Parent involvement in beginning primary school: Correlates and changes in involvement across the first two years of school in a New Zealand sample☆

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ABSTRACT

This study described the relations of parents' and teachers' beliefs and attitudes to forms of parents' involvement in children's first two years of primary school. Parents of children in their first year of primary school (age 5) were recruited from 12 classrooms within four schools in New Zealand; 196 families participated in their child's first year, and 124 families continued to participate in their child's second school year. Parents completed the Family-Involvement Questionnaire, New Zealand, and we archivally collected parent-documented children's oral reading homework. Teachers' rated helpfulness of parents' involvement at school (level 2) and parents' rated teacher invitations to be involved and their perceived time and energy (level 1) contributed to school-based involvement in Year 1 in multilevel models, with parents' rated teacher invitations for involvement also found to predict Year 1 home-school communication in regression analyses. Contributors to Year 1 child-parent reading in multilevel models included level 1 predictors of two or more adults in the home and parents' perceived time and energy. Longitudinal analyses suggested both consistency and change in each form of involvement from Year 1 to Year 2, with increases in each form of involvement found to be associated with increases in parents' and/or teachers' views about involvement in Year 2 in cross-sectional time-series analyses. Implications for schools wanting to engage families are that parents' involvement in children's schooling may be influenced by parents' perceptions of their capacity, teachers' engagement efforts, and the school's climate for involvement. This is a special issue paper "Family Engagement in Education and Intervention".

1. Introduction

Parent involvement, or "participation in the educational processes and experiences of their children" (Jeynes, 2005, p. 245), is an umbrella term encompassing the many ways that parents support their children's education (Sibley & Dearing, 2014). Classic research and theory in parent involvement have delineated important involvement systems, correlates, and potential direct and

indirect benefits (Ginsburg-Block, Manz, & McWayne, 2010; Kim & Sheridan, 2015; Sibley & Dearing, 2014). Leading scholars built on this foundation to pinpoint methodological issues and research needed to advance understanding of connections between parents and schools (Christenson & Reschly, 2010; Sheridan & Kim, 2015a, 2015b). Most relevant to practice is determining what schools can do to engage parents in ways that foster children's educational outcomes (Christenson & Reschly, 2010; Redding, Murphy, & Sheley, 2011). Children develop over time, and parent-child interactions evolve with that development. Acknowledging that relationships form over time, through repeated interaction, scholars are likewise increasingly calling for a relational approach to foster family-school connections (Reschly & Christenson, 2012; Sheridan & Kim, 2015a, 2015b). In the current study we consider the views of New Zealand (NZ) parents and teachers of young elementary-age students and how they relate to forms of parents' involvement in children's first two years of primary school.

1.1. The many facets of involvement

1.1.1. Developmental settings and systems

Seminal theorists and subsequent researchers concur that involvement is not a unitary construct (Epstein, 1995; Ginsburg-Block et al., 2010), with at least three systems reflected in empirical results: involvement at school, at home, and the interface between school and home. Conceptually, these systems align with ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Ecological systems theory acknowledges the importance of the developmental settings of home and school and the interconnections between them (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Research using the parent-report *Family Involvement Questionnaire - Elementary* (FIQ-E; Manz, Fantuzzo, & Power, 2004), for example, has consistently supported dimensions of School-Based Involvement, Home-Based Involvement, and Home-School Communication in studies employing different analytic approaches with data from parents from differing backgrounds (Garbacz & Sheridan, 2011; McWayne, Manz, & Ginsburg-Block, 2015; Manz et al., 2004).

Although each of the studies cited above support the three-dimensional structure of the FIQ-E or the early childhood FIQ-EC, these studies also suggest that the specific ways parents support their children's learning may vary across cultural and educational contexts. Manz et al. (2004) investigated the structure of the FIQ-E with parents of children attending "high poverty" urban elementary schools in the Northeastern United States (US), replicating and extending findings with parents of preschoolers from the same area (Fantuzzo, Tighe, & Childs, 2000). Garbacz and Sheridan (2011) analyzed parents' responses on a NZ adaptation of the FIQ-E from primary schools serving more middle to moderately low income communities in a small NZ city, and McWayne et al. (2015) examined the early childhood version of the FIQ (FIQ-EC) with a sample of Latino parents of preschool and young elementary children in multiple US sites. Given the increasingly diverse communities served by schools in the US and internationally, such findings highlight the need for further consideration of contextual fit in future family-involvement research (c.f., Dearing, Sibley, & Nguyen, 2015; McWayne et al., 2015; Sibley & Dearing, 2014).

1.1.2. Specificity of involvement

In addition, the ways that families support children's learning may be content general, applicable across the educational curriculum (Dearing et al., 2015; Garbacz et al., 2016), or domain specific, related to one area of the curriculum or learning (e.g., reading, Crosby, Rasinski, Padak, & Yildirim, 2015; Fishel & Ramirez, 2005). Both are associated with children's achievement, although the pathways to educational benefits may vary.

Content-general involvement may be indirectly related to children's school achievement via links to developing child competencies such as self-regulated learning (Daniel, Wang, & Berthelsen, 2016) or achievement-related attributions and motivations (Dearing et al., 2015); however, relations may be moderated by sociodemographic variables (see Ginsburg-Block et al., 2010; Sibley & Dearing, 2014). Daniel et al. (2016) examined links between school-based involvement in Grade 1, a potential example of content-general involvement, and children's reading and math performance at Grade 3 in an Australian longitudinal sample. This analysis controlled for sociodemographic and other involvement variables. School-based involvement in Grade 1 predicted Grade 3 reading achievement in the direct path model, with subsequent mediation models supporting indirect relations to Grade 3 reading and math through self-regulated learning. Significantly, in a US sample, the most pronounced promotive effects of early involvement for children's literacy achievement across elementary school was found for children demographically at-risk for poorer reading achievement due to lower maternal education (Dearing, McCartney, Weiss, Kreider, & Simpkins, 2004). In further analyses, increased school-based involvement predicted improved child literacy within families such that the oft-cited achievement gap was observed when involvement was low but not when involvement was high (Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006).

Domain-specific activities, on the other hand, might be more likely to improve academic achievement in particular academic domains (Fishel & Ramirez, 2005; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). For example, parents' listening to children read has been found to be associated with children's developing literacy skills (Mean weighted $d = 0.52$; Sénéchal & Young, 2008) and is considered to be a theoretically important aspect of the home literacy environment during reading acquisition in beginning primary school (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2014). Such results not only document contributions of involvement to children's achievement trajectories but also highlight the need for longitudinal research that examines factors related to successfully engaging parent involvement in beginning schooling.

1.1.3. Involvement over time

To add to the complexity, involvement may be dynamic, that is, parents' involvement may change over time. Although results of cross-sectional studies examining involvement by elementary school grade present mixed results, some suggest involvement may decline across grades (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007). In US high poverty schools, Manz et al. (2004) found no differences in involvement by grade, whereas Green et al. (2007) found a declining profile of involvement from early