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The Role of Parental Involvement in the Academic Achievement of Student's

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ABSTRACT

The major research objective of this study was to assess the effect of parental involvement on students' academic growth during the high school years. The National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88) data were used, and latent growth curve analysis within the framework of structural equation modeling was the major analytic tool. The following are the major findings of the study: (a) Parental involvement appears to be multidimensional; (b) ethnic group samples reported comparable degrees of parental involvement; (c) parents' aspiration for their children's education attainment had a consistent and positive effect on students' academic growth; and (d) the effect, or lack thereof, of parental involvement was consistent across ethnic group samples and across data sources (student vs. parent data). Plausible reasons for the consistent effect of parents' aspirations on students' academic achievement are discussed. The author offers explanations for why some parental involvement dimensions showed negative, though generally small, effects on students' academic growth.

Keywords: Achievement, Consistent, NELS, Parental involment

INTRODUCTION

Considerable research evidence suggests that parent's' behaviors with their children stimulation, consistency, moderation, and responsiveness influence the children's cognitive and social development (Clarke-Stewart 1983). Not surprisingly, educators and public policymakers continue to pay close attention to the ways in which parents can foster or inhibit cognitive development and, by extension, academic achievement (see U.S. Department of Education 1986).If we can identify parental practices that are relatively successful in enhancing cognitive growth, we may be able to help more parents help their children reach their intellectual potential. This is not a trivial goal, given simultaneous concerns over the school performance of poor and minority children (a population is

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increasing), and the poor performance of American children in general, particularly in relation to that of Asian children, such as the Japenese (McKnight et al. 1987; Pallas, Natriello, and McDiII 1989; Stevenson, Lee, and Stigler 1986).This paper examines research on parent involvement in their children's education by exploring socialization patterns that foster high achievement and describing the structure and effectiveness of parent involvement programs in this country. As will be shown, most parents, educators, and educational administrators are very much in favor of involving parents in children's learning. However, there is little consensus on which specific behaviors are likely to maximize children's achievement.

Socialization That Foster Academic Achievement :James Coleman's large scale study of the factors that influence academic achievement showed a stronger correlation between achievement and family background and environment than between achievement and the quality of the school (Coleman et al. 1966). Researchers have since devoted much attention to ways that parents can foster their children's school achievement. The literature distinguishes between cognitive socialization—how parents influence the basic intellectual development of their children, and academic socialization—how parents influence the development of attitudes and motives that are essential for school learning (Baker and Stevenson 1986; Epstein, in press; Stevenson and Baker 1987; Milne et al. 1986). In some families, the socialization of achievement operates in ways that produce a relative match between the child's learning skills, attitudes, and motives and the demands of the school (see Bempechat and Ginsburg 1989; Epstein 1989). In other families, the socialization of achievement operates in such a way that children have difficulty realizing their full potential, so that they fall behind in their school work and develop poor attitudes, low expectancies, and maladaptive achievement behaviors (e.g., learned helplessness). In this section, we examine the literature on cognitive and academic socialization. Cognitive Socialization. Early work in this area showed that children's general level of achievement is associated with such factors as the degree to which parents provide tutoring when it is needed (Haggard 1957; Toby 1957). More recently, researchers have focused on parent-child interactions, usually with the mother, that foster or inhibit cognitive development. Some of this work has been heavily influenced by the writings of Bygotsky and Piaget. The underlying assumption is that parents function in much the same way as teachers, and their behaviors are contingent on the particular contexts in which they interact with their children. Instruction is not necessarily explicit, nor does it have to involve specific techniques or strategies. Parental teaching is embedded in daily life and occurs in many subtle and indirect ways. In Hess and Shipman's (1965) now classic observation study, academic achievement was found to be enhanced by parents who promote an active approach to learning. In a related vein, McDevitt and Hess (1985) found that parents' direct control techniques hampered children's cognitive development by influencing their self-appraisals. Mothers who made appeals based on their authority had children who tended to attribute failure to lack of ability and did not attribute success to ability. It could be that in not allowing more self-exploration, these controlling mothers foster a lack of confidence in their children. (Irving Sigel et al. 1986; Sigel 1982, 1985) has proposed that differences in parental distancing strategies may account for differences in cognitive development. Distancing refers to the psychological separation of an individual from the immediate

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present, and is critical in the development Of representational thinking. According to Sigel, parental distancing strategies, which vary along a continuum from less to more demanding, activate children's representational thinking processes. For example, observing and labelling are considered less demanding tasks than proposing altematives and resolving conflict. Distancing strategies have been shown to be related to measures of cognitive skill. Researchers have since devoted much attention to ways that parents can foster their children's school achievement. The literature distinguishes between cognitive socialization—how parents influence the basic intellectual development of their children, and academic socialization—how parents influence the development of attitudes and motives that are essential for school learning (Baker and Stevenson 1986; Epstein, in press; Stevenson and Baker 1987; Milne et al. 1986). In some families, the socialization of achievement operates in ways that produce a relative match between the child's learning skills, attitudes, and motives and the demands of the school (see Bempechat and Ginsburg 1989; Epstein 1989). In other families, the socialization of achievement operates in such a way that children have difficulty realizing their full potential, so that they fall behind in their school work and develop poor attitudes, low expectancies, and maladaptive achievement behaviors (e.g., learned helplessness). In this section, we examine the literature on cognitive and academic socialization. In a related vein, Barbara Rogoff and her colleagues have proposed that the important aspect of the adult-child interaction is the way in which adults bridge the contexts of novel problems with more familiar ones cloisters at appropriate places, and modelling mature performance. In this view, adults implicitly help children create a context in which new information becomes compatible with current knowledge and skills.Rogoff argues that the structuring of information serves as a scaffold for the learner, providing a framework as the learner searches for a problem's solution. Leaders can use the scaffold to support the performance of new aspects of a task that they may not have been able to handle alone. Rogoff notes that parents may not have explicit instructional goals, but may structure their interactions with their children in very subtle ways that promote their children's social and cognitive development. In the learning process, information and skills are transmitted through pragmatic communication, and instruction occurs during the interaction. Initial instruction consists of highly supportive scaffolding, which eventually, through adult encouragement, gives way to greater participation by the child. Ideally, the child participates at a comforting but challenging level (the "zone of proximal development"), and the adult continually revises the scaffold for learning as the child's abilities develop. The adult who guides the child's growth in the most optimal way adjusts his or her support to levels just beyond what the child could manage alone.Not surprisingly, social class operates to influence cognitive socialization. Empirical studies of middle- and working-class mothers have shown that middle-class mothers exhibit higher levels of questioning in a problem-solving task, and that middle-class children show higher levels of representational thinking than do working-class children (Bee et al. 1982; Sigel 1982; Sigel and Olmstead 1971). Middle-class mothers are more likely to foster an active and assertive approach to learning, while lower-class mothers foster a passive and compliant approach (Hess and Sharman 1965). The evidence suggests that middle-class mothers may be more likely than lower-class mothers to structure instruction, or "scaffold" their children's learning, in a more challenging way

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by integrating explanation demonstration while emphasizing the child's active participation in learning (see Rogoff and Gardner 1984).Academic Socialization. How do parents influence the development of attitudes and beliefs that are helpful in dealing with instruction in school? A considerable amount of research evidence is converging to show that parents' attitudes, expectancies, and beliefs about schooling and learning guide their behavior with their children and have a causal influence on the children's development of achievement attitudes and behaviors (Ames and Archer 1987; Bloom 1985; Eccles 1983; Entwisted et al. 1987; Entwisted and Hayden 1988; Haggard 1957; McGillicuddy-DeLisi 1985; Margaritas' 1979;Miller 1986; Phillips 1987; Seginer 1983; Sigel 1985; Wagner and Spratt 1988; see Bempechat and Wells 1989; Dweck and Bempechat 1983).

Parents' beliefs do not necessarily have to be explicit. Often subtle aspects of beliefs and behavior—of which parents may be unaware—can be very influential. For example, research on mathematics achievement has shown that, despite equivalent levels of performance, mothers' attributions for success and failure differ on the basis of children's sex (Holloway and Hess 1985; Danton, McDevitt, and Hess 1988). Mothers of boys attribute success to ability and failure to lack of effort. Mothers of girls attribute success to effort and failure to lack of ability. Such differential beliefs have a profound influence on children's self-appraisals of ability, attributions for performance, and attitudes towards math. Researchers have found that, relative to boys, girls have lower self-concept of math ability and believe that math is harder and of less general value (Eccles 1983; Parson, Adler, and Kaczala 1982). Moreover, they are less likely to attribute success to ability and more likely to attribute it to stable effort. They are also more likely to attribute failure to lack of ability. It appears that children's self-perceptions of math ability appear to be influenced more by their parents' appraisals than by their own record of achievement. Not surprisingly, relative to lower-class parents, middle-class parents' academic socialization practices may operate in ways that are better suited to the demands Of the school (Ginsburg, Bempechat, and Chung in press; Henderson 1981). For example, Baker and Stevenson (1986) found no philosophical differences between high and low SES mothers with regard to the strategies they developed for fostering their children's achievement. However, high SES mothers were more likely to implement these strategies than were low SES mothers. That is, they were more likely to monitor closely their children's school progress and to initiate contact with the school in response to their child's academic difficulties. In a related vein, Laureau (1987) argues that "Middle-class culture provides parents With more information about schooling and promotes social ties among parents in the school community. This furthers the interdependence between home and school. Working-class culture, on the other hand, emphasizes kinship and promotes independence between the spheres of family life and schooling" (p. 82).Middle-class parents also tend to have higher expectations for their children's academic performance and higher career aspirations (Baker and Entwisted 1987; Lareau 1987; Rosen and D'Andrade 1959; Toby 1957). While the literature suggests that academic and cognitive socialization are facilitated by middle-class status, considerable research has shown that lower-class status does no t necessarily predict less effective parent practices. For example, Clark's (1983) ethnographic study of low income high and low achieving African-American children showed that high achieving children had parents who stressed the value of

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education for their futures, monitored their academic progress closely, and fostered an internal sense of control and responsibility over academic outcomes (see also Boardman, Harrington, and Horowitz 1987). Similarly, in a study of achievement motivation in Chinese-, Southeast Asian-, Korean- and Caucasian-American fifth and sixth graders, Bempechat, Mordkowitz, Wu, Morison, and Ginsburg (1989) found that, regardless of ethnicity and social class, high achievement was associated with intense educational socialization, including close supervision of school progress.

Epstein (1989) has examined home factors that contribute to academic achievement. She argues that differences in children's motivation and learning can be partly accounted for by the degree to which the environments of the school and the home overlap. Her model of educational socialization (TARGET Structures) identifies six interrelated aspects of the home environment that are conducive to academic achievement.

Task structure, or the variety of activities, including intellectual activities, that children participate in at home. The literature suggests that preschoolers who are actively prepared for school are more ready for its formal onset, have more initially positive attitudes, and experience less grade retention.

Authority structure, or the degree to which children have responsibilities and participate in family decision-making. Authoritative, rather than permissive or authoritarian, parenting is associated with independent and exploratory behavior in young and older children.

Reward structure, or the ways in which parents recognize advances in learning. Epstein suggests that, particularly when children begin formal schooling, parents are unsure of how best to reward children for intellectual progress.

Grouping structure, or the ways in which parents influence the child's interactions with family members and peers. Epstein proposes that schools can do more to help parents make use of the peer group in socializing academic achievement.

Evaluation or parental standards for and means of judging performance. Clear and realistic standards that are communicated warmly and constructively can foster motivation.

Time structure, or the ways in which parents manage children's time for schoolwork and other activities. Parents that manage children's time effectively support the completion of both school and non-school related tasks.

In sum, the literature supports the view that parental cognitive and academic socialization practices can foster children's academic achievement. Given that middle-class parents appear to have both the material and social resources to implement such practices, researchers have examined the degree to which we can enhance the achievement of educationally disadvantaged children through parent education programs. This issue is explored below.

Parent Education:

The accumulated evidence suggests that children's cognitive development benefits from programs that disseminate child development information to their parents and helps parents further their own education and enhance their job skills (Becher, in Henderson 1987; Clarke-Steward 1983; Comer 1980, 1986; Dokecki, Hargrove, and Sandler 1983; Keller 1983; Olmsted and Rubin 1983). For example, parent involvement was a major focus of

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the nation-wide Follow Through (FT) program, established in 1967 for low income kindergarten and first graders to sustain the gains made in preschool compensatoxy education programs. Evaluations of the various FT models showed that participating parents learned both how to help their children with school-work and also improve their own job skills (Olmsted and Rubin 1983). They tended to become more involved in their children's academic progress, and their children showed gains in cognitive skills. James Comer (1986) reported that many low income parents participating in a parent involvement program became role models for their children by virtue of continuing their oven education, taking new jobs, and eventually leaving the welfare roles.Parent education is one of the major foundations for an innovative intervention program in Chicago—the Beethoven Project. Housed in the nation's largest public housing project, the Robert Taylor Homes, this program provides pre- and post-natal care to mothers, in an effort to enhance children's academic success when they begin formal schooling at the neighborhood Beethoven Elementary School. The program emphasizes child development training and continuing education for mothers. The first wave of children in this five-year project will begin kindergarten in September, 1992.

Parent Involvement Programs Structure and Effectiveness:

A variety of techniques exist for involving parents in their children's education. These range from parent-school contacts (parent-teacher conferences, notes home) to parent training to parent involvement in school policy (Barth 1979; Becker and Epstein 1982; Moles 1982). In a survey of 3700 first, third, and fifth grade teachers, Becker and Epstein (1982) found that teachers' techniques for involving parents in their children's fell into five broad categories: (I) reading activities, (2) learning through discussion, (3) suggestions for home activities (i.e., supervision and review of homework), (4) contracts between parents and teachers (i.e., concerning rewards and punishment's), and (5) techniques to foster parents' tutoring skills. Epstein (1988) suggests that a

comprehensive program of parent involvement should include:

(I) techniques to help parents create home environments conducive to learning, (2) frequent and clear communications from teachers to parents about pupil progress, (3) the use of parents as resources in school (i.e., volunteers), (4) teacher assistance with educational activities in the home, and (5) involvement in school governance, through such vehicles as the mA.

The evidence suggests that parent involvement programs have a positive impact on children's achievement (Henderson 1988). Parents who maintain frequent contact with the school have higher achieving children than parents who have infrequent contact. And, schools that are well-connected with the community tend to have higher achieving students than schools with fewer ties. Parents who become involved in their children's schooling tend to develop positive attitudes towards their children's teachers. They rate teachers higher in interpersonal and teaching skills, perceive them as wanting them to help their children and as very helpful in suggesting ideas for home activities (Epstein 1987). Involved parents also tend to enlist the support of others, become actively involved in community issues, and further their own education (Becher, in Henderson 1987).Parent involvement programs have been empirically examined in a variety of studies (Barth 1979;

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Epstein 1987; Fehmarn, Keith, and Reamer's 1987; Karraker 1972; Walberg, Bole, and Waxman 1980). For example, Walberg et al. (1980) examined a school-wide program (K—6) in which parents signed a contract, pledging to set high expectations, provide an appropriate study environment, encourage learning by discussing schoolwork daily, and cooperate with teachers in matters related to discipline. Results showed that classes differed in the extent to which teachers themselves embraced the program. In classes where teachers made intensive efforts to involve parents, classes gained about 1.1 grade level in reading. In classes with less involved parents, the reading gain was 0.5 of a grade level.

In an ongoing study Of first, third, and fifth grade teachers, principals, parents, and students, Epstein (1987) reported a positive relationship betvveen the frequency with which teachers encouraged parent involvement and reading gains for all students. In addition, fifth graders developed more positive attitudes towards school and completed more homework on weekends.

In addition to examining parent involvement behaviors, some researchers have explored the effect of children's perceptions Of their parents' involvement on academic outcomes. Keith and his colleagues (Fehrmann et al. 1987; Keith et al. 1986) defined parent involvement as actual or perceived expectations for performance, verbal encouragement or interactions regarding homework, direct reinforcement for academic improvement, and general academic guidance or support. Using the 1980 wave of the High School and Beyond (HSB) data set, they found that perceived parent involvement had a positive effect on students' grades. Thus, the evidence suggests that close supervision and high support for academic activities are important factors in school achievement.

The Role of the Teacher in Parent Involvement

As mentioned earlier, parent involvement appears to blossom when teachers are intensely committed to the idea. addition to examining parent involvement behaviors, some researchers have explored the effect of children's perceptions Of their parents' involvement on academic outcomes. Keith and his colleagues (Fehrmann et al. 1987; Keith et al. 1986) defined parent involvement as actual or perceived expectations for performance, verbal encouragement or interactions regarding homework, direct reinforcement for academic improvement, and general academic guidance or support. Using the 1980 wave of the High School and Beyond (HSB) data set, they found that perceived parent involvement had a positive effect on students' grades. Bempechat and her colleagues (Bempechat) While most teachers and school administrators are in favor of greater parent participation in children's schooling, some obstacles exist. For example, teachers report that while they engage in traditional means of parent-teacher communication (i.e., notices home, interactions during parent-teacher nights), many do not go beyond such attempts (Becker and Epstein 1982). They admit to not knowing the best way(s) to get parents involved in their children's education. This corroborates findings from a recent survey of teacher educators, which showed that there is a paucity of teacher training in parent involvement (Chavkin and Williams 1988). In a sample of over 4000 teacher educators, 65 percent revealed that they either discuss the issue casually or devote only one class period to the topic .Many teachers worry that parents, particularly low income parents, may not have enough time, training, or education themselves to help their children with school work (Becker and Epstein 1982;

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Epstein and Becker 1982; McLaughlin and Shields 1987; Moles 1982). Moles (1982) reports that many teachers also have low expectations that parents will follow through on commitments to help their children with schoolwork. Researchers, however, have documented the fact that low income parents do want to help their children, are willing to be active participants in their children's leaming, and do implement suggestions offered by teachers (Berliner and Casanova 1985; McLaughlin and Shields 1987). Others have noted that many low income parents care about their children's academic progress, but do not know how to help their children (Berliner and Casanova 1985; Lareau 1987; gobo 1989).Seeley (1982) argues that parent involvement might be facilitated if the relationship between parents and teachers became a true partnership based on mutual sharing, helping, and accountability. He contends that as long as schools see the parents' role as one of background support (i.e., providing food, clothing, and shelter) the current relationship between parents and teachers will remain unequal and based on assumptions of power.

Conclusions:

Thus, the accumulated evidence supports the importance of parent involvement in children's education. Some parents have the skills to foster both cognitive growth and achievement motivation. More importantly, parents who do not have these skills can readily acquire them. The research shows that when teachers and educational administrators are strongly committed to drawing parents into their children's education, the academic outcomes for children can be very positive.

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