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ABSTRACT

As a first step toward understanding the joint effects of teacher and parent teaching styles, this study assessed the consistency within and between the children's home and school learning environments. Twenty-four teachers from Los Angeles (California) area and from 33 diversified prekindergarten and kindergarten classrooms completed questionnaires rating a variety of classrooms and home teaching practices. Eighty-three parents who indicated they had chosen their child's school also completed questionnaires, indicating their endorsement of a variety of teaching practices, the frequency with which they engaged in various in-home teaching activities, and their goals for their child's education. The study found that both parents and teachers have coherent systems of beliefs about early childhood education corresponding to child-centered and adult-directed approaches. For parents these approaches are not correlated representing distinct sets of beliefs, but for teachers these approaches are highly correlated appearing to be opposing ends of a single continuum. Parents' beliefs were systematically correlated with: (1) their own behaviors; (2) the classroom instruction their child received; and (3) the beliefs of their child's teacher. (EAJ)

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Parents and Early Childhood Education:
Assessing the Relationship Between
Parents' Beliefs, Parents' Behaviors and Children's Schools

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Background

Research on teaching in early-childhood has conventionally contrasted two instructional styles: child-centered teaching (based on constructivist or Piagetian theories) and adult-directed teaching (based on learning theories). Research on the effect of each of these approaches, in the classroom and at home, has found both advantages and disadvantages to each approach.

Research has not examined the effects that different combinations of parent and teacher instructional approaches have on children. The effect of a teacher-directed school environment that stresses basic skills acquisition might vary depending on parents' in-home teaching styles. As a first step toward understanding the joint effects of teacher and parent teaching styles, this study assessed the consistency within and between children's home and school learning environments.

Goals

- To assess parents' and teachers' beliefs about teaching young children.
 1. To determine whether parents and teachers have coherent beliefs about appropriate strategies for enhancing young children's learning which correspond to child-centered and adult-directed approaches.
 2. To create separate measures of endorsement of child-centered and adult-directed approaches, rather than a single measure treating these approaches as opposing ends of a continuum.
- To assess the relationships between parents' beliefs and parents' self-reported in-home teaching behaviors.
- To assess the relationships between parents' beliefs and behavior and the instructional program in their child's preschool or kindergarten.
- To assess the relationships between parents' beliefs about early-childhood education and the beliefs of their child's teacher.

Subjects and Procedure

Information was gathered from classroom, teachers and parents.

Classroom Measures

- 33 prekindergarten and kindergarten classrooms participated
- Classrooms in the Los Angeles area were selected to maximize diversity (i.e. in curricula, social class and ethnicity).
- Observations were made using the UCLA Classroom Observation Measure, which contains two subscales.

Direct Instruction

- measures the amount of teacher direction and emphasis on basic skills in a classroom
- sample items:
 - amount of time spent on basic academic skills (e.g. literacy or mathematics)
 - amount of time spent working on worksheets
 - proportion of activities which had close-ended, or teacher defined, goals

Positive Social Climate

- measures the social atmosphere of the classroom
- sample items:
 - teacher affect and nurturance
 - children's opportunities to interact with each other during class

Teacher Measures

- 24 of the primary teachers in each classroom completed the questionnaire
- Teachers indicated their endorsement of a large variety of classroom and home teaching practices. Factor analysis of the responses resulted in two factors: Endorsement of Teacher-Directed Strategies and Endorsement of Child-Centered Strategies.

Teachers' Endorsement of Child-Centered Strategies

$\alpha = .83$

- 1) The enthusiasm and interest children is more important than how well they do a task.
- 2) Children should be allowed to opt out of activities.
- 3) Children learn best through active exploration.
- 4) Curricular areas should be combined.
- 5) Experimentation with letters and writing is a good way to develop literacy.
- 6) Children should not have homework in kindergarten.
- 7) Children learn math best through manipulatives.

The following items are reversed:

- 8) Children must complete an activity before they stop working on it.
- 9) Even four and five-year-olds should be told if their work is right or wrong.
- 10) It is important for children to follow the teachers plan exactly.
- 11) Children should not interrupt the teacher during her lesson.

Teacher's Endorsement of Adult-Directed Strategies $\alpha = .94$

- 1) Children who begin formal instruction in preschool will do better in elementary school.
- 2) Worksheets are a good way to teach basic skills.
- 3) Preschool teachers should make sure children know the alphabet before they begin kindergarten.
- 4) Teaching basic academic skills should be a teacher's top priority.
- 5) Children learn basic skills best through repetition and review.
- 6) Practicing letters and sounds is the best way to learn to read.
- 7) Children should be given formal instruction in numbers even if they are not interested.
- 8) Children should look quietly and independently.
- 9) Teachers should emphasize quality in children's final product.
- 10) If a child is not doing well in kindergarten, time should be set aside for them to practice every day after school.
- 11) Preschool children need to be good at counting and recognizing numbers.
- 12) Rewards are a good way to motivate children.

The following items are reversed:

- 13) Children should be given formal instruction in reading and writing only if you want it.
- 14) Children's schoolwork should not be graded in preschool and kindergarten.
- 15) Teachers should not emphasize whether children's work is right or wrong.

Parent Measures

- 113 parents returned the parent questionnaire
- 83 parents indicated that they had chosen their child's school. Only these parents were included in these analyses.
- Parents were asked to indicate:
 - 1) their endorsement of a variety of teaching practices
 - 2) the frequency with which they engaged in various in-home teaching activities
 - 3) their goals for their child's education

Parent Endorsement of Child-Centered Strategies $\alpha=.66$

- 1) The enthusiasm and interest children have in a task is more important than how well they can do it.
- 2) Young children learn math best by working with concrete objects.
- 3) Teachers should give students opportunities to express their wishes about what they do at school.
- 4) Children learn best through active exploration that they initiate.
- 5) Schoolwork should not be graded in the early elementary grades.
- 6) Having children experiment with writing through drawing, scribbling or inventing their own spelling is a good way for children to develop literacy skills.
- 7) Formal instruction in math and reading-related skills should only be given to preschool and kindergarten children if they want it.
- 8) Teachers should be more interested in how children work and play than in what they produce.

Parents' Endorsement of Adult-Directed Strategies $\alpha=.89$

- 1) Children who begin formal reading and math instruction in preschool will do better, academically, in elementary school.
- 2) It is important for preschool and kindergarten classrooms to be quiet and orderly.
- 3) Elementary school children should be punished when they do poorly on their schoolwork.
- 4) Practicing letters and their sounds is the best way for children to learn to read.
- 5) Four and five-year-olds should be told whether their work is good or bad.
- 6) Most children should learn to read in kindergarten.
- 7) Parents should make sure their kindergarten children practice reading and arithmetic at home.
- 8) Parents should make sure that their children know the alphabet before they start kindergarten.
- 9) Children learn basic skills through repetition and review.

Parents' Reports of In-Home Adult-Directed Teaching $\alpha=.76$

- 1) Teaching child about letters or reading with materials like flashcards, workbooks or paper and pencils.
- 2) Teaching child about numbers or arithmetic with materials like flashcards, workbooks or paper and pencils.
- 3) Helping child practice writing letters

Parents' Report of In-Home Child-Centered Teaching $\alpha=.67$

- 1) Playing with toys (for example: blocks, puzzles, dolls, games) with child.
- 2) Reading to child.
- 3) Talking about things child learned or did in school.
- 4) Teach child about numbers or arithmetic while doing other activities (like counting forks to set the table, counting stairs or counting toes).
- 5) Listening to child read or tell stories.

Parents' Goals for Early-Childhood Education

- 1) **Social Skills**
(getting along with other children)
- 2) **Independence and Initiative**
(solving problems on own)
- 3) **Self-Concept**
(self-confidence, feeling good about self)
- 4) **Creativity**
(imagination)
- 5) **Basic Skills**
(letters/reading and numbers/arithmetic)
- 6) **Cooperation**
(following rules, getting along with adults)
- 7) **Knowledge**
(facts, like the months of the year)
- 8) **Work Habits**
(completing tasks, trying hard, paying attention)
- 9) **Motor Skills**
(sports, coordination)

Results

Relation Between Parents' and Teachers' Scores

	Parents' Endorsement of Adult-Directed Strategies	Parent's Endorsement of Child-Centered Strategies	Parents' Report of Adult-Directed Behavior	Parents' Report of Child-Centered Behavior
Teachers' Endorsement of Adult-Directed Strategies	$r=.52$ $p<.0001$	$r=-.23$ $p<.05$	$r=.41$ $p<.0001$	NS
Teachers' Endorsement of Child-Centered Strategies	$r=-.37$ $p<.001$	$r=.29$ $p<.01$	$r=-.29$ $p<.01$	NS
Classroom Direct Instruction Scale	$r=.46$ $p<.0001$	$r=.26$ $p<.01$	$r=.42$ $p<.0001$	NS
Classroom Social Climate Scale	$r=-.34$ $p<.001$	$r=.21$ $p<.05$	$r=-.36$ $p<.0001$	NS

Relation Between Parents' Beliefs and Reported Behavior

	Parents' Endorsement of Adult-Directed Strategies	Parent's Endorsement of Child-Centered Strategies
Parents' Report of Adult-Directed Behavior	.34 $p<.001$	NS
Parents' Report of Child-Centered Behavior	-.25 $p<.01$.28 $p<.005$

Relation Between Child-Centered and Adult-Directed Measures

- Teachers' Adult-Directed and Child-Centered Beliefs are negatively correlated. ($r = -.69, p < .0001$)
The classroom scales of Direct Instruction and Social Climate are negatively correlated. ($r = -.61, p < .0001$)
- Parents' Adult-Directed and Child-Centered Beliefs are not significantly correlated.
- Parents' reports of Adult-Directed and Child-Centered in-home behavior are not significantly correlated.

Relation Between Parents' Educational Goals, Reported Behavior and Beliefs

Parents' Educational Goals	Parents' Endorsement of Adult-Directed Strategies	Parent's Endorsement of Child-Centered Strategies	Parents' Report of Adult-Directed Behavior	Parents' Report of Child-Centered Behavior
Social Skills	NS	$r = .27$ $p < .01$	NS	NS
Independence	NS	$r = .34$ $p < .001$	NS	$r = .20$ $p < .05$
Self-Concept	NS	$r = .20$ $p < .05$	$r = .20$ $p < .05$	$r = .20$ $p < .05$
Creativity	NS	$r = .31$ $p < .001$	NS	$r = .29$ $p < .01$
Basic Academic Skills	$r = .31$ $p < .01$	NS	$r = .26$ $p < .01$	NS
Cooperation	$r = .19$ $p < .05$	NS	$r = .28$ $p < .01$	NS
Knowledge	$r = .31$ $p < .001$	NS	$r = .23$ $p < .05$	NS
Workhabits	NS	NS	$r = .33$ $p < .001$	NS
Motor Skills	$r = .35$ $p < .001$	NS	NS	NS

Conclusions

- Parents and teachers do have coherent, organized systems of beliefs about early-childhood education, and these beliefs correspond to child-centered and adult-directed approaches.
 1. The systematic nature of these beliefs is indicated by the positive relationship between parents' endorsement of child-centered approaches, parents' valuing social and self-concept goals for education, and parents' reports of child-centered teaching. Similarly, parents' endorsement of teacher-directed approaches is related to their valuing academic and task-related goals and to reports of adult-directed in-home teaching.
 2. For parents, endorsement of child-centered and adult-directed teaching approaches are not correlated, indicating that these represent distinct sets of beliefs.
 3. For teachers, endorsement of child-centered and adult-directed teaching approaches are highly correlated, indicating that for teachers these approaches may be seen as opposing ends of a single continuum.
- Parent's beliefs and behaviors are systematically correlated, so that parents report engaging in the type of behaviors which they believe are effective.
- Parents' beliefs and reported behavior are highly and systematically related to the classroom instruction their child receives.
- Parents' beliefs and reported behavior are highly and systematically related to the beliefs of their child's teacher.

Directions for Future Research

- We are currently conducting a study to examine the relationship between parents' report of their behavior and their actual teaching behavior with their children.
- Research is needed to determine the causal relationship between parent and school variables.
 1. Are parents choosing schools because the school's teaching strategy matches the parent's beliefs?

OR

2. Are parents' beliefs a result of information provided by the school (either through communication from the teacher or through observation of classroom activities)?
- The different relationships for the beliefs scales for teachers and parents deserve future study. Why do parents appear to consider child-centered and adult-directed approaches independently, while teachers seem to consider them as opposing perspectives?



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