of poor and ethnically diverse students' academic
success: schools that do not view ethnically diverse parents as concerned or able to contribute to the
improvement of their children's school success. Schools' traditional failure to involve parents is reflected in
the available research on parent training, which speaks of schools' expected ability to reach between 5% to
30% of parents for any one event (Weston, 1989). The general skepticism of school personnel was expressed by a school secretary who stated: "I have been at this school for over fifteen years, and we have tried to involve parents. You (PIQE) will be lucky to get twenty parents, so don't have high hopes."

PIQE is guided by a Board of Directors. It has a Director, Associate Director, and Secretary, and a cadre of educators who serve as instructors. Volunteer work is provided by professional supporters of PIQE in proposal writing, curriculum development, advising, and the recruitment of parents.

Benefits to School Communities and Society

The social benefits of connecting and empowering ethnically diverse and low-income parents to become involved in the education of their children are many. Among the most salient benefits are: (a) reduction of the 80% underachievement of K -6th grade low-income students, (b) increase in the potential of youth to become productive members of society, (c) decrease in family social dependency on community support, (d) increase in the self-reliance of families, (e) increase in the tax base of our communities, (f) decrease of social conflict and human disempowerment, (g) increase in tax revenues for community services, (h) improvement in the quality of life of families and communities, and (i) increased community participation in our democratic process.

How the Parent Institute Works With Families

PIQE works directly with participating families through intermediary organizations, usually public schools at the K to 9th grade level. For each training series, content is designed around the specific issues and concerns of participating parents and is presented in one-and-a-half to three hour training workshops. Each training workshop has as its objective connecting parents with their children's education and creating a collaborative relationship with the school community. Such collaboration leads to the education of children for the world of work in the informational economy.

PIQE stresses an active relationship with schools and community organizations to create a full partnership between parents and schools on behalf of the children. The work of PIQE is inclusive and consciously seeks to integrate the schools, administrators, instructors, and family members into a communication and coordination network responsive to issues of change and empowerment.

Training Objectives

PIQE recommends that the school community or school district commit to meeting the following objectives: (a) offer training to all parents and households whose children attend the school, (b) recruit and graduate from its training series no fewer than 60% of parent/households in the school community over a three year period, (c) provide training on the importance of home and school collaboration to actualize the personal commitment of 60% of households, (d) call each parent before each of the training sessions in order to keep retention rate high, and (e) provide training to connect 60% of households with social agencies to increase family self-sufficiency as active members of the community.

Steps in Establishing Parent Training

When a school invites PIQE to undertake parent training, the cost to the school is shared: private foundations and church organizations pay for half the cost of the instructors, office space, staff assistance, phones, postage, travel, equipment, and costs of duplicating materials needed for the preparation, delivery,
and evaluation of each training session.

PIQE follows an 11 step process each time a new series of parent workshops is introduced at a school site. These steps operationalize the parent training process as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1.

**Step 1. School receptivity and collaboration** begin with the premise that the school community is committed to parent empowerment and home-school collaboration. PIQE becomes involved with the school community when there is mutual interest and commitment to provide short and long-term parent training with the goal of connecting parents with their school community.

**Step 2. Orientation and letter of agreement** is initiated when PIQE makes an appointment with the requesting school principal to discuss the program. At the initial meeting PIQE provides research to the school personnel on the correlation between parent involvement and student academic achievement. PIQE's approach to training, as well as newsletters, brochures, sample training-series themes and topics are presented. To assure mutual understanding, a letter of agreement of mutual collaboration between the school and PIQE is developed. Among important specified responsibilities are notification of parents, letters/phone calls to parents, registration of parents, identification and training of facilitators for training series, child care services and refreshments for the children of participating parents, site/room for training and child care, scheduling of training dates and times, organization and implementation of graduation ceremonies, and documentation of participation and evaluations. To ascertain a good understanding of the school, PIQE's staff examines the sociocultural characteristics of the community (ethnic and linguistic achievement trends by grade level, curriculum content, attendance patterns, and levels of parent involvement).

**Step 3. Preparing and informing school community** requires that PIQE and the school community begin informing school personnel and the parent community of the proposed training. Two weeks before an orientation meeting PIQE gives the principal a sample letter of invitation for the parents which is sent by the principal about seven days before the first parent planning meeting. PIQE requests two complete sets of all household address labels and a list of phone numbers from the school and calls parents as soon as they receive the principal's letter. During this period, direct telephone contact is made. PIQE estimates that 30% or 40% of parents in each school community will attend at least one PIQE class; therefore, for the specified dates, the appropriate number of classrooms to accommodate 25-30 persons per meeting room are secured for the morning and again in the evening. Due to school overcrowding, PIQE instructors are usually assigned to the cafeteria, the teachers' lounge, the library, the auditorium, the counseling center, and the parents' room to conduct training sessions. PIQE then schedules the dates and times for classes estimating about nine to twelve weeks of work: two to five weeks of recruitment and orientation, six weeks of classes, and a final week for graduation.

**Step 4. Specification of training themes and recruitment** requires a number of pretraining meetings with parents. PIQE considers the two to five weeks of recruitment to be the most important and delicate area of its program since this is when parents come to believe that PIQE will provide them with training in a collegial way and with information that they need. It is imperative that the person delivering the message to the parents believes that the parents are interested in their children's education. Such a person must also believe in the importance of parental involvement in schools and in education. Parents attending the initial meetings are registered. Eight to 12 parents may attend the first meeting; by the second meeting the group increases to between 16 and 24; and by the last meeting, the group may benefit from the participation of 50 to 75 parents. This growth reflects participating parents' first experience of success since they themselves
become active recruiters. In these orientation meetings, parents are provided factual data on educational trends and are invited to participate in a discussion that identifies topics they feel would be helpful in preparing them to understand and assist their children. As the parents respond, their ideas are written on the chalkboard in their exact words without interpretation or rephrasing. This list is used to select the themes that parents would like the training to address. In the area of recruitment, parent volunteers register parents every morning and afternoon before and after school for one week for the PIQE training classes. Classes are offered in all of the languages spoken by the parents (e.g., Hmong, Farsi, Vietnamese, Spanish, English). The telephone also becomes an important tool for registering parents. A phone list that the school provides (in alphabetical order by parents' names) is used by bilingual parents to invite parents to the parent training. The bilingual callers introduce themselves as follows:

"My name is _________________. I am calling from PIQE. The Institute has been invited by your child's school principal to bring our program to the school. Have you heard about us? We are offering classes to parents for six consecutive weeks. You may choose to come either only once a week in the morning or in the evening for a total of six times. The topics being taught are those chosen by parents from the school. In the past, we have offered classes such as discipline, on how to help our children with their schoolwork at home, on drugs, etc. The classes are offered in your home language. You will be instructed in the language of your choice. The classes are free and child care is provided. Would you like to attend?"

If the answer is "yes," the parents are enrolled. When parents answer "no," they usually give an excuse which prompts a remark:

"Well, I understand your time demands, but let me tell you why we are doing this. Did you know that the dropout rate of (ethnicity) is 40 to 50 percent? These children need our help, and one way to help is for us parents to get together and find areas in which we agree and receive more information. The instructors for these classes are professors from the universities, counselors, school teachers, or people working in our communities who have a sense of the need to change those statistics. We are ready to help, we just need your participation. Would you like to join us?"

If the parent chooses not to participate, the caller must be understanding and leave the lines of communication open for a possible future PIQE program in the school.

**Step 5. Determining the content of training and trainers** begins in the orientation meetings where parents' issues, concerns, and opinions are expressed. Their voices are documented, and the list of issues, concerns, and opinions is clustered around unifying themes. These themes are presented to the school's parent group which is asked to rank them. Upon completion of this step, PIQE makes the commitment to develop workshops for each of the top six themes selected. Instructors are identified for each training series. The instructors reflect the ethnicity of the parent groups and are bilingual (e.g., English-Spanish, English-Vietnamese, English-Filipino). Logistics for scheduling, facilities, and child care are undertaken. Lessons for each workshop are developed, typed by language of the participants, duplicated, and provided to the instructors. Each week the parent participants receive a copy of the lesson.

**Step 6. Training of instructors and management tasks** requires that dates, site, rooms, and child care facilities be established weeks in advance of initial training. The Director of PIQE assigns all personnel and volunteers to each of the school communities. An orientation meeting is scheduled with all instructors before each training series during the training and at the end of series. Graduation logistics that require validation of attendance records, graduation site, invitation of representatives/guests, refreshments, and certificates are also planned.
Step 7. **Preimplementation of parent training** requires both short and long-term planning. At a pretraining retreat, instructors review the logistics of the training and PIQE's goals and are given an overview of workshop themes that they need to facilitate during classes I to VI and guidelines for delivering and documenting training. With respect to school personnel, the school principal informs teachers of the training and the expected increase in parents' inquiries about their children's progress, needs, and concerns. The school is also asked to initiate long-term training plans for integrating parents into school activities, involving them in classroom and school functions, and collaborating with them to assist their children at home.

Step 8. **Implementation and assessment of training** requires cooperation between PIQE staff and school personnel to make each parent training session a positive experience for all involved. PIQE instructors facilitate 20 to 30 parents per parent group; school personnel provide child care, a nurturing climate for parents, and the other elements delineated in the "Letter of Agreement." In this step, PIQE instructors are responsible for preparing their lessons, for documenting and interacting with parents, and for acknowledging the work of each parent. Each workshop has suggested support materials and readings for the instructors to review which provide background information on the concepts being discussed under each theme. Instructors hold one-hour weekly meetings to prepare, review, and share strategies about the weekly lesson based on a selected theme. Attendance is monitored weekly, and phone calls are made to nonattending parents. At the end of the training series, parents are asked to evaluate the training using a questionnaire to assess the value of the training.

Step 9. **Closure and recognition** acknowledge the role of the parents as equals in the education of their children. This practice of paramount importance permeates each training session and culminates in a special graduation ceremony. In this final training ceremony, the superintendent of the school district, the president of an institution of higher education, or both, present a certificate of recognition to each parent who completes the training. Each parent-training class selects a representative member to give a short graduation speech on the group's personal growth affected by the training. This event provides each parent with a link to school personnel. As the organizational commitment on the part of the school persists, this training cycle is repeated.

Step 10. **Follow-up posttraining** is carried out by the school personnel during the year following parent training. The principal invites PIQE graduates to (a) discuss regularly their children's academic progress with their children's teachers, (b) work with the teacher to agree on a plan to bring students to grade level if they are more than six months below norm at the time of the first parent and teacher conference, (c) visit their children's class to observe at least one hour of instruction; (d) participate in a school-initiated series of workshops based on parent-identified needs; (e) participate in a school-initiated series of training workshops leading to a certificate which will enable parents to volunteer in a classroom; (f) participate in school-designed home learning activities for parents and students; and (g) work with the school counselor, nurse, or both, to provide counseling, resource information, referral information, and health guidance. PIQE maintains active communication with its graduate families through a monthly newsletter that includes updates on the program, training conferences, testimonials from participant families, and instructional material for families.

Step 11. **Constructive change and renewal** call for a debriefing about the training series involving principal, instructors, and PIQE's staff. They discuss issues of follow-up and renewal of the process, and outline PIQE's involvement in the future. The goal of PIQE is for parents and school personnel to form a collaborative relationship that produces a permanent change in student achievement and access to college.
education. Periodic evaluation of principals' and parents' perceptions of PIQE's training is undertaken along with studies to examine short and long-term student achievement and school participation.

**Problem-Posing Education**

Problem-posing is the pedagogical technique used to design and provide workshop experiences that are generated by parents (see Figure 2) and is also a process that parallels the experiential learning cycle. Workshop activities already familiar to the parents provide a common experience on which they learn to reflect critically (analysis of issues/concerns) in dialogue with the PIQE facilitator and with each other, leading to conceptualization of the causes of problems (understanding of issues) and then to praxis (acting on issues). Through experience, reflection, conceptualization, and praxis, parents internalize issues, behaviors, expectations, and personal growth.

The problem-posing process typically begins with a school-community group identifying a number of concerns, such as the issue of communication and discipline as one of its problems or concerns. In any one school community, over one hundred concerns will be documented. These concerns usually range from individual issues (pertaining to family problems) to issues dealing with school concerns, school district practices, or both. PIQE has identified twenty-four themes that predominate in the school communities of Southern California. Each theme is presented in one or more training workshops. These themes can be clustered into four areas:

**Student Development and Growth:** The issues under this cluster involve child-parent interactions. Among the workshops developed are: (a) harmony among child-home-school, (b) communication and discipline, (c) assertive behavior, (d) harmony and conflict: family issues and relations, and (e) abuse: physical, emotional, and sexual.

**Home-Family-Interaction:** The issues under this cluster involve parent guidance of the social, physical, and academic development of the child. Workshops developed include: (a) stages of child development; (b) the home, motivation, and self-esteem; (c) bilingual education and first and second language development; (d) adolescent growth and parenting; (e) increasing school and parent participation in the academic future of youth; (f) communication, awareness, and parenting.

**School-Home Accountability:** The issues under this cluster are of parental advocacy with the school for their children's quality education. Workshops developed include: (a) parent rights, (b) home-school collaboration, (c) preventing underachievement, (d) support strategies for at-risk students, (e) how the school system works, (f) career choices and colleges, (g) home and school working together in support of student achievement, (h) learning skills and parental monitoring, and (i) principles of leadership and school accountability.

**School Culture and Community:** The issues under this cluster are of community concerns for the quality of life of families, schools, and students. Workshops developed include: (a) cross-cultural communication and avoiding miscommunication, (b) drugs and alcohol, (c) community social services, and (d) avoiding negative influences.

An illustration of the problem-posing process can be seen in the following process. In the initial planning meeting, parents identify the theme of communication and discipline as a major concern. In the initial training workshop parents are asked to work in small groups, to brainstorm the meaning of communication and discipline, and to report their ideas. As each group reports, the ideas are documented on the board. The
process may generate fifty different ideas. The parents are then asked to cluster the ideas into subthemes. In this particular theme of communication and discipline, parents may identify six subthemes: (a) **clear communication** when we speak to our children, (b) need to be **consistent** in our involvement with our children, (c) need to establish **limits and rules** that parents expect their children to follow, (d) need to establish **consequences** when our children disobey, (e) need to provide **structure** to the lives of our children, and (f) need to teach **respect** to our children. Each of the subthemes invites dialogue, and through group discussion, incidents experienced by the parents are developed for them to problem solve collectively. For homework parents are asked to reflect and to apply the six concepts in their home context. At the next training meeting parents are asked to share their reflections. Each theme follows a similar process using interactive strategies.

**Mode of Delivery**

Each workshop follows a common approach, a series of empowering activities, or both. The workshop begins with a common structure (experience) for the given theme being addressed. A workshop period consists of 90 to 180 minutes and uses diverse teaching methods and approaches that are appropriate for the given theme. The workshops are delivered in the target languages of the parents. Thus, usually the sessions are conducted in three or more languages in multilingual sites, both morning and evening on selected days. The specific structure of each training workshop, developed for the particular needs or concerns of the school community, is written using the following format: (a) introduction overview of the workshop theme; (b) concept what parents should be able to generalize at the completion of the lessons; (c) series of questions directly related to the theme to initiate dialogue and interaction; (d) exercises for practice enabling activities for parents to interact and discuss, designed to support the identified concepts of each workshop; and (e) homework assignment suggested activities for parents to undertake, designed to support the identified concepts of each workshop. The assignment, for example, can consist of gathering facts and information in the school community that pertain to the theme. Approaches to gathering the information and possible problems are discussed during the initial sessions. The purpose of the fieldwork assignment is to give the participants an opportunity to begin to develop and use their skills as they work with the school community.

**Instructors**

The instructors whose background ranges from parents to university professors reflect the ethnic diversity of the target parent group (e.g., African American, Caldean, EuroAmerican, Filipino, Hmong, Latino/Hispanic, Vietnamese). Trainers are selected for their experience and sensitivity in working with parents as well as for their ability to deliver workshops in Spanish, English, and other languages. The general rule for PIQE trainers is that they must meet at least three of five requirements: (a) have experience in working with ethnically diverse families and communities, (b) be a parent who has had experience in parenting, (c) demonstrate ability to work with parents as equals, (d) demonstrate bilingual communication skills or sensitivity to the target language of the school community, and (e) demonstrate leadership in working with people in the empowerment of the human condition. To facilitate dialogue and interaction, the instructor provides a low-anxiety learning climate in which ideas and concepts can be examined. Parents are trained in groups of 20 to 30 a group size that allows for interaction, personalization, dialogue, and activities with a free flow of communication. The instructor invites dialogue and interaction that are led by parents for at least 60% of the time. Instructors assume that each parent participant brings to each meeting a wealth of knowledge and resources which are pooled, with instructor guidance, permitting the experience, ideas, and concepts of each to be examined through the eyes and views of more than one parent.

**Proposed Parent Training Outcomes**
PIQE seeks to accomplish the following outcomes: (a) increased parent graduates' participation and collaboration with the school community; (b) improved low-income households' participation in solving communities' social, cultural, and educational problems in a nurturing and problem solving manner; (c) self-perception by low-income parents and teachers as collaborators in the education of children; (d) strongly developed home-school support activities to assist children in homework and success in school; (e) schools that integrate the home as a vital part of the learning process and that broker information on sociocultural problems and/or concerns to at least 60% of households; (f) low-income parents who are knowledgeable about school and parenting and feel a sense of belonging to the school community; and (g) improved student achievement in literacy skills, attendance, homework, and citizenship.

Assessing the Effects of Parent and School Collaboration

The goal of PIQE training is to increase home-school collaboration and the critical reflection of parents wishing to advocate quality education for their children. Furthermore, the research literature identifies the factors of organizational climate and receptivity as the driving variables for home-school collaboration (McLaughlin & Shields, 1986). Data have been collected to determine the effect of PIQE's intervention on parents, students, and teachers as perceived by parents and school principals.

Data Collection and Analysis

To determine parent and school-leadership perceptions of the quality of PIQE parent training, its potential effect on their children's grades, and its effect on their family life, data were collected using parent questionnaires, a quasi-experimental design, and structured interviews. These three different approaches were used to examine the effect of PIQE's work for the period of 1988-94.

First, parent information was collected at the end of selected training series (N=1360) using a Likert instrument and open-ended questions to determine parent satisfaction and parent perception of the extent and ways that training improved self-confidence, understanding of school, and home support. Second, a study was conducted to examine the effect of parent training on students' report-cards in reading grades and homework grades. The study tracked students whose parents participated in PIQE training (N=81) against a control group of students whose parents did not participate in PIQE training (N=53) at four grading periods (pre and posttraining). Third, the school-principal structured interviews were conducted at sixteen school sites. The purpose of the interviews, lasting an average of 75 minutes each, was to determine the principals' perception of the effect of the training on parents, students, teachers, and the need for follow-up and concerns.

Findings: Parents' Perceptions of the Training

One thousand three hundred and sixty (N=1360) parent evaluations in 16 PIQE training interventions were analyzed. More than 50% of respondents provided comments in the open-ended portion of the evaluation instrument. Responses to the question "The training workshops were of what value to you?" to be ranked on a 5-point scale from "no value" to "very high value" yielded no statistically significant results due to the overwhelmingly positive response. Table I provides the results of parent opinions about the value of each workshop.

Responses to a series of items were highly positive averaging above 4.53. For a large majority of the parents this type of training was their first experience with parent involvement, and they were impressed by the
quality of bilingual professional trainers and facilitators who spoke the parents' home language, worked with them for six weeks, and were able to relate to their sociocultural context.

The open-ended section of the instrument produced comments clustered in seven areas of perceived benefit suggesting parents' increased confidence in their interactions with school, teachers, and their children.

Table 1

Percentages, Standard Deviation, and Means of Parent Participants in PIQE Training: A Series of Six Workshops (N=1360): Perceived Value

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workshop</th>
<th>No Value</th>
<th>Somewhat Valuable</th>
<th>Valuable &amp; Very Valuable</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Esteem</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>92.1</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>4.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>93.1</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>4.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>90.4</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>4.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents' Rights</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>94.2</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>4.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drugs &amp; Abuse</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>94.5</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>4.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career &amp; College</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>95.4</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>4.81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The findings suggest that over 92% of the parents gave a high value to each of the workshops received over a six week period. To further examine their perceptions of the training, 108 written comments were analyzed and categorized into areas of perceived benefit using a content analysis approach. The written comments yielded seven areas of perceived benefit. The first area of benefit was increased understanding of home communication and discipline. A parent wrote:

I am aware of my responsibility to guide my child, yet often I cannot control my temper when my child fails to follow my directions. Out of anger, I say things that I don't mean, and my children model my behavior. How do other parents deal with their anger and discipline at home? I need to be consistent in communication and discipline with my child.

The second area of benefit was the importance of maintaining harmony between the home and school. In this area, parents expressed a need for guidance. One parent wrote:

Before attending these workshops my husband would question my work with the school. I began to tell him what happens when we are not involved. After dealing with our differences... now I volunteer him if there is something he can do when he is not working...and he'll come. My children are doing better, and we understand our roles as parents better.

Such understanding sometimes is attended with conflict, given that the schooling of children is the responsibility of the women in many homes. One parent described her experience:
From the beginning my husband expected me to do everything for him if I worked with the school. He would tell me that I had not cooked dinner on time, or finished cleaning the house, or taken care of our home. I felt a lot of pressure from him. But you know what, I felt good that I was helping my children and the school! Because I felt that what I was doing was important, slowly, my husband changed and he saw the light.

The third area of benefit was identified as the parents' role in home-school accountability. Parents' voices expressed concern about home-school accountability and how the school informs parents about their children's education. For example, a married couple explained:

Whenever we went to open house the teachers of our children would tell us "she is doing fine," or "she needs to pay more attention, but she is a good girl." Then in the fourth and fifth grade we find out she is not reading at grade level. Why? We were told they were doing fine! We come to the school to find out what we can do, but they don't explain what is wrong. We have to get angry to receive attention. Why?

A fourth area of benefit was an increased awareness of school climate and equal treatment. Parents expressed disempowerment and unequal treatment because of their lack of English proficiency, and they wondered how their children were treated if they themselves experienced unequal treatment. A parent explained:

Often when I go to my children's school, I feel very uncomfortable (sin ganas) because I cannot speak English. As an adult I can negotiate in my language very well, but when you are limited in English you have difficulty expressing yourself, I feel stupid (tonta). And I don't like the way people translate. They only give you a few words. I want to be bilingual so they stop treating me as a second class person, they'll see.

The fifth area was of increased understanding of how the school system works. Improved understanding enabled parents to realize that their respect for school is often misinterpreted. Parents expressed their respect for education as well as frustration about teachers who perceive that respect as apathy or as passiveness. A parent explained:

Our parents don't understand the system! They place too much faith on what the school is doing. They respect teachers too much! That's OK, but they need to see that things are not OK. Why do we have so many students reading, writing, and computing below grade level? We cannot tolerate such a situation. Our children deserve a better future. Pagamos nuestros impuestos (we are tax payers)!

The sixth area was an increased understanding of parental guidance about the dangers of drug abuse in their school communities where drug dealing was abusive. Working with school leadership, parents organized to confront the situation. A parent described the situation:

Nos tenian atrapados (we were under siege) and in fear. We said basta (enough). We could no longer allow drug dealings around our school. Our children were walking in fear, we were afraid to work with law enforcement. Our parents united and formed a community watchdog committee. The police were convinced to provide extra assistance. Slowly, we are overcoming drugs and our children can now play.

The seventh area of benefit was ability to be assertive when they recognized they were not being afforded basic respect. Parents expressed a need for more strategies to deal effectively with intimidation by school personnel, social service agencies, or even their spouses. Their questions dealt with: "What is aggressive behavior? What is passive behavior? What is responsible (assertive) behavior?" A parent explained:
The way people talk to me, often aggressively or in an abusive manner, makes me uncomfortable and makes me mad. If I need information or want a question answered, people are rude and inattentive to me, because of how I look prieta (dark skinned) or how I speak. How do I deal with such behavior and responsibly demand my rights?

The seven areas of perceived benefit suggest that PIQE's workshops support parent empowerment as a process: opportunity for dialogue; problem solving with and through people; freedom to express opinions; and taking action on issues that undermine or deny parents' right to equal participation, choice, and quality education for their children. Hampden-Turner (1975) refers to the above behaviors as necessary for increasing the quality of perception, self-esteem, and competence to invest energy to improve the human condition.

Effect of Parent Intervention on School Grades

A pilot study was undertaken to assess the effect of PIQE parent training intervention on students' report-card grades in reading and homework (Sherman, Cheyette, & Peterson, 1991). Data were collected for 134 children in the first through fifth grades at one PIQE training site. Subjects included 81 participant children whose parents graduated from parent training in the fall of 1988 and a control group of 53 nonparticipant children whose parents did not participate in the training. Subjects were matched for grade level, area of residence, and socioeconomic level. The two groups' report card grades were compared for four grading periods: 2/88, 6/88, 2/89, 6/89. These periods included two prior to the parent training and two after the training. The groups were compared in reading and homework grades, which ranged from 1 to 4 with 1 representing an excellent grade and 4 representing an unsatisfactory grade. Two-way analyses of variance were conducted comparing the two groups across the four time periods. An alpha level of p<.01 was used as the criterion for significant differences.

This exploratory research yielded positive results for participants in the parent intervention for both reading and homework grades. Reading grades yielded a significant interaction for the two groups over time (F=80.98, p<.001). Table 2 lists the means and standard deviations for the two groups. The results showed that while nonparticipants of the parent intervention initially received significantly higher reading grades than participants, after the parent training, intervention participants achieved significantly higher grades than nonparticipants.

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*The lower the mean the higher the grades

Table 3 shows similar results for homework grades over the four time periods. Homework grades yielded significant interaction for the two groups over time (F=3.55, p.<01). The two periods prior to parent training showed no differences between the groups in homework grades, while in the two periods following parent training, participants earned significantly higher homework grades.

These results suggest that the parent training had a positive effect on the children's report-card grades in reading and homework. While the results are exploratory, a larger sample of school sites and subjects is being examined in 1995-96, and the collection of data and analyses indicate the same positive trends.

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*The lower the mean the higher the grades

**School Leadership Interviews**

To assess the degree of home-school collaboration and parent advocacy triggered by PIQE's parent-training intervention, school interviews were conducted with principals at 16 PIQE school training sites 6 months after training had been completed. A structured interview was used to elicit school principals' perceptions of the effect of the training in response to four questions:

1. What was the effect on parents of PIQE workshops at your school?
2. What was the effect on students of PIQE workshops at your school?
3. What was the effect on school personnel of PIQE workshops at your school?
4. Where do you go from here?
The interviews were conducted over a 5 day period, with each interview lasting an average of 75 minutes. In addition to the questions posed above, we sought to assess issues related to the school organizational receptivity and to explore possible tensions created by the projected increase of parent-teacher interactions. Each of sixteen school principals was interviewed, and responses to the four open-ended questions were summarized as follows:

**What was the impact of the parent intervention at your school, if any, on parents?**

The responses identified five areas of impact: (a) parents' increased their understanding of the school and of their involvement in their children's education, (b) parents became more confident and vocal in their involvement with teachers, (c) parents showed increased positive feelings about their role as parents, (d) parents showed more willingness to participate in school activities and to volunteer, and (e) parents increased their interactions with their children's teachers and principals.

One school principal explained:

Yes, there has been a difference in parent involvement. In September, they were eager to know what classes were going to be offered for parents. The interaction with teachers has been incredible! They are confident, they got used to seeing me (during parent workshops). They came to understand that this is their school. They come and sit in classrooms, observe, and talk to teachers (before, they would mostly come to me, not the teacher); now they feel more at ease talking to teachers. Yes, parents who took the course are influencing other parents. We have used them to make calls, because they are more vocal and can influence those who did not participate in the course. Also, attendance at other meetings has increased.

**What was the effect of the parent intervention at your school, if any, on the children?**

This question generated two types of responses. The first suggests that about half of the principals saw parent training as parents gaining skills that will influence their children. Principals commented:

"When parents are present in school children do better."

"When parents get involved, it's going to show in their children."

"The more bonds there are between school and home something is going to happen, it's subtle, but it does happen."

"Hard to say or attribute changes to one thing (parent intervention)."

The second type of response suggests that students were perceived by the school principals as making an improvement in completing more homework, having better communication with their teachers, and having an attitude change and more pride. They saw parents learning to read to their children, being more attentive to learning, and having a sense of accountability. Comments from principals illustrate these:

"I saw attitudes change. Once they saw parents coming to school and learning, I did not see them in the office that much."

"There's a better return on homework and communication with their teachers."
"We have had some 180-degree turn-round. Parents have come forward to express changes in their children."

**What was the effect of the parent intervention at your school, if any, on school personnel?**

The responses to this question pointed to teachers' surprise at the number of parents who participated in the training interventions. Yet, in some sites the principal expressed concern about the attitude of staff members who did not want to be bothered with parent involvement. However, at the majority of sites, principals identified increased trust, closer relationships, and strengthened support as the key factors in their staffs' perception of parent training. Principals categorized their staffs as being supportive, more open, and having a positive attitude towards parent involvement. These specific comments were made by principals:

"The staff was impressed with the numbers that attended."

"They had not seen that kind of involvement and interest."

"We have 250 PTA members. Staff attitude towards parents is changing because parents are being involved."

"Teachers have told me parents come to visit their classes."

"Now, as they come and pick up their child, they don't just leave, but remain and ask 'how is he/she doing'?"

"We are proud to see so many parents."

"They've (staff) come a long way from blaming parents; they view them differently, and appreciate them."

"There is a trust being built between parents and teachers."

**Where do we go from here?**

The sixteen school principals as a group identified a need for additional training to introduce other topics related to the school curriculum: conditions contributing to at-risk students; visiting the classroom; using effective discipline; parenting problem-solving skills; and networking with social agencies. Two principals spoke of how some Anglo parents feel that large numbers of Latino/Hispanics are moving to the area and feel threatened. Another indicated the importance of talking to his staff about making parents feel welcomed and building a school culture. Other principals stated the need for schools to work closely with social agencies, to establish a social contract with parents, and to provide an organizational liaison between the school and the community. They saw a need for parents to mentor other parents, to work with teachers on parent involvement, and to promote equal status among all parents in the school community. Some typical comments follow:

"We need more in-depth programs with parents."

"As a community [we need to] develop more support groups, strong mentor programs, parents mentoring other parents."

"Our school is good, but it has to continue."
"We would like some sessions with young mothers who feel there's no way out."

"Need to get [establish] comfort zone to see that school is pleasant, to get [parents] in the door and feel good about being there."

"We need to look at parental participation in different ways, such as showing parents how to visit classrooms, empowering them, and using them to make a difference in the lives of their children."

**Forecasting School Organizational Tensions**

In parents' voices we hear their desires for alternatives and for a language of possibilities to create responsive democratic schooling. Contrary to the myth that low-income, ethnically diverse parents are not active or committed to nurturing the development of their children, PIQE's work in the metropolitan urban centers of Southern California has clearly shown that most parents not only want to be involved, but they will make significant sacrifices for their children. The schools involved with PIQE have a track record of having involved no more than 5% to 10% percent of their parents. Yet, PIQE's parent training intervention has increased parent participation at each of the school sites. Parents improved their understanding of home-school relationships and of the importance of helping in the education of their children at home, at school, and in the community. Our exploratory research study suggests that parent training interventions positively affect the climate of the home, parental relationships, parent involvement with their child's education, and their children's reading and homework grades.

Furthermore, the perceptions of school principals where parent training interventions have been undertaken indicate a favorable impact. The principals see an increase in parents' understanding of the role of the school, their involvement, their confidence, and a shift toward more positive feeling about their own roles as parents. Principals have also witnessed an increase in parent participation in school activities and a growing ability to initiate interactions with school personnel.

Principals' perceptions of the effects of parental trainings on students suggest the following results: students value parental modeling, students complete more homework, students have better communication with their teachers, students have an improved attitude about school, and they have a heightened sense of school accountability.

The principals' perceptions of parental training's effects on teachers suggest that such training has made teachers act more positively towards parents. In addition, teachers feel a trust between parents and the school and have a sense of support and a positive relationship with parents.

The direction identified by principals for further parental training interventions indicates a desire for more training and parental mentoring of other parents. And their increased communication with parents has revealed a need for schools to connect with social agencies, to strengthen their social contract with parents, and to develop effective school/community liaisons. As the principals' direct experience with low-income, ethnically-linguistically diverse communities increased, so has their recognition that there is a need for status equalization with regards to school expectations and equal access to career choices.

In PIQE's interaction and dialogue with parents, we hear them call for ways to create more responsive, more democratic schooling for their children in schools where they exercise their right to equal participation in meaningful decision making, where their right to informed knowledge is respected, and where their rights to due process, to equal encouragement, and to equal participation are not undermined or denied (Pearl, 1989).
Organizational Tensions

The initial work of PIQE has begun to develop a language of possibilities through active parent involvement with school communities. That activity has also produced tension: the tension of possibilities, alternatives, and desire for change. Among the most salient issues that any school community must forecast and address proactively, as parents exert their rights as advocates for their children and their communities, are the following:

**Tension in communication and negotiations.** As parents become more actively involved with their schools and are more assertive in interacting with school personnel, the tension in communicating and negotiating home and school accountability needs to be understood. Preparing the school community to expect and address new parent behaviors as positive and as part of the dialogue between school and home is imperative for schools.

**Tension over school control.** As parents raise their voices and express their concerns (e.g., about school climate, environment, or school facilities) to the superintendent and school-board, sociopolitical and organizational tensions arise among those previously exercising control. Parents request school-site leadership control in their communities. Parent training directed at parents assuming responsibility for the well-being of their children and for their school community will generate a positive tension. If the tension of participatory democratic process is addressed responsibly it can (and should) lead to a win-win relationship and not a win-lose relationship.

**Tension in parents as advocates.** As parents become advocates for their children and their communities their behavior is often perceived as an intrusion into the normalcy of classroom or school. Rather, the intrusion should be treated as creating bridges among parents, teachers, students, and administrators, producing a partnership for achieving a single objective developing the full potential of students and ensuring their career opportunities.

**Tension in parents as equal partners.** As parents focus on their children's development and raise questions about their academic and social skills, they often feel they are not accepted as equal partners by school personnel. The professional educational community's reluctance to see low-income parents as capable equals is a social and political failure that must be addressed. Vertical involvement leads to win-lose relationships, while horizontal involvement leads to win-win relationships.

**Tension in systems change.** As parents articulate problems, conditions, and solutions that challenge the too long held deficit perspective and move for acceptance of a systems change perspective, parent-school-community tension will increase and will require dialogue through which the various sectors can move beyond people blaming each other for disempowering conditions. An ecological, open-systems approach that seeks problem solving and the involvement of families, social agencies, and the school is one for school leadership to consider seriously.

**Tension in school organizational support.** As parents become a force in their school communities, the organizational commitment and actual support to provide parents with on-going training diminishes. Few school communities initiate follow-up training after long-term parent training interventions. Parent empowerment is a process that requires support, faith, respect, patience, and problem solving.

Conclusion
The work of the Parent Institute for Quality Education has been demanding and promising. Such endeavors have challenged those involved with the Institute to continue to work with parents, teachers, students, and administrators in problem-posing education. Our work has convinced us that not only are low-income parents interested, willing, and socially responsible for improving the quality of education provided to their children, but that a vision exists for making schooling a truly democratic and empowering institution.

PIQE's exploratory work has been convincing to many educators, but it remains insufficient and incomplete as we prepare to address a number of structural and social tensions that disempower children. In the words of Reverend Vahac Mardirosian, "low student performance is due to neglect, not the child's ability." We must increase our commitment to see that no child shall fail to receive an education as the schools in the urban centers throughout our nation become ethnically diverse in their majority, and, for the most part, low income.

References


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