



Family-school partnership: key points from literature review

This literature review aims to present the main dimensions of the current state when it comes to theorizing and research on parental involvement as one of the important assets of school outcomes improvement.

Epstein's Theory of Parent Involvement

Joyce Epstein is one of the most frequently cited authors when it comes to theorizing about parental involvement (Epstein, 1996). In Epstein's opinion, schools and families share responsibilities for the socialisation of the child. Concepts of family-like school and school-like family are used to stress that the family needs to recognize that child is a learner to whom the importance of school, homework and learning in general needs to be pointed out, while the school is to make every child feel special, accepted and included as it is within the family. Similar principles go also for the community level and its interaction with both families and schools.

Epstein and her colleagues (1996) have proposed a framework of parent involvement that includes six main types of activities that connect families, schools, and communities: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, collaboration with the community.

Sheridan and Kratochwill's model of family-school partnership

Family-school partnership is a perspective that can be used in comprehensive analysis of various factors influencing and promoting the overall child development, primarily focusing on the interweaving roles of two key agents in education and socialization: family and school. Analyzing the specific facets of the family-school partnership, Sheridan and Kratochwill tend to put a special stress on the two of them: collaborative relationships and shared responsibility for the educational outcomes.

Collaborative approach to schooling issues between the family and the school are defined primarily by trust, which opens the door to good and sincere communication, and supports consensual decision making. Only if both of the partners see each other as equal can their efforts jointly contribute to the best outcomes for children.

Literature review on parental involvement suggests that there are a few dimensions of this problem that need to be taken into account.

Parent-teacher expectations and their importance for educational outcomes

- Diamond and Gomez (2004) - parents develop "role constructions," defined as parents' expectations of themselves with regard to parent involvement and their actual involvement practices based on these expectations
 - Poulou and Matsagouras (2007) have conducted a study in order to analyze parents' perceptions of teacher's role, their own role, their involvement activities and the areas of cooperation with teachers, the main findings pointed that there is a clear differentiation between teachers and parent's roles: while teachers are expected to organize the learning and to inform the parents on the child's academic progress, parents are responsible for child's social and emotional development; parents prefer formal ways of communicating with teachers, such as parent-teacher conferences, help with children's misconduct in school, informing the teachers about the child – „concrete and superficial relation with the
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teachers“; teachers perceive their roles as very distinct from parents and “conceptualize their cooperation in rather limited and schoolcentred way”.

- Deslandes & Rousseau (2007) examined the congruence between teachers’ and parent’s role construction and their expectations regarding their involvement in homework; the study had shown that the attitudes parents have towards school are very important, since the ones with more positive attitudes perceived their role in doing homework as more important.
- Evangelia Boutskou (2007) aimed at understanding the ways of special education teachers’ (as well as the teachers’ in integration units) perceive the parents and their roles in schooling of their children; parents that cooperate with the teachers are identified as caring, while the others are considered to be non-caring, while it is also assumed that the caring parents do not question the quality of teachers’ work and their children show progress.
- Nada Polovina (2007) - there is an agreement between school employees, students and their parents that the parental involvement and presence in schools needs to be more significant; still, parents ranked it as priority number one, while for teacher’s it was on 5th place and for students on the 10th (Stankovic, according to Polovina, 2007); most of the parents lack the information and school assistance on how to support learning of their children; absenteeism and lower achievement are correlated with lower frequency of meetings with teachers; parent-teacher relations are burdened by dissatisfaction, frustrations and “readiness to quit and disengage”, while the expectations of the other side are very high (teacher expected a lot from parents and vice versa).

Predictors of parental involvement

- Smit, Driessen, Sluiter and Slegers (2007) one of the most interesting findings is the one regarding the types of parents and the appropriate strategies for their involvement; authors identify 6 types of parents: the supporter, the absentee, the politician, the career-maker, the tormentor, the super parent.
 - Waanders, Mendez & Downer (2007) analyzed the parent’s involvement in education within Head Start programs, paying special attention to factors that boosted this participation; their study had shown that involvement during preschool is determined by multiple factors.
 - Stelios Georgiou (2007) centred his study around the questions of the characteristics of parents that tend to get involved and the strategies to encourage the parent participation; perceiving themselves as more efficient and seeing their role closer to teachers promotes parental involvement; parents involvement depends on parents perceptions of their beliefs and thoughts about themselves as parents – they need to believe „they are able to make a difference“ (Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler and Brissie, 1992)
 - Markward and her colleagues (Markward et al., 2006) examined socio-political control among the parents of school-age children; the authors have proved that there is a significant lack of sense of policy control and the interest in community-based activities on the local level, which may also explain why people living in similar life and societal conditions may have not be too interested in participating in the decision-making process and policy issues regarding schooling.
 - Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) are well known for insisting on the importance of the way parents construct their roles for their actual involvement; belonging to different groups and associations means being subjected to their explicit and implicit norms and expectations which, as a consequence has the fact that over time these expectations get „recursive“, influencing the nature, patterns and intensity of parent involvement - the intensity of group expectations also mediates the patterns of parental involvement; there are 3 main sources of parental involvement: psychological motivators promoting involvement, perceived invitations
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to involvement, parent's perceptions about life context elements that enable involvement

- Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2007) report on the study which resulted on proposing a revised model of parental involvement process; there is a need for differentiating between home- and school-based involvements.
- Adams, Forsyth and Mitchell (2009) report on a study antecedents of parent trust toward schools; main finding of the study reveal that parent trust varies by factors that affect the opportunities for parents to make discernments about the trustworthiness of the school, that differences in organizational characteristics of school lead to variation in parent-school trust most of the inter-school variability can be explained by the parents' sense of influence and that systematic steps taken by the school taken in order to enhance the parent influence results in more trust

Teacher's practices of parental involvement

- Seitsinger, Felner, Brand & Burns (2008) presented a study aiming to identify the key indicators that can be used in assessing the strategies schools use attempting to facilitate parent involvement; results had revealed that there are three underlying factors characterizing the strategies teachers use for facilitating parent involvement at the classroom level: informing the parents on student performance and problems, providing the information and recommendations on increasing the involvement in academics, providing the connections with health and community institutions; the more often the teachers simply reach for parents, the more often parents from all socioeconomic groups tend to put some effort in engaging in the school life.
- According to Benson (1999), parental involvement is a world of "multiple realities", so the challenge for educators and parents is to find ways to work collaboratively based on each other's reality in the best interest of the child's development, achievement and success; partnership models provide conceptual scaffolding upon which collaborative relationships between parents and teachers can develop; while each partnership model has its strengths and weaknesses, their common feature is insisting on two-way communication between home and school.
- In the study of conditional aspects of school-home conversations, Anne Dorthe Tveit (2007) tried to determine if school and family communications can be characterized as a dialogue; she provides some valuable examples of both violating this general rule, and acting in accordance with the principles.
- Eleni Theodorou (2007) pays special attention on problematizing the assumptions behind the wide-spread practices for fostering parent involvement since the minority and immigrant families might be under the risk of "becoming marginalized while being held responsible for getting 'involved'"; she claims that although the parental involvement issues have arisen on a large wave of discussions about the school democratization, it actually failed in recognizing the potentially harmful implications for vulnerable groups.

Teacher and parent perceptions of parental involvement

- Lawson (2003) has conducted an ethnographic study with a group of teachers and African American parents that is very important since it gave a good picture on how disparate can be these perceptions; main finding of the study is that teachers' and parents' perceptions of parental involvement significantly differ - parents' and teacher's narratives are organized around different subjects: while parents are concerned about communitycentric pathways, teacher-parent communication, trust in schooling, aspirations for the school to become communityserving institution, teachers were concerned with parents' involvement as defined
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by the teachers, teacher's beliefs and attributions, teachers' loneliness, scepticism and withdrawal in the process of school reform; the origin of unsatisfactory teacher-parent communication is perceived to lie within the school who should initiate the collaboration by being more responsive to parental and children's needs; deficiency in this school initiative is sometimes interpreted as the lack of school's interest for involving the parents; school teachers and staff members couple notions of expertise with deficit assumptions about how children's academic aptitude relates to parental caring, which induces the parents' sense of powerlessness and outrage; teachers define parental involvement in terms of parents' and families' readiness to cooperate and meet the school needs as set by the teachers

Effects of parental involvement

- William H. Jaynes (2007) presented one of the most comprehensive meta-analysis on the relationship of parental involvement and secondary school achievement, including 52 studies in his review
- Wendy Miedel Barnard (2004) has conducted a very comprehensive study trying to determine if home involvement is associated with long-term school success; the significance of this study is in the fact that it did not examine just the association between parent involvement in elementary school and indicators of school success at age 14 and age 20, but also found a significant association between parent involvement in early school and long-term school success.

Theoretical and methodological considerations regarding the concept of parental involvement

- Bakker and Dannesen (2007) provide as with an interesting analysis of the ways parental involvement was conceptualized and measured, trying to provide a convincing argumentation that this issue needs to have special attention in a study of involvement; the authors claim the term parental involvement refers to a variety of parental behaviours that directly or indirectly influence children's cognitive development and school achievement.
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