

CSR Connection

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Factors Influencing Levels of Parental Involvement: Findings from Research

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An important question for current education policy and comprehensive school reform (CSR), and one that has received little attention, is "What are the determinants of parental involvement?" Though much emphasis has been placed on understanding the effects of parental involvement, the answer to this question of why parents choose to become involved or remain uninvolved in their children's education still eludes us. Finding an answer will help states, districts and schools to create and implement parental involvement programs that meet the CSR legislation's requirement for research-based strategies.

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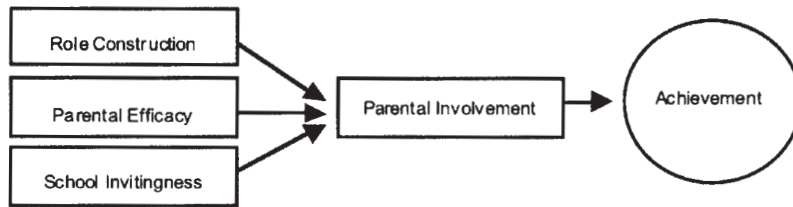
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The Theory: Three Determinants of Parental Involvement

Funded by NCCSR, our research team attempted to gain a better understanding of the motivating factors leading to parental involvement through an examination of the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (HDS) model (1997) of parental involvement. In this five-level model, three research-based factors are named in the primary level as influencing levels

Level 1 of HDS (below)



In the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model, how parental involvement relates to achievement is essentially a two step process: Variability in parental involvement is predicted by parents' sense of efficacy, role construction, and the school's level of invitation. This involvement then predicts variability in student achievement outcomes.

of parental involvement: parental role construction, parental self-efficacy, and school invitingness.

Role construction signifies how parents construct their roles as parents in general and in regard to their children's education in particular. Some parents, for example, adopt a passive view of their role, perhaps believing that their children's education falls under the umbrella of the school system. Other parents view themselves as an integral, active part of their children's education. Parental efficacy measures how effective parents believe they are in terms of helping their children succeed in school. The construct of school invitingness indexes the frequency that schools actually invite parents to be involved in their children's schools.

According to the HDS model, in combination parental role construction, parental efficacy and school invitingness (hereafter referred to as HDS factors) predict parental involvement and, indirectly, affect student achievement.

The Study: What Is the Evidence Behind the Prediction of the HDS Factors?

We designed a study to discover whether the foundation level of the HDS model is supported in the data from a national survey. Our main research question was, "Do the HDS factors predict parental involvement in middle and high schools?" We

define parental involvement as direct parental participation in school activities and functions.

Using data from the Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey – a dataset of information on parents and their students in the Kindergarten through 12th grades – of the 1996 National Household Education Survey (NHES) (NCES, 1996), we examined the promising HDS model's determinants of parental involvement. Specifically, NHES data on middle and high school students and their parents were chosen for statistical analysis. (This sample was selected because research suggests that parents of these populations are less likely to be involved in their children's schools; thus, evidence-based information about determinants of parental involvement for these populations is in high demand [Crosnoe, 2001, Ramirez, 2001].)

To create reliable measures, we selected the questions from the NHES related to each of the HDS factors. Parental efficacy was indexed by questions that asked parents how confident they felt in helping their children with science, math, and English homework as well as how frequently they helped their children with homework. School invitingness drew on 16 items to index the school's level of outreach to parents to inform them of a wide variety of issues from their student's performance to community activities. Only for role construction were indirect measures of the construct used, due to the lack of available information in the dataset.

For this variable we retrieved information provided by parents about their community involvement (e.g., community service, voting, and volunteer for a political campaign). We suggest that parents who are active in their communities are also more likely to have an active orientation toward their children's education. Data on parents' attendance at school and teacher meetings, and other school events were used to define parental involvement.

The Findings: HDS Factors Predict Parental Involvement

Together, the HDS factors do predict parental involvement. In the full 1996 sample, the three factors accounted for 18% of the variance in parental involvement ($p < .001$). This means that almost one-fifth of the differences in parental involvement were related to variation in the HDS factors; in statistical terms this constitutes a medium effect size. From the greatest to least influential, each of the following factors was a statistically significant predictor: role construction, school invitingness, and parental efficacy. Parental efficacy was only weakly related to involvement.

We examined the significance of the prediction across several groups, including gender (males vs. females), school type (middle vs. high school), household income level ($< \$25,000$ vs. $> \$25,000$), highest parent education level ($<$ high school vs. high school grade vs. some college vs. college grad vs. graduate degree), and ethnicity (Caucasian vs. African

American vs. Hispanic). The significance generally held across all groups. Parental efficacy, however, was found not to predict involvement in less-advantaged groups, among parents of high school students, and of parents with a graduate degree or higher. Additionally, role construction was not a statistically significant predictor of involvement for parents that did not graduate from high school. The effects for school invitingness generalized across all groups.

Limitations

Working with the 1996 NHES dataset meant that the survey questions were determined before our research question was; thus, in creating the HDS factor constructs we were limited. For example, we admit that our narrow definition of efficacy—confidence in helping with homework—might not capture the full flavor of the construct. Also narrow was the definition of parental involvement: direct participation in school activities and functions. While this is perhaps the most obvious way that parents can be involved in their children's education, there are important involvement activities not measured, including parental expectations for academics and provision of a home setting conducive to learning.

Conclusion

Our recent research supports the link between role construction, parental efficacy, and school invitingness with parental

Summary of HDS factors predicting direct parental involvement in schools in the full sample of the 1996 NHES Survey

HDS Factor	Beta	Significance
Role Construction	0.33	0.001
School Invitingness	0.20	0.001
Parental Efficacy	0.07	0.001
1996 EQN Stats: $R^2 = 0.18$; $F(3,5420)=394.98$, $p < .001$		

involvement. The significance of the influence these HDS factors had on parental involvement suggests that efforts to foster these factors may offer great returns on investment in terms of parental involvement. Though more research should be done before budget dollars and human resources are redirected toward such efforts, certain messages from this research can be heeded:

- Combined, the three HDS factors are important predictors for levels of parental involvement (although the influences of parental efficacy and role construction on parental involvement were weak for some groups).
- By far the most consistent predictor of parental involvement was school invitingness. Schools interested in fostering parental involvement would be wise to establish outreach programs to improve the school's invitingness to parents.

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