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Clarifying Parent Involvement and Family-School Partnership Intervention Research: A Preliminary Synthesis¹

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Introduction

- Interactions and experiences within home and school systems, uniquely and together, form the foundation for developmental trajectories throughout students' educational careers.
- As a lifelong resource, families represent the first essential system and source of support for the learning and development of children and adolescents (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).
- When parents are involved in their children's learning, children experience increased achievement and academic performance, stronger self-regulatory skills, fewer discipline problems, better study habits, more positive attitudes toward school, improved homework habits and work orientation, and higher educational aspirations (e.g., Fan & Chen, 2001; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Benefits are evident after students' abilities and socioeconomic status (SES) are taken into account, with some evidence of magnified effects for families of low SES (Domina, 2005).
- Two distinct approaches to family intervention can be found in the school-based literature: family/parent involvement and family-school partnership.
- *Parent involvement* is defined as the participation of significant caregivers (including parents, grandparents, stepparents, foster parents, etc.) in activities promoting the educational process of their children in order to promote their academic and social well-being (Fishel & Ramirez, 2005).
 - Parent involvement interventions are designed to *align structures and practices* at home and school; attention is on *parents' actions or behaviors* in supporting their child more so than contributing to establishing effective strategies or building relationships with teachers.
- *Family-school partnership* is defined as a child-focused approach wherein families and professionals cooperate, coordinate, and collaborate to enhance opportunities and success for children and adolescents across social, emotional, behavioral, and academic domains (Albright & Weissberg, 2010; Downer & Myers, 2010; Lines, Miller, & Arthur-Stanley, 2010).
 - Family-school partnerships emphasize *the relationship between families and schools*, and purport to enhance student outcomes through development of cross-system supports and continuities across settings.
- Despite general support, research inconsistencies are evident. Variability in findings could be due to the imprecision with which the construct has been investigated. Studies have often failed to operationalize the variable of interest, or failed to differentiate between approaches or activities.

Research Needs and Purpose of Present Review

- Previous meta-analyses have failed to differentiate between general parent involvement models (that focus on activities parents do) and family-school partnership models (that focus on relationships between family members and school personnel).
- There is a need to (a) differentiate between interventions that are relational in nature and strive to strengthen family-school partnerships, versus those that are structural in nature and attempt to promote parent involvement activities; and (b) identify the primary components that typify these approaches.
- The present review is a preliminary summary of studies that investigates the benefits of two clearly distinct approaches – i.e., interventions that are relational in nature and strive to strengthen family-school partnerships and those that are structural in nature and attempt to promote parent involvement activities. Our interest is in:
 - the broad effects of involvement and partnership interventions on academic (learning), behavioral, and social-emotional outcomes for students from preschool to grade 12;
 - the parent involvement or partnership components that typify the interventions;
 - the degree to which contextual distinctions are present in the research, such as child developmental level (i.e., age, grade), family variables (i.e., socioeconomic status, ethnicity), school factors (i.e., geographic context such as urban or rural, socioeconomic composition); and
 - aspects of study quality (e.g., presence of a control group, manualization).

Research Questions

1. To what degree do family intervention studies espouse involvement versus partnership approaches?
2. What structural and relational components are most prevalent in involvement and partnership interventions?
3. Which outcomes are most commonly assessed in parent involvement and partnership interventions?
4. What sample and setting characteristics are most prevalent in the literatures on parent involvement and family-school partnership interventions?
5. What methodological features characterize the literature?

Methods

Study Selection

- A broad search of the literature yielded over 27,000 abstracts that met the following criteria:
 - Investigated parent involvement (Fishel & Ramirez, 2005) or family-school partnership (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001) up to or including Grade 12
 - Presented outcomes for children, parents, teachers, schools, communities, or partnerships
 - Occurred in a naturalistic, not laboratory, setting
- Multiple approaches were used to identify the relevant literature (1979-2011):
 - Reference databases (i.e., ERIC, PsycINFO)
 - Hand searches of journals
- Abstracts are being subjected to a coding process by researchers, and studies that meet criteria for inclusion are being retrieved. To date, 2,809 abstracts have been coded; 484 (17.23%) have been retained. Retrieved studies are being further reviewed to determine their fit to study criteria.

Sample for Current Review

- Randomly selected parent involvement and family-school partnership intervention studies ($n = 21$) are reviewed in the present study.

Coding Variables (see Appendix A)

- Type of intervention (parent involvement, family-school partnership)
- Relational/structural components of the intervention
- Child and parent outcomes
- Student, family, and school characteristics
- Study quality

Coding Procedures

- Five trained individuals are coding the studies.

- Fifteen percent of all studies meeting our selection criteria are being coded by two coders to ensure reliability.
- Regular meetings are held to address questions and minimize drift.

Results

Research Question 1:

To what degree do family intervention studies espouse involvement versus partnership approaches?

- Four-fifths of the intervention studies investigate the effects of a parent involvement approach, rather than a partnership approach.

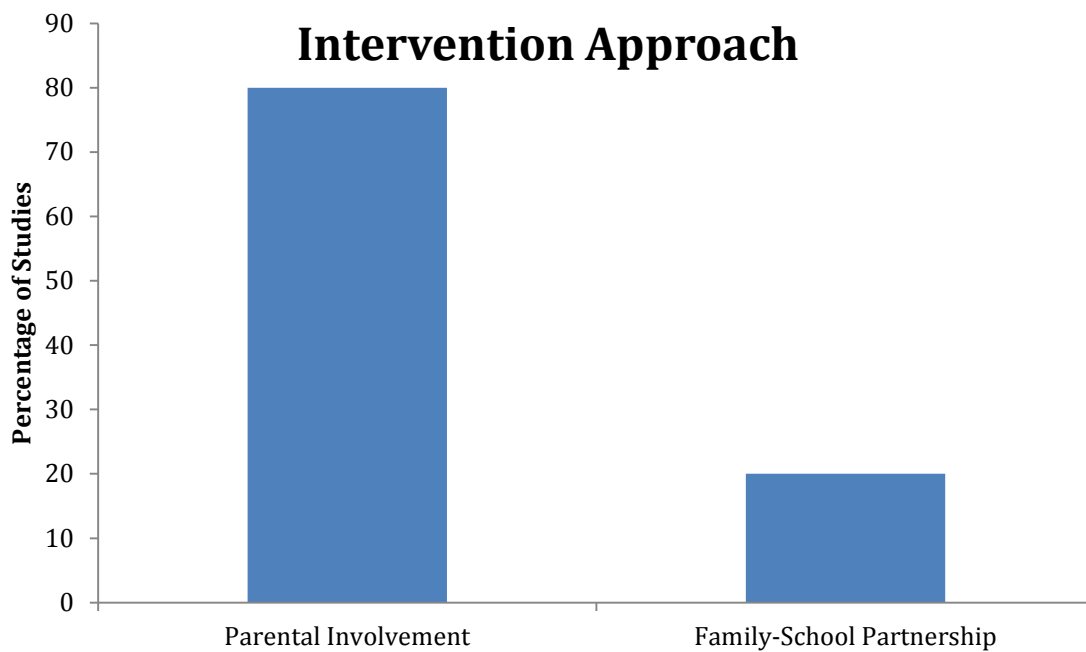


Figure 1. Percentage of studies using parental involvement or family-school partnership intervention approaches.

Research Question 2:

What structural and relational components are most prevalent in the involvement and partnership literatures?

- Consistent with the higher frequency of PI studies, the majority of studies utilized structural approaches when working with parents.
- The most prevalent structural approach involved promoting “curriculum of the home” elements, followed by school to home (one-way) communication.
- The most prevalent relational component of interventions involved promoting parent-child relationships, followed by two-way (home and school) communication.

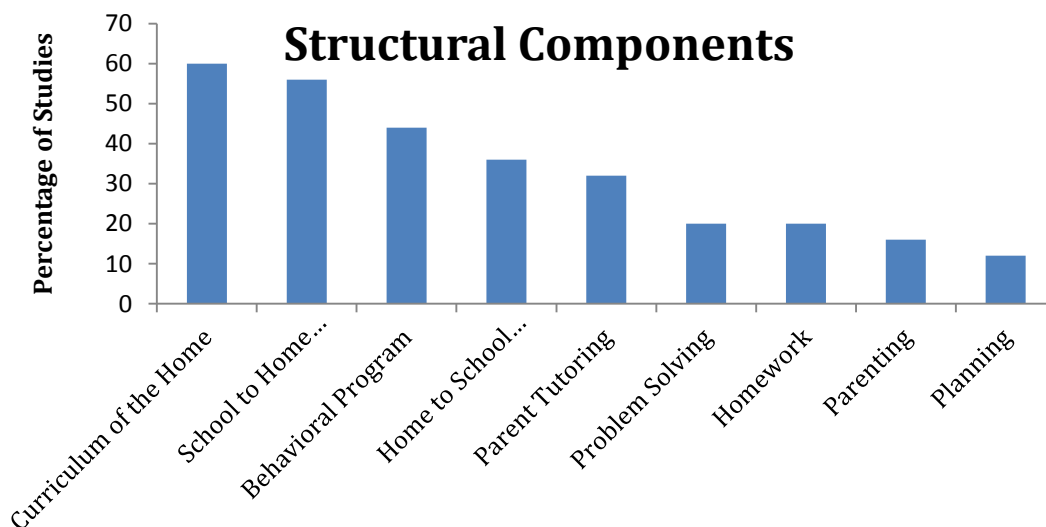


Figure 2. Percentage of studies using structural intervention components.

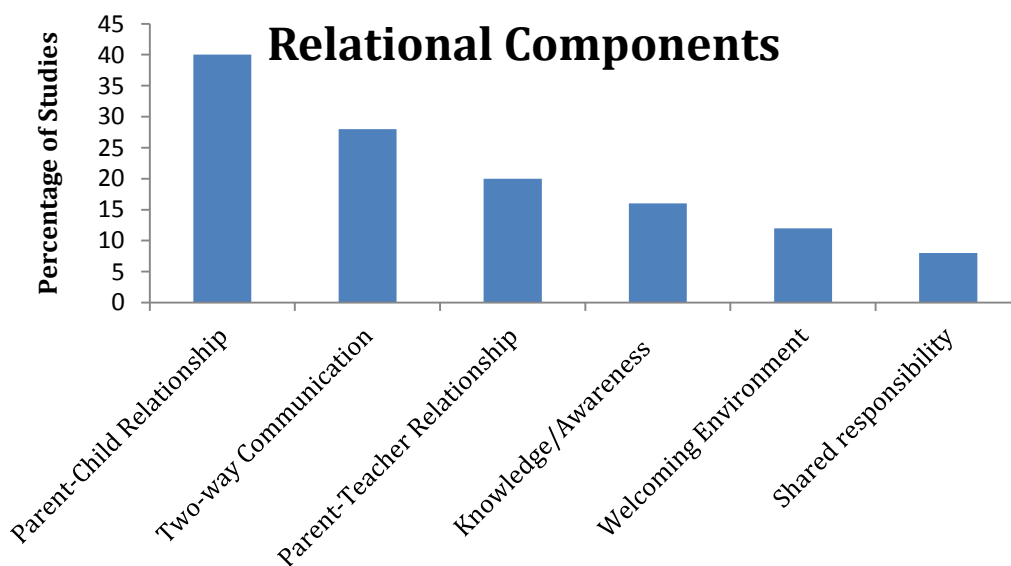


Figure 3. Percentage of studies using relational intervention components.

Research Question 3:

Which outcomes are most commonly assessed in the parent involvement and partnership literatures?

- The vast majority of studies assessed child outcomes as the primary variable of interest; of these, academic achievement was represented in nearly 40% of studies.
- Fewer than 15% of studies targeted parent outcomes, and among these, the majority were structural behaviors/activities.

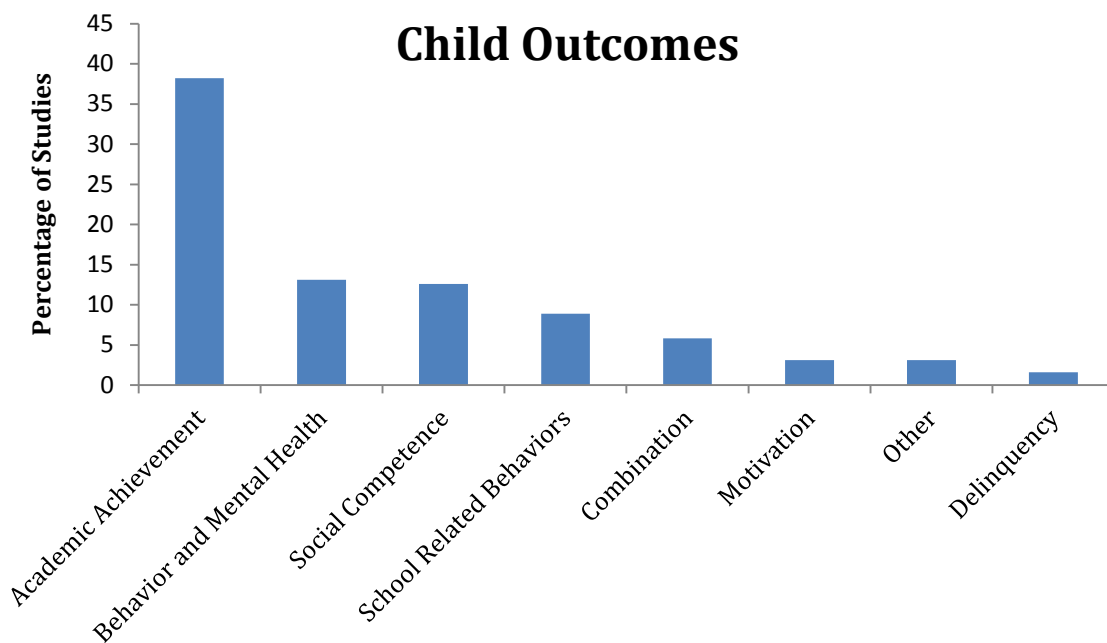
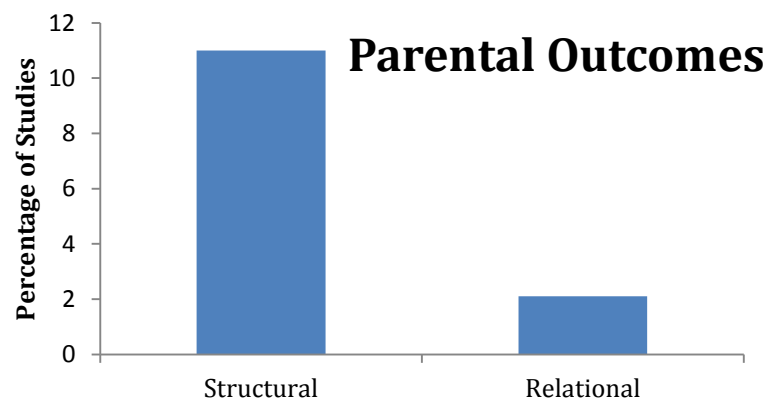


Figure 4. Percentage of studies reporting various child outcomes.



*Figure 5. Percentage of studies reporting structural vs relational parent outcomes.
Research Question 4:*

What sample and setting characteristics are most prevalent in the literatures on parent involvement and family-school partnerships?

- The majority of intervention research is occurring in the elementary grades.
- Approximately half of the samples experience a learning or attentional problem.
- Over one third of the studies are in urban areas.
- More than half of the interventions are in regular education classrooms.

Table 1. Study Characteristics

<i>Sample Information</i>		
Number of Children	Range	8 to 678
	Average	154
	Total	3228
Grade Level	Preschool	9.5%
	Elementary	71.4%
	Junior High	19.0%
Learning difficulties or ADHD		52.4%
<i>Setting Information</i>		
Community	Urban	38.1%
	Suburban	4.8%
	Rural	14.3%
	Combination	14.3%
	Not reported	28.6%
Classroom Types	Regular Education	52.4%
	Head Start	9.5%
	Other	14.3%
	Not reported	23.8%

Research Question 5:

What methodological features characterize the literature?

- The majority of intervention research on parent involvement and family-school partnerships uses random assignment to conditions, with control group procedures specified.
- Intervention components appear to be reported in approximately two-thirds of the intervention research.
- Four-fifths of the intervention studies use multiple methods to assess outcomes.
- Fidelity is promoted through supports offered in close to three-fourths of the studies; however, fewer than half document adherence to treatment standards.

Table 2. Methodological Features (Quality Criteria)

Unit of Assignment	Individual children/parents	60%
	Classroom	24%
	School	16%
Type of Assignment	Random	84%
	Non-random	12%
	Not reported	4%
Control Group Procedures	Typical intervention	28%
	Intervention element placebo/Alternate intervention	8%
	No intervention	36%
	Waitlist/Delayed intervention	12%
	Minimal contact/Other	8%
	Not reported	8%
Documentation of Intervention Components		64%
Multiple Assessment Methods		80%
Fidelity Indicators:		
Training/Consultation/Supervision		72%
Fidelity assessment indicates adherence		44%
Manualization		44%

Discussion

- Despite an increasing focus on the relationships between families and schools in the literature, the interventions reviewed herein have largely focused on enhancing the structural aspects of parents' involvement in children's schooling.
- Based on the small subsample of articles used for the current review, the preliminary findings suggest that the majority of the school-based literature on family interventions focuses heavily on the following:
 - supporting parental involvement through the use of structural intervention components, including school-to-home communication and the promotion of a home environment conducive to student learning;
 - participants in urban areas attending regular education elementary classrooms experiencing learning or attentional problems; and
 - measuring the effectiveness of the intervention based on child-level academic outcomes (e.g., standardized tests and measures of academic competence).
- A minority of the studies examined partnerships between families and schools and utilized relational intervention components (e.g., improving parent-child relationships and bidirectional sharing of information).
- Few of the reviewed studies assessed parental outcomes or included a diverse set of participants (e.g., students in special education or gifted classrooms, English Language Learners, high school students) in non-urban communities.
- Aspects of study quality show that the majority of studies used random assignment to conditions, multiple methods of assessment, and offered support through supervision, training, or consultation. However, few studies reported adherence treatment fidelity.
- There is a need for additional family intervention research that:
 - focuses on the relationship between families and schools;
 - uses a more extensive set of components that promote continuities across the home and school settings, including shared-decision making, collaborative problem-solving, and relationship building;
 - is conducted with a broader set of participants and study outcomes; and

- reports fidelity adherence and criteria.
- Study samples were primarily comprised of elementary students in urban settings in regular education classrooms. Future research should broaden these characteristics to strengthen conclusions about the effectiveness of involvement and partnership activities across various developmental levels and contexts.
- Several limitations characterize this research.
 - Due to the small sample of studies currently reviewed, effect sizes documenting the impact of these interventions on child and parent outcomes could not be computed.
 - This research focused on only a small slice of the research on parent involvement and family-school partnership interventions. Thus, these results may not be representative of this literature as a whole.

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Appendix A

Coding Scheme

Intervention Approach	
I.	Parent involvement (i.e., the participation of significant caregivers (including parents, grandparents, stepparents, foster parents, etc.) in the educational process of their children in order to promote their academic and social well-being [Fishel & Ramirez, 2005])
II.	Family-school partnership (i.e., child-focused approaches wherein families and professionals cooperate, coordinate, and collaborate to enhance opportunities and success for children and adolescents across social, emotional, behavioral, and academic domains [Christenson & Sheridan, 2001])
Intervention Components	
III.	Structural components <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Curriculum of the home (e.g., reading together, talking about school) B. School to home communication (e.g., communication and invitations from school) C. Behavioral program (e.g., delivery of concrete reinforcers) D. Home to school communication (communication from home) E. Parent tutoring (e.g., parents use of specific skills or behaviors to provide direct instruction to their child on tasks outside of homework) F. Problem solving G. Homework (e.g., direct aid, monitoring) H. Parenting I. Planning (e.g., goal setting)
IV.	Relational Components <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Parent-child relationship (e.g., encouragement, warmth) B. Two-way communication (e.g., two-way information sharing) C. Parent-teacher relationship (e.g., relationship building, showing respect) D. Knowledge/awareness E. Welcoming environment F. Shared responsibility (e.g., joint decision making, creating joint perspectives)
Outcome Categories	
V.	Child outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Achievement (e.g., grades, test scores, ratings of competence) B. School-related behaviors (e.g., engagement, truancy) C. Motivation (e.g., intrinsic motivation, school value) D. Social competence (e.g., peer relationships, behavioral regulation) E. Behavior and mental health (e.g., self-esteem, emotion regulation) F. Delinquency (e.g., substance use and abuse behaviors and attitudes)
VI.	Parent outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Structural (e.g., homework involvement, contact with teachers) B. Relational (e.g., parent-child relationship quality, joint decision making)
Sample Information	
VII.	Child factors

- A. Number of children
- B. Grade
- C. Learning difficulties or ADHD
- VIII. Setting factors
 - A. Community (e.g., rural, urban)
 - B. Classroom types (e.g., Head Start)

Methodological Features

- IX. Study quality
 - A. Unit of assignment (e.g., individual children/parents, classrooms)
 - B. Type of assignment (i.e., random, non-random)
 - C. Control group procedures (i.e., waitlist/delayed intervention, minimal contact)
 - D. Documentation of intervention components
 - E. Multiple assessment methods
 - F. Fidelity indicators
 - 1. Training/consultation/supervision
 - 2. Fidelity assessment indicates adherence
 - 3. Manualization
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