

8-1-1999

Parent Participation in School Functions Following Participation in Head Start or Title I

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Parent Participation in School Functions
Following Participation in Head Start or Title I

A Thesis

Presented to the

Department of Teacher Education

and the

Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

University of Nebraska at Omaha

by

Melissa R. Sindelar

August, 1999

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THESIS ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College,
University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts,
University of Nebraska at Omaha

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July 6, 1999

Abstract

Parent Participation in School Functions Following Participation in Head Start or Title I

The involvement of parents in a child's schooling is an essential part of public schools and early childhood education programs. Results from previous studies indicate that this parental involvement has positive effects on a child's cognitive ability and attitude toward school. This study assessed the effects of early childhood education programs, specifically Head Start and Title I, with stated parental involvement components, on continued parental involvement in school activities as compared to children who did not attend these programs. Data collected compared the frequency of attendance for school-related functions for program participants to frequency of attendance for non-program participants. A further assessment was made on the types of these involvements, whether they were parent-initiated or teacher-initiated. This study assessed whether teacher experience (years of teaching) affected this involvement. Results indicated no significant difference in overall parent involvement between the two groups. Results did indicate a highly significant difference in parent-initiated contacts by prior participants and a nearly significant difference between teacher-initiated contacts with the prior participant group. Finally, results on teacher experience as it affects parent involvement showed no significant difference between the high (9+ years of experience) and the low (0-8 years of experience) groups.

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Chapter 1: Problem

The purpose of this study was to assess the effects of early childhood education programs, specifically Head Start and Title I, with stated parental involvement components on continued parental involvement in school activities as compared to children who did not attend these programs. These programs offer a variety of opportunities for parents to participate in their child's schooling. An anticipated outcome of participation in these programs is that parents will continue to participate in school activities and continue to maintain the home-school relationship. This study assessed if this desired outcome was achieved by keeping track of parent's participation in school functions. A comparison between two groups (program participants and non-program participants) was made.

Further investigation was made to compare the types of contacts, whether parent-initiated or teacher-initiated, for a randomly selected target group comprised of prior program participants and non-program participants.

A significant amount of research is available on the teacher's role in parent involvement. This research indicates that teacher training and the school setting has a major influence on getting parents involved. But what role does a teacher's years of experience play in involvement. Does teaching for a longer amount of time increase the number of involvements? A final analysis

investigated whether teacher experience (specifically number of years taught) influenced the number of parent involvements.

Introduction

The involvement of parents in schools and classroom practices is not a new development in the educational field. The establishment of neighborhood schools and community school boards consisting of lay people are outward signs of this parent involvement (Greenberg, 1989). Parental support and involvement in public education has always been an important factor in the education of children. Assessing, promoting, and maintaining high levels of parental involvement are concerns to all involved in the educational field.

The promotion of this involvement is apparent with the development and implementation of early childhood education programs which provide a component for parent involvement. In 1965, one of the most comprehensive programs, Head Start, was developed through government grants made available through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (PL 89-10). This act provided government funds to establish programs to aid education, specifically targeting programs to help children raised in poverty, programs such as Head Start, Home Start, and Project Follow Through. These programs were designed to provide educational experiences to children, as well as support to families through health, nutritional, and psychological services. Parental involvement in these programs provided families with early, positive

interactions with the school as well as opportunities to become more involved through volunteering, employment opportunities within the school setting, or participation in advisory board activities.

Title I programs were also developed in the 1960's as a way to meet the needs of "educationally deprived," low-income students. School districts who serve economically deprived children are eligible for Title I money to expand and enhance the education of these children. To receive this money, local educational agencies submit program applications for approval to the state educational agencies. Because of the difference in needs of each local educational agency, a wide variety of Title I programs are found within districts and within states. The Department of Education has outlined five basic types of Title I programs that include in-class projects, pull-out programs, replacement programs, add-on programs, and school-wide programs. Each program provides a different type of instructional setting for students involved. Title I resources have also been applied to the development of early childhood education programs to meet the needs of these educationally deprived students.

Head Start and Title I programs continue to operate and provide services to families in need. Many of these programs are now found within the public school setting and the parent-relation component of these programs (home visits, parent volunteers) have been utilized in public schools as a way to reach families. It is believed that these early, positive interactions between families

and schools will promote continued parent involvement as the child continues through school.

Families who participate in Head Start or Title I are provided a strong foundation for school involvement. As their child enters their next phase of education (kindergarten), this involvement needs to be encouraged and continued. But continuing this involvement may become difficult based on school and teacher practices. Head Start and Title I programs have outlined specific types of involvements that parents participate in (such as home visits). These programs have made parents an integral part of their child's development and learning by providing opportunities and experiences that encourage and teach parents. Unfortunately, these specific guidelines for parent involvement are not often found in the public school setting. There is also a difference in the types of opportunities and experiences parents have as they enter kindergarten and first grade. The school, and more specifically, the teacher becomes the deciding factor in the types of experiences parents will have and in the opportunities they are given for involvement. The school can encourage teachers to include parents; but one of the most influential factors for parent involvement is the actual practices of the classroom teacher. In a study by Epstein and Dauber (1989) investigating teacher attitudes and practices of parent involvement, they found that "almost all teachers express strong,

positive attitudes about parent involvement in general but few teachers have strong programs in place.” Most teachers do not receive undergraduate training on establishing strong parental involvement programs. Whether teachers gain this knowledge and develop strong parental involvement programs with increased years of experience is unknown. The one thing that is certain is the need to involve parents and to encourage and help teachers find ways to enhance this involvement.

Background of the Problem

Research has shown that parental involvement does make a difference in a child’s academic growth. Significant gains in IQ score and increased positive attitudes toward school have been documented throughout research on parental involvement (Rich, 1987). Further research studies have shown positive benefits for parents and for teachers (Herman & Yeh, 1983; Rich, 1987). Parents benefit many ways when they become involved with their child’s school for example through increased confidence about their child’s school. Epstein (1992) also found that involved parents had better feelings about their parental role. Teachers also benefited from this involvement by providing additional resources to teachers (Herman & Yeh, 1983). Parents can help teachers by providing services, such as getting material ready, or volunteering in the classroom. As stated, everyone (student, parents, and teachers) benefit by getting parents involved. Unfortunately, this involvement may not be available.

Research has also been conducted to identify barriers to involvement. This research produced an array of possible interferences including family work schedules (Klimes-Dougan, et al., 1992), changes in family structure (Chavkin, 1989), and barriers within the school structure (Nardine & Morris, 1991; Chavkin, 1989).

Although past research has identified the effects of parental involvement, barriers to involvement, and the support for parental involvement in early childhood education programs (Gullo, 1992), research on whether early childhood programs with a parental involvement component enhance future involvement with the schools, and more specifically, whether they increase the number of later contacts parents have with school, is needed to show the strength of these programs. Does attending these programs build the strong home-school relationship that is desired? Do parents continue to be involved and initiate contacts with the schools? Do other factors, specifically teacher experience, affect the number of opportunities parents have for involvement? This study will address these concerns.

Statement of the Problem

The support for early childhood education programs is increasing in school districts throughout the country. This is seen through increased funding of Head Start and the availability of Title I resources. These programs, specifically Head Start and Title I, place a major emphasis on parent

involvement and building a home/school partnership. To enhance this partnership, these programs outline types of parental involvement available. For example, parents may participate in advisory boards and participate in the decision making for the program. Parents may participate as volunteers in the classroom, participate in parent meetings which provide specific information (such as nutrition, health) to parents, and participate in home activities developed by the classroom teacher. Parents also participate in home visits when classroom teachers visit with families to offer suggestion on ways to enhance their child's education (Head Start Bureau, 1980). This partnership provides a strong foundation for children and families as well as providing support for schools and teachers. During a child's attendance in these programs, the involvement of parents is evident through volunteering in the classroom and participation in home visits. Whether this involvement carries over as the child continues through public schools is unknown. This study attempted to find out if there is continued parental support of public school activities following participation in a Title I and Head Start early childhood education program.

Teacher and classroom practices play an important part of parent involvement. Teacher preparation and training on parent involvement are needed for teachers to build a strong parent involvement program in their classroom. Unfortunately, most undergraduate programs do not provide this

training. And whether school districts provide in-service or training to teachers on parent involvement is unknown. As stated previously, most teachers strongly support parent involvement, but actually doing something about it is not as strongly supported. Teacher training plays a part of building a strong parent involvement program, but what is the role of teacher experience (number of years taught) on parent involvement? Is there a difference between teachers with low experience (0-8 years) and teachers with high experience (9+ years) in the number of opportunities provided to parents for involvement? This study attempted to find out if a teacher's experience affects parent involvement.

Statement of Hypotheses

The investigator expected that:

1. parents of children who participate in early childhood education programs (specifically Title I and Head Start within the school district) would participate in school-related functions in kindergarten and first grade at a significantly higher frequency than those parents of children who have not participated in these programs.
2. parents of children who participated in Head Start or Title I would have a higher frequency of parent-initiated contacts than those children who did not participate in these programs.
3. teacher experience (high=9+ years/low=0-8 years) would influence the number of contacts made with the families.

Definition of Terms

The following terms will be used throughout the study and will be defined as:

Parent involvement will be used to describe the attendance of parents in school-sponsored functions and follow through on at home activities (such as homework, class projects). These functions may include parent/teacher conferences, curriculum night, classroom volunteers. Although parent involvement is a broad term; for purposes of this study, it will be used for the actual attendance of school-sponsored functions and response to school correspondence mentioned previously.

Program participants are those children who have attended Title I preschool or Head Start preschool within the school district. Both of these programs offer a parental involvement component which includes frequent parent/school interactions through such activities as home visits, field trips, and parent meetings.

Non-program participants are those children who have not attended the school district Title I or Head Start preschool program. These children may have no preschool experience or have attended a privately-owned preschool or church-sponsored preschool program.

Study Limitation

The time needed to complete this study is a limitation causing difficulties in the area of attrition, students who moved out of the district where dropped from the study. Another limitation is the lack of information regarding attitudes of the specific teachers in this study toward parental involvement. Lack of randomization with those children attending Chapter I and Head Start programs is also a limitation. The sample size and limiting the sample to one school district restricts generalization. A final limitation is the numbers of individuals collecting data and possibility of a lack of consistency among those individuals.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview

The involvement of parents in schools and classroom practices is not a new development in the educational field. The establishment of neighborhood schools and community school boards consisting of lay people are an outward sign of this parent involvement (Greenberg, 1989). But as society has evolved, there has also been an evolution in the support and involvement of parents in the schooling of their children. These changes in parental involvement have been a focus of educators. Assessing, promoting, and maintaining levels of parent involvement are a concern to all involved in the educational field. The collaboration between home and school has many positive effects on the child. Thus educators have placed an emphasis on promoting and enhancing this collaboration.

One way in which the public schools have started to promote parental involvement is through program development and implementation. Early childhood programs with a component focusing on parental involvement have increased and are becoming a part of school systems.

The following review of related literature will provide a history of parental involvement, provide information on Head Start and Title I, describe types of involvement, describe the teacher's role in parent involvement, and outline benefits and barriers of parental involvement.

Parental Involvement - History

At one time, parents may have been a child's only teacher. Prior to the establishment of formal school, families were the major source of education for children. Education focused on skills needed for survival and transmission of family/community values. In the 1600's and 1700's as communities became more established, parents began to lose their influence in their child's education. Religious leaders within the community were the determining factor in what children should learn. With the belief that all children should be educated, the Puritans set the precedent for educating young children. The "Old Deluder Satan Law" passed in 1647 required communities of 100 or more to establish schools (Cohen, 1974). Although the Puritans believed that the family was the primary educator of children, a foundation for community responsibility in education had been laid. The next change in schooling was felt with the advent of the Industrial Revolution in the late 1700's. With the Industrial Revolution came the development of urban settings and also the development of families moving away from the self-sufficiency of farming to dependence of manufacturing. Now one, if not both, parents relied on manufacturing for economic means. With this evolution, families were no longer available to help teach their child vocational skills or reading and writing. Families relied more on schools to teach these skills. In the mid 1800's, the need for public education was apparent as more and more families lacked the resources to educate

children at home. Education of children became the responsibility of the government. With the establishment of compulsory education in the late 1800's, parents were less dominant in their child's education. States, schools, and professional education groups were most influential in the needs of children regarding education. Thus the evolution of society from self-sufficient farming communities to technological advanced urban communities has greatly impacted parent as educators and their involvement in their child's education. Throughout these societal changes, parents have continued to provide input on schools such as curriculum issues; but they have also given the responsibility of education over to public schools.

Along with societal evolution, changes in child-rearing practices, family demographics, and school structure, also impacted on the roles of parents as primary educators.

Prior to the 1950's, formal schooling and early childhood education programs were established in response to national concerns. Daycare services for working parents or enhancing a child's well being were the basis of programs offered during this time period (Berger, 1991a).

The baby boom era of the 1950's brought changes in family demographics and thus changes in schooling and early childhood education programs. Two-parent families with the father as the primary income earner and the "stay at home" mother became a national ideal. An increase in the number

of school-aged children brought subsequent changes in the public schools. Half-day kindergarten programs were established to accommodate the increased student population. The parent's role became one of supporting teachers and schools, rather than participator in decision-making roles (Berger, 1991b).

The 1960's brought a new era in education and early childhood programs because of the civil rights movement. As the nation focused on racial and social welfare issues, the schools focused on academic success. An increase in working mothers, single-parent families and poverty rates impacted on the welfare of children. Early childhood programs, such as Head Start (1965), were developed in response to the increased needs of family (Olmsted, 1992). Emphasizing enrichment and education, Head Start focused on the whole child and inclusion of parents in the development of the child. Parents were involved in the decision-making practices and classroom activities.

The 1970's brought increases in funding for programs founded in the 1960's. Parental involvement in schools was increased through passage of Public Law 94-142 (PL 94-142), Education for All Handicapped Children Act. This Act not only required special education services be provided for all children, but also advocated that families be actively involved in their child's education. Although the original Act has been amended, the participation of parents in their child's education has continued to be a focus. Among the parental guarantees outlined in PL 94-142 is to be able to participate in the individual education plan

(IEP) development and implementation and to play an active role in education decision-making (Reilly, 1998).

Within the last decade, an increased number of external factors have intruded on parent/children interactions (Mintz, 1989). This, in turn, has impacted the home/school partnership. These external factors include increases in number of children under age 6 living in poverty (Dimidjian, 1989), increase in single parent families and teenage mothers (Hamburg, 1991; Chafel, 1990). Because of these external factors, parents have delegated rearing responsibilities to care substitutes such as public schools. These factors have brought a change in the relationship between home and school as parents may no longer have the time or resources available to help their children at school.

Schools continue to develop and implement curriculum to educate children and to create opportunities for parent participation. Comer (1986) states the current task is "to make institutional adjustments - changes in the ways of schooling - that will once again give parents, teachers, and administrators the power to help students grown intellectually, psychologically, and socially. Direct parent participation in the schools is one such needed adjustment."

Early Childhood Education

Schools have made efforts to enhance parental involvement by increasing the number of programs that include parents as a major component; most notable seen in early childhood programs. Traditionally, early childhood programs have been an advocate for parental involvement emphasizing and utilizing the parent's influence on the child's growth and development. Early childhood programs have recognized the need to include parents in the development and implementation of programs (Sandall, 1998). As stated by Chavkin (1989), the preschool years are the most critical for parent involvement. Thus, these are the years to work with parents and to set the stage, through positive interactions, to build a strong home/school partnership.

These early childhood programs may reproduce many elements of informal support systems that today's families may be lacking including home visits, referral services, support groups, and parenting classes (Halpern, 1987). Many programs developed as a need to provide not only educational support to families but also to provide community support.

Successful early childhood education programs have generally supported parent involvement through such activities of including parents in field trips, parties, snacks, small groups, and policy maker (Gullo, 1992). A brief description follows of two programs (Head Start and Title I) that have been established to meet the needs of families through early intervention.

Head Start - This federally funded program founded in 1965, began as a six week project. Recognizing that children were part of a community as well as part of a family, parental as well as community involvement were paramount for its success. Head Start was unique in that it provided comprehensive services for preschool aged children and their parents. For children to be most successful, reinforcement for what was learned at school needed to be continued at home and in the community. Therefore, Head Start focused on the child and family as a whole by providing services for health, psychological, and family needs. Types of parental involvement outlined by Head Start policy manual include volunteering and observing in the classroom, participating in home visits, reinforcing school learning through home activities developed by center staff, and attaining employment within the center. Parents are also included in three levels of decision making including Center Committee, Policy Committee, and Policy Council (Leik & Chalkley, 1990).

Research into the effects of this comprehensive program has shown the positive effects of working with children and families at an early age. The benefits of participation in Head Start vary from initial IQ boosts to increased family participation. One study by the Consortium for Longitudinal Studies (1978, 1983) found that program participants gained an initial boost in IQ scores and also showed a decrease in future school retention. Other studies revealed that Head Start participants also had better rates of immunization and improved

nutrition and health as well as enhanced socioemotional traits (McKey, et al., 1985). In another study by Cople, Cline, and Smith (1987), Head Start participants were found to have a better adjustment to school than their non-participant peers.

The success of Head Start with its strong parental involvement has provided a model to other programs being developed. It has also helped emphasize the importance of parents in a child's educational development.

Title I - the development of Title I programs began in the 1960's as a way to provide assistance for "educationally deprived", low-income children. This federally funded program provides monetary resources to states who then distribute the funds to local educational agencies that provide services for economically disadvantaged children. Unlike Head Start, programs developed under Title I vary from state to state and within local educational agencies. Five basic types of Title I programs have been identified by the Department of Education (Arroyo & Zigler, 1993). These include:

1. In-class programs - additional instruction is provided in the regular classroom.
2. Pull-out programs - student leaves his/her classroom to receive Title I services.
3. Replacement programs - students receive services in a self-contained setting rather than regular classroom instruction.

4. Add-on programs - instruction is provided during times when students would not normally be in school.
5. School-wide programs - serve all students within the school.

These programs are established in schools with at least 75% of the population is low-income.

The overall effects of Title I programs are limited. Because of the wide range of programs available and the lack of a standard of evaluating this programs, research on effects of Title I programs is limited to individual programs. Research on the long-term effects of these programs is not available. Current legislation has been proposed to evaluate these issues (Arroyo & Zigler, 1993).

Parent Involvement - A Definition

Parent involvement in school and early childhood education programs is widely accepted as a desirable and even essential part of effective school (Comer and Hynes, 1991). A goal of parent involvement is to produce a climate of shared responsibility for student learning and development (Sandfort, 1987).

Parental involvement is a very broad term. Defined as how parents interact with the schools it includes involvement at home with school-related issues and other activities that generally support the school and its programs. Parent participation is a more involved term. It refers to parental influence, or

attempts to influence, decision making in areas of substantial impact: personnel, programs, and budget (LeBlanc, 1992).

Through surveys of parents, teachers, administrators, and students, Epstein (1987, 1992) has identified six types of partnerships:

Basic Obligations of Parents - this most basic form of involvement is the provision of food, clothing, shelter, health, and safety; i.e. providing for the child's basic well-being.

Basic Obligations of Schools - this form of involvement encompasses communication between home and schools. Schools provide communication to the parents regarding school programs, child progress. Parents are expected to act on this information.

Parent Involvement at School - parents are present at the school for volunteer assistance, school functions (assemblies, performances), workshops and training sessions.

Parent Involvement in Learning Activities at Home - in this involvement, parents assist in learning activities at home. Developing, enhancing, or remediating students skills is the major focus. For example, parents may assist a child in learning multiplication tables.

Parent Involvement in Governance and Advocacy - the fifth type of involvement is the participating of parents in decision-making roles. Through participation in organizations such as PTA, PTO, parents assist in school

planning and other decision-making processes. Individual and group advocacy is also a form of this involvement.

Collaboration with Community Organizations - Schools coordinate with outside agencies to support and extend student learning. They work with organizations to provide information to families about support services and community resources.

The six types of partnerships bring differences in materials, resources, and process requirements. Parent and student outcomes reflect the different types of involvement (Brandt, 1989). With these varied outcomes, school systems can analyze programs and move toward achievement of more involvement.

Teacher's Role in Parent Involvement

The classroom teacher plays an important role in getting parents involved. As stated by Grolnick, et. al. (1997), "teachers are parents' primary contacts within the school and thus practices in the classroom are potential influences of parent involvement." Through contact and encouragement, teachers can support parent's role in their child education. The goal for every teacher should be to encourage involvement of parents.

Teachers provide parents with the opportunities for involvement. Teacher practices highly influence the amount of participation from parents. These practices vary from teacher to teacher. Some ways in which teachers encourage

involvement is through parent contact such as newsletters, notes home, telephone calls, and conferences (Hester, 1989). These practices help to inform parents of school activities and provide them with a basic understanding of the classroom and how their child is performing. Teacher practices may go beyond these initial contacts to having parents volunteer in the classroom, requesting parent feedback or input, or having parents share their resources (such as work experiences, etc.). These contacts allow parent to take a more active role in their child's education and the classroom.

When establishing these parent involvement programs, teachers and school administrators need to consider that comprehensive and well-planned programs work best as well as providing programs that are preventive and developmental (as opposed to remedial) will encourage participation from parents (Flaxman & Inger, 1992). Teachers as well as school administrators must also keep in mind that parents do not have to be well-educated to be an asset to the classroom.

Teachers are the connection to parents. Therefore, their role must be one of encouraging and providing opportunities for involvement. These opportunities must go beyond the standard school functions (such as Open House, Curriculum Night). These opportunities must provide parents with meaningful experiences with the school and the classroom. When these exist, the benefits of parental involvement will be felt by everyone.

Benefits of Parental Involvement

Parental involvement does make a difference. Everyone gains when the schools welcome parents as partners in the educational process (Hamby, 1992). Although parents have always collaborated in the educational process, improving this home/school partnership is a focus of educational institutions. Much research on the benefits of parent involvement has been conducted including research on the benefits of participating in Head Start. Initial studies indicated cognitive gains for children in their first years, but these gains diminished by their third year (Westinghouse Learning Corporation, 1969). But studies of long-term effects indicated that those children who participated in Head Start fared much better than their peers in academic achievement in school (Lazar & Darlington, 1982). Other benefits of participation in Head Start included social development. Head Start children were more task oriented and curious about learning than their non-participant peers (Collins, 1984)

Along with the studies of Head Start participants, other research into parent participation and its benefits emerged. A range of benefits for children and families has been identified through this research from cognitive gains to improvement of attitudes toward school. A study by Watson, Brown, and Swick (1983) showed that children whose parents were actively supportive scored higher than non-supportive parents on Cognitive Skills Assessment Battery (CSAB). Rich (1987) stated that students not only consistently produce

significant gains in IQ scores, but positive attitudes toward school and more regular homework habits also emerge. Other benefits for children include increased social interaction with different adults (Morrison, 1978), higher attendance and lower dropout rates (Hamby, 1992).

Parents also benefit through increased interaction with the schools. Herman and Yeh (1983) found positive effects between parent participation and parent satisfaction. A better understanding of school and curriculum (Rich, 1987), enhancement of parent self-image, and enhanced interpersonal relationships between parent/child result from parental participation (Morrison, 1978). A review of research by Henderson and Berla (1994), found that when parents become involved in their children's education, one or more of the following resulted:

- Higher grades and test scores
- Better attendance and regularly completed homework
- Fewer placements in special education or remedial classes
- More positive attitudes and behavior
- Higher graduation rates
- Greater enrollment in post-secondary education

Teachers benefit through decreasing time spent on activity preparation (Morrison, 1978), increase in parental support of activities, and development of

empathy toward families. Teachers also benefit through increased resources (i.e. parent talents, occupations).

The positive impact of parental involvement stresses the need to further develop programs to enhance this involvement. Early childhood education programs have traditionally provided a component of parent involvement. Programs developed within the school must further enhance this partnership between home and school. But programs developed must take into account those barriers that limit involvement.

Barriers to Involvement

A strong parent involvement component is a goal of educational institutions. When developing programs to reach this goal, educators must take into account the numerous barriers and obstacles that interfere with parent involvement. Research on barriers of involvement have produced an array of possible interference issues to interactions between home and school. Klimes-Dougan and colleagues (1992) found work schedules and child-care issues to be the most frequently cited issues. Working parents are often not available during school hours to volunteer in the classroom or meet with teachers for conferences.

Changes in the American family has also interfered with the involvement of parents in schools. An increase in divorce rate, single-parent homes, and dual-income families have impacted on parents ability to provide support for

school-related activities (Chavkin, 1989). Today's parents may be consumed by the demands of work and caring for their family, the time and energy for school involvement is not readily available (Fruchter, 1984).

Galinsky (1988) also points out that a lack of respect on the part of educators who may underestimate children's skills and abilities as another barrier to parent involvement.

Cultural differences, parental attitudes toward school, and the lack of knowledge to improve school conditions (Fruchter, 1984) are still other barriers between effective parental involvement.

Barriers within the school structure are also present. These include lack of funding for parent involvement programs, no written policies or practices of involvement, and the inexperience of teachers or administrators in developing programs promoting parental involvement (Nardine & Morris, 1991; Chavkin, 1989).

Epstein (1988) found that teacher practices impacted more on parent involvement than education, marital status, or work place of parents. Thus, a need to prepare teachers and administrators in parent involvement issues becomes an apparent need.

For successful home/school partnerships, these barriers must be taken into consideration. Successful programs, such as Head Start and Chapter I, view the child and family needs and work to overcome these obstacles.

Summary and Conclusion

The involvement of parents in a child's schooling is an essential part of public schools and early childhood education programs. The challenge of educators and administrators is to provide a means for involvement that provides meaningful and informative experiences to families. Early childhood education programs have a history of including parent components as an integral part of their program. Such programs as Head Start and Title I have provided a framework for future program development. These programs, through home visits and parent meetings, have included parents beyond classroom visitations. An emphasis is placed on the child and family needs. Head Start and Title I have provided families with a strong beginning in their child's education. These programs have proven successful with the continued achievements of participants. The success of these programs will also be seen if parents continue interactions with the schools as their children enter the primary grades. This study will, therefore, investigate whether parents who have participated in Head Start and Title I early childhood education programs continue to support their child's education through participation in school-related activities in kindergarten and first grade. Another variable that may impact on this involvement, teacher experience, was also investigated.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This study investigated the relationship between participation in early child education programs (specifically Head Start and Title 1) with stated parental involvement components and frequency of attendance at school-related functions. A comparison of the frequency of attendance at school-related functions was made between the parents of children who did attend these programs to parents of children who did not attend these programs. This study also investigated the effect of teacher experience (high/low) on parent contacts. A comparison of teacher initiated versus parent initiated contacts was also conducted. The study compared the types of these interactions using teacher report. Independent variables were the participation in Head Start or Title I early childhood education programs and reported teacher experience (low=0-8 years/high=9+ years). Dependent variables were total frequency of attendance at school-related functions, number of parent-initiated contacts, and number of teacher-initiated contacts.

Subject Selection

Subjects for this study were from a midwest, urban school district in Nebraska. This school district has thirteen elementary schools and serves approximately 4,800 students at the elementary level. Four out of thirteen elementary schools were selected as site schools. The number of students at these four elementary schools ranges from approximately 175 to 500. These

schools are within the same school district and are similar based on program services available (Head Start or Title I preschool). The remaining nine elementary schools within the district were not eligible to receive these services based on economic resources. Children who had participated in the Title I preschool programs or Head Start program, and were enrolled in kindergarten or first grade on August 30, comprised the program participant group. In the district, children qualify for the Chapter I program based on their results on the Development Indicators for the Assessment of Learning - Revised (DIAL-R). This screening test identifies children at risk for development delay in concept, motor, or language development. Children whose scores indicate a delay in one or more of these areas qualify for Title I preschool. Children qualify for Head Start based on financial need. The combined group of prior-program participants consisted of a total of 78 children (46 kindergarten; 32 first grade).

Non-program participants were identified as those students who enrolled in kindergarten and/or first grade on August 30 and who had not participated in Title I or Head Start. This group consisted of 324 students (176 kindergarten; 148 first grade).

Only kindergarten and first grade were used for data collection. These two grade levels were chosen because of the number of students at these grade levels who had previously attended Head Start or Title I. Head Start and Title I were relatively new programs implemented in this district and, therefore, there

was not yet a significant number of subjects available at the higher grades. All of the available kindergarten and first grade classroom teachers were invited to participate in the study, with 100% agreeing to participate. A total of 507 subjects were identified for this study. This total comprised 12 kindergarten classrooms (265 students), and 11 first grade classrooms (242 students). A total 402 students remained at the end of the study year.

The two groups were similar in that approximately 80% resided with both parents. Seventy-nine percent of the program participant group were white, while 85% were white in the non-program participant group. In both groups, approximately 50% of mothers were employed; 88% of the fathers in the non-program participant group were employed; and 82% of the father's in the program participant group were employed. The non-program participant group consisted of approximately 52% male and 47% female. The program participant group consisted of approximately 59% male and 41% female.

The four site schools selected were similar in that they are neighborhood schools whose socioeconomic background meets the criteria for Title I funding. These schools provide at least 50% of their student population with free/reduced meal services. Along with this, families who live within these school boundaries are eligible to participate in the Title I preschool program. One of the site schools also housed the district Head Start program. The majority of children

who attend the Title I and Head Start program will continue their education at these four schools.

Procedure

During the study, kindergarten and first grade teachers at the four site schools kept a log (Parent Participation Form, Appendix A) of parental involvement activities for all students in their classroom. Teachers indicated whether parents attended school-related functions, using a list of “standard” functions identified as similar at each school. Space was provided for classroom teachers to include “other” functions which required parent involvement (Parent Participation Form B, Appendix B). These included classroom-only activities such as homework or school-only activities such as special school functions (e.g., creativity fair, art show).

Two students in each classroom (one who participated in Title I or Head Start and one who had not participated in such programs) were randomly selected as target children for additional data gathering purposes. During the year, the teacher kept an individual log of family interactions/contacts for both of these students (Target Student Report, Appendix C). These interactions were coded (by the classroom teacher) as parent initiated or teacher initiated.

Contacts with teacher participants were made by the investigator throughout the study year to encourage data collection and answer questions.

Information regarding family background, socioeconomic background, race, family structure was also gathered for descriptive information. Information regarding teacher experience (high = 8+ years/ low = 1-8 years) was collected through interviews with the classroom teacher participating in the study.

The study year began August 30 and ended May 28 when data folders were collected by the investigator. Data was then coded by the investigator for computer analysis.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed for three different hypotheses. The first analysis was done to determine if there were an overall difference between program participants and non-program participants on the frequency of contacts and participation in school-related functions.

A second analysis was made for comparison of teacher or parent initiated contacts between the two groups.

The final analysis was made to determine if teacher experience (low/high) affected parent contacts.

Data analysis was completed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

Results

Hypothesis 1 stated that students who participated in Head Start or Chapter I preschool would have a higher frequency of participation in school-related functions than their peers who did not participate in these programs. This hypothesis was not supported. An independent t-test showed no significant difference ($t=.50, p=.620$) in overall level of parent involvement between the two groups ($n=324$ non-program participants; $n=78$ program participants). When looking at particular involvements, slight differences are shown. For example, 22% of parents of non-program participants attended Open House as compared to 26% of parents of prior program participants. Attendance at conferences was high for both groups, as shown in Figure 1. On the other hand, participation in PTA for both groups was relatively low, with parents of program participants at 15% and parents of non-program participants at 14%. Similarly, low participation was found in attendance at classroom parties, as shown in Figure 2. Figure 3 shows the attendance of parents for in-class participation such as volunteering in the room or participating in VIP (Very Important Person program in which the parent(s) visits the classroom to share about their child). Figure 4 shows the percentage of parents who attended functions which involved performance from their child (such as music programs).

Figure 1: Percentage of Parents Who Attended Conferences

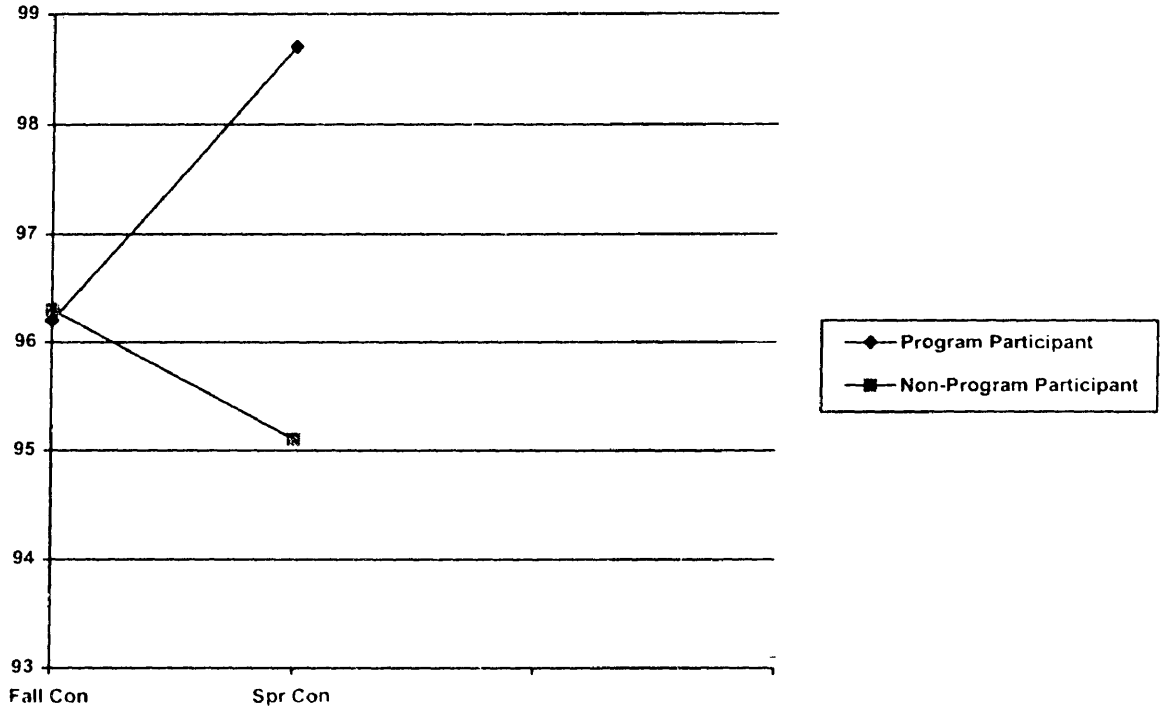


Figure 2: Percentage of Parents Who Attended Classroom Parties

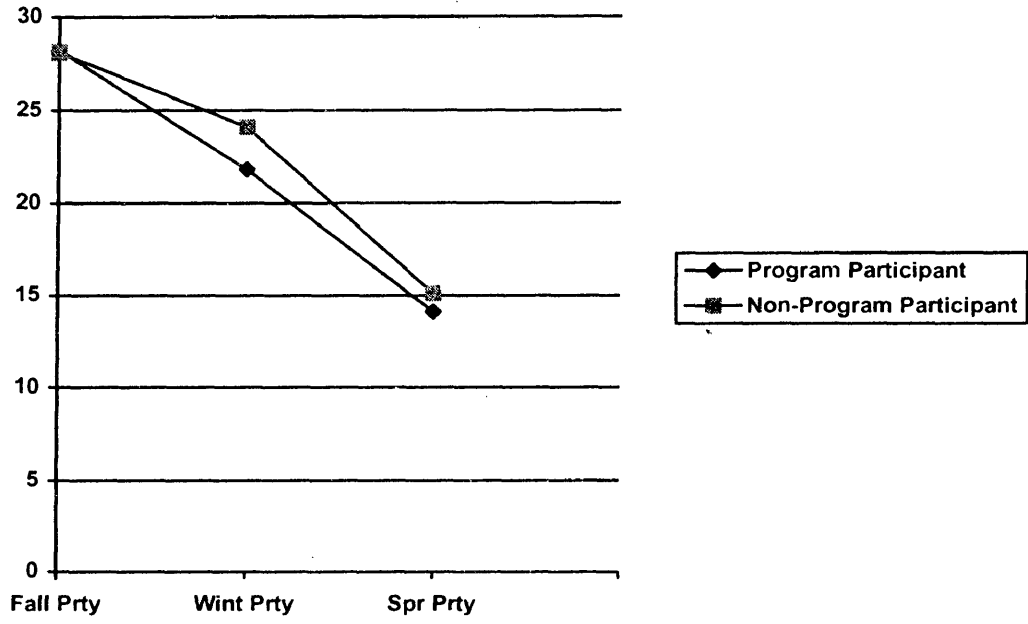


Figure 3: Percentage of Parents Who Attended In-Class Activities

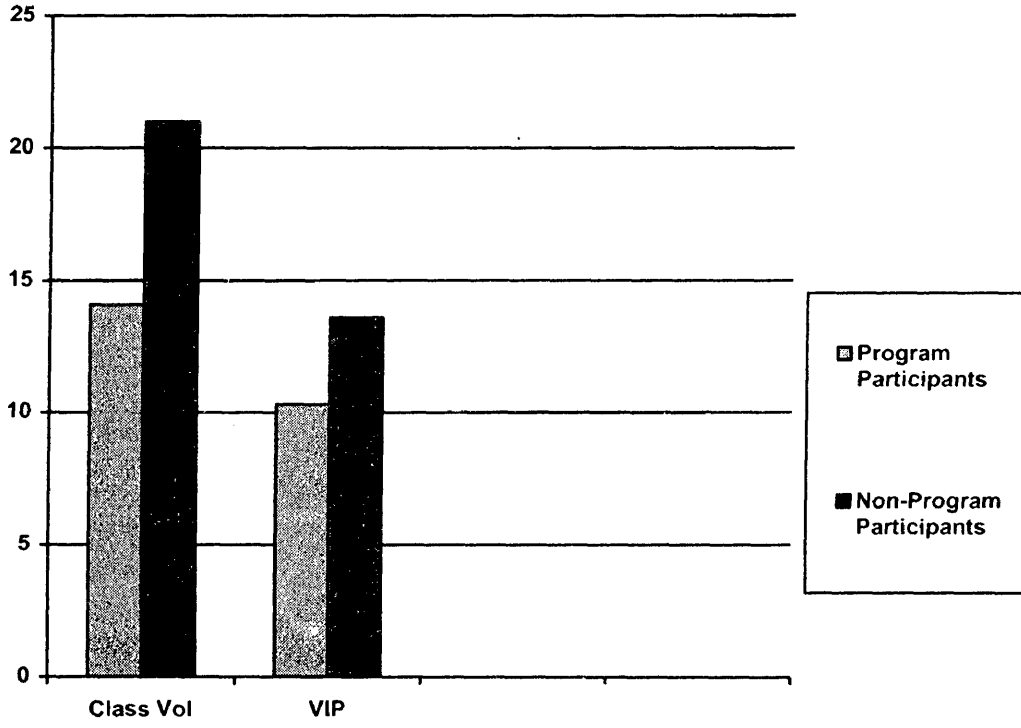
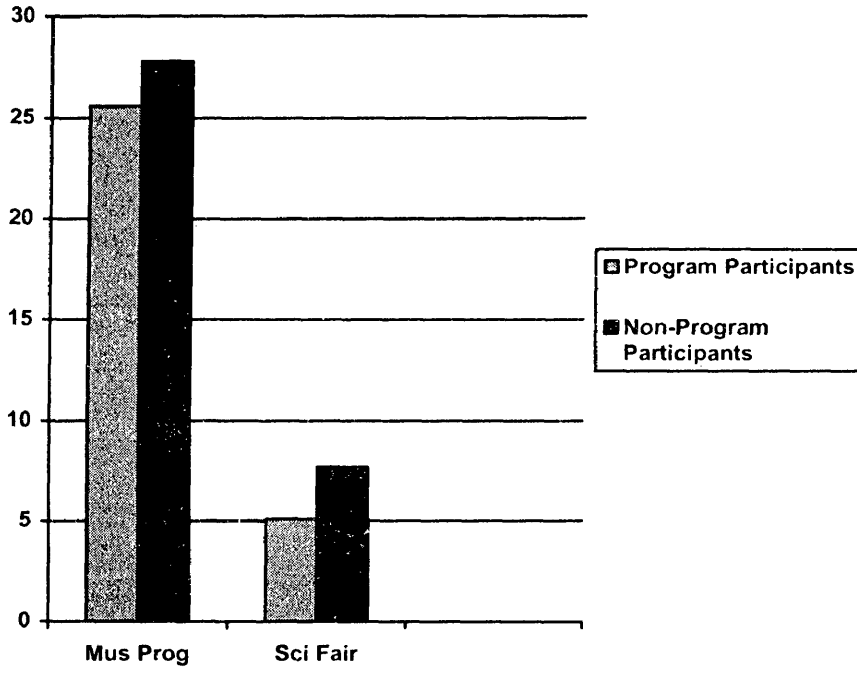


Figure 4: Percentage of Parents who Attended School Performances



Hypothesis 2 stated that parents of children who participated in Head Start or Chapter I would have a higher frequency of parent-initiated contacts than those children who did not participate in these programs. This hypothesis was supported. An independent t-test showed a highly significant difference ($t=-2.69$, $p=.009$) in parent-initiated contacts by the prior participant group of target children ($n=22$ program participants; $n=22$ non-program participants). A nearly significant difference ($t=-1.84$, $p=.069$) also was found in teacher-initiated contacts for this same group. Table 1 outlines the findings from hypotheses 1 and 2.

Hypothesis 3 stated that teacher experience (high=9+ years/low=0-8 years) would have an impact on the number of parent involvements. This hypothesis was not supported by an independent t-test which showed no significant difference ($t=-1.32$, $p=.186$) in teacher-initiated contacts by level of teacher experience. Also there was no significant difference ($t=.96$, $p=.340$) in parent-initiated contacts with teacher experience as a grouping variable.

Table 1
Summary of Variables Across Groups

Variable & Group	Mean	S.D.	<i>n</i>
Total Frequency			
Program Participants	21.897	2.388	78
Non-program Participants	22.049	2.570	324
Parent-Initiated Contacts			
Program Participants	1.8974	2.505	22
Non-program Participants	1.1204	1.023	22
Teacher-Initiated Contacts			
Program Participants	13.8333	42.724	22
Non-program Participants	4.5525	25.535	22

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to assess the impact of attendance in early childhood education programs (Head Start or Title I) that have outlined parent involvement components on future attendance of parents in school-related functions. This was done by comparing the frequency of attendance between parents of prior program participants and parents of non-program participants. This study also compared the types of contacts (whether parent-initiated or teacher-initiated) between the two groups. A third factor was also assessed: the role of teacher experience (number of years taught) on the number of opportunities for involvement for parents.

The involvement of parents in their child's schooling is a desirable component in public education. Early childhood programs (specifically Head Start and Title I) provide an early start to this involvement through home visits and home activities. Continuation of this involvement as the child enters kindergarten and first grade is a desirable outcome of these early intervention programs. This study indicated no significant difference with frequency of involvement between the group who participated in these early childhood programs compared to non-program participants. Although this result does not support the hypothesis that prior program participation would increase the number school-related events parents attended; it does give a good indication of

the types of activities that parents participated in for both groups. For example, high parent participation was found for conferences whereas low participation was found for school performances (for example music programs) and in-class activities (such as classroom volunteering and VIP program) Further investigation of these findings to clarify why some events had greater participation than did others would be of interest. It would also be of interest to see if this similarity of parent involvement between the two groups continues as the children advance in grade levels.

This study showed that parents with prior program experience treated teachers significantly differently than did parents of non-program participants when looking at parent-initiated contacts. Yet there was not a significant difference in the way teachers treated both groups of parents as shown by teacher-initiated contacts. An implication of this may be that parents who had prior experience through these programs had developed a relationship with the school/staff and felt more comfortable initiating contacts compared to the non-program participants. Since these programs (Head Start and Title I) were sponsored by the schools in the study, parents were familiar with the school setting and with the staff at the school. These parents, through their prior participation experience, showed more initiation in making the contacts.

This study also showed that the level of teacher experience (high/low) was not a significant factor in parent participation. It was assumed that teachers with

high experience would have had more opportunities for training on parent involvement and would have more opportunities to develop a parent involvement program in their classroom and thus would have created more opportunities for parents to be involved. Results from this study do not show that years of teaching experience directly affected parent involvement.

Recommendations

Based on the research literature and findings of this study, this investigator recommends that schools districts and teachers develop a parental involvement program that provides meaningful opportunities for participation. There is a need to identify and create programs that will enhance this parent involvement. The “standard” list of involvements had limited participation with the exception of parent-teacher conferences. Programs need to be developed by teachers, administrators, and parents that will encourage more involvement.

Programs and information should also be developed for parents as to how they can keep in contact with schools. With the increased number of parent-initiated contacts by prior program participants, this study showed that Head Start and Title I did have an effect on parents' behavior. School administrators need to look at these programs and identify those components which encourage parent participation and can be integrated into the elementary schools to further enhance this involvement.

School administrators and others involved in teacher development and workshops need to address the issue of parent involvement more clearly.

Development of ideas for ways to involve parents in the classroom beyond the standard (conferences, PTA) need to be identified and utilized by all classroom teachers.

Recommendations for Future Research

Several questions for future research resulted from this study. First, whether these parents continue their involvement as their children continue their education grades may show a difference between the two groups that was not found at this stage. As children continue through the grades, parent participation lessens. Their children may no longer need help with homework or input from parents. As these children progress, would the effects of attending Head Start or Title I on parent participation begin to show. Would there be a difference between the two groups? Also, would the parents of prior program participants continue to initiate contacts at a higher rate than non-program participants?

Parental attitudes on the types of involvement opportunities needs to be researched as to why certain opportunities are more attended. Why are some functions more highly attended? Understanding this from a parents' perspective will help administrators and others design and implement activities for parents that will meet the needs of all.

involvement) needs to investigate the relationship between years of experience and parental involvement programs. This information will provide administrators and others who design workshops, in-services to implement programs that will help teachers get parents involved.

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Appendix A

Appendix B

Appendix C

