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ABSTRACT

Recognizing that affective factors related to learning can be measured and that attitude influences learning, this study investigated the relationship between parental attitudes and children's reading ability. A short form, self report parent questionnaire was administered to 107 sets of parents whose children had been referred to a diagnostic center for reading disabilities. Results of the questionnaire indicated significant but low correlations between the parent attitude scores and the child's verbal intelligence and reading achievement. Both mothers and fathers rated reading as important for business and homemaking success, with more emphasis on reading for homemaking success. There were no consistent relationships between parental sex, age, occupation, or educational level, and the perceived reading problems that occurred within the family. Further research that would include extended parent interviews is suggested. (Author/MAI)

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Examination of Parental Attitudes Within
The Diagnostic Intervention Process

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Examination of Parental Attitudes Within

The Diagnostic Intervention Process

That parents can and do influence a child's reading ability is generally well accepted (Sutherland, 1975). More specifically, their attitudes toward reading appear to influence their children's reading development (Della-Piana, Stahmann, & Allen, 1968; Goldman & Barclay, 1974). Parental attitudes have also been found to be consistently related to parental judgmental processes (Brim, Glass, Lavin, & Goodman, 1962; Emmerich, 1969). Thus, the diagnostician may want to acquire information about parental attitudes to be used within the diagnostic-intervention process. Recognizing that affective factors related to teaching and learning can be measured (Vaughn & Sabers, 1977) and that attitude does influence learning, the problem is to determine the relationship between attitude and reading ability, given the scarcity of valid affective measurement instruments.

The major purpose of this paper is to examine one self-reporting inventory of parental attitudes toward child-rearing and reading. This inventory is used as part of the initial parent interview at a university affiliated learning disabilities center. This study reports relationships between this parental attitude measure and the following characteristics: reading achievement; intelligence; parent age, occupation, and education level; number of children in family; and expressed perception of the child's reading ability. Relationships between fathers' attitudes and mothers' attitudes are reported separately. Our discussion focuses on the implications for the diagnostician based on the results of the study.

Method

A questionnaire measuring parents' perceptions of their attitudes about child-rearing was completed by parents of 107 children seen at a learning disabilities center. Two-parent families were used for the study; thus 214 individuals responded to the questionnaire. The range for parent education level and occupation is narrower than that which would be expected in the general population. This can probably be attributed to the self-referral nature of admission to the center. Clients come primarily from those families who recognize the presence of an actual or potential learning problem who are actively seeking assistance.

The questionnaire originally was developed by Dorothy McGinnis (1963) for her unpublished doctoral dissertation and later reported in Diagnosis and Treatment of the Disabled Reader (1970). Items on this questionnaire fall into two categories: 1) demographic information, answered directly, and 2) attitudes toward reading and toward child rearing, answered on a Likert Scale. Some of the statements are phrased positively and some negatively; responses are scored from 1 (most restrictive choice) to 4 (most child-centered choice). Range for the total score is from 18 to 72; the lower the score, the more restrictive or authoritarian is the attitude indicated by the parent toward child rearing practices and reading importance.

At the close of the initial conference, the parents were asked to complete this questionnaire and then leave it with the clinician. This procedure attempted to minimize discussion between parents and to avoid extremely long deliberation about responses.

Results

Descriptive statistical analyses of the two questionnaire categories indicate the areas from which implications for diagnosticians can be drawn. First, results indicate significant, but somewhat low correlations between parent Attitude scores, verbal intelligence, and reading achievement (Table 1).

Insert Table 1 about here

Tentative relationships are indicated by the low positive correlation between mothers' attitude scores and child's reading achievement scores. Both father and mother attitude scores correlate somewhat higher with verbal intelligence score. The significant correlations between mother attitude score and both intelligence and reading achievement scores indicate that the maternal attitude is stronger and has greater influence than the paternal attitude. All of the correlations discussed are statistically significant.

The results show few statistically significant correlations between parents' attitudes and age, occupation, education level, number of children in family, and perceived reading problem. However, low negative correlations between father's attitude, father's occupation level, and father's education level were found (Table 2).

Insert Table 2 about here

As groups, both mothers and fathers strongly associate the importance of reading with the importance of reading for business success and for

homemaking success. For both mothers and fathers, the correlation between the importance of reading and the importance of reading for homemaking success was slightly higher than the correlation between importance of reading and the importance of reading for business success (Table 3).

Insert Table 3 about here

Within each family, the perceived attitudes between parents have a tendency to be similar ($r = .31$, $p = .001$).

Discussion and Conclusions

These results suggest some generalizations. First, we should not assume that the mother always places higher value on reading than the father; rather, parents may tend to share similar attitudes. This consistency of attitudes should be recognized by persons attempting to initiate a reading program for a student so that care is taken to prevent possible alienation of the father by assuming that because the mother's attitude toward reading is a stronger influence than the father's, it is the only one of importance. Similarly, we should avoid stereotyping. We may assume incorrectly a strong causal relationship exists between parents' increased education level and more unrestricted, positive attitudes toward child-rearing practices in general and the importance of reading ability specifically. Thus, the diagnostician should not assume that well educated parents will tend to have supportive attitudes toward a child's reading ability or conversely that parents with little education necessarily tend to have nonsupportive attitudes. Second, the use of such a questionnaire

to assist in the preparation of remediation plans is questionable because of a lack of strong correlation between it and the children's achievement levels.

Third, while the formal assessment of parental attitudes through the use of a short-form, self-reporting questionnaire yields some useful generalizations, we found little systematic relationship between information from the questionnaire and the nature or degree of the child's reading achievement. The authors' clinical experience suggests that the information yielded by this questionnaire could have been more accurately and efficiently acquired by extending briefly the interview time with the parents.

By comparison, the results of this type of questionnaire in its more extensive form were much more significant (Emmerich, 1969). This instrument, the Parent Attitude Research Instrument (PARI) developed by Schaefer and Bell (1958) and modified by Walter Emmerich for his study of the parent role, provided more comprehensive and pertinent information (Emmerich, 1969). While the PARI may be a more valuable instrument for use within the diagnostic-intervention process, additional factors influencing consideration for its possible inclusion in the diagnostic battery [e.g. 1) length of the PARI requires considerable amount of time for parents to complete and 2) different forms are used - one for mother and one for father] are related to the question of accuracy versus time efficiency.

The instrument in its single, shortened form as used in this study provides minimal information within the diagnostic-intervention process. Continued use of this form of the questionnaire is not

supported by the results of this study. These results do not indicate that attitude forms or questionnaires are inappropriate within the intervention process, but that the information needs of researchers and diagnosticians are not identical. Specific research is needed to determine the most efficient method of obtaining pertinent and valid diagnostic information about affective factors, including parental attitudes, that influence the reading ability of children.

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Table 1

Correlations Between Parents' Attitude Scores
and Intelligence and Reading Achievement

	1	2	3
Father attitude score	.41*	.14	.11
Mother attitude score	.38*	.28*	.22*

*significant $\leq .05$

1 = WISC-R (Verbal Score)

2 = WRAT Reading Achievement Percentile

3 = PIAT Reading Achievement Percentile

Table 2

Correlations Between Parents' Attitude Scores
 And Age, Occupation Level, Educational Level,
 Number of Children, and Perceived Reading Problem

	1	2	3	4	5
Father attitude score	.08	-.36*	-.15*	-.01	.05
Mother attitude score	.00	-.16	.08	.00	.07

*correlation significant $\leq .01$

1 = Age

2 = Occupation level

3 = Education level

4 = Number of children

5 = Perceived reading problem

TABLE 3

Correlations* Between Parental Attitude Toward
 General Reading Importance and Reading as Important
 for Success in Business and Homemaking

	1	2	3	
1		.54	.61	M o t h e r
2	.45		.47	
3	.61	.53		
		F a t h e r		

*all correlations are significant $\leq .05$

1 = Reading is important

2 = Reading is important for business success

3 = Reading is important for homemaking success