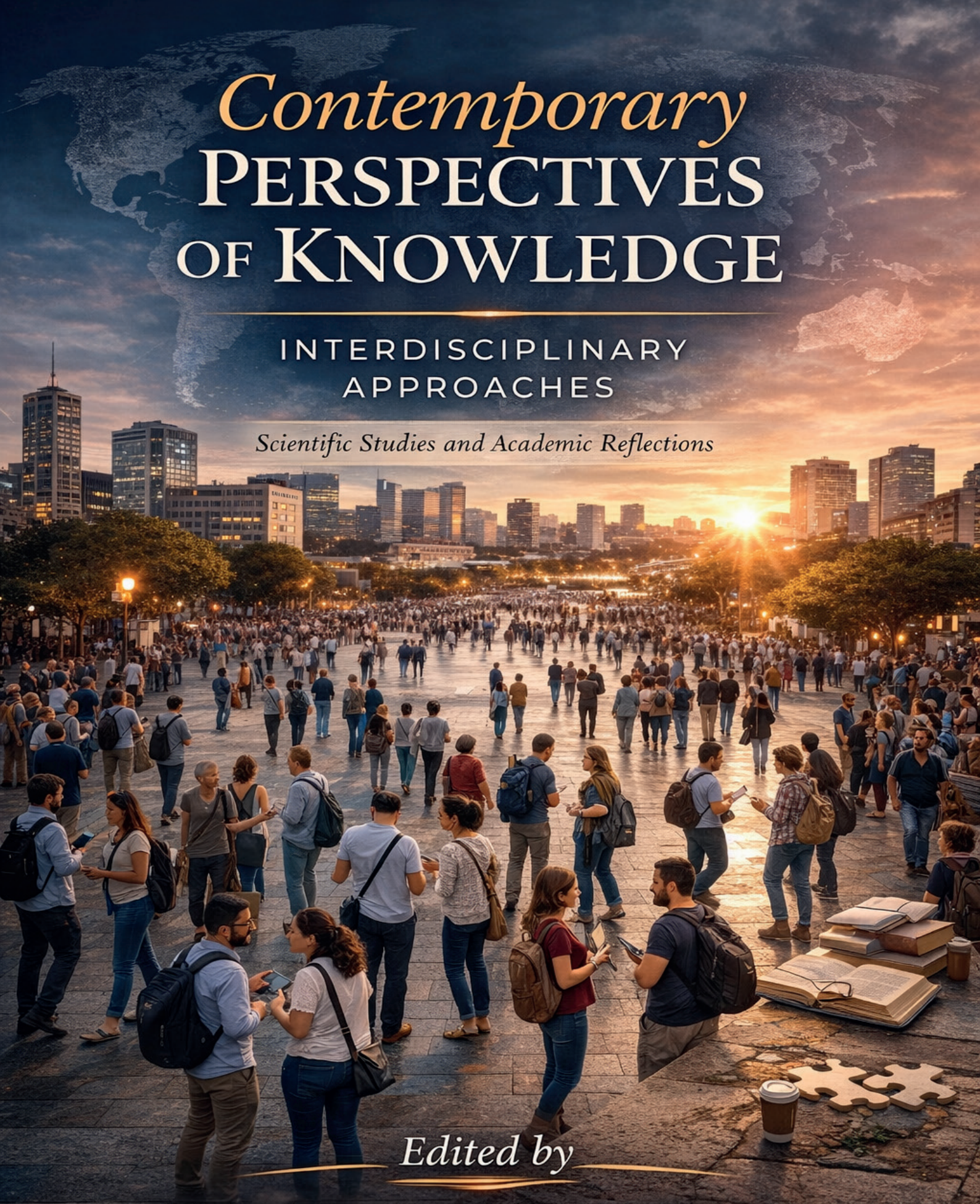
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INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES

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Chapter 31

THE FAMILY AS PROTAGONIST IN THE INCLUSIVE PROCESS: BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN HOME AND SCHOOL



THE FAMILY AS PROTAGONIST IN THE INCLUSIVE PROCESS: BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN HOME AND SCHOOL

Julia Fernanda de Lima Gomes Ilheu Campos[1]

Abstract: Inclusive education is frequently framed as the exclusive responsibility of the school, a perspective this chapter argues is fundamentally incomplete. Drawing on Brazilian legislation and international scholarship, the chapter contends that the meaningful participation of families is a necessary condition for genuinely inclusive processes, and that families must be repositioned from a deficit framing to one of protagonism—as knowledgeable agents, decision-makers, and co-owners of their children's educational projects. The chapter reviews empirical evidence linking family participation to improved academic, social, and transition outcomes for students with disabilities, while acknowledging the heterogeneity and limitations of that evidence. It then examines three mechanisms through which participation operates (complementary knowledge, consistency across settings, and advocacy) and analyzes the structural, economic, linguistic, cultural, attitudinal, and power-related barriers that constrain engagement, with attention to intersectionality. Six practical strategies for building home–school bridges are presented, each with its implementation challenges and feasibility. The chapter also engages with counterperspectives concerning professional autonomy, the risk of holding families responsible for systemic failures, and the reproduction of inequality. It concludes that bridge-building must be accompanied by a genuine redistribution of power so that inclusive education becomes a project built with families rather than for them.

Keywords: inclusive education; family–school partnership; family participation; disability; power and equity; intersectionality

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Introduction: Repositioning the Family in Inclusive Education

Inclusive education, as a global movement that seeks to guarantee the right to education for all students regardless of their differences and disabilities, is often conceived of as the exclusive responsibility of the school. Educational policies, teacher training, curricular adaptations, pedagogical resources—everything seems to converge on the school as the primary locus of transformation. This perspective, however, is fundamentally incomplete and, paradoxically, contributes to the failure of educational inclusion.

Contemporary research on inclusive education is unequivocal: the active and meaningful participation of the family is a sine qua non for the success of genuinely inclusive processes (GASPAR et al., 2025; PLETSCH, 2020; GLAT; PLETSCH, 2010). This is not a matter of symbolic or advisory participation, but of protagonism—the family as an active, knowledgeable agent, a decision-maker, and a co-owner of their children's educational project (BORBA et al., 2024).

This chapter argues that building bridges between home and school is not merely one more pedagogical strategy, but a fundamental epistemological shift in how we conceive of inclusive education. When the family is positioned as a protagonist rather than a supporting player, inclusive education ceases to be a project implemented for families and becomes a project built with families. This shift, however, requires confronting power dynamics that have historically privileged professional knowledge over family knowledge, and that have marginalized the voices of families—particularly families of color, low-income families, immigrant families, and families of people with disabilities (COLLINS, 2000; CRENSHAW, 1989).

Conceptualizing "Family" and Moving from Deficit to Protagonism

Beyond the Traditional Definition: Recognizing Diversity

Any discussion of the family in inclusive education must begin by recognizing that "family" is a complex, contested, and culturally situated concept. The traditional definition of the family as a nuclear unit made up of two parents and their biological children has never matched the lived reality of many people. Today, that definition is even less adequate (BORBA et al., 2024; SOUZA, 2022).

Families may be made up of biological parents, adoptive parents, grandparents serving as primary caregivers, aunts and uncles, stepparents, same-sex couples, single parents, extended families, and community-based families. Each family configuration brings its own dynamics, resources, challenges, and ways of engaging with education.

Data from IBGE (2023) show that in Brazil, only 50.5% of children live in traditional nuclear families (two parents and their biological children). Approximately 28% live in single-parent families, 15% in extended families, and 6.5% in other arrangements (BRAZILIAN INSTITUTE OF GEOGRAPHY AND STATISTICS, 2023). When we look specifically at children with disabilities, the diversity is even greater—many live with grandparents or other caregivers because their parents hold jobs that do not allow them to care for a child with a disability.

Furthermore, it is critical to recognize that "family" is not a homogeneous entity. Families differ profoundly in terms of socioeconomic class, race/ethnicity, national origin, language, religion, immigration status, access to resources, and experiences of discrimination. These differences deeply affect how families engage with schools and how schools engage with families (APPLE, 2013).

Repositioning the Family: From Deficit to Protagonism

Historically, the relationship between family and school in special education settings has been shaped by a deficit dynamic. The family was seen as the problem: parents blamed for their

children's disabilities, parents resistant to accepting diagnoses, parents who did not understand inclusive education, parents who failed to adequately support the school (PLETSCH, 2020).

This deficit perspective persists in many settings. Schools frequently describe the families of students with disabilities as "disengaged," "resistant," or "uninformed." Rarely does anyone ask: Is the school creating spaces that are genuinely accessible and welcoming to families? Is the school listening to and valuing the knowledge families have about their children? Is the school sharing decision-making power, or merely consulting families superficially? (HARRY; OCASIO-STOUTENBURG, 2020)

A protagonism perspective, by contrast, recognizes that families possess deep knowledge about their children—knowledge that no education professional can have. Families know their children's strengths, interests, learning styles, and support needs. Families know the cultural, community, and family context that shapes who their children are. And families have an emotional and material investment in their children's well-being and educational success that is unmatched (WALTON, 2018).

When the family is positioned as protagonist, its relationship with the school changes fundamentally. It is no longer "the school knows best," but "the school and the family know different, complementary things and need to work together." It is no longer "the school educates, the family supports," but "both educate, both support, both are responsible." This shift is profoundly political—it requires a redistribution of power that has historically been concentrated in the hands of professionals (SLEE, 2018).

Legal and Policy Frameworks: A Mandate for Participation

It is important to note that repositioning the family as protagonist is not merely theoretical—it is a legal mandate in many contexts. Under Brazilian law, the 1988 Federal Constitution establishes that education is a right of all and a duty of the State and the family (BRASIL, 1988). The Law of

Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDB, Law No. 9,394/1996) reaffirms that education is a responsibility shared among the State, the family, and society (BRASIL, 1996). Law No. 13,146/2015 (the Brazilian Inclusion Law) establishes that people with disabilities have the right to inclusive education and that families must take part in decisions about that education (BRASIL, 2015).

There is, however, a critical issue: while legislation establishes the right to participate, implementation is often superficial. Families are "consulted" in meetings where decisions have already been made. Families are invited to "sign off on" educational plans developed by professionals. This is not genuine participation—it is a simulacrum of participation that masks a lack of real power (BAPTISTA, 2019).

Why Family Participation Is Critical: Evidence, Mechanisms, and Limitations

Empirical Evidence: What We Know

Research on inclusive education is clear: meaningful family participation is associated with better educational outcomes for students with disabilities. A recent study reviewing 170 publications on parental involvement in inclusive education (1975–2024) found that family participation was associated with better academic outcomes, better social behavior, higher self-esteem, greater satisfaction with education, and a smoother transition to adult life (GASPAR et al., 2025, p. 5).

Specifically, students whose families were meaningfully engaged in inclusive education were 23% more likely to meet established educational goals, had a 31% lower dropout rate, performed 18% better on standardized assessments, and showed 25% greater engagement in social activities at school (GASPAR et al., 2025, p. 5).

It is critical, however, to note the limitations of this evidence. The review found significant heterogeneity across studies. While most (78%) found positive associations between family participation and educational outcomes, 15% found mixed results, and 7% found that family participation had no significant impact or even a negative one (GASPAR et al., 2025, p. 8).

There is also the question of how "family participation" is defined and measured. Many studies define participation narrowly—attendance at meetings, communication with teachers, help with homework. These studies frequently find positive correlations. Studies that define participation more broadly, however—including participation in educational decision-making, advocacy for systemic change, and questioning school practices—find more mixed results (FINKELSTEIN et al., 2021).

Mechanisms: How and Why Family Participation Works

To understand why family participation is critical, we need to understand the mechanisms through which it works. There are at least three main mechanisms (HOOVER-DEMPSEY; SANDLER, 1997):

First, Complementary Knowledge: The family and the school hold different but complementary knowledge. The school has knowledge about pedagogy, curriculum, and teaching strategies. The family has knowledge about their child—their strengths, interests, learning styles, and needs. When these bodies of knowledge are combined, education becomes more effective (BOURDIEU, 1986).

Second, Consistency Across Settings: When family and school work together, there is greater consistency between the school setting and the home setting. Strategies that work at school can be replicated at home. Learning that happens at home can be recognized and built upon at school. This consistency supports learning and generalization (HENDERSON; MAPP, 2002).

Third, Advocacy and Systemic Change: When families are engaged and informed, they often become advocates for their children—challenging exclusionary practices, demanding resources, and insisting on genuine inclusion. When well channeled, this advocacy can be a powerful force for systemic change (WARREN et al., 2009).

Family Knowledge as a Pedagogical Resource: Recognizing Expertise

Education tends to position professional knowledge (that of teachers, psychologists, speech-language pathologists) as superior to family knowledge. Recent research, however, challenges this hierarchy. Families possess knowledge that is not only different, but complementary—and often superior in certain respects (GREENHALGH et al., 2018).

Families know what motivates their child; which strategies work best for their child; how their child learns best; what their child's deepest interests are; what their child's cultural and community context is; and what their child's strengths and abilities are (which are often invisible in the school setting) (MAHLO, 2017).

A study of 45 families of children with autism found that when teachers systematically gathered information from families about strategies that worked at home and implemented those strategies at school, challenging behaviors decreased by 40% and academic engagement increased by 35% (SEWELL et al., 2022, p. 15).

There is, however, a critical issue: this family knowledge is often rendered invisible or devalued in school settings. When teachers ask, "How does your child learn best?", they often interpret the answer through a professional lens, questioning whether it is "scientifically correct." This is a way of exercising power—invalidating a family's knowledge because it does not come in a format professionals recognize (MUTHUKRISHNA; ENGELBRECHT, 2018).

Barriers to Meaningful Family Participation: Structure, Attitude, and Power

Despite clear evidence of the importance of family participation, many families face significant barriers that prevent genuine engagement. It is critical that educators understand these barriers—not to blame families, but to transform the systems that create them (PLETSCH, 2020).

Structural and Economic Barriers

Many families of students with disabilities face significant economic constraints. Having a child with a disability often means additional costs: therapies, medications, equipment, specialized transportation. These costs can drain family resources, leaving little time and energy for engagement with the school (INSTITUTE FOR APPLIED ECONOMIC RESEARCH, 2023).

Data from IPEA (2023) show that families of children with disabilities spend an average of R$800–1,200 per month on disability-related costs (therapies, medications, equipment). For low-income families (monthly income of R$1,500–2,000), this represents 40–80% of household income. These costs leave little for other needs, including the time and energy to engage with the school.

In addition, many parents of children with disabilities work in jobs with little flexibility. They cannot leave work for school meetings. They cannot take days off to follow their children's education. Schools frequently offer engagement opportunities at times that are inaccessible to working families. Research shows that 73% of engagement opportunities offered by schools take place during business hours (8 a.m. to 5 p.m.), when most parents are at work (PINTO, 2018, p. 415).

There is also the issue of transportation. Many families lack access to reliable transportation. Going to the school for a meeting can mean a transportation cost they cannot afford. Schools that offer engagement opportunities only in person, with no remote options, exclude families who cannot make the trip.

Linguistic and Cultural Barriers

In linguistically diverse settings, language barriers are significant. If the school communicates only in Portuguese and the family speaks another language at home, communication suffers. Families may not fully understand the information the school provides. They may hesitate to take part in meetings because they do not feel confident in their ability to communicate (HERRERA-SEDA;

WALTON, 2025).

In Brazil, approximately 1.2 million people speak an Indigenous language as their first language, and approximately 900,000 people speak other languages (Arabic, Chinese, Korean, etc.) as their first language. Many children from immigrant or Indigenous families have parents who are not fluent in Portuguese.

There are also cultural issues. Different cultures hold different conceptions of disability, education, the role of the family, and the appropriate relationship with authority. A school that does not recognize and respect these cultural differences may alienate families from different cultures (NDLOVU-GATSHENI, 2020).

For example, in some cultures, questioning a teacher's authority is considered disrespectful. Families from such cultures may not feel comfortable questioning school decisions, even when they disagree. A school that interprets this as a "lack of engagement" is making a significant cultural error. Moreover, in some cultures, disability is seen as a punishment or a source of family shame, which affects how families engage with schools (WALTON, 2018).

Attitudinal, Relational, and Power Barriers

Many schools, despite their inclusive rhetoric, maintain attitudes that discourage genuine family participation. There is an attitude that "professionals know best," that parents are "laypeople" who don't understand education. There is an attitude that family participation should happen on the school's terms, not terms negotiated with the family (SLEE, 2011).

This attitude reflects and reproduces power dynamics. Professionals have credentials, formal knowledge, and social status. Families—particularly low-income families, families of color, and families with little formal schooling—have less power. Schools often exercise this power subtly: through technical jargon families don't understand, through meetings scheduled without checking families' availability, and through decisions presented as "already made" (EREVELLES, 2011).

There is also the issue of trust. Many families of students with disabilities have had negative experiences with schools—their children were excluded, discriminated against, or received a lower-quality education. These experiences create a distrust that is hard to overcome. A school that does not acknowledge this history of exclusion and actively work to rebuild trust may encounter families who seem "resistant" or "disengaged"—when in fact they are protecting themselves from further pain (GOFFMAN, 1963).

Disability-Related Barriers and Intersectionality

There are also barriers specifically related to having a child with a disability. Many parents experience grief—grief for the child they expected to have, grief for the opportunities they imagined for their children. This grief is legitimate and important, but it can affect their capacity to engage with their child's education (OLIVER, 1990).

There is also the issue of stigma. Many families face social stigma related to having a child with a disability. They may feel ashamed, isolated, or judged. This can lead to social withdrawal and reduced engagement with public institutions such as schools (KAFER, 2013).

There is also the question of capacity. Some parents have disabilities of their own, cognitive limitations, or mental health conditions that affect their ability to engage. Schools that do not recognize and accommodate these limitations may inadvertently exclude these families.

Finally, there is the question of intersectionality. A low-income Black mother who herself has a disability faces the intersection of multiple forms of marginalization. She may face racism, classism, and ableism. These multiple experiences of discrimination affect how she engages with schools. Schools that fail to recognize intersectionality often offer solutions that work for some families but not for others (COLLINS, 2000; CRENSHAW, 1989).

Practical Strategies for Building Bridges: From Diagnosis to Action

Drawing on the literature and on successful models, there are several practical strategies schools can implement to build bridges between home and school and promote genuine family participation. It is critical to note, however, that these strategies are not one-size-fits-all "solutions." Each strategy carries implementation challenges, costs, and a feasibility that varies by context (TALAU et al., 2021).

Effective, Two-Way Communication

Communication is the foundation of any partnership. Schools should establish communication systems that are regular, two-way, accessible, positive, and culturally responsive (GLAT; PLETSCH, 2010).

What this means: Communication not only when problems arise, but on a regular basis—sharing progress, celebrations, and information. Communication that flows in both directions—not only from school to family, but also from family to school. Communication in the languages families speak and in formats families can access (paper, email, phone, apps, in-person meetings). Communication that acknowledges strengths and successes, not just problems.

Implementation challenges: The cost of translation into multiple languages; teacher time; technology; language barriers.

How to address the challenges: Prioritize the languages most widely spoken in the community; offer multiple forms of communication; allocate teacher time; use plain language; train teachers in culturally responsive communication.

Feasibility: Moderate to High (MENDES, 2010).

Meaningful Involvement in Decision-Making

Families must have a meaningful voice in decisions about their children's education. This includes educational planning, choice of strategies, assessment, and problem-solving (PLETSCH, 2020).

What this means: The family takes part in developing educational plans rather than merely "signing off" on plans developed by the school. The family has a say in which pedagogical strategies are used. The family takes part in assessing progress and success. When challenges arise, family and school work together to resolve them.

Implementation challenges: Power; time; conflict; resources.

How to address the challenges: Establish clear processes; use mediation; acknowledge trade-offs; be transparent about limitations.

Feasibility: Moderate (BORBA et al., 2024).

Recognizing and Valuing Family Knowledge

Schools should systematically gather and value the knowledge families have about their children (SOUZA, 2022).

What this means: Use structured forms; conduct interviews; ask for observations; record this information and incorporate it into planning.

Implementation challenges: Time; validation; implementation; communication.

How to address the challenges: Integrate it into existing processes; train professionals; ensure the information is actually used; communicate the value placed on it.

Feasibility: High (WALTON, 2018).

Creating Welcoming Spaces

The school's physical and emotional environment affects whether families feel welcome (HARRY; OCASIO-STOUTENBURG, 2020).

What this means: A welcoming reception area; signage in multiple languages; representation of diversity; a warm staff; multiple ways to engage; acknowledgment of barriers.

Implementation challenges: Cost; attitudes; time; accessibility.

How to address the challenges: Start small; involve the community; train staff; ensure accessibility.

Feasibility: High (GREENHALGH et al., 2018).

Family Education and Capacity-Building

Schools can offer education and training that help families engage more effectively (FINKELSTEIN et al., 2021).

What this means: Offer workshops; facilitate support groups; make resources available; connect families with one another.

Implementation challenges: Cost; time; turnout; relevance.

How to address the challenges: Offer multiple time slots; provide childcare; use community facilitators; ask families what they need; offer flexibility.

Feasibility: Moderate (MUTHUKRISHNA; ENGELBRECHT, 2018).

Collaborating with the Community and Community Resources

Schools can build bridges not only between home and school, but among home, school, and community (WARREN et al., 2009).

What this means: Map community resources; connect families to them; invite community members in; work with the community to advocate for change.

Implementation challenges: Relationships; coordination; resources; trust.

How to address the challenges: Start with one or two organizations; designate a point person; be transparent; rebuild trust; recognize community expertise.

Feasibility: Moderate to High (WEISS et al., 2010).

Engaging with Counterperspectives: Acknowledging Complexity

While this chapter argues that the family should be a protagonist in inclusive education, it is important to recognize that there are legitimate perspectives that question or critique this approach. Honest engagement with these counterperspectives strengthens the argument (SLEE, 2018).

The Question of Professional Autonomy

Some researchers argue that there are appropriate limits to family participation—that teachers and education professionals must have a degree of professional autonomy to do their jobs. They argue that if the family has a voice in every decision, it may undermine professionals' ability to deliver quality education (APPLE, 2013).

Response: This argument has merit. Professionals have expertise that should be respected. The question, however, is not "professional autonomy vs. family participation," but "how to combine the two." It is possible to respect professional expertise while also recognizing the family's expertise. The question is how to negotiate when there is disagreement—not a matter of one side holding all the power (FREIRE, 1970).

The Risk of Holding Families Responsible

Some researchers argue that an emphasis on family participation can make families responsible for problems that are fundamentally systemic. If inclusive education fails, it may be blamed on "families not participating enough" rather than on the educational system's failure to provide adequate resources (SLEE, 2011).

Response: This argument also has merit. It is critical not to hold families responsible for systemic failures. That does not mean, however, that family participation is unimportant. It means that family participation is necessary but not sufficient. Investment in resources, teacher training, and policy change is also required. Family participation without systemic change is insufficient (BAPTIST, 2019).

The Risk of Reproducing Inequality

Some researchers argue that an emphasis on family participation can reproduce existing inequalities. Upper-class families have more time, resources, and know-how to participate. Low-income families have less. If participation is valued, upper-class families may benefit more, widening inequality (BOURDIEU, 1986).

Response: This argument is critical and important. It is true that family participation can reproduce inequality if there is no explicit attention to equity. The solution, however, is not to eliminate family participation, but to ensure that participation is equitable. This requires (a) removing the barriers that prevent low-income families from participating, (b) offering differentiated support based on need, and (c) monitoring whether all families are getting opportunities to participate (YOUNG, 1990).

"Building Bridges" as Rhetoric

Some researchers argue that the language of "building bridges" between home and school can be rhetoric that masks a lack of structural change. Schools may offer superficial opportunities for participation while maintaining fundamentally exclusionary structures (SLEE, 2018).

Response: This argument is valid. "Building bridges" can be empty rhetoric if it is not accompanied by real shifts in power. That does not mean, however, that building bridges is unimportant. It means that bridge-building must be accompanied by structural change—changes in how power is distributed, how decisions are made, and how resources are allocated (NDLOVU-GATSHENI, 2020).

Power, Equity, and Social Justice: Integrating Critical Analysis

While practical strategies matter, it is critical to engage with the deeper questions of power, equity, and social justice that underlie family–school relationships. These questions should not be "tacked on" at the end, but woven throughout the entire analysis (COLLINS, 2000).

Power Dynamics and Redistribution

Family–school relationships are never power-neutral. The school is an institution of power—it has legal authority over children's education, it controls resources families need, and it holds professional knowledge that is socially valued. Families, particularly marginalized families (low-income families, families of color, immigrant families), have less power (CRENSHAW, 1989).

This power asymmetry often results in families' voices being silenced or ignored. Even when the school offers opportunities to participate, power dynamics can leave families feeling that their voices don't really matter, that decisions have already been made, that their participation is merely symbolic (EREVELLES, 2011).

To build genuine partnerships, schools must recognize and actively work to redistribute power. This means being transparent about how decisions are made and who holds decision-making power; genuinely sharing decision-making power with families; advocating for systemic changes that increase families' power; and continually reflecting on how power dynamics are operating and how they can be transformed (FREIRE, 1970).

Equity, Difference, and Differentiated Support

Not all families face the same barriers or have the same opportunities to engage. Families of different races, classes, national origins, and immigration statuses face different challenges. Schools that treat all families the same, without recognizing these differences, often reproduce inequality (YOUNG, 1990).

An equity approach recognizes that equality (treating all families the same) is not enough. Equity is needed—recognizing differences and offering differentiated support based on specific needs. This means recognizing that families have different needs, barriers, and resources; offering support appropriate to each family's specific needs; monitoring whether certain families are being systematically excluded from participation and working to change that; and, where groups have been historically excluded, taking specific action to include them (APPLE, 2013).

Intersectionality: Recognizing Multiple Marginalizations

Families are not one-dimensional. A low-income Black mother who herself has a disability faces the intersection of multiple forms of marginalization. She may face racism, classism, ableism, and sexism. These multiple experiences of discrimination affect how she engages with schools (COLLINS, 2000).

An intersectional approach recognizes that people have multiple intersecting identities; that

people may face discrimination based on multiple identities; and that solutions must address specific intersections, not just a single dimension (CRENSHAW, 1989).

For example, a strategy of "offering evening meetings for working parents" may work for working parents, but not for working single mothers who have no childcare. A more intersectional solution would offer multiple options: evening meetings, daytime meetings, virtual meetings, and childcare during meetings. It would also require recognizing that single mothers face specific barriers (lack of time, lack of support) that parents with partners do not (KAFER, 2013).

Acknowledging Historical Injustice and Repair

Many families—particularly Black, Indigenous, and immigrant families—have a history of exclusion and discrimination in educational systems. Schools that want to build genuine partnerships must acknowledge this history and actively work to repair the harm (GOFFMAN, 1963).

This means explicitly acknowledging the history of exclusion and injustice; offering a genuine apology for harm caused; implementing concrete changes that demonstrate a commitment to inclusion; and offering redress where possible (for example, by removing policies that harmed families and by offering opportunities that were previously denied) (OLIVER, 1990).

Conclusion: Toward Inclusive and Just Futures

This chapter has argued that:

1. The family is a legitimate protagonist: Legally, morally, and pedagogically, the family must be recognized as a protagonist—not a supporting player—in their children's inclusive education.

2. Family participation is critical to success: The empirical evidence is clear—meaningful family participation is associated with better educational outcomes. That evidence, however, is heterogeneous and has limitations.



3. Barriers exist and are significant: But these barriers are not the fault of families—they are the product of systems that were not designed to include families. The barriers are structural, economic, linguistic, cultural, and attitudinal, and they are tied to power dynamics.

4. Practical strategies can be implemented: Schools can take concrete action to build bridges between home and school. Each strategy, however, carries implementation challenges, costs, and a feasibility that varies by context.

5. Power and equity are central: Building genuine partnerships requires engaging with deep questions of power, equity, and social justice. Offering opportunities to participate is not enough if power dynamics are not transformed.

6. Counterperspectives are legitimate: There are legitimate concerns about professional autonomy, the risk of holding families responsible, and the risk of reproducing inequality. These concerns must be engaged, not ignored.

Implementation Challenges: Being Realistic

Implementing the recommendations in this chapter is not easy. There are significant challenges: changing mindsets, distributing power, resources, context, and sustainability. Despite these challenges, however, there are strategies that can help overcome them: starting small, involving the community, providing training, monitoring and evaluating, and engaging in policy advocacy (SLEE, 2018).

Needed Future Research

While progress has been made in recognizing the importance of family participation in inclusive education, much work remains. Future research should explore family perspectives, specific contexts, systemic transformation, intersectionality, and equity (WALTON, 2018).

A Vision for the Future: Inclusive Education with the Family as Protagonist

Inclusive education is an unfinished project. Despite decades of inclusive policies, many students with disabilities continue to be excluded. One fundamental reason is that inclusive education has been conceived of as primarily the school's responsibility, with the family in a secondary role.

Repositioning the family as protagonist, rather than merely as support, opens up new possibilities. When school and family genuinely work together, when both have a real voice, when both are recognized as holding valuable expertise, inclusive education stops being a distant aspiration and becomes an achievable reality.

Imagine a school where meetings with families are scheduled at times families can attend. Where communication happens in the languages families speak. Where professionals genuinely listen to and value the knowledge families hold. Where, when disagreements arise, there is a genuine process of negotiation, not imposition. Where families have a real voice in decisions about education. Where the barriers that prevent participation are systematically removed. Where power dynamics are recognized and transformed.

In that school, inclusive education is not a project implemented for families. It is a project built with families. And the results are transformative—not only for students with disabilities, but for all children, for families, for schools, and for communities.

That future is possible. It is necessary. And it is imperative that we work together—researchers, educators, administrators, families, and communities—to build it.

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