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ABSTRACT

Presenting a review of research on parent involvement, this document is intended to serve as a basis for developing policies, programs, and practices in parent involvement programs. Specifically, the review concerns (1) the role of parents, family, and home in determining children's intelligence, competence, and achievement; (2) the effects of parent education programs on children's cognitive development and school achievement and the characteristics of effective parent education programs; (3) parental practices that promote reading readiness and receptivity to reading instruction and intervention efforts to enhance these effects; and (4) the effects of parent involvement in child care and education programs, the means for bringing about such involvement, and the means for improving parent/teacher relationships and communication. Attention is also given to research regarding the attitudes of parents, teachers, and administrators toward parent involvement and to the problems encountered in parent involvement efforts. In addition, a set of basic principles characterizing successful parent involvement programs is offered as a guideline for program development. In conclusion, some cautions and concerns for consideration in developing policies, programs, and practices in parent involvement are discussed. Extensive references are included. (Author/BJD)

# PARENT INVOLVEMENT: A REVIEW OF RESEARCH AND PRINCIPLES OF SUCCESSFUL PRACTICE

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## INTRODUCTION

The involvement of parents in the development and education of their children has become a topic of intense interest to educators, researchers, politicians, and parents. Recognition has been given to the crucial role parents play in establishing the educability of their children, facilitating their development and achievement, and remedying educational and developmental problems. In addition, the rights and responsibilities of parents to influence educational programs have been emphasized. Programs of parent involvement and parent education continue to grow, and there is now an extensive and convincing body of research to support and guide these efforts.

The purpose of this discussion is to present a review of the research on parent involvement in order to serve as a basis for developing policies, programs, and practices. Specifically, the review concerns (a) the role of parents/family/home in determining children's intelligence, competence, and achievement; (b) the effects of parent education programs on cognitive development and school achievement and the characteristics of effective parent education programs; (c) parental practices that promote reading readiness and receptivity to reading instruction and intervention efforts to enhance these effects; and (d) the effects of parent participation and involvement in child care/educational programs, the means for bringing about those efforts, and the means for improving parent-teacher relationships and communication. Attention is also given to research regarding the attitudes of parents, teachers, and administrators toward this involvement and to the problems encountered in parent involvement efforts.

In addition, a set of basic principles characterizing successful parent involvement programs is presented. These principles address implementation aspects not yet empirically established. They are, therefore, intended to serve as guidelines and descriptions for successful parent involvement program development. They also serve to illustrate the skills teachers need for establishing effective parent involvement programs.

Finally, some serious cautions and concerns that need careful consideration when developing policies, programs, and practice regarding parent involvement are discussed. Despite these cautions, however, the current state of knowledge about parent involvement, described in the discussion to follow, provides an extremely strong basis for the continued encouragement of these efforts. It also generates considerable optimism regarding the improvement of education and educational opportunities for children.

## RESEARCH BACKGROUNDS

### Parent Involvement and Achievement, Intelligence, and Competence

The role of parents in the development of intelligence, achievement, and cognitive and social/behavioral competence in their children is an area that has been the focus of extensive research. A variety of standardized tests and other measures, including observational systems, have been used to determine levels of development and performance. Efforts have been made to identify and understand the nature of the family characteristics, home conditions, and parent-child interactions which influence these. In addition, there have been numerous parent education intervention programs assessing the degree to which parents can be educated or trained to more positively affect their children's intelligence, cognitive development and school-related achievement.

The important and, in fact, crucial role of the parents, family, and home in determining children's cognitive development and achievement has been documented in numerous studies. In addition, it has been shown that such factors are far more important and influential than school factors for such development (Coleman, 1966; Jencks, 1972; Mayeske, 1973; Mosteller & Moynihan, 1972).

Socioeconomic status, as defined by educational, occupational, and income levels, has been the most frequently studied family characteristic and one that has been consistently related to achievement (Fotheringham & Creal, 1980; Jencks, 1972; Keeves, 1972; Vernon, 1979). While significant and interesting, this research does not really explain how the effects are mediated to the child (Fotheringham & Creal, 1980).

Family process variables and parent behaviors. In an effort to understand the mediating aspects of family and home environments, a second line of research has examined the relationships between specific family process variables and parent behaviors, and the development of intelligence, competence, and achievement in children. A number of major factors have been found to be significantly related.

First, children with higher scores on measures of achievement, competence, and intelligence had parents who held higher educational expectations and aspirations for them than did parents of children who did not score as high. Parents of the former children also exerted more pressure for achievement, provided more academic guidance, and exhibited a higher level of general interest in their children (Boocock, 1972; Entwisle & Hayduk, 1978; Gordon, 1978; Hess, Holloway, Price, & Dickson, 1979; Keeves, 1975; Parsons, 1981; Schaefer, 1972, 1973; Seginer, 1983).

Second, parents of children with higher scores had considerably more interactions that were responsive to children or contingent upon their responses than did parents whose children did not score as high (Bradley, Caldwell, & Elrado, 1977; Gordon, 1978; Ladd, Lange, & Kienapple, 1981).

Third, children with higher scores had parents who had perceptions of themselves as "teachers" of their children stronger than those of parents with lower-scoring children. The former group of parents also used teaching modes and strategies considered to be more appropriate and effective (Brophy, 1970; Gordon, 1978; Hess & Shipman, 1965; Nottleman, 1978).

Fourth, parents of higher-scoring children used more advanced levels and styles of thought and language in interactions with their children than did parents of children who did not score as high. These advanced levels and styles of thought and language included the use of more advanced organizing information, more detailed instruction, and more verbal variety. In addition, the parents of higher-scoring children provided more explanations and reasons when correcting their children's behavior or performance. Furthermore, they provided better problem-solving strategies for their children and more assistance in the development of problem-solving strategies by their children. (Gordon, 1978; Hess & Shipman, 1965; Olmsted & Jester, 1972).

Fifth, children with higher scores had parents who acted as stronger models of learning and achievement for their children than did parents of children who did not score as high. (Home and School Institute Report, 1983; Seginer, 1983).

And, finally, higher-scoring children came from homes in which there was considerably more reinforcement of school behavior than for children who did not score as high (see Atkinson & Forehand, 1979; Barth, 1979).

Effects of Parent Education Programs. In addition to the research investigating naturally occurring behaviors of parents and aspects of the home environment associated with the development of competence, intelligence, and achievement in children, there is a large body of research assessing the effects of parent education programs on such development. Most of the empirical work in this area began in the mid- to late 1960s and extended through the mid-1970s. It centered on federally funded compensatory education program efforts to train low income parents how to teach their children in order to prevent or remediate basic cognitive and school achievement deficiencies.

There is considerable evidence indicating that parent education programs are effective in improving the intellectual functioning of children, as measured primarily by standardized intelligence tests (Gordon, 1969, 1972, 1973; Gordon, Olmsted, Rubin, & True, 1979; Grantham-McGregor & Desai, 1975; Gray & Klaus, 1970; Guinagh & Gordon, 1976; Johnson et al., 1974; Karnes, Studley, Wright, & Hodgins, 1968; Karnes, Teska, Hodgins, & Badger, 1970; Lambie, Bond, & Weikart, 1973, 1974; Lasater, 1974; Lasater, Briggs, Malone, Gillim, & Weisberg, 1975; Leler, Johnson, Kahn, & Brandt, 1974; Levenstein, 1970, 1971, 1972; Madden, Levenstein, & Levenstein, 1976; Radin, 1969, 1972; Sprigle, 1974, Weikart, 1971, 1973; Weikart, Deloria, Lawser, & Wiegerink, 1970; Weikart, Rogers, & Adcock, 1970; Wittes & Radin, 1969, 1971).[1] There is also evidence that the gains achieved have been sustained for at least 1 year, and in several cases for 3, 4, and 5 years following completion of the program (Gordon, 1973; Gordon & Guinagh, 1974; Gray & Klaus, 1970; Lasater, 1974; Levenstein, 1974; Radin, 1972; Sprigle, 1974).

Furthermore, there is substantial evidence that parent education programs are effective in improving children's language performance (Andrews, Blumenthal, Bache, & Weiner, 1975; Henderson & Garcia, 1973; Lasater et al., 1975; Mann, 1970, Sprigle, 1974); their performance on standardized achievement tests (Gray & Klaus, 1970; Sprigle, 1974; Weikart, 1971, 1973); and their general school behavior (Levenstein, 1974; Sprigle, 1974; Weikart, 1971, 1973).

In addition, parent education programs have produced significant positive changes in (a) parents' teaching styles, (b) their interactions with their children, and (c) their provision of more stimulating home learning environments (Andrews et al., 1982; Gordon, 1970; Gordon & Guinagh, 1974; Gray & Klaus, 1970; Kogan & Gordon, 1975; Lambie et al., 1973; Lasater, 1974; Lasater et al., 1975; Leler et al., 1974; Sandler, Dokecki, Stewart, Britton, & Horton, 1973; Weikart, 1971, 1973).[2]

Characteristics of effective parent education programs. While the evidence regarding the effectiveness of parent education programs in reaching their goals is convincing, very few attempts have been made to systematically relate specific characteristics of effective programs to their outcomes. Some indications can be drawn, however, from the program analysis works of Goodson and Hess (1975, 1976), Stevens (1978), and Becher (1982). First, these analyses cautiously suggest that home visits, either alone or in combination with preschool classes, are apparently more effective than parent meetings, classes, or workshops in bringing about cognitive gains in children. Second, programs that place a high emphasis on encouraging parental teaching of children produce more stable long term gains in children than programs that place only slight emphasis on this component. Third, no one type of program content (e.g., language

development, sensorimotor development, cognitive development, child development principles, etc.) has been shown to be more effective than another in bringing about increased achievement. Fourth, a one-to-one parent-teacher relationship produces greater effects than a group instructional relationship. Fifth, highly structured, prescriptive, concrete tasks for parents produce more stable gains than less structured programs. Sixth, there is no difference in the effectiveness of programs that instruct parents in specific teaching techniques versus programs that encourage a general style of interaction. Seventh, programs that are most effective in producing considerable changes in both children and parents involve long term consultation for a minimum of 18 to 24 months. And finally, effective programs are both prescriptive (attempting to achieve quality control through clearly specified goals, objectives, and activities and careful monitoring) and personalized (emphasizing the modification of content so that a "proper fit" for each parent-child dyad is achieved).

In conclusion, although program analyses provide guidance for program development, there is a great deal more to be learned about the specific aspects of parent education programs contributing to effectiveness. It can be said with confidence, however, that parent education programs are effective in helping parents, particularly low income parents, teach their children in order to prevent or remediate basic cognitive and school achievement deficiencies.

## Parent Involvement and Reading

The development of reading competence in children is perhaps the highest-ranking educational objective of teachers, parents, and the general public. There is an intense interest in the development of capable readers, and stringent criticisms are leveled against education for its failure to

bring all children to an acceptable literacy level. As a consequence, a number of research investigations have been conducted to assess the critical roles parents play, in both the home and school environments, in promoting increased achievement, specifically in reading.

Parental practices at home. One line of research has examined what parents do with their children at home to promote reading readiness and receptivity to reading instruction. Research repeatedly has indicated a significant positive relationship between the availability and range of reading materials in the home environment and children's attitudes towards and achievement in reading (Davie, Butler, & Goldstein, 1972; Douglas, 1964; Durkin, 1966; Lamme & Olmsted, 1977; Sheldon & Carillo, 1952; Smith, 1971). Additional research has established a number of parental interactive practices that are significantly associated with the development of a positive attitude towards reading and increased reading achievement. Many of these practices may, in fact, mediate the influence of material availability (Wigfield & Asher, in press).

Reading to the child is one practice that has been shown to be significantly related to children's reading development. Specifically, this practice has been shown to improve children's (a) receptive and expressive vocabularies; (b) literal and inferential comprehension skills; (c) sentence length; (d) letter and symbol recognition; (e) basic conceptual development, extension, and expansion; and (f) general interest in books (Brezinski, 1964; Burroughs, 1970; Dix, 1976; Green, 1981; Hansen, 1969; McCormick, 1981; McKay, 1981; Romotowski & Trepanier, 1977; Teale, 1978). Reading to the child is also important because it promotes a bond between children and parents, and establishes reading as a valued personal activity, exposes and develops shared topics of interest, promotes positive

social-emotional interactions among family members, familiarizes children with a variety of language patterns and an expanded vocabulary, and serves as a source of data from which children construct knowledge about rules that govern the reading process (Dix, 1976; Durkin, 1966; Green, 1981; Hansen, 1969; Ransbury, 1973; Schickedanz, 1978; Siders & Sledjeski, 1978).

A very limited amount of research has examined specific aspects of the "reading to the child" practice. One area that has received some attention is the question of how much time parents should spend reading to their children. In a study of styles of parenting among parents of young gifted children, Karnes, Shwedel, and Steinberg (1982) found that parents of young children of average intelligence read to their children an average of 7 to 8 minutes a day, whereas parents of young gifted children spent an average of 21 minutes a day reading to their children. Hoskins (1976) found that prekindergarten children of parents who read to them at least 60 minutes a week, or an average of 8 to 9 minutes a day, for the 3 months prior to entering kindergarten showed significant increases in readiness abilities and more positive attitudes towards reading. In addition, they scored significantly higher on tests of reading achievement than did children in the control group, whose parents had not been asked to read to their children on a regular basis. Romotowski and Trepanier (1977) found that the reading achievement scores of young children whose parents read to them from four to seven times a week were significantly higher than the scores of children whose parents did not read to them that often. Henry (1975) found significant gains in reading readiness abilities among boys whose fathers read to them on a daily basis during the 6

months before entering kindergarten as compared with a similar group of boys whose fathers did not read to them.

Results of these studies, while not definitive, suggest that a regular pattern of reading to children 4 to 7 days a week for at least 8 minutes at a time is associated with more positive attitudes and more advanced abilities in reading. There is also a cautious suggestion that the more time children are read to, the higher their achievement level.

In addition to time devoted to reading to children, investigators have looked at some of the specific practices parents engage in while reading to their children. In examining parental styles of reading to their children and children's performance on reading related tasks, Flood (1977) identified five factors significantly related to performance. First, children who talked more about the story during the reading process scored higher than children who did not talk during the story. Second, children who asked more questions during the story had higher performance scores on reading tasks than children who did not ask as many questions. Third, children who answered more questions about the story scored higher than children who did not answer as many questions. Fourth, children whose parents used "warm-up" questions before beginning reading performed better on reading tasks than children whose parents did not ask such questions. And finally, children whose parents used follow-up questions after completing the story received higher reading achievement scores than children whose parents did not use follow-up questions. Teale (1978) repeatedly found that the quality of interaction between the parent and child during the reading activity was associated with learning to read. Specifically, it was found that children who were more successful in learning to read had reading expriences with their parents that were more positive, more task-

oriented, and more verbally stimulating than those of children who were less successful in learning to read. Furthermore, Smith (1971) found that children whose parents discussed with them their various experiences and the books that they read exhibited greater reading abilities and more highly developed and expanded concepts than children whose parents did not engage in such discussions.

Although research is limited on the nature and effects of specific practices utilized while reading to the child, it can be concluded that the "engagement" of both the parent and child in the process of reading to and being read to is important in furthering reading development in children. The more that both the parents and the children became involved in the activity, the higher the children's reading achievement. These findings support the view that reading to the child is a cognitive or "thinking" activity rather than a "listening" activity; they also provide suggestions for parent education/intervention studies.

In addition to the important practice of reading to the child, a number of other practices engaged in by parents in the home environment have been shown to be related to the development of positive reading attitudes and increased achievement in reading. First, it has been found that children with more positive attitudes towards reading and higher achievement have parents who themselves read more and model the reading process more than the parents of children with less positive attitudes towards and lower achievement in reading (Dix, 1976; Hansen, 1969; Siders & Sledjeski, 1978). Second, children who have more positive attitudes and higher achievement scores have parents who provide more encouragement to read; who provide guidance in reading (including assisting in the setting of goals, selecting and discussing books, and

looking things up); and who help with homework (Hansen, 1969; Wells, 1978). Third, children whose parents listen to them read on a regular basis have higher achievement scores and more positive attitudes toward reading than children whose parents don't (Hewison & Tizard, 1980). Fourth, children with higher achievement levels and more positive attitudes towards reading have parents who have actively "coached" or instructed them in the mechanics of reading. In addition, these parents have also provided materials useful in reading subskill development (Clegg, 1971; Hess et al., 1979; Hewison & Tizard, 1980; Teale, 1978). Fifth, children who have exhibited higher achievement levels in reading have parents who have pressed for or expected this achievment (Hess et al., 1979). And sixth, children with more positive attitudes and higher achievement levels in reading have parents who have rewarded that achievement through extensive praise and reading-related activities. These rewarding activities include trips to the library, the purchase of additional books, and the selection of books of high interest to the child (Wells, 1978).

Some parental practices have been found to have negative effects on attitudes and achievement in reading. Children whose parents put excessive stress and emphasis on reading achievement, who push children to the point of frustration, and who punish their children for not reading or not reading well have less positive attitudes and lower achievement levels in reading than children whose parents do not engage in these practices (Wells, 1978).

The effects of parent involvement education efforts. A second line of research has been interventionist in nature. Parents have been asked or trained to engage in a variety of additional, expanded, or altered experiences or practices in order to improve the reading attitudes and

achievement of their children. Several approaches have been found to be successful. One approach has been to train parents in the teaching of reading and the development and use of reading materials. This has been done by holding parent meetings and workshops (Burgess, 1982; Raim, 1980; Swift, 1970; Vukelich, 1978; Woods, Barnard, & TeSelle 1974); developing parent guides, handbooks, and information packets (Siders & Sledjeski, 1978); and using a combination of strategies including (a) training sessions, information packets, and contingency management (Niedermeyer, 1970); and (b) training sessions, information packets, and meetings (McConnell, 1974). A second approach has been to specifically ask parents to read to their children for specified amounts of time (Henry, 1975; Hoskins, 1976). A third approach has been to increase the information parents have about the school reading program as well as to increase the communication parents receive from their child's reading teacher regarding their child's progress in reading. This practice enables the parents to better encourage, assist, and reinforce the reading process at home (Criscuolo, 1979; Grimmett & McCoy, 1980; McLaren, 1965; Rupley & Blair, 1975).

Although there are still many unanswered questions regarding the specific ways in which parents affect their children's attitudes and achievement in reading and concerning the best ways of maximizing their potential influence and positive impact, the research to date does indicate that parent role is critical. In addition, it suggests that parents who assume, whether on their own or as a result of intervention efforts, an active, participating, "engaged" positive interactive strategy with their children regarding the reading process have children who exhibit higher reading achievement levels and more positive attitudes towards reading than the children of parents who assume more passive roles.

Parent Involvement and Schools

Improving parent-teacher-school relationships and expanding the roles parents play in child care and educational programs has received increasing emphasis during the past 15 years. Interest in such efforts has grown steadily as social, political, economic, educational, theoretical, empirical, and legislative forces have converged in response to difficult social and educational problems and changing cultural and societal norms. Several factors have refocused attention on the rights, responsibilities, and impact of parents who wish to influence educational programs. These factors include declining achievement scores, rising educational costs, distrust of bureaucratic institutions, feelings of alienation, recognition of cultural and ethnic differences, and renewed interest in the basic American concept of participatory democracy. In addition, accumulating evidence indicates that parent involvement is critical in both preventing and remedying educational and developmental problems and in facilitating children's development and achievement. The consequence of these events is that, at the present time, vast numbers of people are being either strongly encouraged or required to participate in parent involvement efforts. Additional momentum has been added to this emphasis by the widely cited document A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) and by the call it issued to parents to assume an even more active role in insuring excellence in the education of their children. As more and more parents and more schools and programs respond to the call, the need for research-based practice increases.

Effects of involvement. At present, there is accumulating research regarding the positive effects of parent participation and involvement in child care and educational programs, the means for bringing about those

effects, and the means for improving parent-teacher relationships and communication. In addition, research exists that indicates some of the problems encountered in parent involvement efforts and that describes the attitudes of parents, teachers, and administrators toward such involvement.

Positive effects of parent involvement have been established for parents, teachers, and children on a number of different variables. Research has indicated that, as a result of parent involvement in educational programs, parents have developed more positive attitudes about school and school personnel and that they have exhibited more positive attitudes than parents who did not become involved (Armer, Yeargen, & Hannah, 1977; Clarizio, 1968; Evans, 1973; Filipczak, 1973; Greenwood, Breivogel, & Bessent, 1972; Herman & Yeh, 1980; Rempson, 1967; Wenig & Brown, 1975; Young, 1975). Second, after having become involved in child care and educational programs, these parents have helped gather community support for the programs (Armer et al., 1977; Bowles, 1979; Filipczak, 1973). Third, parents who became involved have also become more actively involved in community activities than they had been before (Gordon, 1978; MIDCO Educational Associates, Inc., 1972). A fourth effect is that parents who have become involved in programs have developed more positive attitudes about themselves, increased their self-confidence, and enrolled in programs to enhance their personal development (Boren, 1973; Donofrio, 1976; Gordon, 1978; Hereford, 1963; Herman & Yeh, 1980; Lane, Elzey, & Lewis, 1971; Radin, 1972; Rose, 1974; Strom & Johnson, 1974). A fifth effect of parent involvement is that the relationship between the parent and the child has improved and the frequency of the parents' involvement in the child's activities has increased (Rempson,

1967; Schaefer, 1972; Young, 1975). Parents also were found to have increased the amount of contact they made with the school (Herman & Yeh, 1980; Young, 1975); understanding of the child's development and the educational process has also increased (Lane et al., 1971; Rempson, 1967). In addition, parents have become better teachers of their children at home and have used more positive forms of reinforcement (Andrews et al., 1982; Olmsted, 1977; Risley, 1968).

Furthermore, it has been shown that teachers, when associated with parent-involvement efforts, have become more proficient in their instructional and professional activities, allocated more of their own time to the instructional function, become more involved with the curriculum, and tended to experiment more. In addition, they have developed more student-oriented rather than text-oriented curricular activities (Benyon, 1968; Hedges, 1972).

And finally, there is substantial evidence indicating that children have significantly increased their academic achievement and cognitive development (Andrews et al., 1975; Beller, 1969; Brookover, 1965, 1967; Eash et al., 1980; Gordon, Olmstead, Rubin, & True, 1978; Henderson, 1981; Herman & Yeh, 1980; Irvine, 1979; Mowry, 1972; Olmsted, 1977; Wagenaar, 1977).

Successful approaches. Although no research was located that specifically compared the differential effects of the various forms of parent involvement, an examination of successful studies has indicated that a variety of approaches to parent involvement have been used. A number of studies reporting positive effects of parent involvement have used parent meetings and workshops as the means for educating parents and stimulating more participation in the education and development of children

(Esterson, Feldman, Krigsman, & Warshaw, 1975; Evans, 1973; Gage, Crawford, Stallings, Corno, & Stayrook, 1978; Greenwood et al., 1972; Herman & Yeh, 1980; Irvine, 1979; Lane et al., 1971; McLaren, 1965; Meighan, 1981; Rempson, 1967. A second successful approach has been to use parent-teacher conferences as an opportunity to describe and encourage ways in which parents could become more actively involved in the child care or education program (Brooks, 1981; Herman & Yeh, 1980; Meighan, 1981; Rotter & Robinson, 1982). Third, increasing the amount and specificity of information parents receive about the school program and their child's performance in the program through more written and personal communication has also been used in programs reporting positive effects of parent involvement (Evans, 1973; Greenwood et al., 1972; Herman & Yeh, 1980; Seginer, 1983; Young, 1975). Fourth, successful programs have encouraged frequent visits to the center, school, or classroom and have directly involved parents in teaching activities (Brooks, 1981; Cramer, 1972; Goodson & Hess, 1975; Herman & Yeh, 1980; Irvine, 1979; Meighan, 1981; Risley, 1968; Young, 1975). And finally, the inclusion and encouraged participation of parents in decision-making and evaluation activities is another approach to parent involvement has been used in programs reporting positive effects (Armer et al., 1977; Ferguson, 1977; Filipczak, 1973; Herman & Yeh, 1980; Middleton, 1975; Project Unique, 1969).

In addition, studies by McKinney (1978, 1980) and Maraschiello (1981) have assessed the most popular areas of parent participation in educational programs. These investigators also assessed the percentage of parents participating and the amount of time parents participated in each of these areas. Results indicated that classroom participation, with the largest

number of volunteer hours, was the most popular form of involvement. Parent meetings and policy planning sessions were next, while social and fund-raising activities drew the least. Workshops and parent meetings were viewed by parents as important components of the programs, with parents exhibiting the most interest in meetings dealing with educational concerns, followed by those emphasizing personal growth and development. Topics dealing with careers, job training, and social services were of least interest.

As evidenced in the work reviewed here and as indicated in earlier reviews of parent involvement efforts (Gordon et al., 1978; Henderson, 1981), all forms of parent involvement strategies seem to be useful. However, those that are well-planned and more comprehensive in nature, offer more types of roles for parents to play, and occur over an extended period of time appear to be more effective.

Parent-teacher relationships. Several recent studies have examined some of the specific factors associated with positive parent-teacher relationships and effective communication. Mager (1980) studied the conditions that influence the teacher in initiating contacts with parents. One of the important findings of this study was that teachers reported considerably more contact with parents than had been reported in earlier studies. This may reflect the important emphasis placed on such contacts in recent educational literature. Among the conditions influencing parent-teacher relationships, Mager found that teachers of upper middle class backgrounds reported a higher frequency of contacts with parents than did teachers of middle or lower middle class backgrounds. Teachers with a high frequency of contact reported significantly more reasons for making such contact and significantly more positive reasons than did teachers with a lower rate of

contact. Teachers with high contact saw themselves as more responsible for initiating contacts and reported greater comfort in meeting the expectations of parents. These teachers did not see parents as placing unrealistic demands on them and felt that parents understood their efforts and limitations as teachers. Another finding was that, as teacher-initiated contacts increased, parent-initiated contacts increased as well.

Powell (1980) reported a synthesis of his work on parent-teacher relationships. He found that, with increases in parent-teacher interaction, there was a corresponding increase in the diversity of topics discussed and the complexity of the discussions. In addition, it was found that, as communication increased, parents used the staff members as primary information sources about education and development and decreased their use of more informal sources. Powell also found that increased communication was related to parents and teachers forming and sustaining a consistent, stable relationship--in some cases, friendships developed.

Rotter and Robinson (1982) reviewed the research on effective communication and conferencing characteristics and skills in parent-teacher relationships, surveying as well research concerned with the effects of training teachers to implement these characteristics and skills. From their review, they concluded that the characteristics of effective communication included (a) concreteness, (b) genuineness, (c) immediacy, and (d) confrontation. The required skills included (a) listening, (b) attending, (c) perceiving, and (d) responding. Results of studies concerning the training of teachers included (a) improved school climate; (b) improved teacher-parent, teacher-student, and teacher-teacher communication; (c) decreased discipline problems; (d) improved student self-concepts; and (e) increased student achievement. In addition, teachers' self-concepts were shown to

improve; they reported increased satisfaction with their skills in the classroom and were judged by parents and evaluators to be more effective.

Since parent involvement in educational programs has been shown to be so effective, and since interpersonal relationships and communication are the heart of such contacts, it is encouraging that some of the conditions associated with effective contacts have been identified. It is also of importance that many of these characteristics and skills can be developed.

Theoretical versus actual commitment. Extensive research has substantiated the effects of parent involvement, and numerous descriptive or testimonial articles have extolled the benefits to be gained (for an extensive bibliography on parent involvement, see Henniger, 1979). In addition, strong policy level commitments and federal laws (e.g., Public Law 94-142, Elementary Secondary Education Act [ESEA] Title I and Title IV; Federal interagency day care requirements, etc.) have mandated the return of more responsibility and control from educational programs to the parents of children who are served by them. However, it must also be recognized that a number of problems concerning parent involvement have been reported, and there is considerable evidence that many parental "commitments" are not being fully reflected in practice. For example, in studying the effects of parent involvement programs in ESEA Title I programs, McLaughlin (1975) indicated that he was unable to locate even one Title I evaluation report in which the parent advisory council was functioning as intended by law. Even more distressing, both Hightower (1978) and Kaplan and Forgione (1978) report numerous instances of only "paper" advisory councils. Burns (1982) found, in a recent large scale study of mandated parent involvement in federally funded ESEA Title I, ESEA Title VII Bilingual, Follow Through, and Emergency School Aid Act programs,

that while communication between the projects and the home was indicated as the second most common form of involvement (following advisory councils), there was actually very little effort extended. Reports indicated that frequently only a single meeting was held to communicate with parents or to "train" them to assist in the instructional process.

Further evidence of the disparity between commitment and practice can be obtained from The 13th Annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes toward Public Schools (Gallup, 1981). Results indicated that respondents believe more parent involvement and better parent-teacher relationships are necessary for the improvement of schools. However, the respondents also indicated that a major problem facing the schools is a lack of interest on the part of both parents and teachers in parent involvement. In addition, Jackson and Stretch (1976), Hegenbart (1980), and Langenbrunner and Thornburg (1980) report survey results indicating that parents, teachers, and administrators all believe that there is significantly less actual parent involvement than is preferred or desired.

With respect to the reasons for this disparity, administrators indicate that while they "believe in" parent participation, it is one of their hardest tasks because parents refuse to participate (Duea & Bishop, 1980; Goldhammer, 1971; Hightower, 1978). Furthermore, although no data are available for elementary teachers, secondary teachers report parent relationships to be one of the most bothersome types of problems (Cruckshank, Kennedy, & Meyers, 1974), while preschool teachers report parent relationships to be not only bothersome but also their most frequently occurring type of problem (Wolfgang, Bratl, & Peck, 1977).

On the other hand, in many cases both parents (Gallup, 1981) and outside evaluators (Goodlad & Klein, 1970; Kaplan & Forgione, 1978; Levin,

1967) indicate that it is not the parents but the teachers and administrators who are apathetic about parent involvement. Levin (1967) found, for example, that when teachers asked parents for help, they responded readily, but teacher requests were not very common. Goodlad and Klein (1970) found that while teachers sincerely believed that they were encouraging parents to be involved in school programs, direct observations of teacher behaviors by trained observers indicated that teachers in fact did very little to encourage involvement. Similarly, Tudor (1977) found that the more positive the attitudes of the teachers toward parent involvement as expressed on an attitudinal survey, the more parent involvement occurred. In addition, research by Langenbrunner and Thornburg (1980), Hegenbart (1980), Jackson and Stretch (1976), and Gallup (1981) suggests that parents are very willing and interested in becoming involved. Related research indicates, however, that in many cases teachers initiate contact with parents only when a problem or crisis situation has developed (Carew & Lightfoot, 1979; Lortie, 1975; McPherson, 1972; Mager, 1980).

Related to this point, recent research by Guttman (1982) indicates that there are significant differences in parents' and teachers' causal attributions of problem behavior at school. More specifically, it was found that when a problem behavior occurred teachers tended to attribute causes to the child first and the parents second. In addition, they tended to play down or dismiss any reasons associated with themselves. Parents, on the other hand, tended to attribute responsibility almost equally to the child, the teacher, and themselves. As Guttman pointed out, the differences in attributional patterns and external/internal locus of control orientations may account for much of the difficulty parents and teachers have in dealing with problem behaviors and arriving at constructive, mutually agreeable solutions.

Problems in initiating parent participation. Research investigations to determine some of the specific factors that impede the initiation and establishment of parent participation activities have indicated a number of important concerns. First, teachers report that they feel uncertain about how to involve parents and still maintain their role as specialized "experts" (Warren, 1973). Second, teachers indicate that they are uncertain about how to balance their concern for the group of children against a more personalized concern for each individual child, which they feel would be expected if parents were more involved (McPherson, 1972). Furthermore, a report by the National Education Association (1972) indicates that teachers believe planning for parent involvement activities takes too much time. This report also states that teachers express concern that parents will try to take over teaching responsibilities and that they won't follow the teacher's instructions and school regulations. They are also concerned that parents will cause confusion and disrupt the classroom because they don't know how to work productively with children and that parents may use nonstandard English or demonstrate other characteristics teachers do not want introduced into the classroom. Other concerns teachers expressed were that parents would not keep their commitments, would discuss confidential information with their friends, and would be too critical and therefore make teachers uncomfortable. In contrast, research by Corwin and Wagenaar (1976) indicates that, according to parents, it is the bureaucratization of schools that keeps many of them from becoming involved and from bringing their concerns, complaints, and demands to the schools.

In summary, it is clear from these and other studies that parent involvement efforts encounter numerous difficulties in carrying commitments

into practice. Yet, despite the difficulties, the accumulating research on the positive effects of parent participation in educational programs has caused interest in parent involvement to continue to grow. In addition, federal, state, and local requirements for greater parent involvement are expected to expand and to affect all teachers, not just those concerned with handicapped children and federally funded programs. The challenge that faces those of us who are committed to the importance of parent involvement is to decrease the disparity between commitment and practice, and to facilitate the establishment of effective programs.

## PRINCIPLES OF SUCCESSFUL PRACTICE

As indicated by the preceding review, extensive, accumulating, and convincing research exists about the benefits and effects of parent involvement and about some of the specific practices found to be most effective. This research provides excellent support for the establishment of parent involvement programs and a sound basis for the selection and implementation of program components. However, additional implementation aspects, not empirically established, need to be considered. From extensive teaching and consultation work with parents, teachers, and administrators in developing successful parent involvement programs and from personal research and program analysis efforts (Becher, 1978, 1982, 1983), a set of basic principles characterizing successful[3] parent involvement programs or seemingly differentiating between successful and less successful programs has been identified. These principles fall into two major groups. The first group includes principles related to perspectives programs hold about parents. The second group includes implementation principles. Together, these two groups of principles provide a basis for

planning and analyzing program development, implementation, and evaluation efforts, and they illustrate the skills teachers need for establishing successful parent involvement programs. They are intended to serve as guidelines, not prescriptions, for successful parent involvement program development.

Perspectives about Parents

1. Parents already make important contributions. The first principle apparent in successful parent involvement programs is that these programs recognize and value the important contributions parents already make to their children's development and education, regardless of the parents' educational and economic backgrounds. From the literature as well as experience, evidence indicates that a great many parents are either unaware or uncertain about the positive influences and impact they have on their children and about their importance in their child's development and education. Furthermore, even parents who are aware of their important role indicate that reinforcement from teachers is appreciated. Successful programs emphasize the strengths of parents and let them know that these strengths are valued. The consequence of this approach is that parents feel good about themselves and the program, and are more willing to become actively involved.

A practical example may illustrate this point: One group of teachers began to listen more carefully to the various things children said they did with their parents at home that reflected a positive relationship as well as sound learning experiences. When, for example, a child would say something like, "My mom let me help make chocolate chip cookies last night. She let me measure some of the things. We made 56 cookies!" the teacher would write a brief note home stating specifically what the parent had done

that the child thought was important and that had made an impact. In addition, the teacher would indicate to the parent the educationally relevant aspects of the experiences. The responses from parents were (a) pleasure that the teacher took the time to let them know that they were doing things with their children that were enjoyed, appreciated, and important; (b) surprise, in many instances, that the child had valued and/or learned from so many small activities; (c) an increase in the activities they engaged in with their children; and (d) increased positive contact with the teachers.

2. Parents can make additional contributions. A second principle that emerges from examining successful programs is that these programs recognize that all parents can make contributions to their child's school or center program or to their child's education and development. Parents, however, may not realize what those potential contributions are. Successful programs help parents to identify what new things parents are capable of doing. In one school, for example, the first-grade teachers had written notes to the parents inviting them to participate in a unit on early America. The parents were asked to share some of their hobbies and engage in or demonstrate cooking or craft activities with the children. Initially, there was very little response from the parents. The response increased considerably after personal contact by the teacher focused on helping the parents realize they did have skills to share. As one parent stated, "I know how to knit, but I didn't think I was good enough to teach anybody else." (In fact, the children were 6 years old, and the teacher really only intended for demonstrations to occur, not instruction!)

Another example occurred in a parent cooperative preschool. After watching one mother conduct an activity with the children, a graduate

student assistant recording the interactions commented to the mother about the rich, varied, and excellent interactive teaching behaviors the mother had engaged in and complimented her on the range and depth of the concepts she developed. The graduate student then asked where the mother had received her training as a teacher. The mother looked at the student with disbelief and said, "I didn't know I was teaching the children anything; I just thought I was talking to them."

3. Parents can learn new parenting techniques. A third principle of successful parent involvement programs is that they incorporate the belief that parents have the capacity for and interest in learning developmental and educational techniques but that a positive approach is necessary. Techniques are presented as "new," "additional," or "alternative" techniques rather than as "better" ones. This perspective does not imply a criticism of existing parental practices. Instead, it suggests that parents have both the ability and interest to expand their parenting strategies and techniques. Although the specific parenting techniques shared (such as ways of correcting a child's errors in learning) may be the same in both successful and less successful programs, the more positive nature of this approach produces more enthusiastic responses from parents.

4. Parents have important perspectives on their children. Successful programs recognize that the perspectives parents have on their children are important and useful to teachers. For example, parents can provide information about their children's relationships, interests, and experiences outside of the school or center environment as well as describe how they learn in those contexts. This information enhances the teacher's understanding of the children and contributes to more effective teaching. It also establishes an important "partnership" relationship between parents and teachers that facilitates further involvement and learning.

5. Parent-child relationships are different from teacher-child relationships. Another principle of successful parent involvement programs is that they recognize the special nature of parent-child relationships. They also recognize that this relationship is quite different from the one between teacher and child.

Katz (1980) has discussed some of the significant distinctions between mothering and teaching, noting that parents and teachers necessarily differ in their relationships with children. The relationships parents have with their children are personal, subjective, and occur over a long period of time. In addition, parents see their children as members of a family, and they relate in the context of daily living. Teachers' relationships with children, on the other hand, need to be objective, impersonal, and short term. Teachers see children as individuals in a group of similar-age children, and their relationship occurs in the context of a specifically designed educational environment. The distinctions in these relationships reflect differences in roles, goals, and values that may be complementary but are not interchangeable. Successful programs recognize and utilize these differences. A common mistake teachers make in less successful programs is to automatically suggest activities for parents to do with their children that they themselves have used successfully at school. Sometimes these activities work, but often they don't. When they don't, it is often because the suggestions do not account for the different relationships and learning environments that exist at home. The effect of such suggestions is that parents either become frustrated with their child because they're "not paying attention" or "not learning," or become frustrated with the teacher because the activities were "stupid." Teachers, on the other hand, become frustrated because parents "aren't doing the activities I

suggested." Successful programs recognize and utilize these differences in relationships. The activities suggested for parents to undertake with their children at home make use of family situations in reaching goals. Furthermore, successful programs incorporate consultation with parents in selecting and developing activities for use at home.

6. Parents' perspectives about involvement are important. In successful parent involvement programs, the process, efforts, and activities are viewed from the perspective of the parents rather than from those of the staff. In doing this, parents' views, thoughts, preferences, feelings, and understandings about parent involvement are sought and not assumed.

In one low income school, ESEA Title I kindergarten teachers had been attempting to involve parents and had experienced mixed success. As they put it, "We never get any response from the parents of children we really need to work with." While doing a "favorite recipe" cooking project, one of the teachers met one of the parents at the grocery store. This parent's child was one who had not brought in a recipe despite a number of notes sent home. When the teacher asked the parent to please remember to send in a recipe, the parent replied, "I don't have any cookbooks or use recipes since I can't read or write." The teacher was startled and realized that up until that time she had been blaming the parents for their lack of interest and nonresponsiveness to her notes when in fact the parent (and other parents, she came to find out) hadn't been able to read the notes and were embarrassed to say so.

Another example concerns a middle income day care center where the director was getting very little input for board meetings despite the fact that every newsletter asked parents to bring concerns to the board. The director was feeling very frustrated and saying that the parents "just

weren't interested" in what happened at the center. In an effort to open up communication, it was suggested that she make some phone calls to some of the parents and discuss the problem. What she discovered was that a number of the parents hadn't been reading the newsletter, which was very long. They said that they usually put it aside "until later." When they did find time to read it, it seemed to have disappeared or they only skimmed it since it was "now so out of date." Most parents indicated that they weren't even aware of the board meetings or who was on the board. The director had assumed that since "it was in the newsletter," everyone knew and that they just weren't interested. After having talked personally with the parents, she found a number who had good ideas to share and who also were interested in serving on the board. At the suggestion of the parents, she decided to send out shorter but more frequent newsletters so that they were more likely to be read.

7. Most parents really care about their children. Another principle of successful parent involvement programs is that they hold and express a sincere belief that most parents really care about their children. This is in many ways related to the point concerning respect for parents' perspectives. When the point of view of the parent rather than the program is considered and the belief is held that most parents really care about their children, it sometimes happens that it may be in the best interest of the child that the parent not participate in an activity. This point emerged in a survey of parents' reasons for nonparticipation (Becher, 1983). Working parents indicated that, since there is so little time at home with their children, they often prefer to spend time "as a family" rather than attend activities that they consider not very interesting. They felt that the time they spent with their child was more important than the time spent listening to discussions often only somewhat related to

their child. Thus, their nonparticipation was not an indication of a lack of interest but rather of a strong desire to be with their child. Another related and frequently stated point was that often the "time press" to get home, prepare dinner, get the children bathed, and get to a meeting created so much tension and conflict in the family that it just didn't seem worth it. These parents cared about their children, and from their perspective it was more important to have good relationships and time with their children than it was to attend an activity someone else thought was important for them. To further underscore this point, ample evidence suggests that parents will turn out in very large numbers when their children are participants in a program or activity.

8. Parents have many reasons for their involvement. Successful programs keep in mind the reasons for involvement when responding to "inappropriate" behavior by parents. One of the frequent concerns of teachers when beginning parent participation programs, whether at home or school, is that the parents will often undertake the activity for the child rather than help the child to accomplish it. Successful programs keep in mind that when parents do this their intentions are good but they often lack an understanding of how to help. When this occurs, successful programs extend additional efforts to make it clear what the purposes are for parent participation and how parents might work best with their child. Furthermore, even in cases where parents don't seem to be responding to suggestions for "helping" rather than "doing," a successful program focuses on the good feelings generated in the parents and the positive relationships provided for the child and consider in effect that the purposes of parent involvement have been achieved. Because of this perspective, successful programs operate in such a way that if an activity

needs to be done only by the child, in a very particular way, then it is not an activity to use for parent participation.

Program Goals, Activities, and Practices

1. Goals, purposes, and activities are matched. Parent involvement programs have many purposes. These include, for example, providing support for families, increasing children's achievement, meeting federal requirements, and keeping parents informed. There are also many "good," "interesting," and "fun" activities. While it seems obvious that the activities chosen should match or meet the goals and purposes of the programs, in many situations this is not the case. As a consequence, these programs are not very successful. As a case in point, one school district in Illinois established a parent involvement program in order to "have better relationships with the parents" and to "help improve children's achievement." Initially, there was excellent response on the part of the parents, but the enthusiasm soon diminished. The activities that parents were asked to do focused primarily on clerical tasks, particularly running dittoes "in the closet down the hall" and making bulletin boards, but in classes other than their children's classrooms. The parents became very frustrated. They felt isolated and as though they were being used, not involved. It soon became clear that the tasks did not match the stated goals and in fact were counterproductive. After receiving numerous complaints from parents, the district did reassess the situation and established activities that involved parents in ways directly related to improving children's achievement and furthering more positive relationships.

2. Staff skills and available resources are considered. Staff members vary in the skills they possess at a given point in time and the resources

available to them. Successful programs look at the staff's development and choose to do what is reasonable and productive rather than trying to "do it all." As the staff gains experience, programs are expanded. The emphasis is on producing success, however small. As an example of this point, one school that had no parent involvement program decided to initiate a program in which parents would share their hobbies, interests, or jobs with the children. Intensive efforts were made to insure that every single parent returned the survey indicating what they would share. A number of weeks passed before all the forms were returned. It was now parent-teacher conference time at the school, and teachers were involved in preparing report cards and planning for the conference. Teachers then began the task of trying to sort through and schedule every parent. Since many parents had several children in the school, as well as limitations on availability, the mechanics of organizing the program soon became troublesome. Further frustration developed when parents' schedules changed and adjustments to the participation schedule were needed. Many parents became angry because it appeared they were not being chosen to participate after being pressured to return the survey. The school's interest in involving all the parents was commendable, but their inexperience, as well as that of the parents, made their first efforts unrealistic and unattainable. As a counter example, a small group of kindergarten and first-grade teachers planned a single workshop for parents focusing on things to do with their children over the Christmas vacation. A wide variety of ideas and activities were shared, and parents were involved in making materials. The workshop was considered very successful, and parents requested several additional workshops through the year. In

addition, parents began making more contacts with teachers about ideas they had that other parents might like to try.

3. Variations in parents' skills are recognized. Successful programs reflect the realization that there are many ways for parents to be involved and that all parents do not need to be involved in the same ways. They also recognize that the ways in which particular parents are involved can grow and change over time. These programs think about the involvement of Mr. Jones, Mrs. Smith, and Ms. Brown, rather than the involvement of "the parents" as a group. These programs also view even minor interest by the parents as contributing to the development of a basis for later, more active involvement. Simply beginning to change basic attitudes makes the efforts of the teacher the following year easier. Parent involvement is therefore viewed as a developing process rather than an all-or-none, now-and-forever situation.

4. Program activities are flexible and creative. Another principle of successful parent involvement programs is that the activities they develop are flexible and creative in order to be appropriate for and responsive to the particular needs of the parents. This is especially important when the majority of parents are working.

In one school district, which served mostly children of factory workers, the district superintendent contacted the major employing companies to arrange for time off, without loss of pay, for the parents (mainly fathers) of children in the school system so that they could occasionally participate in school activities. A great deal of publicity was given to those companies who supported the schools, and the program was considered to be very successful. As one parent reported, "The companies probably more than made up the few half days they gave up because of

the goodwill engendered in the employees, which in turn probably affected their overall productivity."

As another example, several day care programs combined potluck dinners with parent meetings. In these programs, parents brought a dish in the morning when they brought their children, and the staff arranged the meal at the end of the day so that parents could come straight from work, have dinner together, hold the parents' meeting (while the children were supervised in another area) and be home by 7:00 or 7:30 p.m. This avoided the problems of hurrying home to fix dinner, clean up, bathe the children, and generate enough energy to go out to a meeting. Positive responses to this approach have been extremely high.

5. Expectations, roles, and responsibilities are communicated. Successful parent involvement programs have clear task expectations, roles, and responsibilities, all of which are communicated to parents. One of the major areas of unease and conflict in parent involvement concerns who does what, when, where, and how. In many cases, there is no "right" or "wrong" way to do certain things, but the teacher may have preferred ways of operating because of her teaching style, philosophy, goals, etc. As long as parents are informed, the incidence of problems is minimal, and the program functions successfully. Parents are usually grateful to know what to do and how the teacher wants it done; it is much more reassuring to know what is expected than to feel uneasy at trying to guess and perhaps guess wrong.

6. Parents are involved in decision making, and administrative decisions are explained. In successful parent involvement programs, there is a strong emphasis on the communication of information. Such communication is important and relevant in allowing parents to participate in decision

making and in understanding administrative decisions. These administrative decisions may concern policies and/or practices regarding both the school or center and parent involvement efforts.

One cause of parent-school conflict is the announcement of decisions with little or no information provided about how and why those decisions were reached; emphasis is placed more on "selling" than on explaining. On the other hand, in successful parent involvement programs, parents are given information that allows them to make and respond to decisions on a rational as opposed to an emotional basis. When parents lack information, they cannot participate freely in the decision-making process, and they can only respond emotionally to decisions that may be surprising or that appear threatening or arbitrary. When parents are provided with information describing the advantages and disadvantages of various positions, they can more effectively participate in the decision-making process and rational exchanges can occur.

7. Problems are expected but solutions are emphasized. In successful parent involvement programs, there is an expectation and an anticipation of problems. As a result, policies and procedures for dealing with them are developed and communicated to the parents. Furthermore, successful programs focus on finding solutions to problems rather than on the fact that they have problems.

There are always going to be some problems when a parent involvement program is established, just as there are always problems when any program is established. The difference between successful and less successful programs is that problems are expected and are therefore not considered to be alarming. Furthermore, in looking for solutions to problems, successful parent involvment programs look at problems or

"failures" as the result of program goals, objectives, activities, tasks, or roles, rather than finding fault with the parents.

For example, when an activity is not effective, rather than blaming the parent for a lack of interest, successful programs consider the possibilities that the activities are not seen as relevant by the parent, that they are not scheduled at a convenient time, that the parents have unmet child care or transportation needs, that parents don't know what is expected, that parents lack information to respond appropriately, and so forth. In looking for these types of reasons, successful programs focus on areas that are changeable--thus, the problems are solvable. Blaming the parents is limiting and self-defeating. (If the parents are at fault, one can do little if anything about it, so why try?) Such an attitude suggests to the parents that there is no real interest in facilitating their involvement.

8. Optimum versus maximum involvement is sought. Successful parent involvement programs are programs in which there is optimum rather than maximum involvement so that all those involved enjoy rather than resent their involvement. If a program undertakes too much, it is unlikely to be successful. Parent involvement takes time, effort, and energy. If staff and parents become overextended, they may feel drained and resentful. If the efforts are optimal, involvement is invigorating.

Helping Teachers Develop More Effective Parent Involvement Skills

Several things need to be done in working with teachers to develop the skills suggested by the principles of successful parent involvement programs. First, teachers need to be helped to realize that they already possess a number of the skills necessary for establishing successful programs. Many of the skills needed are characteristic of good teachers (e.g.,

caring, relating, individualizing, personalizing, selecting appropriate activities, reinforcing, teaching, explaining, reteaching, evaluating, etc.). For the majority of teachers, it is a lack of awareness, priorities, and attention rather than inabilities that hinders the development of successful involvement programs. Once teachers develop a commitment to parent involvement, they can begin to more systematically and specifically use the skills they already possess in achieving optimum and successful involvement.

Second, teachers need support for their efforts, particularly when things don't work. One way to help them in this regard is to establish a system of "colleagial counseling." Talking with others who are actively working at parent involvement efforts helps to renew one's energy as well as to solve problems that occur.

Third, teachers need help in identifying their own feelings about various aspects of parent involvement. It is only when teachers become aware of their own fears, concerns, and negative feelings, emotions, and perceptions that they are able rationally to eliminate them and to select and develop more effective strategies.

Fourth, teachers need help in developing conflict resolution rather than conflict avoidance strategies. Many teachers express a fear that some conflict with a parent may arise if parents are actively involved. Therefore, to avoid having to deal with the conflict, they avoid parent involvement. Many models of assertiveness training and conflict resolution are available; choosing one and learning to use it provides the confidence and skills necessary to prevent the practice of avoiding problems by not doing anything.

Fifth, teachers need help in decentering their perspectives about parent involvement so that they begin to see the process from the per-

spective of the parents rather than solely from their own viewpoint. In order to do this, they need to begin really talking with and seeking advice from parents regarding the development of involvement strategies, selection of involvement activities, and establishment of appropriate role relationships.

Sixth, teachers need to be reminded or helped to select activities for parent involvement in terms of the goals and purposes of the program rather than because the activities look interesting or useful. The development of this skill is facilitated first by encouraging teachers to think about their goals and purposes when selecting activities and second by asking them to solicit specific feedback from parents as the programs progress.

Finally, teachers need to be reminded to bring into play the skills they use in making friends when reaching out to parents. Teachers possess these skills already. It's a matter of perspective to begin to think about parents as potential friends when beginning to relate to them. Once this occurs, the rest of the program can move forward effectively.

## CONCLUSIONS, CAUTIONS, AND CONCERNS

In summarizing the research on parent involvement, it becomes very clear that extensive, substantial, and convincing evidence suggests that parents play a crucial role in both the home and school environments with respect to facilitating the development of intelligence, achievement, and competence in their children. In addition, considerable evidence indicates that intervention programs designed to train or encourage parents to engage in a variety of additional, expanded, or altered experiences or practices with their children are effective in improving children's cognitive

development and achievement. Furthermore, while a limited number of research studies have systematically examined the relationship of specific characteristics of effective programs to their outcomes or have evaluated the effectiveness of specific aspects of various parental teaching and involvement practices, there are some indications regarding the best ways of maximizing potential influence and positive impact. The proposed principles of successful practice provide an additional basis for analyzing and implementing program planning, action, and evaluation efforts, as well as for illustrating the skills teachers need to establish effective parent involvement programs. The current state of knowledge about parent involvement provides extremely strong support for the continued encouragement of such efforts. It also generates considerable optimism regarding the improvement of education and educational opportunities for children.

However, some serious cautions and concerns need careful consideration before policies, programs, and practices regarding parent involvement can be developed. One caution concerns the degree to which continuous and increased emphasis on the crucial role of parents in facilitating intelligence, achievement, and educability places excessive pressure and responsibility on them. As Schlossman (1978) has said in a critical analysis of parent education and its politics,

> These programs . . . view poverty mothers--rather than professional educators--as the critical agents in developing their child's intellectual potential. . . . Parent education programs thereby shift the burden of accountability for failure from . . . professional education to the poverty parent . . . Parent education not only tends to blame the victim, it places an inordinate share of blame on women alone. (pp. 790, 796)

A second closely related concern is the degree to which the now popular phrases describing the parents as "the child's first teacher" or even "the child's best teacher" suggest that parents stand in loco magisterio (i.e., in place of teachers [Katz, 1980]). This view may in fact shift the focus of educational responsibilities and accountablity sufficiently so that schools, programs, and teachers will fail to examine more critically the ways in which they might change to more fully enhance children's development, education, and achievement. In further support of this concern is the interesting fact that when the work of Coleman (1966, 1975), Jencks (1972), and other similar studies documented that parents, families, and homes were far more influential than school factors in determining children's cognitive development and achievement, major emphasis was placed on training parents--and in many cases training them to be like teachers. While, as documented by this review, there has been considerable success in employing this approach, an expanded perspective is needed. Very little if any attention has been given to considering the ways in which schools and teachers might become more like homes and parents in their work with children. About this point, Fotheringham and Creal (1980) have said,

> It is important to look at what differences between the learning environment of the home versus the school account for the homes' paramount influence. The home is an individual or small group learning situation that provides contact over time with a few caring adults, whereas the school is a large group environment generally teaching to the mean of existing children by a changing series of adults over time whose styles, values, and

levels of commitments vary. If there are crucial differences in relation to achievement, then modifications of public schooling would require techniques to provide more individualized instruction in an environment that more consistently transmits its styles and attitudes towards learning than presently exist. (pp. 316-317)

A further related concern is that as more and more parent involvement efforts become encouraged or required through policy commitments and legislated mandates, a number of teachers not personally disposed to establishing strong parent-teacher relationships will be asked to take a more active role. Since a number of teachers already feel that they assume more responsibilities than should be expected for activities beyond the direct instructional role, there is a danger that tension between teachers and parents will be created. Without specific training in parent involvement techniques and strategies, and without considerable help and guidance, it is unlikely that efforts can be successful. And, given the fact that there is no research indicating that teachers not disposed to establishing parent involvement programs and relationships can be successfully trained to do so, blanket expectations create risks as well as promises unlikely to be fulfilled.

Furthermore, although principles of successful practice can serve as guidelines for the establishment and implementation of parent involvement programs, since many of the connections between positive program outcomes and specific program components and practices have not been empirically established, program developers still must operate with a degree of uncertainty. While one can expect that additional research will continue to address this problem, optimism about the impact of such research efforts

must be guarded. One reason for such reservation is the report of the decade-long, multimillion dollar Parent-Child Development Center Project (Andrews et al., 1982). This project, which was specifically designed to address substantial research issues in parent education and which represented one of the few attempts to mount a carefully controlled field experiment, was unable to respond successfully to many concerns. In explaining some of the major hindrances to success, Andrews et al. (1982) state that

> a good program must be able to respond both to changing participant needs and staff perceptions and to changing external circumstances. However, in order to fulfill the condition of being the independent variable, they must merit the opposite requirement: to change as little as possible and ideally not at all. (p. 76)

Another concern regarding program development and effective practices is that very little attention has been given to the role of the father. The increase in the number of employed mothers, and particularly of employed mothers of young children, means that fathers have more responsibilities for their children and that these responsibilities begin when the child is at an early age. As Parke's (1981) review of this research on fathers has indicated, fathers as well as mothers play very influential roles in facilitating cognitive development, but these roles are very distinctive in nature. Mothers and fathers differ in how they organize the environment, in their encouragement of different behaviors, in their expectations of their children, and in the nature of their interactive relationships. What impact the participation of fathers in parent involvement programs will have on program structures, relationships with teachers and schools,

roles ascribed to parents, and the nature of the effects of such programs on children's development and achievement remains to be assessed.

An additional related factor regarding the increasing rate of employment of mothers may also impinge directly on parent involvement efforts. This factor concerns the changing nature of mother-child relationships and the models of behavior working mothers present. Parke (1981) cites a study by Blanchard and Biller (1971) indicating that the role fathers play as models of perseverence, achievement motivation, and successful functioning in the outside world is significantly associated with the intellectual development and achievement of their sons. Research is needed exploring these relationships for mothers, who are now also serving as these same types of models. Recent research cited in the Home and School Institute Report (1983) regarding the effects of maternal employment on school achievement tentatively suggests that those roles may be operating positively for mothers as well. Again, if and how changing roles and relationships will affect parent involvement efforts and parent-teacher relationships remains to be established. Developing an awareness of the possible impact of the changing roles and relationships of fathers and mothers is essential if policies and practices are to be appropriately adapted to changing social and parental norms.

In conclusion, it is important to reiterate the fact that there is extensive, substantial, and convincing evidence regarding the crucial role of parents in the development and education of their children. There is also considerable evidence indicating that parents can be trained to engage in a variety of practices that positively affect their children's development and education. In addition, there is limited but growing research regarding the effectiveness of specific parental and program practices. Again, while

cautions and concerns exist that must not be ignored when encouraging parent involvement, these are not barriers. Responsiveness to the issues may insure that the increasing optimism regarding the improvement of education and educational opportunities for children through parent involvement will be justified.

## FOOTNOTES

[1]Other studies indicating that parent education programs are effective in improving children's intellectual functioning, as measured by standardized intelligence tests, include Adkins & Crowell, 1969; Adkins & O'Malley, 1971; Alford & Hines, 1972; Andrews et al., 1975; Barbrack, 1970; Barbrack & Horton, 1970-a, 1970-b; Bertram, Hines, & Macdonald, 1971; Boger, Richter, Paolucci, & Whitmer, 1978; Boger, Kuipers & Berry, 1969, Boger, Kuipers, Wilson, & Andrews, 1973; Final Report, 1969; Gilmer & Gray, 1970; Mann, 1970; and Waters, 1972.

[2]Further evidence of the effects of parent education programs can be found in the following studies: Adkins & Crowell, 1969; Adkins & O'Malley, 1971; Andrews et al., 1975; Barbrack, 1970; Barbrack & Horton, 1970-a, 1970-b; Boger et al., 1973; Champagne & Goldman, 1970; and Mann, 1970.

[3]For the purposes of this discussion, "successful" parent involvement programs are defined as those that are effective in reaching their goals, whatever their goals may be.

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