

## FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP MODELS

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### 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. Therefore, her theory of overlapping spheres of influence posits that the work of the most effective families and schools overlap and they share goals and missions. There are three most important contexts in which children grow and develop: family, school and community. Although some practices of school and family are conducted separately, there are some important things that need to be done conjointly by these contexts, reflecting the shared responsibilities of parents and educators.

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.

Since it is assumed that the child is the reason for the connections between home and school, the model focuses on the key role of the child as student in interactions between families and schools, parents and teachers, or the community. If children feel cared for and encouraged to work hard in the role of student, they are more likely to do their best academically, and to remain in school.

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: families are to provide for the health and safety of children, and create a home environment that encourages learning and good behaviour in school; schools should provide training and information to help families understand and promote their children's development;
- communicating: schools should be accountable for reaching the families and providing them with the information about the school progress and student performance/progress; means of communication should be appropriate for parents and their cultural specificities, while the process needs to be bidirectional;
- volunteering: parents can make significant contributions to the environment and functions of a school; schools can get the most out of this process by creating flexible schedules, so more parents can participate, and by working to match the talents and interests of parents to the needs of students, teachers, and administrators;
- learning at Home: parents can help their children in school-related activities with the guidance and support of teachers;
- decision-making: schools can give parents meaningful roles in the school decision-making process, and help them make the most of it; this opportunity should be open to all segments of the community, not just people who have the most time and energy to spend on school affairs;
- collaboration with the Community: schools should coordinate the work and resources of the community, businesses, colleges or universities, and other groups to strengthen school programmes, family practices and student learning and development; schools can help families

gain access to support services offered by other agencies, such as healthcare, cultural events, tutoring services, and after-school child-care programs.

Still, although there are some recommendations that can be drawn from Epstein's work, she herself argued that good programmes to implement parent involvement would look different in each site, as individual schools tailor their practices to meet the specific needs of students and their families.

### 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 facets of this partnership and the ways for promoting it, Sheridan and Kratochwill (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2007) start by pointing out the key differences between the partnership approach and the traditional way of conceptualizing the family-school relations.

Table 1. The differences between traditional and partnership orientation

Partnership orientation	Traditional orientation
Clear commitment to work together in order to promote child's performance/achievement	Emphasizing the school role in promoting learning
Frequent communication that is bidirectional	Communication initiated just by the school, infrequent and problem-centered
Appreciating the cultural differences and recognizing the importance of its contribution to creating the positive learning climate	"One size fits all" – cultural difference is a challenge that needs to be overcome
Appreciation of the significance of different perspectives	Differences are seen as barriers
Roles are clear, mutual, and supportive	Separate roles distance participants
Goals for students are mutually determined and shared	Goals determined by school, sometimes shared with parents
Plans are co-constructed, with agreed upon roles for all participants	Educational plans devised and delivered by teachers

Analyzing the specific facets of the family-school partnership (these defining characteristics are presented in the Table 2), Sheridan and Kratochwill tend to put a special stress on the two of them: collaborative relationships and shared responsibility for the educational outcomes.

Table 2. Defining characteristics of the family-school partnership

Characteristics	Key indicators
Relationships among partners are <i>collaborative, interdependent, and balanced</i>	Diverse individuals and vantage points work together as coequal parties, share in the identification of goals and solution of problems, and forge trusting relationships More than simply working together, the notion of partnerships involves a fundamental restructuring of how individuals work together across home and school systems Roles are complementary – each partner makes a unique contribution that is mutually beneficial All have generally equal opportunity in decision making
Responsibilities for educating and	Resources, power, and responsibilities are shared

socializing children are shared	Goals are mutually determined Outcomes achieved in the context of the partnership are uniquely superior to those achieved by any one party in isolation
Maintenance of a <i>positive relationship</i> is a priority	Failure to develop relationships can undermine the formation of successful partnerships Personal needs are put aside to allow the needs and goals of the partnership to take precedence To be successful, partners must believe that the other person is trustworthy, is working toward a mutually held goal, and holds positive regard toward the other All believe that the partnership and the anticipated outcomes are worthy of the expenditure of time and energy necessary for its maintenance
Services are <i>flexible, responsive, and proactive</i>	Unique family–school contexts define the form the partnership takes
<i>Differences in perspectives</i> are seen as strengths	A range of diverse experiences, skills, and views are brought to bear on the solution of problems Unique knowledge, resources, talents, and expertise brought by parents and educators enhance the potential outcomes for students
There is a commitment to <i>cultural competence</i>	Cultural values and traditions of the family and school are respected Services that are sensitive to important cultures and traditions of schools and families are most likely to be effective
Emphasis is on <i>outcomes and goal attainment</i>	Partnerships have clearly specified goals, and progress is monitored through data-based decision-making processes Programs are not offered because they are available; rather, they are considered fully with attention to the degree to which they fit within the overarching priorities of the partnership

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.

When it comes to shared responsibility, in traditional perspective (actually being the operating principle in majority of the schools) it is missing. Still, blaming just the school or just the family for a child's failure does not promote the partnership, but prevents it from endorsing the development in complementary ways.

The authors point to a few theories underlying the concept of partnership: ecological theory, behavioural theory, family-centred approach and then describe a shift towards a partnership-centred approach.

Ecological theory is concerned with the multiple interdependable, inseparable systems or environments environments and contexts that surround the children's development and education:

- microsystems: home, classroom
- mesosystems: the interrealation of mycrosystems
- exosystem: influencing the mycrosystems – e.g. parent's working environment that supports parental involvement or produces various obstacles for it
- macrosystems: overall societal and cultural setting, including national educational policies.

The key input taken from this theory is the importance of mesosystem, the interaction of two most important microsystems in education.

The behavioural theory is important since it stresses the importance of learning, and focuses on the “here and now” of the situation – identifying the environmental (in contrast to personal, dispositional) factors that influence the family-school interaction.

Both the family and school are in the focus of a partnership-centred approach: “Needs are jointly determined by members in the partnership (i.e., families, educators, consultants) and are not solely professionally or family determined... Finally, strengthening of social supports includes the support networks shared by educators and family members, who derive support from the partnership itself.” (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2007)

Sheridan and Kratochwill’s approach is therefore ecological-behavioural, blending the strengths of both approaches: paying attention to behaviour but having on mind the systematic influences of the interweaving environments.

The authors still go beyond these two approaches including the family-centred services (FCS), since empowering, strengthening the family is necessary for an effective partnership. Therefore, in order to form such a partnership between the school and the family, it is important to identify needs, mobilize the resources, and accomplish goals through the development of family capacities, strengths and abilities.

From a partnership-centered orientation, authors pay special attention to the development of skills and competencies of both family members and educators.

The authors identify three main goals of family-school partnership:

- creating meaningful roles for family members in supporting their child’s learning
- promoting continuity
- enhancing competencies of all participants.

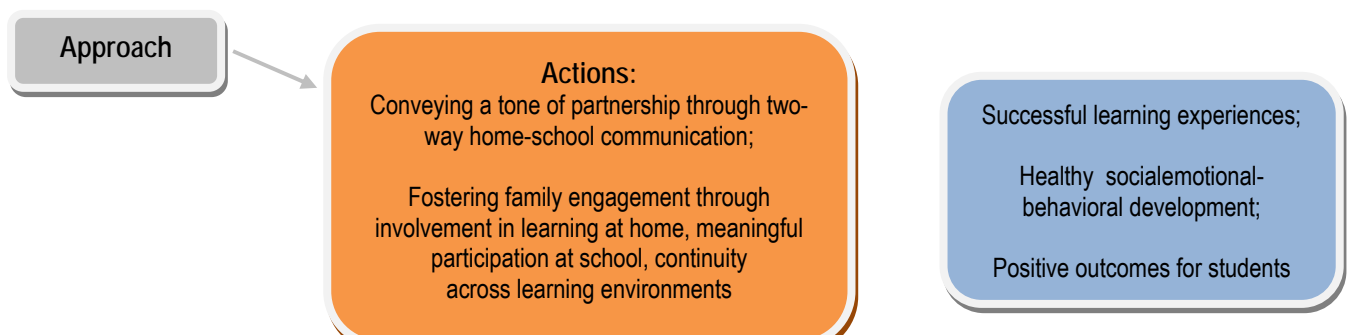
Some of the studies cited by the authors reveal that just 25% of variance in children’s achievement can be ascribed to differences in socioeconomic status and the structure of the family, but that even 60% of the variance can be predicted by the “family process variables” – the things families actually do to facilitate learning and academic success.

The family process variables are referred to as the “curriculum of the home” (Walberg, cf. Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2007), stressing the active role of the parent in creating the positive learning environment.

Continuity across home and school is important since it supports effective learning transitions. Authors cite the results of an ethnographic study that had shown that low-achieving students often reported the discontinuity between the family, school and peers when it comes to, e.g. valuing the aspects of cultural differences such as values, beliefs, knowledge, skills. The lack of this congruence within the child–family–school system significantly influenced the academic achievement (Phelan, Davidson, and Yu, according to Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2007).

Figure 1. The “four A’s of partnership” (adapted from Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2007)

**Prerequisite Conditions:**  
These “3A’s” must be in place for  
Actions to be accepted and effective





The first A stands for approach: the school needs to assume a vis-à-vis family participation while there has to be a shared responsibility for educational outcomes. Second A stands for attitudes: both the school and the family need to share the idea that together they can accomplish more than is the simple sum of their individual potentials. The third A is for atmosphere: schools need to become “family-friendly communities”, building the partnership on a mutual trust. The fourth A, or actions relate to all the strategies of practices that enable building the successful family-school partnership.

The four A's consequently lead to satisfying educational outcomes: successful learning experiences, overall healthy development and general positive outcomes.

## STUDYING THE PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

In our further analysis we will focus on the research evidence that will help us understand the key dimensions in studying the parental involvement:

- parent-teacher expectations and their importance for educational outcomes
- predictors of parental involvement
- teacher's practices of parental involvement
- teacher and parent perceptions of parental involvement
- effects of parental involvement
- theoretical and methodological considerations regarding the concept of parental involvement

### Parent-teacher expectations and their importance for educational outcomes

Mutual perceptions of their roles in schooling shape the interaction patterns of schools/teachers and parents, influencing the educational outcomes indirectly, partly by parental involvement. Exploring both parents' and teacher's perceptions is therefore necessary for the encouragement of parents' participation in schools. Still, when it comes to reviewing the research on this issue, it must be admitted that there are a very few of them. Among those worth mentioning are a study conducted by Diamond and Gomez (2004), a study conducted on Cyprus by Poulou and Matsagouras (2007), Deslandes & Rousseau study from 2007, Boutskou study (2007) and a study by Polovina (2007).

The framework from which Diamond and Gomez's study originate is based on the fact that parents develop “role constructions,” defined as parents' expectations of themselves with regard to parent involvement and their actual involvement practices based on these expectations (Hoover-Dempsey &

Sandler, cf. Diamond & Gomez, 2004). There are a few points that resulted from their review of relevant literature and from their own study that one might find useful:

- working-class parents place limited value on education, which curtails their involvement in their children's schooling and lowers their children's educational aspirations
- because of racial discrimination in the labour market, African American and Hispanic parents may lower their educational aspirations and expectations for their children
- family resources should be treated as forms of capital: human (knowledge, skills, or expertise), economic (income or wealth), social (networks and relations of trust) and cultural capital (cultural values influencing the attitudes towards schooling); these types of capital compound a multidimensional family capital that needs to be taken into account and serve as a resource for social action;
- perceiving a school and teachers as inherently interested in their children's educational progress and achievement influences the stances parents take toward school and teachers (making pressure on teachers, adopting reform-oriented stances or being supportive).

Still, although Diamond and Gomez's work might be seen as important since it gives an interesting perspective on how the issues of race (or belonging to a specific cultural group) could be deconstructed in order to better understand its influencing the educational contexts, primarily focusing on the issues such as: school choice, educational orientations that depend on the perception of the children's schools, the racial context of African-American parenting does not give us too much space for drawing the conclusions that could be applied in Serbian society.

Therefore, we will now focus on the Cyprus study, since the cultural context is relevant for Serbian society.

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 study was conducted on a sample of 581 parents from Athens, of whom 45% had tertiary education who had filled the inventory on school-family relations.

The main findings of the study can be summarized as follows:

- there is a clear differentiation between teachers and parents' roles;
- 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 teachers“.

Although on a first look these findings may lead to the conclusion that the parent and teacher's roles are seen as complementary and in a practical way, they actually reveal a traditional, „schoolcentered“ model of school-family relations in which there is no clear insisting on direct and honest communication between the school and the family, which suggests that teachers need to find the way for building balanced relationships with the family.

When it comes to teacher expectations, Poulou and Matsagouras (2007) summarize the main findings of their study on the teachers' expectations saying that they too perceive their roles as very distinct from parents and “conceptualize their cooperation in a rather limited and schoolcentred way”.

Deslandes & Rousseau (2007) examined the congruence between teachers' and parents' role construction and their expectations regarding their involvement in homework. This 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. Higher expectations regarding the feedback on homework were identified among the parents that are of higher education and holding more positive attitudes. On the other side, it appears that the teachers expect more from parents than parents are aware, which especially goes for the secondary level of education – they expect them to be by far more involved than they actually are.

A study conducted by 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. She also summarizes the main findings of some other studies on similar issues. First thing that has to be mentioned, is that there is a clear differences of how the parents are perceived by special schools' teachers, and by the teachers in integration units. The teachers from special schools see the parents within a deficit model (a disabled child disables the whole family, the higher the disability level the more difficult it is to cooperate with the parent) where the parents' problems are the obstacles for both children's progress and cooperation with the school. 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. Speaking of parents, teachers actually refer to mothers, deeming them as caring or non-caring. On the other side, the teachers from integration units perceive parents as the consumers of educational services and therefore they are informed, tend to interfere in the education of their children while being driven by individualistic concerns rather than by "collective welfare and rights" and worried about the social stigma.

"Parents are interested in the way you work with the child. Parents intervene in the teachers' work. Parents complain about the classmates in the Integration Unit. They do not want children of lower ability at the Integration Unit and make comparisons all the time... This derives by the fact that both children with disabilities and children with learning difficulties attend the Integration Unit. Once I discussed it with some parents and they accepted that they worried about what people would say for their child..." (Michael)

"Parents do not want their children to attend this class. They do not even want to discuss it. Although the mainstream teacher told parents that "the child has some problems and he will receive more help there (at Integration Unit) and he can overcome his problem." They answered "No, I do not want my child to be mocked by the others and call him stupid." (Leo; cf. Boutskou, 2007)

Here we would like to mention one recent analysis of family-school cooperation in the Serbian society done by Nada Polovina (2007). Polovina's analysis starts from examining the wider context of socio-political change and transition processes within the Serbian society setting a scene for better understanding of the relations of school and the family. A study on these relations was conducted in 2001, when 85 round tables were organized on the issues of democratization of education, so there were around 9000 respondents. The results had shown that there was 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 5<sup>th</sup> place and for students on the 10<sup>th</sup> (Stankovic, according to Polovina, 2007). Most of the parents lack the information and school assistance on how to support learning of their children. The other study Polovina mentions consisted of school documentation analysis. It was concluded that the parents visited the school and contacted the teachers concerned about the issues of grades, school absenteeism, and discipline problems, while the number of visits decreased with the students' age. The absenteeism and lower achievement were correlated with lower frequency of meetings with teachers. In an action study conducted also by Polovina and her associates it proved that the parent-teacher relations were burdened by dissatisfaction, frustrations and "readiness to quit and disengage", while the expectation of

the other side were very high (teacher expected a lot from parents and vice versa). It is obvious that some parallels can be drawn between this study and the results from the Cyprus study – the dominant model of school-family relations is traditional.

### **Who gets involved and why: predictors of parental involvement**

One of the most comprehensive studies on parent involvement was conducted by Smit, Driessen, Sluiter and Slegers (2007). The study consisted of 3 expert panels, web survey with 500 school leaders, a focus group discussion and 20 case studies aiming to identify the effective strategies of parental involvement. One of the most interesting findings is the one regarding the types of parents and the appropriate strategies for their involvement. We here present their typology.

Figure 2. Types of parents (taken from Smit, Driessen, Sluiter and Slegers, 2007)

### THE SUPPORTER

- **Education:** low/medium
- **Characteristics:** satisfied and involved, prepared to help with practical matters, willing to work, an excellent helping hand, pleasant partner, active, available on demand, has sufficient time
- **Key words:** helpful, nice, solid, friendly, creative, sympathetic, joint thinker, harmonious, supportive, enlightening, willing to serve, naive, well-adjusted
- **Suited for:** lending a helping hand, parent committees
- **Not suited for:** school advisory board or school board without first following one or more training courses
- **How to approach:** appeal to sense of solidarity, existence of an alliance, partnership with shared goals

### THE ABSENTEE

- **Education:** low/medium
- **Characteristics:** does not consider him/herself suited to make a contribution, may only participate when asked explicitly, moderately dissatisfied, uninvolved. School has no priority (anymore), leaves choice of school up to chance, impossible to contact, introverted, unapproachable
- **Key words:** loner, quitter, has (almost) no contact with other parents, no friendship relations with the school, uncommunicative, wrestles with cultural gap due to different cultural background
- **Suited for:** school support network, can serve as a bridge to other absentee parents or group of parents
- **Not suited for:** school advisory board, school board, or parent committees without first following one or more training courses
- **How to approach:** look for contact, show interest, enter to discussion of cultural background and children, show empathy, see where you can help, win trust

### THE POLITICIAN

- **Education:** medium/high
- **Characteristics:** desire to help make decisions, exert influence, and be involved; satisfied as long as parent can participate in meetings; critical consumer; extroverted, pays attention to 'democratic' quality of the choice of school
- **Key words:** critical, precise, optimistic, desire to inspire, persuasive
- **Suited for:** school advisory board, school board
- **Not suited for:** actual conduct of helping-hand services
- **How to approach:** appeal to desire to influence school policy, be heard, and hear oneself speak; in order to fully utilize the capacities of this parent, ask him/her to participate on the behalf of parents in the school advisory board or school board

### THE CAREER-MAKER

- **Education:** medium/high
- **Characteristics:** places responsibility for child raising, child care, and education on the school; one-stop-shopping approach; satisfied as long as school takes on all tasks; critical with regard to choice of school; has attitude of 'school is for the parents' and sees teachers as an extension of parents
- **Key words:** aloof, "no news is good news", businesslike, basically all take and no give
- **Suited for:** school advisory board or school board, provided this fits the individual's career prospects
- **Not suited for:** time consuming helping-hand services
- **How to approach:** enter into conversation about work, career, education; mention the functions of school advisory board and school board, interesting people participating in these, and what such participation could mean for career

### THE TORMENTOR

- **Education:** high
- **Characteristics:** feel offended and misunderstood as a result of the school's attitude and own educational experiences; denounces errors on the part of the school as a critical consumer, is an unguided missile for the school team; is only satisfied when the school cringes and takes responsibility for suboptimal functioning
- **Key words:** know-it-all, cold, insensitive, aggressive, conflictual, fighter, theatrical, impatient
- **Suited for:** school advisory board, school board
- **Not suited for:** helping-hand activities, parent committees
- **How to approach:** show real interest in the motives of this parent and his or her (new) ideas regarding child raising and education; be professional but see that the parent remains comfortable; keep your goals in mind; be well-prepared; pose good questions; send a thank you note after meeting, take notes on the conversation; keep the line of communication open

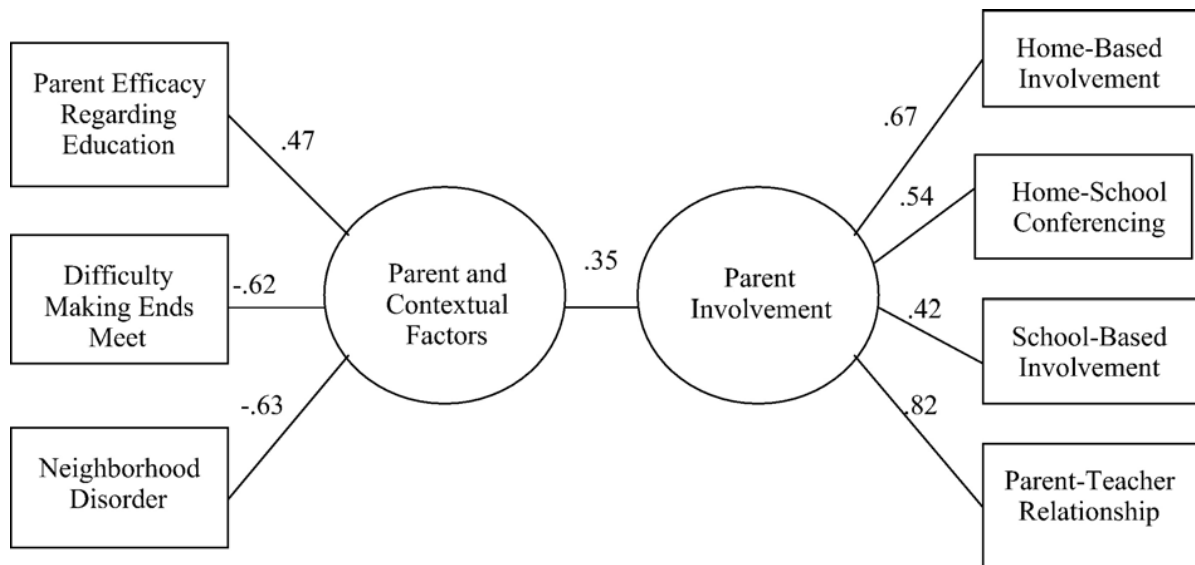
### THE SUPER PARENT

- **Education:** high
- **Characteristics:** feels responsible for child raising and education together with the school; is prepared to support the school alongside a busy job; is willing to invest in the school relation; thinks critically along with the school; contributes good ideas; is prepared to utilize own networks; is satisfied when the school does its best for the performance and well-being of own child and other students
- **Key words:** loyal, ambitious, strengthener, innovative, communicative, inspiring, walking encyclopedia, grows
- **Suited for:** thinking about problems, finding solutions, handling crises, acquisition of funds, school board (chair)
- **Not suited for:** supportive school network
- **How to approach:** show a warm interest in the opinions and expectations of the parent with regard to child raising and education, gauge the need for (greater) involvement, be open to ideas of this parent

We will come back to this study once more, when we start discussing the strategies schools and teachers use in supporting parent involvement.

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.

Figure 3. Model of parent involvement derived for the analysis (taken from Waanders, Mendez & Downer (2007))



The analysis revealed a few important things:

- involvement is a multidimensional construct consisting of home-based involvement, home-school conferencing, school-based involvement and parent-teacher relationship
- there are 3 constructs explaining the parent and contextual factors influencing parent involvement: parent efficiency regarding education (positive contributor), difficulty in making ends meet and neighbourhood disorders (negative effects)
- parent and contextual factors are moderately associated with the construct of parental involvement
- increasing the opportunities for parent visitation with teachers in school settings helps fostering home-school connection during preschool
- home involvement is higher among the parents with higher levels of education, stronger social networks, greater sense of efficacy when it comes to education of their children.

Similar effect of parents' level of education on home involvement and home-school conferencing was also identified in a study conducted by Fantuzzo (Fantuzzo et al., 2000).

Stelios Georgiou (2007) centered his study around the questions of the characteristics of parents that tend to get involved and the strategies to encourage the parent participation. There is a substantial amount of empirical evidence that family SES is a strong predictor of parental involvement, as well as gender, educational level. Still, a few studies tend to go beyond the demographics. Georgiou mentions two important studies that focus on other than SEES.

- perceiving themselves as more efficacious and seeing their role closer to teachers promotes parental involvement (Grolnick, 1996)
- 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)

In a study conducted by Markward and her colleagues (Markward et al., 2006) socio-political control was examined among the parents of school-age children, and, although it was not directly connected with the concept of parental involvement, it has some important implications, being conducted in a postsocialist environment. Namely, 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.

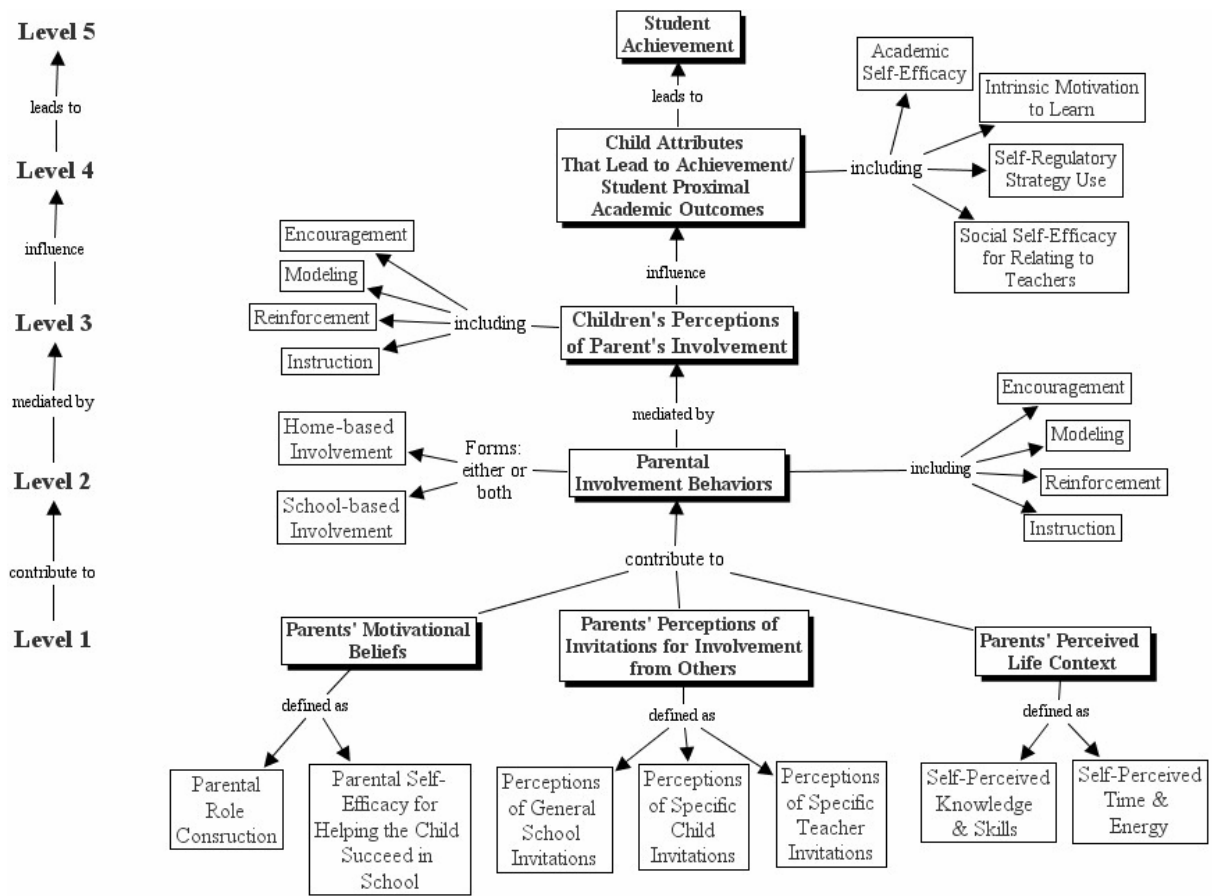
Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) are well known for insisting on the importance of the way parents construct their roles for their actual involvement. Belonging to different groups and associations means being subjected to their explicit and implicit norms and expectations which, as a consequence has the fact that over time these expectations get „recursive“, influencing the nature, patterns and intensity of parent involvement. Therefore, the height of group expectations also mediate the patterns of parental involvement.

Summarizing the research finding in this area, Hoover-Dempsey (2007) points to 3 main sources of parental involvement:

- psychological motivators promoting involvement
  - ✓ parental beliefs (they believe they *should* be involved)
  - ✓ parent has a sense of efficacy for helping the child's school success („it will make a difference“, „I feel successful about my efforts to help my child learn“)
- perceived invitations to involvement
  - ✓ school invitations (e.g. structure, management practices, welcoming school climate, school practices that ensure that parents are well informed about student progress)
  - ✓ child invitations („My child asked me to help explain something about his or her homework“)
  - ✓ specific teacher invitations („My child's teacher asked me or expected me to supervise my child's homework“)
- parent's perceptions about life context elements that enable involvement
  - ✓ parent believes to have knowledge and skills helpful for child's school success (individuals with the same level of skills and knowledge may perform differently given variations in personal efficacy beliefs about what one can do with that set of skills and knowledge, „I know enough about the subjects of my child's homework to help him or her“)
  - ✓ parent believes to have time and energy for involvement („I have enough time and energy to attend special events at school“).

Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2007) report on the study which resulted on proposing a revised model of parental involvement process.

Figure 4. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) revised model of the parental involvement process



As previously said, most of the models explaining the reasons of parental involvement did not go beyond the demographics which gives the additional importance for this study. Authors of this study had proved that parental involvement is primarily influenced by the relationships with teachers, children and relevant aspects of the context, while SES was not additionally predictive of it - there are other causal components

beyond SES and parental involvement that influence both variables. The other vital finding regards the need for differentiating between home- and school-based involvement.

Home-based involvement:

“Specifically, parental role activity beliefs, parental self-efficacy, specific child invitations, and parental perceptions of time and energy predicted significant amounts of variance. General invitations to involvement from the school, specific teacher invitations, and self-perceived skills and knowledge were not significant predictors, although all three constructs were significantly correlated with home-based involvement.”, (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler 2007)

School-based involvement:

“...parental role activity beliefs, parental self-efficacy, specific teacher invitations, specific child invitations, and parental reports of time and energy for involvement were significant predictors. General invitations for involvement from the school and skills and knowledge were not significant predictors, although both constructs were significantly correlated with school-based involvement.”, (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler 2007)

## Re-examining teachers practices of parental involvement

There is a substantial amount of research evidence suggesting that parental involvement is important in improving the overall academic achievement of children as well as in developing a general positive attitude towards school and schooling: there is no doubt that parent engaging in education is the essential part of high performing schools. A shift in understanding the parent role in schooling that moved the parents “from outsiders to partners in transforming schools, blurring boundaries between school and home, school and community, and faculty and families” (Seitsinger, Felner, Brand & Burns, 2008) was therefore a logical consequence. Still, what can be questioned are the best practices in promoting parental involvement.

Starting from identifying teacher-parent-contact-practices (TCP), Seitsinger and her colleagues presented a study aiming to identify the key indicators that can be used in assessing the strategies schools use attempting to facilitate parent involvement. The analysis and conclusions the authors have presented are based on a longitudinal study which lasted for 5 years and included 35,000 teachers, 89,000 students and 45,000 parents, which can be considered as a good starting point for providing us with the reliable data. The 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.

Still, what appears to be more vital is a very simple finding: 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. Although it seemed that parental involvement tends to decline with the age of their children, it proved not to be necessary, since it was mediated by the teachers' efforts to include them. Reaching for parents more often was also positively correlated with students' levels of academic adjustment.

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. Partnerships need to be adapted to fit:

- specific conditions of family
- demographics
- student developmental needs,
- school structures
- community resources.

Innovations - such as parent centres, homework 'hotlines', home visits, parent coordinators, teachers as 'ethnographers', parent-teacher teaming, parent education and training, three-way conferences, and 'schools in the community' – are particularly promising ways to foster two-way communication, emotional understanding, cohesion between school practices and parent support roles, and involvement of community resources. However, unless real rather than illusory power is shared with parents, who are willing and able to accept the responsibilities that go with it, the notion of parent-teacher partnership will be "hollow words".

Previously mentioned study by Smit, Driessen, Sluiter and Slegers (2007) provided us with the inventory of types of parents and specific school strategies that are to be used in order to facilitate parental involvement. The strategies authors describe are formed around a few key points:

- development of a vision of parental participation;
- expansion of the visibility and approachability of the school team via the creation of contact moments;
- attention to the concerns of parents;
- connection to what parents find interesting;
- an eye for the quality of the communication between school and parents;
- stimulation of creativity and initiative;
- giving parents time to learn something from the school team.

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 the valuable examples of both violating this general rule, and acting in accordance with the principles.

Positive practices identified are:

- focusing on positive aspects of child's performance when providing the feedback to parents in order to stress child's potential that can be used for overcoming the difficulties a child might be experiencing; still, this focus should not misrepresent the real achievement of the child;
- taking the parental perspective by teachers help them understand which type of feedback is useful for them in order to be able to help the child in achieving the future educational and developmental goals
- sincerity of the conversation is crucial, although there are things that need to be said „in a diplomatic way“
- „it's not only what you say, but how you say it“ – treating a parent gently when in need of delivering a bad news is important in building trust and openness in the teacher-parent relationship
- having a strategic orientation, not being focused just on here and now, but on building a successful partnership.

In her study on the assumptions and implications of parental involvement, 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'". Namely, 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 such as:

- some groups are more likely to comply with educational policies on parental participation than are others because of differential social resources – an effective strategy therefore has to count with this and be very flexible in finding the ways for promoting involvement
- the difference is to be made between school-based and home-based involvement – while some parents may lack the necessary social resources for participating in school activities and visiting school (due to unfavourable working hours, transportation problems, language barriers, etc) they are not necessarily to be accounted as not caring for children; other ways for promoting home-based involvement are to be used flexibly
- specific cultural barriers may be preventing parents from successful participation

“As policies and practices of parental involvement stand now, not only do they appear to fail to integrate various vulnerable groups in schools, but they also seem to further their marginalization, and thus, indirectly, strike a blow to the democratization of public education. Hence, unless the present policies, practices and ideologies of parental participation become more culturally-sensitive, which could mean their taking up an entirely new form, it is my suggestion that schools should seriously consider abandoning them altogether.” (Theodorou, 2007)

#### Between cooperation and conflict: teacher and parent perceptions of parental involvement

“I am always available. Parents can call me any time. I’m always ready to meet them. . . . I’m not sure whether I would call teaching a profession, but when parents question or criticize a teacher’s proficiency, her way of instructing, etc., that’s where I draw the line, and I see it as crass interference. I encourage parents to get involved with the class, even as regards pedagogic decisions . . . but I don’t agree that they teach instead of me. They can be involved, but responsibility in class is mine only. This I will not surrender to anyone.” (Anne, elementary school teacher, cf. Addi-Racah & Arviv-Elyashiv, 2008)

Along with the global tendency for school decentralization, reshaping the power relation and empowering the parents as important stakeholders in school decision-making process, there are some arising issue:

- whom the parents find to be responsible for their empowering
- which impact does this parent empowerment has on the teachers and which are their reactions?

In order to try to maximize the effects of parental involvement, it is necessary that the teachers and parents have complementary perceptions of parental involvement, although it would be ideal if these perceptions would be identical. Lawson (2003) has conducted an ethnographic study with a group of teachers and African American parents that, although has a very limited potential for generalization, is very important since it gave a good picture on how disparate can be these perceptions. Apart from that, the methodological approach that was ethnographic is important since it is found to support deeper analysis of the attitudes and contextual life conditions underlying the perceptions of parental involvement. Providing us therefore with a comprehensive analysis of the conflicting world views of teachers’ and parents’ this study deserves to be presented in more details.

The 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 community centric pathways, teacher-parent communication, trust in schooling, aspirations for the school to become community-serving institution, teachers were concerned with parents' involvement as defined by the teachers, teacher's beliefs and attributions, teachers' loneliness, scepticism and withdrawal in the process of school reform
- although parents conceptualize involvement in a school-centric way (doing what the school asks), they actually see it as a fight for their children's lives that need to start from the community and then move to the schools
- parents are concerned by the lack of affection teachers are showing to children and by the teachers' attributing negative actions and behaviours by children to parental irresponsibility and neglect; labelling the parents as non-loving and non-caring teachers stop taking into consideration their concerns
- 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
- parents believe that in addition to ignoring parents because of differential levels of educational experience, school teachers and staff members couple such notions of expertise with deficit assumptions about how children's academic aptitude relates to parental caring, which induce the parents' sense of powerlessness and outrage
- the erosion of trust in the school is perceived to cause parents to approach teacher-parent interactions with hostility, even when the school is trying to accentuate positive accomplishments by the students
- when it comes to teachers, they define parental involvement in terms of parents' and families' readiness to cooperate and meet the school needs as set by the teachers
- still, the teachers do conceptualize the parental involvement as both school- and home-based, and the home-involvement is vital due to its potential to provide adequate motivational patterns and children's attitudes towards school and teachers
- parents are held responsible for not providing stable, nurturing home environments so the children come to school unprepared, require more teachers' attention and with behavioural and disciplinary problems
- "Part of the education, in my opinion, is that parents need to be educated as to involvement in their child's lives. . . . It's a necessity."; parents need to improve their parenting skills, as well as their communication with teachers
- majority of the surveyed teachers believe that the overall success of their students, as well as their own senses of professional efficacy, depends on an important conversion process: uninvolved parents must become involved.
- teachers consider the involvement to be one of the fundamental responsibilities of parents; still, not being able to make the parents become involved, they offer different types of incentives that are then considered to be "bribing" and therefore the parents are blamed and seen as not being intrinsically involved in their children's development
- negative school-family relations are attributed to parents being intimidated - their insecurities lead them to feel that teachers will not listen to their concerns
- teachers tend to feel a genuine lack of ownership over many programs and policies existing in the school, including parent involvement; this lack of ownership stems, in part, from teacher

exclusion from planning the programs in which they are expected to participate which, consequently, decreases their faith that new reform initiatives will result in any type of “real” change in the school, which than actually diminishes the possibility of that change; they feel unappreciated, and scepticism in the process of school reform increases

- teachers are ambivalent believing that the provision of additional supports and services for families at the school may serve to continue to let parents “off the hook” from their primary responsibilities

## Effects of parental involvement

Can parental involvement really improve the educational outcomes of urban children?

To what degree is parental involvement associated with higher levels of school achievement among urban students?

Do school programs of parental involvement positively influence urban students?

What aspects of parental involvement help those students the most?

Does the relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement hold across racial groups? (Jeynes, 2007)

William H. Jeynes (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.

Jeynes’ analysis has revealed that parental involvement had a consistent effect and did hold across the various population (culturally diverse). Parental involvement is a better predictor of achievement in elementary than in secondary school, which may be connected with the higher levels of elementary children responsiveness to parental values, while parents are in general more involved in their children’s lives while they are younger. The results for parental involvement programs are quite encouraging for those people who wonder whether parental involvement can work, if it is not initiated voluntarily. Nevertheless, the findings of this study suggest that voluntary parental involvement likely works better than parental support programs. Nevertheless, overall parental involvement programs appear to be effective.

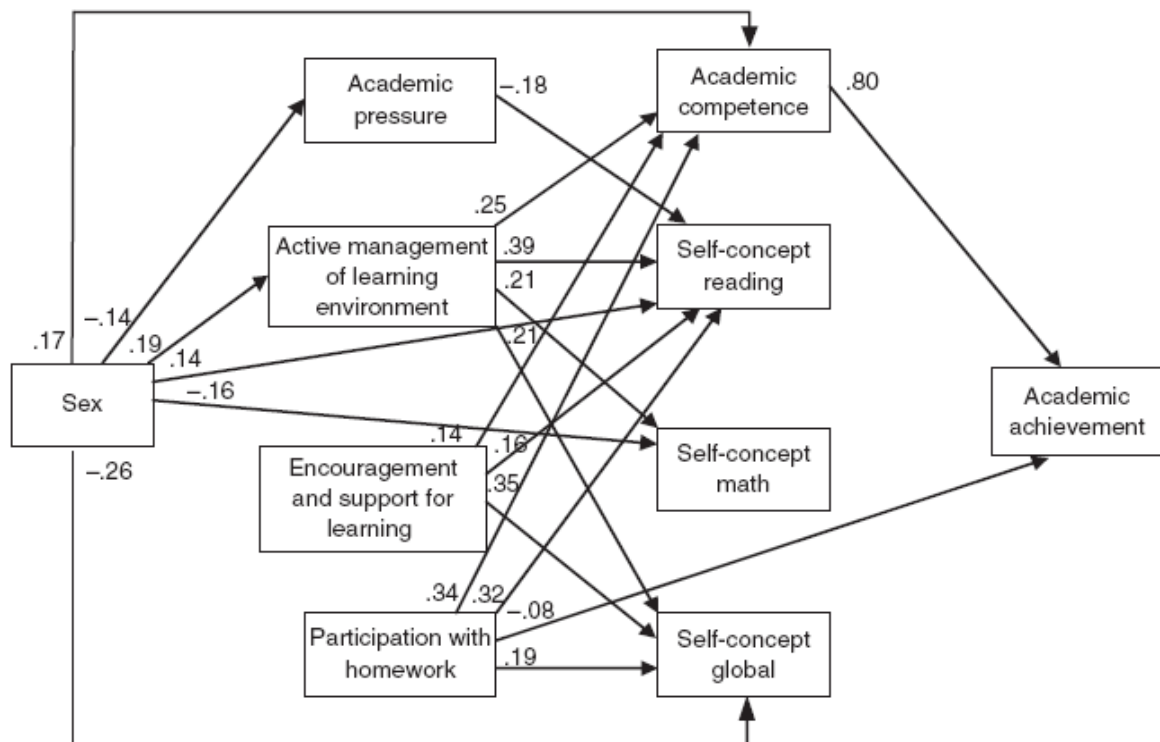
The study also regarded the effectiveness of specific components of parental involvement. Main findings revealed the following principles:

- subtle aspects of parental involvement such as parental style and expectations had a greater impact on student educational outcomes than some of the more demonstrative aspects of parental involvement such as having household rules and parental attendance and participation at school functions
- parental participation and attendance has an impact on grades, but not on the overall achievement, so the author hypothesizes that parental attendance is more likely to help students assimilate material covered in school than it is to help students excel in understanding the broad range of knowledge that is usually covered in standardized tests while also enhancing the relationship between parents and teachers, which positively affects grades
- parents’ participation improves the relationship between parents and teachers and positively influences the school outcomes
- the influence of parental involvement largely transcends SES

The correlation between involvement and achievement did hold across the racial groups which opens the space for concluding that paternal involvement may help closing the gap between the achievement of groups with the different racial/cultural backgrounds.

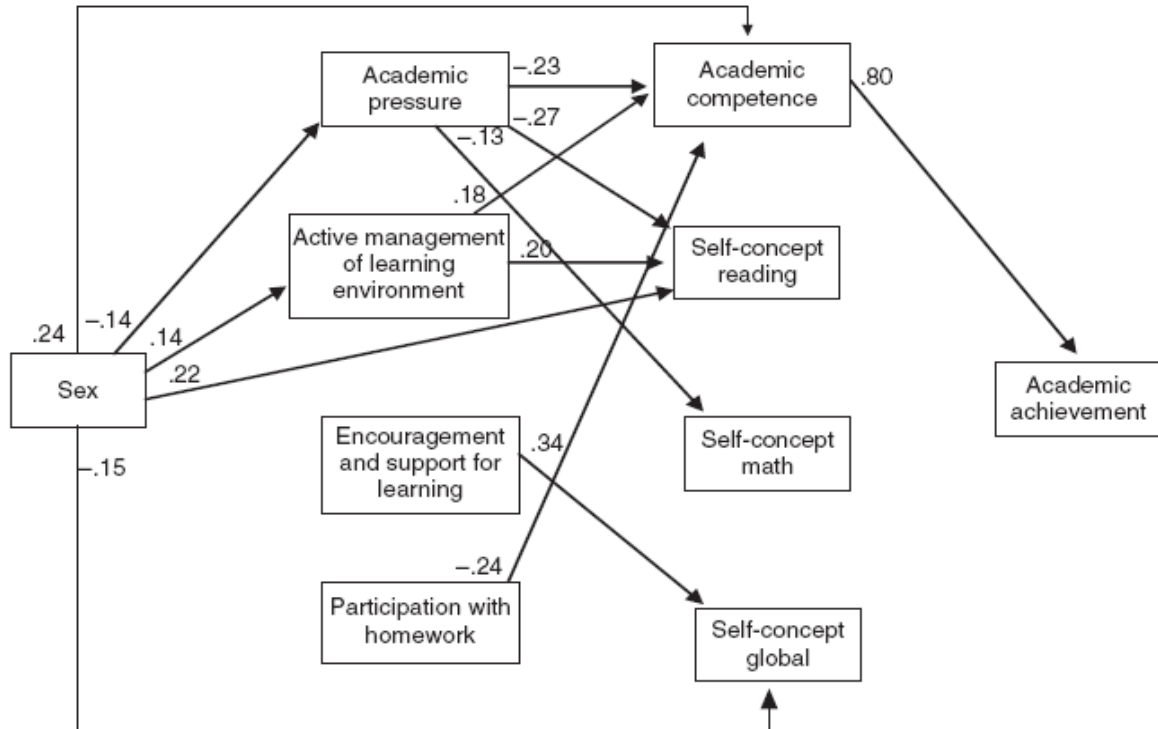
Rogers, Ryan, Adams & Keating (2009) conducted a study aiming to describe the effects of parental involvement on primary school achievement, while especially focusing on different roles of mothers and fathers. Their research result had shown maternal involvement in the home is indirectly related to achievement, primarily through the child characteristic of academic competence. In comparison to boys, girls have higher academic competence, higher self-concept in reading, and have more active management of the learning environment by their mothers. Conversely, boys reported higher self-concept in math, a higher global self-concept, and higher academic pressure from their mothers. Mothers' emotional support for children's learning is a positive factor in achievement.

Figure 5. Maternal model (taken from Rogers, Ryan, Adams & Keating, 2009)



An examination of the father model shows that active management of the learning environment is a positive predictor of academic competence. That is, when fathers take an active and operative role in their children's learning, their children are likely to show higher academic competence. However, both academic pressure and participation with homework were negatively associated with academic competence. Fathers who place pressure on their children to excel at school and who engage in their children's homework processes appear to have children with lower academic competence and, hence, lower achievement.

Figure 6. Paternal model (taken from Rogers, Ryan, Adams & Keating, 2009)



The differential examination of the mother and father models shows that parents are involved in their children's school-related activities in both similar and different ways. Both parents show active management of their children's learning environment that is positively associated with academic competence. Both parents participate with their children's homework, although the basis for this relation with achievement is unclear. The key difference between parents is that mothers show more encouraging involvement, which is related to higher academic competence, whereas fathers show more academic pressure, which is related to lower academic competence. These differences suggest that maternal and paternal involvement behaviours are manifested in different ways.