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Parent Involvement and Family-School Partnerships: Examining the Content, Processes, and Outcomes of Structural Versus Relationship-Based Approaches¹

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Introduction

- Interactions and experiences within home and school systems, uniquely and together, form the foundation for developmental trajectories throughout students' educational careers.
- Families represent the first essential system and source of support for children's learning and development and serve as a lifelong resource to children (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).
- Parent involvement in children's learning is associated with increased achievement and academic performance, improved self-regulation, fewer discipline problems, stronger homework and study habits, improved work orientation, more positive attitudes toward school, and higher educational aspirations (e.g., Fan & Chen, 2001; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). These benefits are evident even after taking into account students' abilities and socioeconomic status (SES; Domina, 2005).
- Research examining the role families play in children's education has investigated a variety of activities or methods through which parents participate in learning. These programs are typically characterized as *parent involvement models*, which are defined as the participation of significant caregivers (including parents, grandparents, stepparents, foster parents, etc.) in activities promoting the educational process of their children in order to promote their academic and social well-being (Fishel & Ramirez, 2005).
 - Studies investigating *parent involvement* often examine what each system (home and school) does in isolation. Examples of practices that have been examined include home literacy practices (Jordan, Snow, & Porche, 2000), communication about school (Kelley & McCain, 1995), parental aspirations and expectations (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994), and establishment of household rules and routines (Webster-Stratton, Reid, & Hammond, 2001). In such research, the emphasis is often on the *structure* of activities (e.g., homework monitoring) rather than the *relational* factors (e.g., parent-child involvement quality).
- A systems-ecological orientation posits that children's learning results from the reciprocal relationship among child/family and school/schooling systems (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). *Family-school partnership models* have emerged in the school psychology literature to address the limitations associated with unidimensional (school *or* home) or unidirectional (school *to* home) models.
- *Family-school partnerships* are distinct from parent involvement models. We define family-school partnerships as child-focused approaches wherein families and professionals cooperate, coordinate, and collaborate to enhance opportunities and success for children and adolescents across social, emotional, behavioral, and academic domains (Albright & Weissberg, 2010; Downer & Myers, 2010; Lines, Miller, & Arthur-Stanley, 2010).

- Family-school partnership models emphasize the bidirectional *relationship* between families and schools, and purport to enhance student outcomes through the development of cross-system supports and continuities across settings.

Research Needs and Purpose of Present Review

- Despite general support for parent involvement, some large scale reviews have indicated little to no effect on student achievement or parent or teacher behavior (Mattingly, Prislin, McKenzie, Rodriguez, & Kayzar, 2002), student grades (Fan & Chen, 2001), or educational outcomes for students with and without disabilities (White, Taylor, & Moss, 1992).
- Previous research has failed to operationalize the variables of interest, or failed to differentiate between general *parent involvement* models (focusing on *structural* activities that parents implement) and *family-school partnership* models (focusing on *relationships* between family members and school personnel for supporting children's learning and development).
- A review of *family-school partnerships* apart from parent involvement may uncover distinct contributions of approaches that promote joint parent-teacher relationships and cross-system supports for broad student outcomes, and operative intervention components (structural and relational) that influence outcomes.
- The present study is an extension of a previously reported (Sheridan et al., 2011) investigation of two distinct intervention approaches – i.e., those that are relational in nature and strive to strengthen family-school partnerships and those that are structural in nature and attempt to promote parent involvement activities.

Research Questions

1. To what degree do family intervention studies espouse involvement versus partnership approaches?
2. Which structural and relational components are most prevalent in involvement and partnership interventions?
3. What outcomes are most commonly assessed in parent involvement and partnership interventions?
4. What sample and setting characteristics are most prevalent in the literatures on parent involvement and family-school partnership interventions?
5. What methodological features characterize the literature?

Methods

Study Selection

- A broad search of the literature yielded over 27,000 abstracts.
- Multiple approaches were used to identify the relevant literature (1979-2011):
 - Reference databases (i.e., ERIC, PsycINFO)
 - Hand searches of journals
- Abstracts are being subjected to a coding process by researchers, and studies that meet the following criteria for inclusion are being retrieved:
 - Investigated parent involvement (Fishel & Ramirez, 2005) or family-school partnership (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001) up to or including Grade 12
 - Presented outcomes for children, parents, teachers, schools, communities, or partnerships
 - Occurred in a naturalistic, not laboratory setting
- Retrieved studies are being further reviewed to determine their fit to study criteria.

Sample for Current Review

- Randomly selected parent involvement and family-school partnership intervention studies ($n = 41$) are reviewed in the present study.

Coding Variables (see Appendix A)

- Type of intervention (parent involvement, family-school partnership)
- Relational/structural components of the intervention
- Outcomes
- Sample and setting characteristics
- Study quality

Coding Procedures

- Six trained individuals coded the studies.

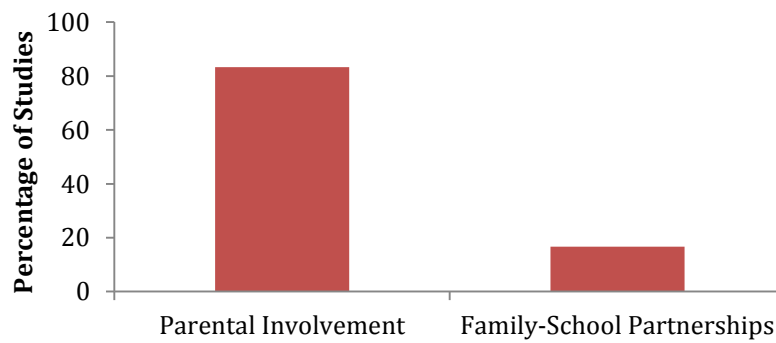
- Twenty-two percent ($n = 9$) of studies meeting our selection criteria were coded by a team of six coders to ensure reliability.
- Regular meetings were held to address questions, minimize drift, discuss discrepancies, and reach consensus.

Results

Research Question 1:

To what degree do family intervention studies espouse involvement versus partnership approaches?

Figure 1: Intervention Approach

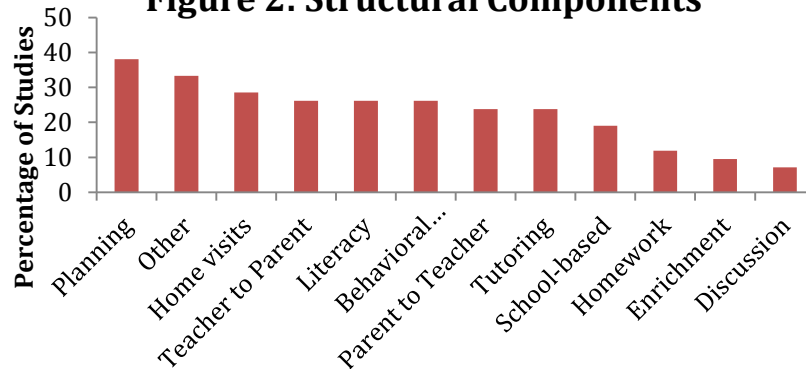


- Over four fifths (83.3%) of the intervention studies investigated the effects of a parent involvement approach; 16.7% used a family-school partnership approach

Research Question 2:

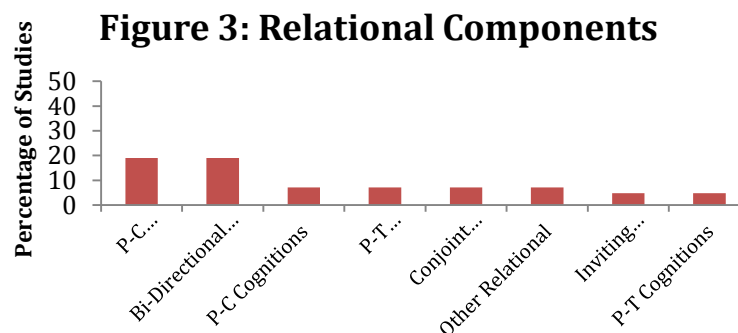
Which structural and relational components are most prevalent in involvement and partnership interventions?

Figure 2: Structural Components



- Given the higher frequency of parent involvement studies, the majority of the studies reported the use of structural approaches when working with parents.

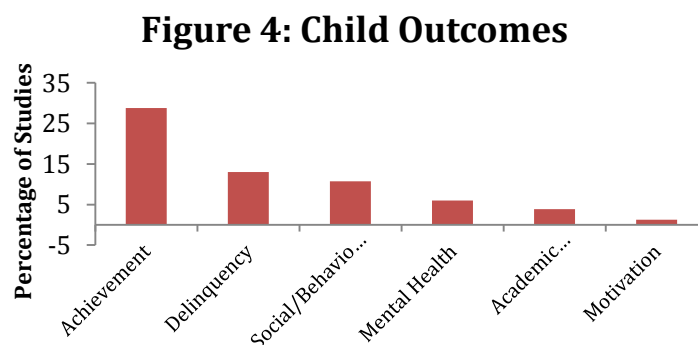
- The most prevalent *structural components* involved planning and problem solving elements (38.1%), such as setting goals for children and troubleshooting problematic behavior. Nearly 29% used structured home visits. The least reported structural component was discussions with children about school or their learning (7.1%).



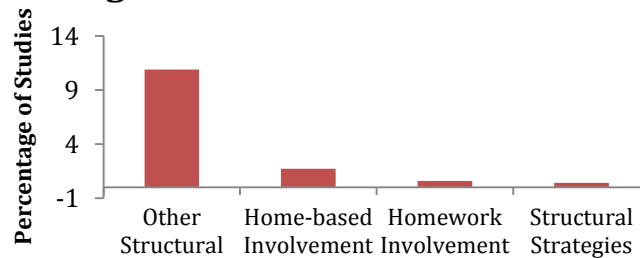
- The most prevalent *relational components* reported were promoting quality parent-child practices (e.g., use of encouragement, warmth, effective communication) and the use of bidirectional communication between home and school (19% each). The least common relational components reported were creating a welcoming school environment and enhancing parents' cognitions about the school (less than 5% each).

Research Question 3:

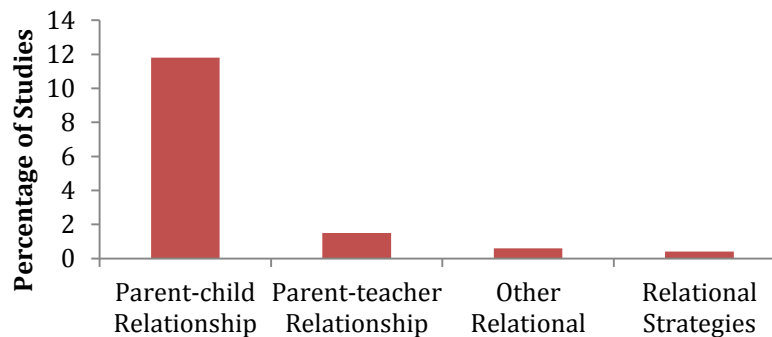
What outcomes are most commonly assessed in parent involvement and partnership interventions?



- Approximately two thirds of the studies assessed child outcomes as the primary variable of interest. More than one-third of outcomes concerned academic achievement (28.8%), followed by delinquency (e.g., substance use and abuse behaviors or attitudes; 13.3%). Very few studies examined students' motivation.

Figure 5: Structural Outcomes

- Approximately 13% of studies assessed structural outcomes. The most prevalent structural outcomes fell within the “other” category (e.g., providing directives, modeling). Surprisingly, less than 1% of studies assessed homework involvement as an outcome

Figure 6: Relational Outcomes

- A minority of the studies (14.3%) assessed relational outcomes. The most common relational outcome measured was the parent-child relationship. Vastly fewer studies (less than 1%) assessed relational strategies (i.e., bi-directional communication and conjoint practices).

Research Question 4:

What sample and setting characteristics are most prevalent in the literatures on parent involvement and family-school partnership interventions?

- Over half (54.8%) of intervention studies were conducted with elementary age students. A small percentage of studies (6.5%) were carried out with students in high school.
- One third of the studies reported student characteristics. Among these studies, students were most commonly characterized as underachieving (18.4%). Very few reported a focus on students who were English Language Learners (ELL) or had learning deficits.
- Most of the studies were conducted in the United States (84.2%).

- More than one third of the studies did not report the type of community (e.g., urban, rural) where the study was conducted.
 - Of the studies reporting the geographic area, the most prevalent community type reported was urban (31%) followed by rural (15.8%).

Table 1. Study Characteristics

<i>Sample Information</i>		
Number of Children	Range	8 to 1,539
	Average	265
	Total	9,554
Grade Level	Preschool	22.6%
	Elementary	54.8%
	Junior High	16.1%
	High School	6.5%
Age	Average (months)	89.3
Ethnicity ¹	White	37.1%
	Black	43.8%
	Hispanic	28.8%
Gender ¹	Female	45.5%
	Male	54.4%
Characteristics	Underachievement	18.4%
	At Risk	10.5%
	ADHD	5.3%
	Learning Deficit	2.6%
	ELL	2.6%
<i>Setting Information</i>		
Community	Urban	31.6%
	Suburban	5.3%
	Rural	15.8%
	Combination	10.5%
	Not reported	36.8%
Country	United States	84.2%
	Other	5.3%
	Not reported	10.5%

¹Indicates average percentage across studies reporting this information.

Research Question 5:

What methodological features characterize the literature?

- The majority of intervention research examined used random assignment to conditions, with control group procedures largely specifying that these participants received no evidence of treatment or attention.

- Intervention components were documented in slightly over half of the studies examined.
- Over three fourths of the studies used at least two assessment methods or approaches (e.g., observations, self-report, teacher ratings).
More than half of the studies promoted fidelity through training, consultation, or supervision, and less than one half reported using manualized interventions. Less than one third of the studies documented adherence to treatment standards.

Table 2. Methodological Features (Quality Criteria)

Unit of Assignment	Individual children/parents	55%
	Classroom	24%
	School	17%
	Not reported	4%
Type of Assignment	Random	71%
	Non-random	17%
	Not reported	12%
Control Group Procedures	No intervention	41%
	Typical intervention	29%
	Waitlist/Delayed intervention	7%
	Other	14%
	Not reported	9%
Documentation of Intervention Components		52%
Multiple Assessment Methods		79%
Fidelity Indicators:		
Training/Consultation/Supervision		60%
Fidelity assessment indicates adherence		29%
Manualization		45%

Discussion

- Based on the subsample of articles used for this examination, findings suggest that the majority of the school-based literature on family interventions has the following characteristics:
 - promotion of parental involvement in children's education through the use of structural intervention components, particularly planning and problem solving;
 - primary use of samples of American elementary age students from diverse ethnic backgrounds;
 - assessment of intervention effectiveness based on children's academic achievement; and

- use of random assignment to conditions, multiple methods of assessment, and fidelity techniques that offer support through supervision, training, or consultation.
- The current review of studies also revealed the following literature base has a limited number of studies with the following characteristics:
 - interventions focused on building relationships between families and schools through the use of relational intervention elements (e.g., use of conjoint practices, improving parent-teacher relationships);
 - use of representative samples that include all grade levels (e.g., prekindergarten-12th grade) and various types of learners (e.g., students who are English Language Learners, have learning deficits, are diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder);
 - assessment of parental outcomes and measurement of a wide range of outcomes (e.g., structural and relational outcomes); and
 - promotion of fidelity through techniques that include reports of intervention adherence.
- This suggests a need for additional family intervention research that:
 - concentrates on partnerships between families and schools;
 - employs a broader set of operative intervention components that provide cross-system supports to enhance continuity across the settings;
 - uses unique samples and more extensive study outcomes; and
 - applies more stringent measures of fidelity.
- Limitations and future research directions:
 - Effect sizes documenting the impact of these interventions on child and parent outcomes were not computed.
 - The review focused on only a sample of the research on school-based family interventions. Thus, these results may not be representative of the entire literature base.
 - The content of the examination reflects only what was reported in each article. Certain assumptions could not be made about specific activities that took place within each study. Therefore, our results were limited to only the information explicitly stated within the articles.

- The present results suggest the need for more rigorous research methods and stringent reporting procedures.
- Continued exploration of studies that meet search criteria are needed to obtain a comprehensive appraisal of the literature on parent involvement (structural) and family-school partnership (relational) approaches.
- Quantitative analyses (such as meta-analytic procedures) are necessary to obtain an objective account of the differential effects of interventions espousing parent involvement (structural) and family-school partnership (relational) approaches.

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Appendix A

Coding Scheme

Intervention Approach

- I. **Parent involvement** (i.e., the participation of significant caregivers (including parents, grandparents, stepparents, foster parents, etc.) in the educational process of their children in order to promote their academic and social well-being [Fishel & Ramirez, 2005])
- II. **Family-school partnership** (i.e., child-focused approaches wherein families and professionals cooperate, coordinate, and collaborate to enhance opportunities and success for children and adolescents across social, emotional, behavioral, and academic domains [Christenson & Sheridan, 2001])

Intervention Components

- III. **Structural components**
 - A. Planning and problem solving (e.g., goal setting)
 - B. Other (e.g., meetings with other parents; parent-child shared journal writing; provision of learning activities to parents; parent meetings)
 - C. Home visits
 - D. Teacher to parent communication (e.g., communication and invitations from school)
 - E. Literacy environment and practices (e.g., reading together)
 - F. Behavioral program (e.g., delivery of concrete reinforcers)
 - G. Parent to teacher communication (communication from home)
 - H. Tutoring (e.g., parents use of specific skills or behaviors to provide direct instruction to their child on tasks outside of homework)
 - I. School-based involvement (e.g., classroom volunteering)
 - J. Homework involvement (e.g., monitoring, direct aid)
 - K. Enrichment (e.g., trips to the museum)
 - L. Discussion (e.g., talking with children about school)
- IV. **Relational Components**
 - A. Parent-child relationship (e.g., encouragement, warmth)
 - B. Bi-directional communication (e.g., two-way information sharing)
 - C. Parents' cognitions about children (e.g., attitudes, expectations)
 - D. Parent-teacher relationship (e.g., relationship building, showing respect)
 - E. Conjoint practices (e.g., joint decision making)
 - F. Other relational (e.g., building social networks)
 - G. School environment (e.g., creating a welcoming atmosphere)
 - H. Parents' cognitions about teachers/schools/school personnel (e.g., interest, beliefs)

Outcome Categories

- V. **Child outcomes**
 - A. Achievement (e.g., grades, test scores, ratings of competence)
 - B. Delinquency (e.g., substance use and abuse behaviors and attitudes)
 - C. Social/behavior competence (e.g., peer relationships, behavioral regulation)

- D. Mental health (e.g., self-esteem, emotion regulation)
- E. Academic behavior (e.g., engagement, truancy)
- F. Motivation (e.g., intrinsic motivation, school value)

VI. Structural outcomes

- A. Other (e.g., provide directives, modeling)
- B. Home-based (e.g., literacy environment)
- C. Homework (e.g., direct aid, monitoring)
- D. Strategies (e.g., planning/problem solving)

VII. Relational outcomes

- A. Parent-child relationships (e.g., encouragement)
- B. Parent-teacher relationships (e.g., showing respect)
- C. Other (e.g., focusing on children's strengths)
- D. Strategies (e.g., bi-directional communication)

Sample Information

VIII. Child factors

- A. Number of children
- B. Grade
- C. Age
- D. Ethnicity
- E. Gender
- F. Characteristics (e.g., underachievement, ADHD)

IX. Setting factors

- A. Community (e.g., rural, urban)
- B. Country (e.g., US)

Methodological Features

X. Study quality

- A. Unit of assignment (e.g., individual children/parents, classrooms)
 - B. Type of assignment (i.e., random, non-random)
 - C. Control group procedures (e.g., , waitlist/delayed intervention, minimal contact)
 - D. Documentation of intervention components
 - E. Multiple assessment methods
 - F. Fidelity indicators
 1. Training/consultation/supervision
 2. Fidelity assessment indicates adherence
 3. Manualization
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