

## PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

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This document draws together evidence on the impact of parental involvement on children's education. Parental involvement in children's education from an early age has a significant effect on educational achievement, and continues to do so into adolescence and adulthood. This review of research finds that it is now generally agreed that school, family, and community partnerships are necessary to improve children's chances for success in school.

**Keywords:** parental involvement, parental role, mechanisms of parental influence.

**Introduction.** The school plays an important role in determining the levels of parental involvement in school. Specifically, schools can outline their expectations of parents and regularly communicate with parents about what children are learning. Also, schools can provide opportunities for parents to talk with school personnel about parents' role in their children's education through home visits and well-planned parent-teacher conferences and open houses. In addition, the National PTA recommends that parent/family involvement programs welcome parents as volunteer partners in schools and that these programs invite parents to act as full partners in making school decisions that affect children and families.

Schools that succeed in engaging families from very diverse backgrounds share three key practices. They:

- focus on building trusting collaborative relationships among teachers, families, and community members.
- recognize, respect, and address families' needs, as well as class and cultural difference.
- embrace a philosophy of partnership where power and responsibility are shared.

**Main part.** Many new studies focus on an area of great interest to educators: how to create and sustain connections between families and school staff from diverse cultural and class backgrounds. We are interested in knowing more about parents' positive influences on their children's educational outcomes.

The literature on parental involvement in child and adolescent education conveys the clear assumption that parents' involvement benefits children's learning (e.g., Chavkin, 1993; Eccles & Harold, 1993; Epstein, 1989, 1994; Hess & Holloway, 1984; Hobbs, Dokecki, Hoover-Dempsey, Moroney, Shayne, & Weeks, 1984; U.S. Department of Education, 1994).

Many have suggested the preeminent significance of parents' education, income, marital status, and related indicators of family status in efforts to understand parents' involvement decisions (e.g., Lareau, 1989). However, we assert that these status variables, while not unimportant, do not explain parents' decisions to become involved, their choice of involvement forms, or the effects of their involvement on student outcomes.

We suggest that parents most often become involved in their children's education for three major reasons:

- 1 their personal construction of the parental role;
- 2 their personal sense of efficacy for helping children succeed in school;

- 3 their reaction to the opportunities and demand characteristics presented by both their children and their children's schools [4].

#### **Personal construction of the parental role**

We believe that parents become involved because they construe the parental role as including personal involvement in their children's education. Several investigators have referenced or examined parents' role construction as a variable potentially important to parental involvement (e.g., Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Eccles, 1993; Eccles & Harold, 1993; Lareau, 1989; Lightfoot, 1978).

A construction of the parental role as including personal involvement in children's education would seem to be a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for the emergence of parent-involvement activities.

#### **Personal sense of efficacy for helping children succeed in school**

We also believe that parents become involved because they have a sense of personal efficacy for helping their children succeed in school.

Parents' sense of efficacy for helping children succeed in school is drawn, thus, from all four sources. Taken together, they create the dynamic quality of efficacy in this general area (Bandura, 1989). The most powerful is direct experience of a positive and successful nature in the field or domain of interest [1]. Usually secondary in importance to direct experience, vicarious experience also serves as a source of personal efficacy beliefs.

Lower in importance but still offering contributions to personal efficacy are the efforts of others in verbal persuasion.

A fourth general source of personal efficacy is emotional arousal. Applied to parent efficacy, the theory suggests that parents who are emotionally and directly concerned about their children's educational success, or whose personal sense of adequacy is emotionally connected to success in helping one's children be successful, will be more likely than those with lower emotional investments or arousal to be high in efficacy.

#### **Opportunities and demands for involvement presented by children and schools**

The demand and opportunity characteristics offered by children or their school settings that influence whether parents will become involved are general demands and opportunities. Children, for example, might be consistently enthusiastic about any parent visits to school or might be generally eager to talk about the school day's events.

Several studies try to answer to what practices are effective by asking parents how and why they are involved in their children's education. Kathleen Hoover-Dempsey and Howard Sandler (1997) conducted a literature review to learn why parents become involved in their children's learning. From their analysis, they developed a theoretical model to explain why parents are involved. Their model suggests that parents' involvement decisions and choices are based on several constructs [3].

**The first construct** is parents' «**personal construction of the parent role**» – what parents believe they are supposed to do in relation to their children's education. This defines the activities that parents feel are important, necessary, and permissible to be involved in on behalf of their children. How parents construct this role stems from expectations

These studies suggest that the quality of the relationship influences whether connections among schools, families, and communities will be formed and sustained.

These groups can be other family members, the child's school, and their workplace. Parents' beliefs about child rearing and about appropriate parent home-support roles also influence their role construction. This construct suggests that different cultural and class contexts shape how parents define their role about how to engage in their children's education.

**The second construct** focuses on parents' «**personal sense of efficacy for helping children succeed in school**». This has to do with whether parents believe and are confident about their ability to be helpful to their child. Parents' beliefs about whether:

- they have the skills and knowledge necessary to help their children,
- their children can learn what they have to share and teach,
- they can find alternative sources of skill or knowledge if and when these sources become necessary shape their sense of efficacy and therefore their involvement.

**The third construct** influencing parents' decisions about their involvement comes from «**general invitations, demands, and opportunities for family involvement**». The question examined by the authors was, «Do the parents perceive that the child and the school want and are interested in their involvement?» In this construct, the child's age and developmental level, overall level of performance, per-

sonality qualities, and the general enthusiasm about parents' involvement at the school all influence parents' decisions about participation. Thus school staff and children signal their expectations about involvement to parents. These signals ultimately influence parents' decisions about involvement.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler suggest that schools and communities can better engage families by working actively to invite and welcome parent involvement and by developing programs that support and enhance parents' efficacy for involvement in their children's schooling.

Delores Peca's (2000) study also explored how parents in one urban elementary school in Texas were or were not involved in their children's education and the factors that influenced their involvement. Peca interviewed 28 parents of children in prekindergarten/kindergarten and third-fourth grade classes. She also conducted observations of a range of meetings and activities and examined school documents regarding parent involvement.

Her study found that parent involvement was influenced by many **factors**. These include language, parent educational level, attitudes of school staff, cultural influences, and such family issues as childcare. Peca emphasizes that it is important for school staff to take the time to gain the trust of parents and to inform them of how they can be involved [5].

In the study, parents not only identified factors that they felt influenced their involvement, but they also offered suggestions for improving parent involvement:

- Make the parents feel more welcomed.
- Change the attitudes of school staff so that they recognize the advantages of teachers and parents working together.
- Consider the educational level, language, culture, and home situation of parents.
- Give teachers time to plan and organize parent activities.
- Take parents' interests and needs into consideration when planning activities.
- Recognize that even if parents cannot be present at school, helping their children at home is also a valuable contribution.
- Provide parents with knowledge about how to be involved in a range of involvement opportunities.

Joyce Epstein and her colleagues at the Center on Family, School, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University, have developed a useful framework of six types of parent involvement.

Table 1

**Six Types of Parent Involvement**

| TYPE OF INVOLVEMENT          | CHARACTERISTIC  |
|------------------------------|---|
| Parenting                    | – Expressing expectations about student's education<br>– Limiting television viewing<br>– Supervising time use and behavior                 |
| Communicating                | – Parent-initiated contacts about academic performance<br>– School-initiated contacts about student's academic program (courses, placement) |
| Supporting school            | Volunteering at school and fund-raising   |
| Learning at home             | – Academic lessons outside school<br>– Music or dance lessons<br>– Discussions about school and plans for future                            |
| Decision making              | Taking part in parent organization  |
| Collaborating with community | – Using community learning resources (like museum visits)<br>– Taking part in community groups (scouts, sports)                             |

Table 1, adapted from the Sophia Catsambis study (1998), is based on this work. It shows how parental involvement is frequently broken down and defined. Many researchers used some variation of this framework (tab1. 1) [2].

We now shift from variables that influence whether and how the parent will become involved to variables that influence how parental involvement will have a positive influence on children's educational outcomes. We address specific mechanisms that we believe operate to determine whether parent involvement—once it is undertaken, in whatever forms selected by the parent—will have a positive effect on children's educational success.

There are three primary **mechanisms of parental influence** on children's educational outcomes: modeling, reinforcement, and direct instruction. These mechanisms of parental influence are set within the context of understanding that parent-involvement behaviours as a whole constitute one of several sources of influence on children's educational outcomes. Parents' involvement plays a role in the context of other variables that have important influences on educational outcomes, such as child variables (e.g., abilities, learning style, developmental level), teacher and school variables (e.g., teaching effectiveness, curriculum appropriateness), and broader sociocultural variables (e.g., cultural attitudes that may limit or enhance the opportunities available to any given child). In most circumstances, parent involvement is most accurately characterized as a powerful enabling and enhancing variable in children's educational success, rather than as either a necessary or a sufficient condition in itself for that success. Its absence eliminates opportunities for the enhancement of children's education; its presence creates those opportunities.

Although none of these mechanisms of parental involvement as manifested in different involvement forms appears necessary or sufficient

in itself to ensure positive educational outcomes, it is not without importance that so much experience and research have suggested that parental involvement manifested in some form is a necessary condition of school success for many children. We suspect that parental involvement—as tempered or mediated by conditions specified below—is most significant in enabling children's accomplishments in skill and knowledge areas where children may be struggling to achieve, and in enabling progress when children come to a roadblock in learning that interferes with continued progress. Under these conditions, when the normal teaching and learning processes of the classroom are insufficient in themselves to create learning, the enabling and enhancing functions of parental involvement may become critical to children's educational success.

**Summing up.** How can we put these findings into action?

- Recognize that all parents – regardless of income, education, or cultural background are involved in their children's learning and want their children to do well.
- Design programs that will support families to guide their children's learning, from preschool through high school.
- Develop the capacity of school staff to work with families.
- Focus efforts to engage families and community members on developing trusting and respectful relationships.
- Embrace a philosophy of partnership and be willing to share power with families.
- Make sure that parents, school staff, and community members understand that the responsibility for children's educational development is a collaborative enterprise.
- Build strong connections between schools and community organizations.

## References:

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## УЧАСТЬ БАТЬКІВ В ОСВІТІ ДІТЕЙ

### Анотація

Дана стаття об'єднує фактичні дані про вплив участі батьків на освіту дітей. Участь батьків в навчанні дітей з раннього віку має суттєвий вплив на їх досягнення, що триває в підлітковому і дорослому віці. Цей огляд досліджень дозволяє зробити висновок, що в сучасних умовах активна участь в процесі навчання і зв'язок школи, сім'ї і інших спільнот необхідні для підвищення у дітей шансів на досягнення успіху.

**Ключові слова:** залучення батьків, роль батьків, механізми впливу батьків.

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## **УЧАСТИЕ РОДИТЕЛЕЙ В ОБРАЗОВАНИИ ДЕТЕЙ**

### **Аннотация**

Эта статья объединяет фактические данные о влиянии участия родителей на образование детей. Участие родителей в обучении детей с раннего возраста оказывает существенное влияние на их достижения, продолжается в подростковом и взрослом возрасте. Этот обзор исследований позволяет сделать вывод, что в современных условиях активное участие в процессе обучения и связь школы, семьи и других сообществ необходимы для повышения у детей шансов на достижение успеха.

**Ключевые слова:** вовлечение родителей, роль родителей, механизмы влияния родителей.