Parental involvement in education: A review and synthesis of the literature

Participación de los padres en la educación: Una revisión y síntesis de la literatura

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ABSTRACT

It is generally accepted that parents influence significantly the manner in which their children approach the demands of school. Research has consistently shown a strong, positive relationship between parental involvement activities (e.g., helping with homework) and children manifesting appropriate classroom attitudes, behavior, and achievement. The parental involvement literature is reviewed systematically as a means of conceptualizing the various parental involvement roles. Parental involvement can be distinguished by both its home and school focus. One may consider the home focus as primary involvement, in that the parents' behavior is more directly and empirically related to the children's classroom efforts. The school focus is conceived of as secondary involvement in that the school is operating as a mediating link between parent behaviors and children's classroom performance. Suggestions are also offered regarding the establishment of parental involvement programs.

DESCRIPTORS: classroom behavior, parental involvement, children.

RESUMEN

Es un hecho generalmente aceptado el que los padres influyen en forma significativa sobre la manera en que los hijos reaccionan a las demandas escolares. Las investigaciones han demostrado, de manera consistente, una fuerte y positiva relación entre las actividades de participación de los padres (por ejemplo, ayudar a los hijos con la tarea) y las actitudes, conductas y logros en la escuela, por parte de los hijos. En el presente artículo se revisan, de manera sistemática, las referencias bibliográficas acerca de la participación de los padres, en la educación de los hijos, con el propósito de conceptualizar los diferentes papeles que ellos desempeñan.

La participación de los padres se puede considerar como primaria o secundaria, dependiendo del contexto en el que ocurra. Es primaria cuando se da en el hogar ya que la conducta de los padres está directa y empíricamente relacionada con los esfuerzos que el niño muestra en el salón de clases.

*Es secundaria cuando se da en la escuela ya que esta última opera como un eslabón
entre las conductas de los padres y el desempeño del niño en el salón de clases. Se ofrecen
sugerencias acerca de cómo establecer programas para la participación de los padres.*
    DESCRIPTORES: conducta en clase, participación de los padres, niños.

Parental involvement has been considered to be a major link in the
home-school relationship (Schaefer & Edgerton, 1974; Mize, 1977). Invol-
vement, as used here, is a multidimensional concept defined by a variety of
school-related activities in the home and direct parent-school interactions
(Sterns & Peterson, 1973). In this article the research on the parent-child-
school interactions most conducive to children's academic success will be
discussed as it provides the empirical evidence favoring parental involvement.
A conceptualization of the many parent involvement roles will be presented
and developed further as a way of incorporating the salient findings of the
research of the home-school relationship.

It has been widely accepted that parents are crucially important agents
in their children's social, affectional, intellectual, and academic development
(Gray, 1959; Grotberg, 1969; Hess, 1969; Rollins & Thomas, 1979). An
aspect of this socialization process is the impact parents have on their child-
ren's classroom achievement, behavior, and attitudes. Within the last 20
years, considerable attention has been focused on the components of a pro-
ductive home-school interaction.

A catalyst for the interest in family effects on students' school perfor-
mance was the Equality of Educational Opportunity Survey conducted by
James S. Coleman in 1965. A significant finding of the Coleman Report
(1966) was that, "Schools bring little influence to bear on a child's achie-
vement that is independent of his background and general social context"
(p. 325).

Several researchers have made attempts to pinpoint more specifically
family factors which contribute to the children's successful school perfor-
mance. Gordon, Greenwood, Ware, and Olmstead (1974), early advocates of
parental involvement, have suggested that there are three elements within
the home which exert an influence on children's school-related behaviors:
demographic factors (e.g., housing, income, and ethnic membership), cogni-
tive factors, and emotional factors. The authors explain:

> The cognitive variables might be further defined as the amount
> of academic guidance provided, the cognitive operational level
> and style of the parents, the cultural activities they provide, the
> instruction they engage in, their educational aspirations. their
> language structure, the frequency of language interaction, and
> the intellectuality they provide such as in books, magazines, and
> the like. The parental emotional factors may be conceived of as
> consistency of management and disciplinary patterns, the
> parents' own emotional security and selfest m, their belief in

> internal versus external control of their environment... and their willingness to devote time to their children... (p. 1)

Friedman (1973), in discussing the familial roots of school behavior disorders, proposed that such variables as the process by which the family negotiates authority issues, the extent and context of parental rewards and punishments, and the psychological and interpersonal climate of the home influence the children's classroom attitudes and behavior. An illustration of how the psychological process of intrafamilial warmth and security can contribute to the home-school link has been described by Brown (1973):

> When there is generalized mutuality and warmth in the home, children feel safe. They are comfortable about exploring their environment, asking questions of each other, sharing feelings and thoughts, and showing enthusiasm for each other's achievements. A positive attitude about learning and experiencing arises out of such a family milieu. (p. 12)

Conversely, erratic classroom behavior could result from the manner in which parents discipline at home:

> Home standards that are contradictory or inconsistent may result in the child's nondeliberate distortion of class rules. A dominating father sets down strict rules for the child, but the mother reacts to what she considers to be father's undue harshness by nonenforcement or inconsistent application of the rules. The end-product may be nonadherence or inconsistent responses by the child to school regulations. (Friedman, 1973, p. 69)

Parent-child Interactions and Children's Classroom Success

The relationship between specific parental behavior and attitudes and their children's successful classroom efforts has been studied extensively within the last two decades. Several conclusions have been reached concerning parental behavior correlates of children's positive school achievement, behavior, and attitudes.

The abundance of individual research projects in this area makes an exhaustive review impossible for the space available in a report of this size. It did become evident, however, that many of the studies could be grouped under similar headings, thereby allowing a representative sample of the research to be presented. The four dimensions of parental involvement are: supporter of children's classroom efforts, motivator and teacher, advocate of educational and intellectual competence, and provider of supportive inde-

pendence training. When parents become involved as supporters, they may encourage appropriate school behaviors by acknowledging verbally the children's classroom achievements or taking time to discuss school matters. As motivators and teachers, parents might tutor their children or ensure that there is a suitable place to study and do homework. The parents as advocates set high standards for their children and make sure that books are readily available in the home. Finally, when parents provide supportive independence training, they might encourage the child to participate in conversations or allow the child to participate in family decision making.

Parent as Supporter

Schaefer and Edgerton (1974) report a study done in England with 5,000 elementary school children. From teacher comments on the level of parental interest in the child's school work and from records of the number of times each parent visited the school to discuss the child's progress, parents were judged to show a high, fair, or low level of involvement. At both eight and eleven years of age the highest average intelligence test scores were made by children whose parents were viewed as most interested. Classroom peformance was also seen to improve to the extent that parents encouraged the children to work hard in school.

A relationship was found to exist between attendance at parent-teacher conferences and children's classroom efforts (i.e., working up to his/her potential), classroom achievement (relative to his/her classmates), as well as with the child being rated as outgoing and/or expressive (Ehrlich, 1980). In a similar study, Anchor and Anchor (1974) found similar results with Junior High School students.

Chapulsky and Coles (1976) examined the relationship between parental expectations (i, e., "how far in school the child would go" and "how good a student the child can be") and the student's attitude toward school. It was found that the higher the parental expectations the more positive the child reported feeling about school. Incidentally, the authors also stressed feeling about school. Incidentally, the authors also stressed the point that the student's perception of parental expectations was a more valid predictor of positive school attitudes than the actual reported parental expectation. The authors emphasized, "the greater the perceived parental expectations the more positive the student's general attitude toward school" (p. 12).

Fox (1964) studied 727 children from 27 public schools in Michigan. The author was interested in determining the effects of students' perceived parental support of their educational efforts. Utilizing correlational analyses between sentence completion results, achievement scores, and attitude surveys, Fox demonstrated that pupils who perceived parental support (in comparison with pupils who perceive little or no parental support): 1) utilize their abilities more (i.e., comparing their Intelligence Quotient (IQ) and

achievement scores); 2) have higher self-esteem; 3) have more positive attitudes towards school; 4) make a better psychological adjustment to school.

Mize (1977) reported a study in which parents were trained to become more involved in their children's education by attempting to understand the child's school behavior and encouraging the student's classroom efforts. The children of these parents scored significantly higher on tests of motivation to learn, self-esteem, academic attitudes, and reading achievement than students whose parents did not receive this training.

Mize (1977) also reviewed another study in which parents attended weekend workshops to discuss with teachers ways to motivate their children. Parents signed a "Pledge of Cooperation" in which the following promises were listed to help improve their children's classroom efforts: 1) "I will insist that my child spend some time studying at home each day"; s) "I will visit my child's teacher at least once during the school semester"; 3) "I will join the Parents Teachers Association (PTA) and attend meetings as often as I can"; and 4) "I will discuss my child's report card with him."

Kifer's (1976) research suggested that the following activities in the home should enhance the children's potential for classroom success:

    a) provide a time and place for students to complete homework
    b) work with the child when faced with a difficult school task
    c) take an interest in and support what the child is doing in school.

Finally, Ehrlich (1980) evidenced a relationship between the child's perception of parental involvement (i.e., the amount of time spent with the child helping with homework, helping to study for tests, and reading with the child) and the child being judged as acting less anxious or fearful in class. It is possible, the author concludes, that as parents participate in the child's school activities, the more familiar and therefore more comfortable the child is with his school experiences (p. 109). With an involved family, the child might come to know that if he experiences some difficulty in class, there are people at home he could turn to for support. This expectation may serve as a buffer against classroom anxiety.

Parent as motivator and teacher

Smith (1970) developed a home and school program in which parents were asked to read to the children, listen to them read, and read themselves in the presence of the children. As a result of this program, the author demonstrated that children of parents in the training program showed overall gains of 5.4 months on the Gates Reading Test in the five month period between pre-post testing, while children of non-participating parents gained only 2.7 months during the same period.

In a study by McKinney (1975), students whose parents received 30 hours of training in tutoring skills showed significantly better performance in reading and math skills than children of non-trained parents. Parents who

received this training also indicated a more positive attitude toward school.

In studies by Csapo (1973) and Fairchild (1976), parents were instructed to reward their children for appropriate schoolrelated behaviors at home while similar behavior were also being rewarded in school (e.g., completing homework assignment). In both studies, the combined home-school intervention resulted in a decrease in the students' inappropriate classroom behavior more so than simply working with the child in school.

Parent as advocate and provider.

Bloom (1964) suggested that differences in academic performance may be related to the value placed on school learning by parents and the reinforcement of school learning in the home. Mize and Klausmeir (1977) have also indicated that when parents exhibit positive attitudes toward school, teachers, and education in general, their children develop similar perceptions of their school experiences.

Cloward and Jones (1963) found that a relationship existed between parent participation in school affairs and their evaluations of the importance of education and their attitudes toward the school. Hess and Shipman (1966) concluded that involving parents in school activities may help children develop more positive impressions of the school, of the teacher, and of themselves as students.

Rankin (1967) identified two groups of third and fourth grade children as either high or low achievers. Examining differences in parental behavior, the author found that the mothers of the high achievers reported the following behaviors with significantly greater frequency than the mothers of the low achievers: 1) talking with their children about the kind of work they do in school; 2) attempting to find the reason for poor school work and helping the child to correct it; 3) desiring that the children go to college; 4) requiring, for the parent's satisfaction, that the child attain high marks in school; and 5) communicating with school personnel.

An innovative program was developed by the Flint, Michigan Public Schools to raise student achievement. Parents were trained to show interest in their children's school work by asking questions and giving praise when deserved, learning motivational techniques, and reminding appropriately that certain papers and books needed to be returned to school. A substantial gain in overall academic performance was noted in the children whose parents participated in this program.

Table 1 presents a summary of the research projects described above, as well as a brief mention of other relevant findings from investigations not included in the text.

TABLE 1
Summary of Findings Which Identified
Specific Parental Characteristics as Correlates
of Their Children's Successful Classroom Efforts[a]

Parents as Supporters:

—respond positively when their children sought approval for their achievements (Crandall, Katkosky, & Preston, 1960).

—take interest in what the child is doing in school (Rankin, 1967; Bilby, 1973; Kifer, 1976).

—show interest and understanding of the child's work (Morrow & Wilson, 1967).

—discuss school matters with the child and attend school conferences (Rankin, 1967; Heisler, 1969; Standford Research Institute, 1971).

—become involved in the child's school activities (Smith, 1970).

—generally support the child's school interests (Fox, 1964; Bronfenbrenner, 1974).

Parents as Motivators and Teachers:

—provide study time and space for the child (Hawkridge, 1968).

—read to and with the child (Della-Piana, 1966; Kifer, 1976; Shea & Hanes, 1977).

—provide assistance on school tasks (e.g., tutoring) and are aware of how the child is doing in school (Dave, 1963; Wolf, 1964; McKinney, 1975; Tregaskis, 1977).

—reward high achievement and punish poor schoolwork (Kagan & Freeman, 1963; Brown & Deutsch, 1965; Bilby, 1973).

—offer academic guidance (Keeves, 1970).

Parents as Advocates:

—provide books and materials in the home for the child (Bing, 1963; Garber, 1970).

—value intellectual achievement in their child (Dave, 1963; Wolf, 1964; Honzik, 1967).

—emphasize accomplishments (Coopersmith, 1967).

—set high standards for their children (Rosen & D'Andre, 1959; Hess, 1969).

—value education (Shaw, 1961; Bloom, 1964, Garber, 1970; Friedman & Meltzer, 1973).

—hold high aspirations and expectations for achievement performance (Rosen & D'Andre, 1959; Offenbacher, 1969; Bilby, 1973; Chapulsky & Coles, 1976).

—often encourage and direct children toward intellectual pursuits (Crandall, Preston, & Rabson, 1960; Morrow & Wilson, 1967).

Parents as Providers:

—engage in sharing of activities, ideas, and confidences (Love & Kaswan, 1974).

—encourage the child to participate in conversations and activities with adults at home (Bing, 1963; Della-Piana, 1966; Slaughter, 1968; Gordon & Jester, 1973).

—treat the child warmly (Wilkins, 1970).

—allow the child to participate in family decision making (Baumrind & Black, 1967).

—provide consistent patterns of child rearing (Baumrind & Black, 1967).

—make demands for self-reliant behaviors (Winterbottom, 1958).

—provide support and control of child (Becker, 1964; Baumrind, 1972; Martin, 1975).

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[a] Many of these studies have been cited in Hess (1969) and Mize (1977).

Incidentally, unsuccessful clasroom efforts (e.g., poor grades, disruptive behavior, or negative attitudes toward school) have often been associated with the absences of the parental variables listed in Table 1, as well as with the

presence of maladaptive parent-child interactions (Bloom, 1964; Fusco, 1964; Hess, 1969; Shapiro, 1975). Love and Kaswan (1974), for instance, demonstrated a relationship between children experiencing school adjustment problems (e.g., attention deficits, classroom fighting, overactivity, or social withdrawal) and fathers who ignored and physically isolated the children and mothers who yelled, hit, and scolded. Wilkins (1970) evidenced an association between children diagnosed as learning disabled and patterns of parental coercion (i.e., extreme pressure on the child to behave according to the parents' desires).

Organized Efforts at Parent Involvement

In the process of researching productive, intra-familial, school-relevant relationships, psychologists and sociologists became concerned about the prevalence of maladaptive parent-child interactions within the low income families (Sterns &Peterson, 1973). Partially as a result of these research findings, Federal Government agencies became concerned about the relationship between poverty and academic underachievement. Low income parents were viewed as facing special problems in serving as educational models for their children (Guimagh & Gordon, 1976; Brophy, Good, & Nedler, 1975). These parents were usually not aware of the need for and the ways to provide their children with cognitive, emotional, and academically-related stimulation, thereby preventing their children from reaching their full potential. Furthermore, these parents' own history of school failure alienated them from the school and educational process. This alienation was thought to have been transmitted to the children in the form of negative attitudes towards learning and school-related tasks (Bronfenbrenner, 1969; Cary, 1966).

In order to compensate for these and other assumed deficits in the low income homes, the United States' Federal Government initiated school programs to enrich the educational preschool environment of the disadvantaged child (Gordon, 1970). Programs Head Start and Follow Through, two of the more popular compensatory educational programs, were designed to equalize the educational opportunity of children from low income families. Assumptions were made that changes in the educational patterns within the home could affect the poverty cycle. Without such changes, parents would find it difficult to circumvent the aversive progression of parental history of school failure, leading to restricted opportunities for job success, thereby encapsulating the children in an environment which could not prepare them adequately for later educational and economic experiences. Parental participation and involvement in these programs were also regarded as essential to maintain any of the benefits the educational programs migth offer. It was thought that helping parents become more active in their children's educational experiences would lead to positive changes in the parent-child

interactions, the children's potential for school success, as well as improvements in the parents' self-concept (Shea & Hanes, 1977). Based upon the research on the parental correlates of children's successful classroom efforts (see Table 1), it was argued that low income parents could be helped to establish and learn may of the parent behaviors associated with children's positive classroom adjustment. Further, involving parents in the educational process of their children, it was assumed, would lead parents to develop a more positive attitude toward education and the school. One hoped-for result of this attitude change was an increase in the children's motivation to learn (Peterson, 1977).

The value attached to parent involvement in the compensatoy edcuational programs was evidenced by Federal legislation which mandated parental participation. The 1967 amendment to the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, for instance, specified that Program Follow Through be designed to provide parent participation "which will aid in the continued development of children to heir full potencial" (Section 222A).

Types of Parental Involvement

Gordon and his associates (1970, 1976, 1978) have written extensively on the value of incorporating parents in compensatory educational programs. In order to implement the parent involvement component parents have been encouraged to become involved in the education of their children in one of six ways: teacher of their own child, paid paraprofessional, decision maker and advisor, learner of new skills, audience or recipient of information, and classroom volunteer (Gordon, Olmstead, Rubin, & True, 1979). In a discussion of these roles, Rubin (1979) explained that these roles are equal in status, "not to be interpreted as hierarchical elements but rather, as elements that provide the opportunity for parents to participate in each and every one of the roles if they so desire" (p. 2). The six parental roles have been conceptualized to form a "circle of involvement" (see Figure 1).

The first aspect of parental involvement is that of direct and active teachers of their own children. In this role, parents tutor their children and aid in the acquisition of school-relevant skills. The paid paraprofessional can function either as a teacher aide or home visitor (a role utilized frequently in Head Start and Follow Through).

Several intervention programs (e.g., Infant Stimulation Through Family Life Education [Ligon, Barker, & Williams, 1971] and Gordon's [1970] Parent Education Follow Through Program) have included a program component in which parents, functioning as paraprofessionals or community volunteers, have gone into the home to train parents various teaching techniques. Through demonstration and modeling these home visitors have taught other parents how to develop home-learning tasks to facilitate the
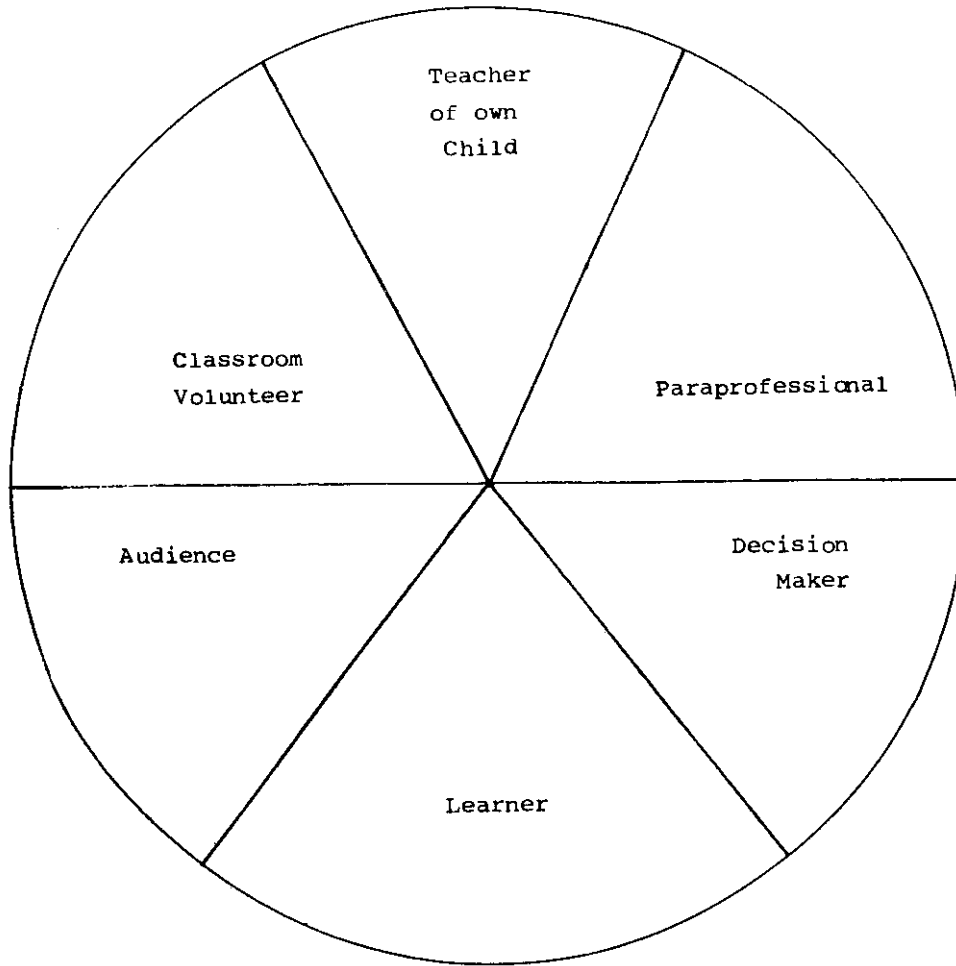
Fig. 1. Parental roles in parent involvement.

children's intellectual competence and personal and social development (Gordon et al., 1979).

The parent as decision maker or advisor is involved in policy and procedures of school and family programs. Parent Advisory Committees (Head Start) and Citizen Advisory Committees (Follow Through) were established to enable parents to serve as advocates of their children and help the school program become more responsive to community and family needs. The parents who participate in this capacity are expected to perform such functions as: initiate suggestions and ideas for program improvements and assume some degree of responsibility for communicating with parents and encouraging their participation in the program (Honig, 1979). An expected outcome

of this type of participation is to help participating parents become more confident in their ability to help children learn, as well as ensure that the programs remain responsive to community needs (MIDCO, 1972).

The audience and learner aspects of parental involvement places parents in the position of receiving information. Some school programs have relied on parent group meetings to help parents develop appropriate involvement behaviors. The objectives of these meetings have been to teach parents about the intellectual, cognitive, and social needs of children as well as help them develop techniques to foster the academic and interpersonal skills in their children. Parent meetings have been focused on, for instance, ways to improve children's motivation to learn, methods to boost children's problem-solving skills, and techniques to develop students' question-asking behavior (Sterns, Marshall, & Edwards, 1971; Nimnicht, 1972; Garcia, 1972). Topics for these parent meetings were chosen as a result of the program developers' belief that the topics were relevant to students' classroom performance. In some programs, parents are given the opportunity to decide on topics of interest to them.

Finally, involving parents as classroom or school volunteers can help teachers by increasing the adult-child ratio in the classroom. Projects Head Start and Follow Through, for example, have consistently encouraged parents to spend time in the classroom to help teachers with clerical and/or instructional activities. Parents who have participated in the direct education of children have tended to develop a more optimistic attitude about the value of education and become more satisfied with their own children's education (Datta, 1973). By structuring participation in classrooms, it was assumed that parents would learn specific teaching strategies and motivational techniques to use with their own children.

A Closer Look at Parental Involvement

There have been many educational programs at the National, University-based, and local school district level, developed to provide families with services expected to enhance children's potential for classroom success. These programs have utilized one or more of the parental involvement models described by Gordon. In most cases, the parent involvement efforts were not the only components of the educational project. Frequently, special classroom instruction for the children, or social services (e.g., providing transportation to the local health center) were included in the programs. In all cases, however, the provisions for parent involvement have been an integral part of the project (Gordon, 1970). It should be noted that this review includes only a brief description of a portion of the many parent involvement projects. The projects selected should serve as examples of the various ways

parent involvement has been achieved. For a more detailed review see Gordon (1970), Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (DHEW) (1972), Goodson and Hess (1976), and Mize (1977).

Since the early 1960s, the Federal Government of the United States has been involved directly in national programs designed to enhance the educational opportunities of the disadvantaged child. In 1964, for instance, a panel of child development experts was commissioned to design an educational program for low income families. The panel's report (often called the "Cooke Memo") later became the blueprint for Project Head Start. Project Head Start, launched as an eight week program by the Office of Economic Opportunity in 1965, marked the beginning of the government's efforts to intervene in the lives of the nation's poor (DHEW, 1975).

After the initial success of Head Start (for children aged 3-5), Project Follow Through was designed to serve children (and their families) from kindergarten through third grade. Developed and implemented according to standards similar to Head Start, the planners of Follow Through hoped that the educational gains achieved in Head Start would be maintained through elementary school.

Once Projects Head Start and Follow Through were in operation throughout the country, several new projects were developed in order to expand the government's service to families. These projects have included:

1. Project Home Start: Comprehensive Head Start services were provided for parents and children at home, rather than in a school center. The emphasis was on helping parents develop their abilities to teach their children with the resources and materials available in the home.

2. Project Developmental Continuity: This was designed to provide continuity for children between the preschool and the elementary school. Two approaches were developed: a) preschool-school linkages, implemented through existing institutions to provide a mechanism to bring Head Start and regular elementary schools closer together, and b) early childhood schools implemented by creating a new institution which would combine into one facility programs for children aged three through eight (DHEW, 1975).

3. Child and Family Resource Program: Complete family support services were offered to families with children aged 0 through 8. Efforts were made to teach parents to become resources for the educational development of their children as well as provide a linkage between the home and various community agencies.

One of the more essential features of these programs has been the effort to involve parents at all levels of the program. Research on the effects of parental involvement in the National programs has been unfortunately scarce. In an extensive review, the author was able to locate one major study which evaluated the effects of involving parents in decision making, staff, and learner roles. The MIDCO Associates studied 20 Head Start Centers across the

United States to determine what effects these parent involvement roles have on parents and children (Bromley, Valdez, & Bowles, 1972). Their findings, most relevant to the current discussion, include:

1. Parents who were high in participation, especially those high in decision making, were also high in feelings of ability to control their environment.

2. Parents who were high in participation also viewed themselves as more successful, more skillful, and better able to influence their environment.

3. Involvement appears to lead to an increase in personal self-esteem. Where involvement was lower, parental self-esteem was lower. Highest self-esteem was in high decision making sites.

4. There is a strong relationship betwen high participation by parents and better performance on intellective and task oriented measures. The children of parents with extensive participation in both roles, decision making and paraprofessional, produced better scores on verbal intelligence, academic achievement, self-concept, behavioral ratings in classrooms and at home, and change ratings in both learning and activities.

It is important to remember when reading these findings that results were based upon correlational analyses. One could not say that parental involvement caused the changes observed in the parents and children. It is noteworthy, however, that positive outcomes in families are associated with high levels of participation.

There have been a wide assortment of University-sponsored projects to intervene in the lives of poor children in such a way as to influence both cognitive development and motivation which might affect later school peformance. Parents were considered a vital part to the success of the program.

The Early Training Project, organized by Susan Grey and associates at George Peabody College, had as a major goal the development of teaching skills in parents. The parents were trained by a professional teacher who arranged home visits. Their work included: 1) using positive reinforcement for any behaviors of the parent which showed concern for the welfare or the children; 3) operating as a home-school liaison whereby relevant school information could be conveyed to parents; 4) teaching the mother techniques to supplement the child's educational program, and 5) help the mother cope with the stresses of her environment.

The University of Illinois Project trained parents to work with their children in the following areas: understanding what they see and hear, relating elements of spoken language and responding vocally with the appropriate response, relating or associating symbols presented through visual and auditory channels, and acquiring appropriate syntactical and grammatical constructions. Additionally, parents were taught how to read to their children, and orient them to school tasks (Karnes, Studley, & Wright, 1966). A benefit of this program was that parents were directly involved in the creation and deployment of the teaching materials.

Other examples of University-based programs were developed at Boston University and the University of Florida. In both these programs, as with the many other University projects, a primary goal was to enhance the mother-child relationship through active and direct involvement of the mother in the child's education. Mothers, for instance, were taught specific techniques for cognitive and verbal stimulation of their children as well as learning methods to develop warm interpersonal relationships.

Throughout the years, many local school districts have also initiated programs to increase the level of parental involvement (Gordon, 1970; Nebgen, 1979). The Baltimore, San Diego, Oakland, Pittsburgh, and Chicago school districts, to name only a few, found innovative methods to involve their parents in their school programs. The types of parental involvement utilized by these school districts have included:

1. regularly scheduled parent-teacher conferences.
2. weekly home teaching sessions betweeen mother and child, under the supervision of a trained teacher.
3. parent volunteering in the classroom.
4. newsletters mailed to parents.
5. parent training to support school programs at home.
6. series of child and education-related workshops.

In both the University and local school district programs, results have generally shown that parents and children have benefited by the increased levels of parental involvement (see reports by Goodson & Hess, 1976; Gordon, 1970: and DHEW, 1968). Part of the success of the parent involvement components has been explained by noting that the parents developed particular skills in working with their children which helped sustain the positive effects of the school program (Honig, 1979). Bronfenbrenner (1974) has additionally stated that unless parents develop methods to augment the educational program, any improvements the child makes in school will fade soon after the program ends.

A Synthesis of Parental Involvement

Despite the highly successful projects to involve parents in their children's educational experiences, as evidenced by the research summarized in Table 1, Gordon's model (see Figue 1) has been the only systematic attempt to conceptualize parental involvement. In order to represent the full dimension of parental involvement, one would need to include the parent involvement roles of supporter, advocate, provider, and motivator/teacher. In this more comprehensive model (see Figure 2) one is able to define parental involvement by both its home and school focus. One may consider the home focus as *primary involvement,* in that the parents' behavior is more
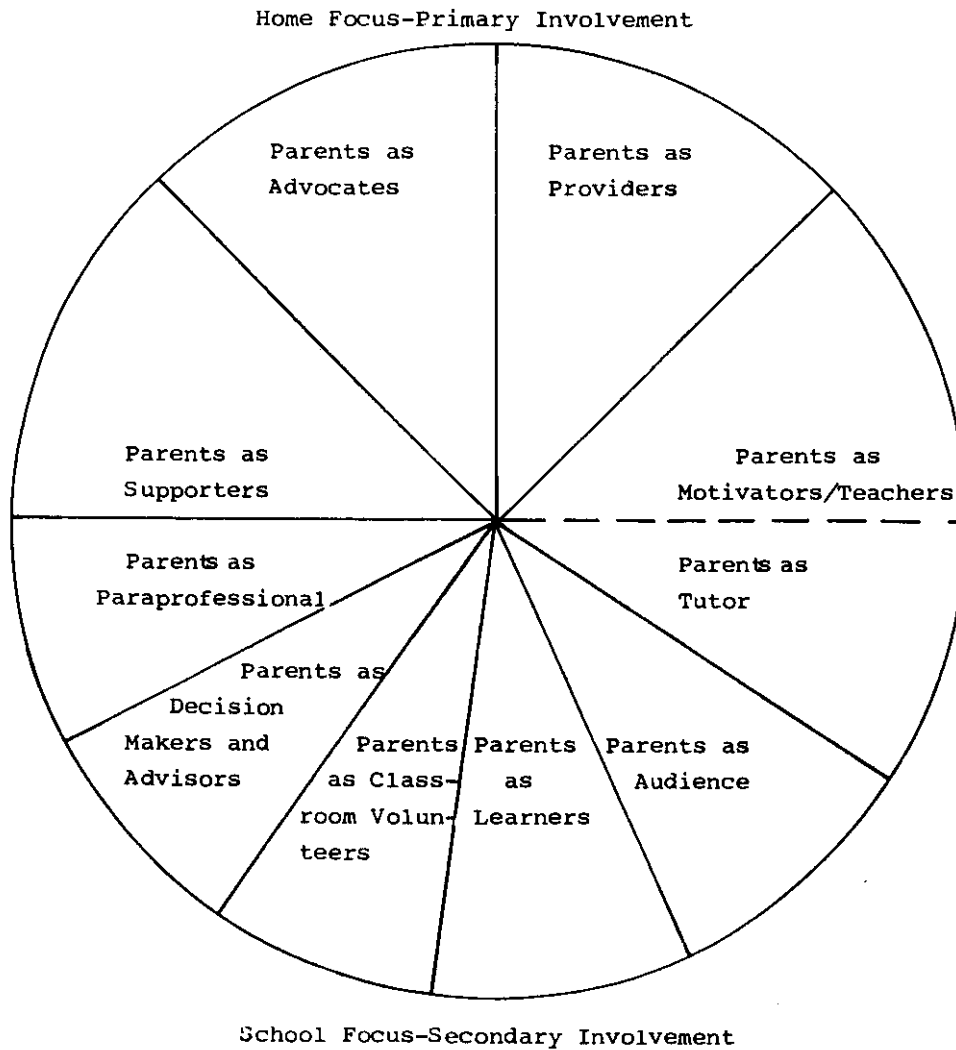
Home Focus-Primary Involvement

Fig. 2. A synthesized model of parental involvement.

directly and empirically related to the children's classroom efforts. The
school focus of the model proposed by Gordon may be considered *secon-
dary involvement* in that the school is operating as a mediating link between
parent behavior and children's classroom peformance. An overlap in these
models obviously occurs in the roles of parent as tutor (in Gordon's model)
and parent as motivator and teacher (in the primary involvement model).

There are several cautions that should be observed when schools attempt
to develop a full "circle of involvement" with their parent population.
Schools are advised to avoid using parental involvement as a means of

"getting the kid in shape." If parents are viewed as the home extension of the school's arm of discipline, the benefits of parental involvement will not be realized. It appears that parental involvement is most effective when it is experienced and offered in a spirit of positive cooperation.

It was quite apparent in the research conducted by this author, that parental involvement requires flexibility in its aplication. Younger children, for instance, will interpret parent participation quite differently than children in higher grades. The preadolescent often views parental attempts to help as "meddling" or as an infringement of his/her rapidly developing desire for independence. It is also advised that both parents involve themselves in ways that are appropriate to the family, as it was found that when both parents involved themselves, the children performed noticeably better on measures of classroom achievement and effort, academic concentration, and teacher ratings of classroom expressiveness than children with only one or neither parent involved (Ehrlich, 1980).

If schools decide to implement parent involvement programs, it is recommended that parents be helped to understand why their involvement leads to beneficial changes in the children's school performance. According to one view, parental involvement operates as a vehicle by which parents model and reinforce socially those child behaviors compatible with classroom success. As parents support, encourage, and sanction the many school-related activities, the children learn which behaviors at home and at school will reap the rewards of parental attention and approval.

Parental involvement is also believed to be effective because it creates an atmosphere within the home in which the children's school experiences are important to and valued by the family. A "school is important" theme is reflected in and by the parents' participation, which has implications for how the child is expected to approach the demands of school. The child's classroom peformance is affected because he/she learns and identifies with the parental attitudes reflected in their interest and dedication to the child's education.

It cannot be stressed too strongly that parents must learn how to make their involvement a natural part of the family's life, rather than a ritualized ceremony. Appropriate involvement can quickly become inappropriate overinvolvement, which may make home-based learning an aversive experience.

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