Home-School Differences: What it Means for Kindergarten Readiness

Differences between Home and School Environments Matter – But Differently Than You May Think

Differences between home and school environments are a topic of longstanding interest and often of concern. The "match" between home and school in terms of child-rearing beliefs and socialization practices can affect the ease with which children adapt to school and ultimately their success in meeting school expectations. With growing numbers of children coming to school from different ethnic and cultural groups, this issue is taking on new relevance for school readiness, especially since teachers of these children rarely reflect similar ethnic and cultural diversity. This discrepancy could facilitate and exacerbate the impact of a home-school mismatch, conferring advantage to children who come from home environments resembling that of the school and demanding more adjustment to the ways and expectations of school from children representing different ethnic and cultural groups.

Typically, discussions of home-school match examine the extent to which home and school environments are similar or different from one another. Usually they begin with the assumption that similarity of beliefs and practices lead to better outcomes for children. This study examines that assumption and raises the question of whether measuring only the presence or absence of a match between home and school environments may mask important differences that have meaning for children's success in school.

By raising this question, this study stretches current thinking, questioning what represents a home-school match, and challenging whether a "match" is always positive. It goes beyond absolute statements of same or different to explore categories of differences – specifically differences in adult- and child-centered child-rearing beliefs and socialization practices revolving around levels of adult control and support in their interactions with children. Delving more deeply into variations between parents' and teachers' beliefs and practices in this regard, it explored the consequences of the *directionality of home-school differences* for pre-kindergarten (pre-k) children's academic and social-emotional competence at the beginning of kindergarten by observing 310 children in 40 pre-k classrooms across 6 states, each with large publically-funded pre-k programs. Of the 310 children, 145 children (47%) were Euro American, 89 (29%) were African American, and 76 (24%) were Latino. While teachers were mostly Euro American (56%), the teachers observed were also African American (20%), Latino (14%), and Multiracial/Asian (10%).

Terms

<u>Child-rearing Beliefs</u>: Adult viewpoints on how children should be treated

<u>Directionality of Home-School Differences</u>: Extent to which parent and teacher beliefs and socialization practices lean in the same way

<u>Home-School "Match"</u>: Similarity of parents' and teachers' beliefs and socialization practices

<u>Socialization Practices</u>: Adult actions that prepare children for success in their particular environment(s)

Digging Deeper to Understand Differences in Home and School Environments

<u>Overview of the Study.</u> Beyond confirming whether a match or mismatch exists between home and school, this study questioned (1) the *nature and direction of the home-school match or mismatch*, including where parents and teachers of pre-k children differ from one another in terms of their child-rearing beliefs and socialization practices, and (2) the impact of home-school differences on children's kindergarten readiness.

Three Study Questions

1. What is the overall prevalence of home-school match and mismatch in public pre-k programs on socialization beliefs and practices?
2. Does the prevalence of match vary by racial/ethnic group membership?
3. Is home-school match in pre-k related to children's academic and social-emotional competence at the beginning of kindergarten?

Six categories of possible match/mismatch between parents' (92% of whom were mothers) and teachers' were examined:

1. <u>Authoritarian</u> adults tend to focus on their own needs and desires. They typically make demands of children and expect them to do as they're told. Children's interests and needs rarely are addressed or used to influence adult decision making.
2. <u>Child-centered</u> adults respond to children's interests and needs and use them to guide interactions, sometimes by following a child's lead (e.g., pausing while walking somewhere to explore an interesting object) or re-directing a child to an adult's request while simultaneously considering the child's interest or need (e.g., why don't you carry your truck while walking upstairs?).
3. Adults relying on <u>low control</u> respect children's desire for independence, providing them with reasonable freedom (in light of safety and other constraints) and offering decision making opportunities (e.g., letting children make choices among activities or select what to do during a block of time).
4. Adults who interact with children using <u>high levels of control</u> tend to be rigid and focused on adult chosen and managed activities. Children's spontaneity is discouraged, and they are offered few if any choices or opportunities to make their own decisions.
5. Adults who provide <u>high levels of support</u> to children tend to be warm and supportive, encouraging children to pursue their individual interests by providing additional time, asking questions, and offering responsive comments.
6. Adults who provide <u>low support</u> during their interactions with children tend to be more focused on their own needs and desires and less attentive to children's need for support; they offer limited encouragement, assistance, or response when children are trying to pursue their own interests or express their needs.

Parents and teachers self-reported their beliefs about children and were observed in their home and school settings to record control and support practices. School readiness was measured by kindergarten teacher ratings and multiple standardized direct assessments that examined children's vocabulary, language skills, and problem-solving abilities.

The findings confirmed the importance of broadening thinking about home-school match. Of particular relevance to practitioners are four findings:

- While affirming that a greater home-school mismatch exists for African-American and Latino children versus Euro Americans, the mere fact of a difference between home and school environments (versus differences in nature and direction of the home-school match/mismatch) was not related to children's readiness for kindergarten unless the direction and content of the difference were considered.

- Children in pre-k programs gained greater skills when their parents and teachers both demonstrated low control and high support during interactions.

- Contrary to conventional thinking about the importance of home-school match, children were less prepared for kindergarten when their parents and teachers were both adult-centered, were controlling, and offered limited amounts of support.

- Sometimes a home-school mismatch was advantageous. When either parents or teachers were adult-centered, controlling, and provided limited support, children benefited from experiencing a mismatch between home and school, i.e., experiencing in at least one setting child-centered adults who were supportive and responsive to their interests and needs.

> The benefits of matching child-rearing beliefs and socialization practices at home and in school vary depending on the type and direction of the match between families and teachers.

Linking Research to Practice

This study extended the meaning of home-school differences. While only a first step in exploring the categorical nature and direction of these differences, it offers insights for teacher practices on a topic of growing significance.

- Child-centered teacher-child interactions that offer children appropriate levels of independence and provide high levels of support promote children's readiness for kindergarten. Even when interacting with families holding different child-rearing and socialization beliefs, teachers should continue strengthening these practices to facilitate children's school readiness.

- Given that these home-school differences in child-rearing beliefs and socialization practices do exist, teachers also need training and support in how to negotiate respectful relationships with parents who may have different perspectives on how children learn and what role adults play in this process.