the evaluation exchange

A PERIODICAL ON EMERGING STRATEGIES IN EVALUATING CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

from the director's desk

Heather Weiss

How children learn is deeply rooted in their experiences at home, in school, and in the community. Recent issues of *The Evaluation Exchange* have explored the learning opportunities afforded by early childhood and out-of-school time programs, which complement what schools have to offer. This issue focuses on another critical complement: family involvement programs and practices.

Research in developmental psychology and sociology continues to confirm that parenting practices and home-school relationships promote children's learning and development, and that family involvement is a complex phenomenon, influenced by class, race, culture, and school and community supports. Years of practitioner knowledge from home visiting, parent education, family involvement, and parent leadership programs guide future program development, research, and evaluation. However, rarely do we marry research and practice knowledge to support practitioners' efforts to design effective, sustainable, and scalable programs. We have also underinvested in evaluation in this arena, especially regarding the application of strong research designs and methodology to school-age programs.

This issue supports efforts to build a conversation about the future research, evaluation, and practice agenda for the family involvement field. In Questions & Answers, Jeanne Brooks-Gunn confirms that parenting behaviors are amenable to program intervention but that two-generational programs are more likely to enhance school readiness. Drawing from several recent evaluations, Theory & Practice culls the practice dimensions to support the development of co-constructed family involvement programs. These dimensions should be treated as hypotheses for further testing in future evaluations.

Ask the Expert provides insights into contextual factors, such as socioeconomic status, that influence family involvement practices and inform program strategies to ensure that all children receive high quality school experiences. An Evaluations to Watch matrix compiles some of the major investments in evaluation that will inform our learning about family involvement, and parent leadership and organizing, in the next few years.

The Promising Practices, Evaluations to Watch, and Beyond Basic Training sections illustrate various methods for the evaluation of family involvement programs, including concept mapping, participatory approaches, multilevel analytic models, and experimental design. A description of the Campbell Collaboration's forthcoming systematic review of parent involvement evaluations, for example, assesses what we can learn now from existing experimental evaluations.

This issue is designed to push all in the family involvement field to think through what the practice-informed research and evaluation agenda should be: How can research and evaluation be aligned with practice knowledge to gain a deeper understanding of the contextual variables that influence family involvement outcomes? Given the findings of developmental research on the importance of family involvement through adolescence, how can we create a continuous system of programs serving children and families from birth to adolescence? What can research and evaluation tell us about where and when in children's lives the most promising investments can be made?

We hope that this issue of *The Evaluation Exchange* sparks discussion and debate about these and other questions.

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> theory & practice

Co-Constructing Family Involvement

M. Elena Lopez, Holly Kreider, and Margaret Caspe from HFRP offer a working hypothesis about the co-construction of home-school partnerships to support children's learning and development.

Family involvement in education predicts children's school success. Developmental and education research confirms that parental attitudes, styles of interaction, behaviors, and relationships with schools are associated with children's social development and academic performance (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Phillips, Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, Klebanov & Crane, 1998). Not surprisingly, over the last four decades, family involvement has been mainstreamed in schools; however, the practice of family involvement often falls short of its promise. Schools still struggle to engage families, and parents voice the need for greater support and opportunities for participation in their children's learning.

As Jeanne Brooks-Gunn concludes (see article on page 12 —*Ed.*), evaluations tell us that many family-centered interventions are successful in changing parenting behaviors. Yet home-school relationships are more difficult to change. These relationships are often characterized as centered on school priorities and initiated by the schools, at the expense of ignoring families' concerns and expertise regarding their children. A home-school relationship should be a *co-constructed* reciprocal activity in which both the agency and sense of efficacy of parents, and the involvement opportunities provided by schools and other institutions that work with children are important (see also Weiss, Dearing, Mayer, Kreider & McCartney, in press). This article identifies key dimensions of home-school relationships that engage families and support effective parental involvement in children's learning.

We used data from five programs, including their evaluations and practitioner reflections, to distill an initial set of dimensions that represent the co-constructed nature of home-school relationships. The programs reviewed all have diverse family roles, are currently being implemented, serve children from kindergarten through high school, and have been evaluated.[1]

Dimension 1: Responding to Family Interests and Needs

One dimension of co-construction is responsiveness to both school and family interests and needs. Responsiveness is particularly important for enrolling family members in program interventions and sustaining their participation so that they can receive the full treatment benefits. At the same time, programs that help schools address their concerns are likely to gain school endorsement. Families and Schools Together (FAST)[2] is a program that seeks to reduce children's behavioral problems at home and in school through a family-based intervention. It offers parents intangible incentives, such as respect and social support, and practical inducements, such as convenient scheduling, transportation, and meals. Through an 8-week session for parents and children, the program enhances family communications and interactions, builds parent social support networks, and promotes trusting relationships between school staff and parents.

An experimental evaluation of one site found that FAST parents reported significant and positive changes in elementary school children's home behavior compared to control group parents (Abt Associates, 2001). FAST parents were also more likely to participate in volunteer work and serve in community leadership positions. Although some implementation challenges may have limited the number and types of positive outcomes, the evaluation concluded that substantial rates of program completion should be considered an achievement because the kinds of families involved are not easy to engage and retain in program interventions.

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[1] The evaluations were formative (1) and summative (4), the latter including experimental (2), quasi-experimental (1), and nonexperimental (1) designs.

[2] This program differs from Fast Track, the program discussed in the article on page 5. —*Ed.*

Dimension 2: Engaging in Dialogue With Families

Trust and mutual respect are key ingredients to meaningful home-school relationships. Such relationships can be built through an ongoing process of dialogue grounded in families' own experiences. The Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE) uses dialogue "to build community and social capital, situating educational activity in the lived experience of participants, and raising participants' consciousness about their situations and their own power to take informed action" (Golan & Peterson, 2002). PIQE engages immigrant parents in their children's education through parenting sessions and follow-up coaching that provide information about the educational system, promote relationships with schools, and help parents support children's home learning. An experimental evaluation of the program found that program parents in elementary, middle, and high schools significantly changed their parenting beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors in support of their children's education, and that parents' knowledge was the strongest predictor of parental involvement (Chrispeels & González, 2004; Chrispeels, González & Arellano, 2004).

Dimension 3: Building on Family Funds of Knowledge

Program efforts that acknowledge the co-constructed nature of family involvement not only draw on the school's expertise but build on the wealth of information and ideas that families impart to their children. The goal of Math and Parent Partnerships (MAPPS) is to improve children's mathematical performance by improving parents' own math skills and by creating opportunities for parents and children to learn about math together. MAPPS facilitates inquiry and gives voice to parents' ideas and concerns about their own and their children's mathematical experiences.

MAPPS workshops support multiple strategies of problem solving and draw on the funds of knowledge of parents and students. A distinctive aspect of the program is that parent and teacher leaders often work as a team to facilitate the workshops. According to a 2003 formative evaluation of four MAPPS sites, leadership training focused on team-building activities, and on taking advantage of the strengths and talents of parent and teacher leaders (Allexsaht-Snider & Bernier, 2003). School support—especially principals, parent liaisons, and enthusiastic teachers—positively influenced parent participation.

Dimension 4: Training Parents for Leadership

Families, schools, and communities need to work together to shape the school changes that ensure all children will succeed. In a system where schools hold power, parents must acquire the skills to become effective advocates for change. The Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership helps parents support and monitor the implementation of Kentucky's school reform by providing them with intensive training and support to implement school projects that focus on student achievement and parental involvement. Parents learn to analyze and use desegregated school achievement data to develop projects that focus on the specific needs of schools.

In a system where schools hold power, parents must acquire the skills to become effective advocates for change.

An evaluation of the program reported that parents did work for change and did give schools the mechanisms to work better with students and parents, but that there were limits to the extent to which parent leaders could change school organization and have a direct impact on student achievement (Corbett & Wilson, 2000; 2001). The findings underscore the complexity of the change process, including the time it takes to co-construct relationships and address power issues. They also suggest the need to invest in training and supporting school leaders and teachers to partner with parents.

Dimension 5: Facilitating Connections Across Children's Learning Contexts

Children grow up in multiple social environments, and families can be involved in their learning and development in the home, school, and community. In particular, parents act as central managers of their children's time out of school, time that offers opportunities for enrichment that are not ordinarily available from home and school. Participation in out-of-school time programs may increase some types of parental involvement, such as help with homework, asking about class work, and attending after school events (Dynarski et al., 2004).

One example of a community-based opportunity for family involvement comes from Capital Kids, an initiative of the Mayor's Office in Columbus, Ohio. The goal of the initiative is to provide academic support, safety and nutrition, a positive environment, prevention and skill building, and strong family involvement in 35 after school program sites. Children's learning is supported in part by the facilitation of connections between families and teachers. In some sites staff members attend a monthly meeting sponsored by the Columbus Public Schools' Center for Parent Engagement to learn about resources parents can use to support their children's education. Families also receive invaluable support, for example, through a food kitchen operated by one of the programs. Finally, programs receive support from families, partly in the form of volunteering and activity planning. A quasi-experimental evaluation showed that the vast majority of youth surveyed feel they learned new things and do a better job on homework, and the vast majority of parents surveyed feel that the program has improved their child's grades and social skills, and that the food kitchen helps support their family (Anderson-Butcher 2001, 2002; Anderson-Butcher et al., 2003).

These five dimensions need to be further examined and tested in order to understand how they add value to parent participation, that is, to enrolling and sustaining parents for the duration of the intervention, and to understand how they connect with school change and student achievement. They also need to be examined to figure out the incentives for school personnel to become enthusiastic partners of home-school relationships. Furthermore, the ways that family involvement is co-constructed between families and schools may vary as children age and become more active

Assessing the Effects of Parent Involvement Interventions on Elementary School Student Achievement

Herbert Turner, Chad Nye, and Jamie Schwartz explain the Campbell Collaboration's application of its systematic review process to parent involvement interventions.

The Campbell Collaboration (C2), an international volunteer network of researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and consumers, produces systematic reviews that assess the effect of interventions on the individuals or groups targeted. A hallmark of a C2 systematic review is the use of the highest standards of scientific inquiry, with an emphasis on randomized control trial (RCT) studies.[1] C2 systematic reviews are designed to identify, organize, analyze, and summarize data from existing research to provide guidance to stakeholders. The development and dissemination of a C2 systematic review involves a transparent process which, when feasible, includes a meta-analysis to statistically reconcile study results. To illustrate the procedural, integrative, and interpretative components of a C2 systematic review, we present below a step-by-step synopsis of the review we are currently completing in the area of parent involvement.[2]

A Systematic Review of Parent Involvement

A C2 systematic review involves five steps:

1. *Formulating the problem and criteria for study inclusion.* In this case we began with the question, What is the effect of parent involvement on the academic achievement of elementary school children in Grades K–5? We decided to include only studies in which (a) parents provided education enrichment activities outside of formal schooling, (b) academic achievement was measured as an outcome, and (c) random assignment was used to create treatment and control groups.

2. *Locating studies.* We searched 20 electronic databases and emailed over 1,500 policymakers, researchers, practitioners, and consumers to request referrals either to studies or to people who knew of studies relevant to our review. To date, we have located 20 RCT studies that meet the inclusion criteria.

3. *Coding the studies.* The 20 studies were independently coded for design characteristics (e.g., random assignment method), intervention characteristics (e.g., parent as reading tutor), outcome measures (e.g., reading achievement), and target population (e.g., fifth graders).

4. *Computing effect sizes.*[3] We then took the difference between the group means on an outcome measure, such as reading achievement, and divided that difference by the pooled standard deviation of both groups.

5. *Interpretation of results.* We found that individual evaluations might turn out to have quite different results, indicating that parent involvement is statistically significant in one study but not in another. Using meta-analysis, that is, grouping the studies and computing an overall d index,[4] what may at first appear to be contradictory studies can be quantitatively summarized and reconciled to give a useful estimate of the magnitude of the intervention effect. Based on a bare-bones meta-analysis[5] of a subset of four of the studies in our review ($d = 0.64$), we were able to conclude with 95% confidence that children in the parent involvement group scored approximately 2/3 of a standard deviation above the average academic achievement score for children in the control group, and that the effect is statistically significant.

Potential Contributions of C2 Systematic Reviews

An important characteristic of a C2 systematic review is *transparency*. Transparency allows stakeholders to interpret the validity of the review, which helps them to distinguish among interventions that are effective, ineffective, and even harmful. Practitioners can use the review as a guide to implement effective interventions, while policymakers can use the review to formulate policy or fund new or existing programs.

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[4] The *d index* estimates the magnitude of the differences among groups in standard deviation units. A *d* index of .20 is small, .50 moderate, and .80 large. For more information on the *d* index, see McCartney, K., & Dearing, E. (2002). Evaluating effect sizes in the policy arena. *The Evaluation Exchange, 8*(1), 4, 7. Available at www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/eval/issue18/spotlight.html.

[5] A *bare bones meta-analysis* is a meta-analysis that examines effect sizes prior to additional analytical steps, such as moderator analysis.

Related Resources

Cooper, H. (1998). *Synthesizing research: A guide for literature reviews.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hunt, M. (1997). *How science takes stock: The story of meta-analysis.* New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

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[1] A *randomized control trial* study randomly assigns individuals to a treatment group or to a control group. When certain assumptions are met, the intervention is interpreted as causing group differences on outcomes.

[2] This review is monitored, supported, and disseminated under C2's Education Coordinating Group, at www.cahs.colostate.edu/r-dcenter/CCECG/home.asp.

[3] An *effect size* measurement calculates the difference between two or more groups.

Improving Parental Involvement:
Evaluating Treatment Effects in the Fast Track Program

Robert Nix,[1] research associate at Pennsylvania State University, describes how a rigorous evaluation of a complex behavior problems preventive intervention analyzes its school-home component.

Children do better in school, both academically and socially, when parents are involved in their education. Children with conduct problems often do poorly in school, and their parents are more likely to have characteristics associated with low levels of involvement (e.g., poverty, single-parent status, or depression). Too often the only contact such parents have with schools occurs when their sons or daughters are in trouble. Promoting positive school-home relations was, therefore, a primary purpose of the parent groups in Fast Track, a school-based, multicomponent, multigenerational intervention designed to prevent the development of serious conduct problems (Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group [CPPRG], 1992). Fast Track parent groups met at their child's school each week for 2 hours during nonschool hours. During the first hour, parents discussed parenting strategies with other families while children met in social skills training groups. In the second hour, parents and children participated in cooperative activities and had opportunities to develop reading skills.

To evaluate whether Fast Track was successful in promoting positive school-home relations—along with its more proximal goal of enhancing children's functioning—the program relied on an experimental design. Schools in poor neighborhoods in four states were randomly assigned to intervention or no-treatment control conditions. Our high-risk sample was comprised of the 10–15% of children in those schools with the most severe oppositional and aggressive behavior in kindergarten. Although Fast Track's evaluators recognized that the assumptions of an experimental design can break down in long-term interventions, they determined this was still the best way to achieve reliable estimates of treatment effects.

To measure the salient aspects of positive school-home relations, Fast Track created the Parent-Teacher Involvement Questionnaire (PTIQ).[2] The PTIQ focuses on six theoretically derived and statistically validated dimensions of involvement: (1) frequency of contact between parents and teachers, (2) parental involvement at school, such as volunteering in the classroom, (3) the quality of the parent-teacher relationship, (4) parents' emphasis on the importance of education, (5) parental involvement at home, such as helping with homework, and (6) parental endorsement of and confidence in children's schools (Kohl, Lengua, McMahon & CPPRG, 2000).

Frequently, different sources of data provide different information about an intervention and its effectiveness. In line with its multimethod and multi-informant approach to outcome assessment, Fast Track created both parent and teacher versions of the PTIQ. With respect to the PTIQ, parent ratings of their own behaviors at the end of first grade did not reveal a significant treatment effect, whereas teacher ratings of parent behaviors did (CPPRG, 1999). It is possible that parents in the intervention might have raised their expectations regarding how much they should be involved in their children's education, and, therefore, rated themselves less favorably. Whatever the reason, this pattern of findings was consistent in Fast Track: Measures with the least bias, such as observations of children's behavior at school, individual sociometric interviews of all classmates, interviewer ratings of parent-child interactions, and standardized testing of children yielded the largest treatment effects. Thus, if Fast Track had relied on parent self-reports alone, it would not have appeared very successful.

It is not possible to isolate completely the effect of one component of Fast Track, such as parent groups, on a particular outcome, such as parental involvement, because all high-risk children and families received an integrated package of prevention services. Even so, preliminary analyses suggest that attendance at and engagement in parent groups was related to more favorable teacher ratings on the PTIQ at the end of first grade. Such findings regarding dose, process, and outcome provide empirical support for hypothesized mechanisms of change.

In sum, Fast Track conducted parent groups in schools to promote more positive school-home relations. Relying on rigorous design and sound measures, the Fast Track evaluation sought to capitalize on the external validity achieved by providing and assessing treatment in real-world settings and on the internal validity that usually comes from smaller laboratory studies.[3]

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[1] This article is co-written by the Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group: Karen L. Bierman, Pennsylvania State University; John D. Coie, Duke University; Kenneth A. Dodge, Duke University; E. Michael Foster, Pennsylvania State University; Mark T. Greenberg, Pennsylvania State University; John E. Lochman, University of Alabama; Robert J. McMahon, University of Washington; and Ellen E. Pinderhughes, Tufts University.

[2] The PTIQ is available for free at www.fasttrackproject.org.

[3] Editors' note: *Internal validity* refers to confidence that the experimental manipulation made a significant difference. *External validity* refers to the generalizability of results over different populations and settings.

Parental Involvement and Secondary School Student Educational Outcomes: A Meta-Analysis

William Jeynes, from California State University at Long Beach, describes a meta-analysis of 52 studies that confirm parental involvement is associated with higher student achievement in secondary school.

Although much research has focused on the importance of parental involvement in children's education, no detailed meta-analysis examines the influence of parental involvement on the academic achievement of the secondary-student population. This fact largely contributes to the limited body of knowledge regarding which aspects of parental involvement help student education and just what components of this involvement are most important.[1] I conducted a meta-analysis to determine the overall effects of parental involvement and to determine the extent to which certain aspects of parental involvement are beneficial to children.

A meta-analysis statistically combines all the relevant existing studies on a given subject in order to determine the aggregated results of the research. The reasonably large amount of available research on parental involvement suggests that this research area has developed to a point at which a meta-analysis would be beneficial; it would yield some answers to questions that the individual studies by themselves are too narrowly focused to address.

A quantitative synthesis of 52 studies examining the effects of parental involvement on secondary students' academic achievement addressed the following questions:

1. *How does the academic achievement of secondary students whose parents are actively involved in their education compare to that of their counterparts whose parents are not involved?*
The results of the meta-analysis indicate that parental involvement is associated with higher student achievement outcomes. This trend holds not only for parental involvement overall but for most components of parental involvement that were examined in the meta-analysis. Also, the pattern holds not only for the overall student population but for minority students as well. Although the influence of parental involvement generally holds across academic variables, it appeared to produce statistically significant effects slightly more often for grades and other measures than for standardized tests. For the overall population of students, the academic advantage for those whose parents were highly involved in their education averaged in the general range of about 1/2 of a standard deviation for overall educational outcomes, grades, and academic achievement when no sophisticated controls were used. What this means is that the academic achievement score distribution for children whose parents were highly involved in their education was substantially higher than that of their counterparts whose parents were less involved.

2. *What is the particular influence of specific aspects of parental involvement?*
One of the most vital aspects of this study was its examination of specific components of parental involvement to see which aspects influenced student achievement. One of the patterns that emerged from the findings was that 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.

3. *Which aspects of parental involvement have the greatest impact on academic achievement?*
The largest effect sizes[2] emerged for parental expectations and style. The effect sizes for family communication about school were smaller than for either parental style or expectations. Parent involvement programs also influenced educational outcomes, although to a lesser degree than preexisting expressions of parental support.

4. *Do the effects of parental involvement hold for racial minority children?*
The results for studies examining 100% minority students and mostly minority students were also close to about 1/2 a standard deviation unit. For overall achievement, the effect size was .46 standard deviation units for studies that examined all minority children, and .53 standard deviation units for those studies that included mostly minority children. These results highlight the consistency of the impact of parental involvement.

Conclusion

Taken together the results of this study are very enlightening. First, these findings are fairly substantial and support the notion that parental involvement has salient effects across various populations. Second, not only does voluntary parental involvement have an effect, but parental programs do as well. Third, this meta-analysis suggests that among the most important aspects of parental involvement are some of the more subtle facets of this practice, among them parental style and parental expectations.

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[1] Ballantine, J. H. (1999). Getting involved in our children's education. *Childhood Education, 75*(3), 170–171; Christian, K., Morrison, F. J., & Bryant, F. B. (1998). Predicting kindergarten academic skills: Interactions among child care, maternal education, and family literacy environments. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 13*(3), 501–521; Hara, S. R. (1998). Parent involvement: The key to improved student achievement. *School Community Journal, 8*(2), 9–19.

[2] An *effect size* measurement calculates the difference between two or more groups. The magnitude of the differences among groups is measured in standard deviation units using the *d* index. A *d* index of .20 is small, .50 moderate, and .80 large. For more on standard deviation units, see McCartney, K., & Dearing, E. (2002). Evaluating effect sizes in the policy arena. *The Evaluation Exchange*, 8(1), 4, 7. www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/eval/issue18/spotlight.html

Blending Evaluation Traditions:
The Talent Development Model

Veronica Thomas and Velma LaPoint, from Howard University's Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk, describe the Talent Development approach to evaluating an urban family-school-community partnership program.[1]

Evaluating family-school-community partnership programs for urban communities, especially low-income and under-resourced communities, is a daunting task. Through our work with Howard University's Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk (CRESPAR), we incorporated a Talent Development evaluation framework to help us design and implement evaluations of our school-based family and community partnership initiative for a public school in a high-poverty area in Washington, DC, which serves predominately African-American students.

The Talent Development evaluation approach is rooted in several evaluation traditions that intentionally seek engagement with contexts of practice. These traditions include responsive, participatory, empowerment, and culturally competent approaches to evaluation. Further, the Talent Development approach seeks to be practical, useful, formative, and empowering for the many individuals served by our evaluations, and to give voice to persons whose perspectives are often ignored, minimized, or dismissed in urban school settings.

Our family-school-community partnership program (FSCPP) sought to improve participants' knowledge of, attitudes toward, and participation in FSCPP activities. The program consisted of a coordinated set of five interventions: (1) a family resource center located in the school building and used by family members, students, teachers, staff, and community members; (2) a high school action team (HSAT), which included students, teachers, staff, Parent Teacher Association representatives, family and community members, and CRESPAR staff; (3) a Talent Development attendance program, comprised of HSAT members, attendance staff, volunteers, and CRESPAR staff; (4) a Talent Development student team, consisting of students, teachers, school administrators, and CRESPAR staff; and (5) the *Newsletter Communication Network*, a publication, written and produced at the school, which provides information to students, family members, school staff, community businesses, and local organizations related to school and community activities.

In addition, five overlapping themes central to the Talent Development evaluation approach were incorporated into our evaluations of the FSCPP: (1) engaging stakeholders, (2) co-construction, (3) responsiveness, (4) cultural and contextual relevance, and (5) triangulation of perspectives. In designing and evaluating the FSCPP, we found that early and ongoing engagement of key

stakeholders was critical. We thus started out by conducting needs assessments to better understand what stakeholders wanted and needed related to family-school-community partnership programming.

Co-construction calls for evaluators and school stakeholders to be ongoing collaborators in the framing of evaluation questions, development of instruments, collection of data, and interpretation, use, and dissemination of findings. We therefore valued stakeholder views in defining problems and solutions—an approach that empowered stakeholders and was effective in obtaining initial and ongoing participant buy-in. We provided multiple opportunities for FSCPP stakeholders to ask questions, critique our efforts, and provide input.

The program and its evaluation were constructed in ways that were directly responsive to stakeholders' needs. Responsiveness was operationalized by consideration of our urban school stakeholders' perspectives prior to planning, implementing, or evaluating any interventions. As for addressing cultural and contextual relevance, we view cultural competence as an essential element for working effectively with diverse populations. We have found that, as African-American evaluators working in a predominately African-American urban school setting, sharing the racial and ethnic background of stakeholders increases our ability to engage stakeholders and better understand the verbal, as well as nonverbal, behaviors being observed. However, we were also challenged to be ever so self-reflective and open to examining our own assumptions about urban schools and their stakeholders.

Triangulation involves using more than one perspective to study the same thing. In our work, triangulation of perspectives occurred in multiple ways, including, for example, investigator triangulation, methodological triangulation, and data-analysis triangulation.

Participants in the high school action team became "assistant evaluators" to CRESPAR staff and received ongoing training in their evaluation role. HSAT members were involved, for example, in developing evidence-based program goals, objectives, and out-

Related Resources

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A Catalog of Family Process Measures

Margaret Caspe from HFRP describes the various measures family intervention and prevention programs use to evaluate family processes.

Developmental research confirms the importance of family processes and of the home environment in child and youth development and learning. How do intervention programs measure changes in family processes? To address this question, the Family Involvement Network of Educators (FINE) here at Harvard Family Research Project reviewed rigorously evaluated intervention and prevention programs that sought to change children's cognitive and socioemotional development by supporting both children and parents. Using the database of effective interventions developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services,[1] we identified 13 programs that measured family processes along four dimensions: family context, parent-child relationship, parenting practices, and parent involvement in children's learning in the home and school.

Family context refers to attempts on the part of the program to address issues of family functioning and the family environment, including stress, isolation, family cohesion, and problems related to child and substance abuse. *Parent-child relationship* relates to efforts to affect parent-child bonding, including increasing parent-child communication, positive interactions, and attachment. In the *parenting practices* dimension, programs impact parenting strategies as regards effective and positive discipline practices, appropriate parental expectations, and monitoring. Lastly, *parent involvement* refers to a program's intent both to increase parents' skills, beliefs, and attitudes in supporting children in homework and literacy activities, and to bolster family and school relationships and parent-teacher communication.

For a breakdown of the various measures programs use to evaluate family processes, see the table on page 9.

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New Resources From HFRP

HFRP founder and director, Heather Weiss, along with Project Manager Holly Kreider, Senior Consultant M. Elena Lopez, and Celina Chatman of the University of Chicago's Harris Graduate School of Public Policy have edited a volume of research-based teaching cases and theoretical perspectives focusing on dilemmas in family-school-community relationships. ***Preparing Educators to Involve Families: From Theory to Practice*** will be published by Sage Publications in spring 2005. For more information about this book visit www.sagepub.com.

[1] For more information go to modelprograms.samhsa.gov/template_cf.cfm?page=model_list.

MEASURES USED TO EVALUATE FAMILY PROCESSES

Family Processes	Measures of Family Processes	Measure Description
Family context	Family Environment Scale (FES; Moos & Moos, 1984)	Respondents (parents or adolescents) describe their family interactions in terms of cohesiveness, expressiveness, conflict, independence, organization, and control.
	Structural Family Systems Rating (SFSR; Szapocznik et al., 1991)	Trained observers rate family interactions for closeness, distance, and boundaries between family members, based on audiotaped recordings of three standardized tasks (e.g., deciding on a menu for a meal).
	Internal Control, Power of Others, Chance scales (IPC; Levenson, 1981)	Parents report their sense of internal control over their lives.
	Social Network Questionnaire (SNQ; Antonucci, 1986)	Parents report about their social networks, including size, who is relied upon, and frequency of contact.
	Parenting Stress Index (PSI; Abidin, 1995)	Parents report their sources of stress (depression, isolation, and health).
	Family Relationship Scale (FRS; Tolan, Gorman-Smith, Huesmann & Zelli, 1997)	Parents report about family cohesion, beliefs about the family, and structure (organization).
	Developmental History & Life Changes (Miller-Johnson & Maumary-Gremaud, 1995)	Parents respond to open-ended questions and describe how they would respond to a series of six standardized vignettes.
	Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales (FACES III; Olson, Portner & Lavee, 1985)	Families report about family adaptability and cohesion.
Parent-child relationships	Parent-Child Interaction Task (PCIT; Forehand & McMahon, 1981)	Parents engage in four tasks with their child, including free play, a parent control situation, a task using LEGO plastic construction toys, and cleanup.
	Parent-Child Affective Quality (Spoth, Redmond & Shin, 1998)	Parents report about positive and negative affect in the parent-child relationship. Trained observers rate warmth and relationship quality of the parent-child interaction in a videotaped family interaction task (e.g., discuss questions on cards related to family life).
	Dyadic Parent-Child Interactive Coding System Revised (DPICS-R; Webster-Stratton, 1985)	Trained observer rates mother interacting with her child for 30 minutes in the home environment.
Parenting practices	Self-Perceptions of the Parental Role scale (SPPR; MacPhee, Benson & Bullock, 1986)	Parents report their self-perceived competence in the parental role and their satisfaction with the role.
	Alabama Parenting Questionnaire (APQ; Shelton, Frick & Wooten, 1996)	Parents report their involvement, positive parenting, monitoring and supervision, and inconsistent discipline and punishment practices.
	Parenting Practices Questionnaire (PPQ; Gorman-Smith, Tolan, Zelli & Huesmann, 1996)	Parents report their discipline and monitoring techniques.
	Parenting Practices Scale (PPS; Strayhorn & Weidman, 1988)	Parents report about their discipline and warmth.
	Ratings of parent change (Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 1999)	Parents describe the extent of change in their own parenting practices and social cognitions over the past year.
Parent involvement in the home and in the school	Parent as a Teacher Inventory (PAAT; Strom, 1984)	Parents report their feelings about their child's need for creativity and play, about their own role as teacher of their child, and about their level of patience with their child.
	Parent-Teacher Involvement Questionnaire (Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 1999)	Teachers and parents respond to questions about parent-teacher contact and relationships, parent involvement in school, parent involvement at home, and parent endorsement of the school.
	Parent-Teacher Involvement Questionnaire (INVOLVE-P/T; Reid, Webster-Stratton & Beauchaine, 2001)	Parents report the amount and quality of their involvement with their children's education and activities at home and at school. Teachers rate parents' involvement in their child's education and their frequency of contact with teachers and school personnel.

Using Concept Mapping to Develop Family Support Program Theory

Scott Rosas, from the Nemours Foundation, discusses the potential of concept mapping for the design and implementation of family support evaluations.

Although family support has gained widespread acceptance as a viable human-service delivery approach, particular characteristics of family support models often present challenges to determining clear program outcomes. Family support models have emerged from a variety of theoretical and nontheoretical approaches, reflected in the wide array of service mechanisms and diverse perspectives on the scope, content, and effects of programs. The absence of a clear empirical foundation on which to base decisions has led to confusion among developers and evaluators about which aspects of these programs to assess.

Moreover, because family support programs interact uniquely with the local context, they are constantly adjusting to environmental influences, and the same model can vary widely across contexts. Finally, these programs cannot be separated from the numerous individual characteristics and perceptions of those who develop and manage them. Although these issues are not exclusive to family support, they highlight the need for clear conceptual frameworks to guide the design, implementation, and evaluation of family support programs.

Concept Mapping

The need for conceptual clarity has led developers and evaluators to search for ways to develop adequate program theory. One promising approach to theory development is concept mapping.[1] Concept mapping is a multistep process that helps to describe and delineate concepts and their interrelationships through group process, multivariate statistical analyses, and group interpretation. It involves the following four steps:

1. Generation of content through group brainstorming.
2. Organization and prioritization of content through sorting and rating procedures.
3. Analysis and construction of concept maps through the application of multidimensional scaling and hierarchical cluster analysis.[2]
4. Labeling and interpretation of the maps through stakeholder review.

Family support practitioners, for example, may brainstorm specific benefits for participants, such as peer support, gaining confidence, and communication skills. They then sort each of the brainstormed items into groups based on similarity—social relationships, personal development, resource control—and rate each item on a scale reflecting their relative importance. The analysis produces a concept map that visually represents each item's place in the hierarchy; for example, relationships may score higher than services. In labeling and interpreting the map, practitioners discuss how it represents their ideas of what happens as a result of participation in the model.

Potential Benefits for Family Support

Concept mapping can assist family support developers and evaluators in articulating a framework of central program concepts. Using concept mapping to guide theory-driven evaluations can help strengthen the conceptual and empirical base of family support. Concept mapping can also help support sound implementation of family support programs. At regular intervals, concept maps could be compared with original program design to monitor the degree to which programs shift or adapt to their environments. Key differences between staff and participant orientations have important implications for program design and evaluation; regular review of concept maps can enable stakeholders to identify disparate views before they lead to implementation problems.

Building and maintaining good stakeholder-evaluator relations is another area in which concept mapping can be of use. Family support evaluations are often collegial and participatory, and require data-gathering techniques to facilitate the socialization of evaluators and agency staff. The application of concept mapping in evaluation can build value for stakeholders, as their input is incorporated throughout the entire process, increasing the likelihood of ongoing engagement in programming and evaluation.

Output from concept mapping can help family support developers and evaluators make informed decisions about design, measurement, analysis, and interpretation. These decisions are crucial; Olds[3] found that the inability to specify the benefits families might receive from family support initiatives has been due to an absence of investigations grounded in a clear theoretical framework.

Finally, concept mapping can help facilitate the development of cumulative knowledge about social problem solving. Comparing concept maps across family support programs can highlight common program elements, thereby enabling practitioners and evaluators to more readily identify similarities and differences in application. Thus, concept mapping could be used to identify under what conditions and contexts family support program features contribute to the effectiveness of a particular model.

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[1] Trochim, W. M. K. (1989). An introduction to concept mapping for planning and evaluation. *Evaluation and Program Planning, 12*(1), 1–16.

[2] *Multidimensional scaling* is a multivariate statistical technique used to place items spatially on a map according to their relative similarity. *Hierarchical cluster analysis* is another multivariate statistical technique, used to group points into clusters representing higher order aggregates of the brainstormed items.

[3] Olds, D. (1988). Common design and methodological problems encountered in evaluating family support services: Illustrations from the prenatal/early infancy project. In H. B. Weiss & F. H. Jacobs (Eds.), *Evaluating family programs* (pp. 239–264). New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Basic Applications of Multilevel Modeling

Eric Dearing, from the University of Wyoming, explains some of the basic uses of multilevel modeling, using examples from family involvement research and evaluation.

Multilevel modeling[1] has become an increasingly popular means of analyzing data. A variety of software programs may be used to estimate multilevel models, and recent books have made this analytic tool highly accessible.[2] Nonetheless, a communication gap often exists between researchers using multilevel models and consumers of their work with less expertise in this area. This gap likely interferes with the translation of research into practice. Using recent research examples, this article briefly addresses some basic uses of multilevel analysis to orient readers who have little familiarity with this method.

One stumbling block to communicating results from multilevel models has been the use of several terms to describe the same modeling technique, terms such as *multilevel, hierarchical linear, mixed-effects,* and *random-effects*. In evaluation research, multilevel modeling and hierarchical linear modeling are common terms, primarily because they identify a central feature of the analyses: nested data. *Nested data* refers to data that are arranged in a hierarchical, multiple-level structure, for example, data in which multiple children attend the same school (i.e., children are nested within schools) or longitudinal data in which there are multiple observations of the same children (i.e., observations are nested within children).

When conventional analytic methods not designed for multilevel analyses are being used, nested data create both statistical and conceptual problems. Conceptually, for example, questions may arise about the appropriate unit of analysis. In the case of children nested within schools, a researcher may wonder whether children, or schools, should be the unit of analysis. Using multilevel models, researchers may simultaneously estimate patterns of association at child and school levels, or, in longitudinal data, simultaneously estimate patterns of stability and change within children and variations across children.

Clements, Reynolds, and Hickey,[3] for example, used multilevel models to examine predictors of verbal performance in a sample of 1,539 children who attended 25 schools (or other early education sites)[4] providing educational and family-support services. Analyses were estimated in two levels: Child and family predictors were estimated at the first level, and site predictors were esti-

It is likely that multilevel models will become an increasingly popular means of analyzing data relevant for science, practice, and policy.

mated at the second level. For example, the association between family risk (a composite of factors, including parent education) and performance was estimated at the first level of analysis; the association between average parental involvement at sites and performance was estimated at the second level of analysis.

Based on the first level of analysis, the authors report a significant and negative effect for family risk, indicating that, on average, risk was associated with lower verbal performance. The authors also report that the size of this association varied significantly across schools. In the second level of their analysis, the authors examined school characteristics associated with variation in children's verbal performance. Children at schools with high levels of parent involvement displayed higher levels of verbal performance than children at other schools. Thus, considering both levels of analysis, Clements et al. simultaneously examined child and school predictors of verbal performance.

Dearing, McCartney, Weiss, Kreider, and Simpkins[5] used multilevel models to examine associations between family involvement in education during kindergarten and children's literacy performance from kindergarten through fifth grade. In the first level of their multilevel model, average rate of change in literacy performance and the extent to which children varied in this rate of change were examined. On average, literacy performance increased over time, yet increases were greater for some children than others. In the second level of their analysis, the authors examined whether level of family involvement at kindergarten helped explain variations across children with regard to rate of change in literacy performance. They report that higher levels of family involvement were associated with greater gains in literacy achievement, particularly for children whose mothers were less educated. Considering both levels of analysis, Dearing et al. were able to examine average changes in literacy performance as well as between-child differences in literacy performance.

Given their usefulness, it is likely that multilevel models will become an increasingly popular means of analyzing data relevant for science, practice, and policy. These two examples provide only portions of the analyses completed in the respective studies and highlight only some of the uses of multilevel modeling. Nonetheless, they illustrate some of the basic capabilities and purposes of multilevel models and, as such, provide a useful starting point for those interested in results generated with these methods.

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[1] *Multilevel modeling* refers to the simultaneous analysis of hierarchically arranged data.
[2] Singer, J. D., & Willett, J. B. (2003). *Applied longitudinal data analysis: Modeling change and event occurrence.* New York: Oxford University Press.
[3] Clements, M. A., Reynolds, A. J., & Hickey, E. (2004). Site-level predictors of children's school and social competence in the Chicago Child-Parent Centers. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 19,* 273–296.
[4] Not all of the sites in the Clements et al. study were in schools, but for purposes of brevity and clarity, I use "schools" to refer to these early education sites.

[5] Dearing, E., McCartney, K., Weiss, H. B., Kreider, H., & Simpkins, S. (2004). The promotive effects of family educational involvement for low-income children's literacy. *Journal of School Psychology, 42*(6), 445–460.

> q u e s t i o n s & a n s w e r s

A conversation with

Jeanne Brooks-Gunn

Jeanne Brooks-Gunn is the Virginia and Leonard Marx Professor of Child Development at Teachers College and at the College of Physicians and Surgeons, both at Columbia University. She specializes in policy-oriented research focusing on family and community influences on the development of children, youth, and families. Her research centers on designing and evaluating interventions aimed at enhancing the well-being of children living in poverty and associated conditions. Dr. Brooks-Gunn has authored over 400 published articles and 17 books. Together with Sharon Lynn Kagan, she directs the National Center on Children and Families.[1]

Q Over the last decade, what have been the breakthrough findings in our knowledge of how family processes and the home environment influence child development?

A We now have better answers to four questions: (1) do parents matter?, (2) how do parents matter?, (3) is it possible to change parenting behavior through intervention programs?, and (4) if we can change parents' behavior, will children be more prepared for school?

Some scholars have questioned the premise that parents matter, their assertions widely publicized in the media. However, research-based rebuttals of the idea that parents don't matter have appeared.[2] Evidence from studies of children who are adopted, are exposed to cocaine parentally, are identical twins, and whose parents receive intervention all indicate that parenting does matter. In terms of how it matters, parents engage in lots of activities with and for their children; in a recent article, Markman and I identified seven different dimensions of parenting behavior: (1) nurturance, (2) language, (3) discipline, (4) materials in the home, (5) monitoring, (6) management of the home, and (7) direct teaching of skills to children.[3]

Different aspects of parenting are associated with different indicators of school readiness. Vocabulary, math skills, prereading skills, impulse control, relationships with peers, and approaches to learning are the most frequently studied aspects of school readiness. Language and learning materials in the home are the parenting behaviors most highly linked with vocabulary and early school achievement; discipline and nurturance are most closely associated with behavior problems, attention, and impulse control.

Differences in parenting behavior are seen between poor and not-poor children. The variation is especially large for those aspects of parenting most linked to school success: language, mate-

Intensive home visiting coupled with center-based programs may be a good strategy for enhancing school readiness.

rials in the home, and teaching. We estimate that about 1/3 to 1/2 of the variation in school outcomes between poor and not-poor children can be accounted for by differences in parenting.

Parenting behaviors are amenable to intervention. In a review[4] that assessed home-visiting programs, center-based early childhood education, literacy programs, and parent training programs in terms of their effects on parenting, my colleagues and I found that home-visiting and center-based educational programs have similarly large effects on parenting behavior. Also, parent training programs, offered to families that have a child with moderate to severe behavior problems, also alter parenting behavior.[5] Literacy programs show the weakest effects, although new, more focused programs, such as that developed by Whitehurst,[6] show quite impressive effects.

Do such program effects on parents translate into gains in children's school readiness? Home-visiting programs, by and large, have not shown effects on children. Why?[7] For one, many home-visiting programs are not very intensive; that is, families do not receive many visits. Only a few programs, such as the Nurse Home Visitation Program,[8] have been able to deliver a sizeable number of home visits. Margaret Burchinal, Mike Lopez, and I divided the sites in the Comprehensive Child Development Program[9] into two groups based on the number of completed home visits per family in each site. Those sites that had more home visits showed positive effects in the treatment group, while those that had fewer visits did not. Additionally, many home-visiting pro-

[1] See nccf.tc.columbia.edu for more information on the Center.
[2] Brooks-Gunn, J., & Markman, L. (2005). The contribution of parenting to ethnic and racial gaps in school readiness. *The Future of Children, 15*(1); Collins, A. W., Maccoby, E. E., Steinberg, L., Hetherington, E. M., & Bornstein, M. H. (2000). Contemporary research on parenting: The case for nature and nurture. *American Psychologist, 55*(2).
[3] Brooks-Gunn & Markman, 2005.

[4] Brooks-Gunn, J., Berlin, L. J., & Fuligni, A. S. (2000). Early childhood intervention programs: What about the family? In J. P. Shonkoff & S. J. Meisel (Eds.), *The handbook of early childhood intervention.* New York: Cambridge University Press.
[5] Brooks-Gunn & Markman, 2005.
[6] Whitehurst, G. J., Epstein, J. N., Angell, A., Payne, A. C., Crone, D., & Fischel, J. E. (1994). Outcomes of an emergent literacy intervention in Head Start. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 84*, 541–556.
[7] For a meta-analysis of home-visiting programs, see Sweet, M. A., & Appelbaum, M. I. (2004). Is home visiting an effective strategy? A meta-analytic review of home visiting programs for families with young children. *Child Development, 75*(5), 1435–1456.
[8] Olds, D. L., Henderson, C. R., Kitzman, H. J., Eckenrode, J. J., Cole, R. E., & Tatelbaum, R. C. (1999). Parental and infancy home visitation by nurses: Recent findings. *The Future of Children, 9*(1), 44–65. www.futureofchildren.org/usr_doc/vol9no1Art3.pdf (Acrobat file)

grams use paraprofessionals to deliver services; this may result in huge variation in service delivery. Home-visiting programs differ in what types of services they offer and in the rigorousness of their training and quality control. All of these factors might account for the general lack of positive effects on children.

Evaluations of center-based programs with a parenting component also have shown great success in enhancing mother-child interactions. In some cases these programs have increased how frequently parents read to their child and the amount of learning materials in the home. These programs also have cognitive effects on the child. The largest multisite programs, like Early Head Start and the Infant Health and Development Program,[10] allow us to see how much of the treatment effects on children are mediated through effects on parents. Effects on parents account for 20–50% of child treatment effects.[11] We may not be seeing these effects in the home-visiting programs because some portion of the effects on children's cognitive development is happening directly rather than through the parents.

These findings suggest that *intensive* home visiting coupled with center-based programs may be a good strategy for enhancing school readiness. However, we are missing counterfactual evidence. Because there exist almost no early childhood programs that do not have a parenting component, we do not know if programs without a home-visiting component would be equally effective in enhancing school readiness.

We do know that very specific book-reading interventions also are effective. That said, book reading is only one of the many experiences important for children's emerging literacy. Changing the literacy environment around books and reading is possible. It is something we can model, so many interventions have focused on that. However, research suggests that a huge range of literacy activities are happening all the time in the home, through talking, playing with toys, looking at cereal boxes. The more parents are using rich, complex talk with their children and asking them questions, the better children will do in kindergarten.

Jeanne Brooks-Gunn

Q Given the focus on experimental evaluations at the federal level, is there a role for nonexperimental work?

A There is nothing more useful than an experiment, both for theory and practice. I am particularly interested in seeing more evaluations that test different sets of interventions rather than having just one treatment and control group. Of course, even experiments have limitations, but they offer less possibility of bias than other designs, such as matching or time-series designs.[12] I do think that longitudinal data are incredibly valuable, as long as we cope carefully with issues like breadth, selection bias, and inference.

Q What are new directions for research, evaluation, and practice in family-focused interventions?

A In general, I would like to see more research and evaluation exploring treatment intensity, timing, and dose. We also need to look more closely at service delivery. We need programs that help link preschool and kindergarten experiences, and we must follow through high school children who received preschool education.

One new direction for research is in the area of fathering—getting fathers involved and changing fathering behaviors. Initiatives are still in their infancy, so we still have a lot to learn. As for practice and policy, it would be good to see more programs that combine elements of the successful programs. We also need to consider how programs are targeted and what we can do from a policy standpoint to ensure effective programs are being offered to families that are most likely to benefit from them. We should also consider whether parent involvement should be more included in the whole prekindergarten movement.

Q Is there sufficient shared knowledge and dialogue among researchers, evaluators, and program developers?

A The work on theories of change has been very important and has helped us get a much better idea about how to evaluate interventions. However, we researchers and evaluators don't fully appreciate how hard it is to implement a program. That's why researchers must spend time in programs and with staff. However, observation is easier to do in centers than in home-visiting programs. In general, the more researchers can work with program developers, the better off we will be. Interventions should be based on research and theory and then worked out with experienced practitioners.

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[9] See www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/core/pubs_reports/ccdp/ccdp_intro.html for more information.

[10] The Infant Health and Development Program is designed to reduce the developmental and health problems of low-birthweight premature infants. See also: Administration for Children and Families, Department of Health and Human Services. (2002). *Making a difference in the lives of infants and toddlers and their families: The impacts of Early Head Start*. Washington, DC: Author. www.mathematica-mpr.com/publications/PDFs/ehsfinalvol1.pdf (Acrobat file); Brooks-Gunn, J., Duncan, G. J., & Maritato, N. (1997). "Poor families, poor outcomes": The well-being of children and youth. In G. J. Duncan & J. Brooks-Gunn (Eds.), *Consequences of growing up poor*. New York: Russell Sage; and Brooks-Gunn, J. (2003). Do you believe in magic?: What we can expect from early childhood intervention programs. *Social Policy Report, 17*(1). www.srcd.org/spr17-1.pdf (Acrobat file)

[11] Brooks-Gunn, J., McCarton, C. M., Casey, P. H., McCormick, M. C., Bauer, C. R., Bernbaum, J. C., et al. (1994). Early intervention in low-birthweight premature infants: Results through age 5 years from the Infant Health and Development Program. *Journal of the American Medical Association, 272*(16).

[12] For a variety of viewpoints from experts on this issue, see McCall, R. B., & Green, B. L. (2004). Beyond the methodological gold standards of behavioral research: Considerations for practice and policy. *Social Policy Report, 18*(2). Available at www.srcd.org/spr18-2.pdf (Acrobat file).

What Matters in Family Support Evaluation?

M. Elena Lopez of HFRP interprets themes from a participatory evaluation and parent engagement institute.

What matters in family support evaluation? In September 2004, researchers, evaluators, practitioners, and parent leaders gathered at the Ewing Marion Kauffman Conference Center in Kansas City, Missouri, to examine evaluation approaches that meet the information needs of various stakeholders and uphold family support principles. Convened by Family Support America, the Participatory Evaluation and Parent Engagement Institute created a forum to discuss the strengths, challenges, and new directions of family support evaluations.

The Institute highlighted programs that conduct family support evaluations in alignment with family support principles. Participatory evaluation in particular reflects several family support principles, among them building the skills of families and forming relationships based on equality and respect. Institute presenters, which included parent leaders, staff members, and evaluators, shared lessons from parents' involvement in evaluation:

- When adequately trained and supported, parents can be involved in all phases of an evaluation, from planning to using evaluation findings.
- Parents bring diverse perspectives, which contribute to balanced views on issues and to outcomes and indicators relevant to families and their contexts.
- Parents and community members raise important questions about data ownership and outcomes, questions that spark deeper discussions about race, class, and power.
- Parents and evaluators are co-learners: Parents can help evaluators learn to communicate clearly to a lay audience an evaluation's purpose, methods, and findings; evaluators can train parents to enhance their critical thinking skills.

Although family support has grown over the last three decades, it is fragile. Programs tend to be underfunded and to lack capacity to deliver quality services. Evaluation can help family support achieve its vision of a high quality, sustainable system of care for children, youth, and families. Although no one evaluation methodology fulfills this function, several evaluation approaches

can build a strong case for the direction and strategy of the field—particularly urgent, as the field operates in a policy environment of competing social programs and scarce resources. In addition, family support evaluation must meet stringent criteria of evidence-based practice and build a learning system that connects evaluation stakeholders at different decision-making levels.

To tackle these challenges, Heather Weiss, of Harvard Family Research Project, urged Institute participants to implement a comprehensive evaluation strategy. As the Institute's final keynote, this strategy connected several strands of the various presentations and included four components:

1. *Experimental evaluations with randomized assignments can demonstrate the value-added of family support practices and whether their implementation leads to improved outcomes for families.* Although this type of evaluation carries its own design, implementation, and financial challenges, family support evaluators from different countries are coming to the conclusion that failure to conduct experimental evaluations poses a greater risk for replication and sustainability than conducting evaluations that report negative findings.

2. *Utilization-focused evaluation can help practitioners use the results to make decisions about training and program development, as well as to demonstrate accountability.* The Office of Child Development at the University of Pittsburgh, for example, presented its family support management information system, which allows centers to use data for program management, improvement, and outcome evaluation. The system uses a set of outcomes agreed upon by family support centers and their parent councils.

3. *Action research and participatory evaluation enable families and program practitioners to use data for community change.* Denver's Community Learning Network[1] presented a resident-driven evaluation process. The Network encourages residents to take the lead in defining their research issues and equips them with the skills to understand, use, and generate data to solve problems. It has evaluated three school-based literacy models and supported a resident-conducted survey of neighborhood crime.

4. *The development of performance standards in family support practice—based on research and evaluation—supports a system of high quality care for families.* Recent work presented by the Orelena Hawks Puckett Institute on program adherence to family support principles and its impact on parenting behavior illustrates the advances in this direction. Adherence to family support principles can be used as a measure of program quality.

Drawing on the wisdom of over two decades of practice, the family support field must now position itself to act on the demands for research-based programs and evidence about the benefits of family support.

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[1] The principles that guide the research of Denver's Community Learning Network can be found at www.aecf.org/initiatives/ldu/strategies/denver_principles.htm.

Related Resources

The **Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health** trains families in evaluation skills. Resources include a website on families in evaluation and articles in the evaluation newsletter *Data Matters*. www.ffcmh.org/families_in_evaluation.htm

Slaton, E. (2003, Spring/Summer). **A family perspective on evidence-based practices**. *Data Matters*, 17, 23. www.georgetown.edu/research/gucchd/datamatters6.pdf (Acrobat file)

Learning From Parents Through Reflective Evaluation Practice

David Scheie, See Moua, and Pang Lee, from the Neighborhood Learning Community, describe the lessons they learned—about children participating in an affiliated program and about evaluation practice—by listening to parents' spontaneous stories during a parent survey interview.

The Neighborhood Learning Community (NLC)[1] is a network of people and organizations working to strengthen the "culture of learning" in the West Side neighborhood of St. Paul, Minnesota. Based on the premise that everyone is a lifelong learner and teacher, the NLC promotes informal learning opportunities, sponsors leadership development, nurtures collaboration, and works for systems change, particularly within St. Paul public schools.

Evaluation is an integral part of the NLC. Consistent with the values of co-creation, collaboration, and reflective practice, the NLC uses a participatory approach. With this approach, information for learning sometimes bubbles up unexpectedly; this happened last spring when 10-minute parent surveys catalyzed hour-long conversations with parents about their children's development and about the NLC.

Using a Parent Perceptions Survey—which contained multiple-choice questions for parents to rate their children's development in seven areas—we interviewed Hmong parents whose children participate in an NLC-member organization known as the Jane Addams School for Democracy (JASD).[2] During the survey, parents rarely responded right away with one of the answer choices; instead, they told stories that taught us, as evaluators, about their children's development and more.

From parents, we learned the following about the children at JASD:

- Each child is an individual and differs from his or her siblings in personal style and qualities, such as shyness, tidiness, or helpfulness to others.
- JASD children tend to be very self-expressive and committed to the community but have less awareness of the future.
- Children come to JASD to play and do homework but often don't understand that JASD offers more than that.
- Children keep coming to JASD largely because of the relationships they build with each other and with adult staff.
- Many children fall short of their parents' expectations at home with regards to responsibility, teamwork, and empathy, despite information from other sources that they behave well in these areas at JASD.

We also learned the following about parents and how to engage them:

- Parents trust JASD staff members, and this trust allows them to send their children to the program even when they don't come themselves.

[1] The NLC receives support from the Wallace Foundation, the Bush Foundation, and several other sources. For more information on the NLC, visit www.westside-learning.org.

[2] See www.publicwork.org.

- Parents have a poor understanding of JASD, but the survey conversations increased their understanding of what the program provides children. These conversations confirmed that to reach out and engage parents effectively, we must meet with them face-to-face.
- Parents appreciated the space provided by survey conversations to talk positively about their children without being perceived as conceited or boastful. This appeared to reinforce their pride in their children, their confidence in themselves as parents, and their appreciation of JASD.

Using What We've Learned

These findings have helped strengthen our practice—our commitment to relationship building among children, parents, and staff; our emphasis on keeping adult staff involved long-term; and our encouragement of staff to initiate more one-to-one conversations with parents. We are also invested in learning more about why some dimensions of child development are further advanced than others through participation in JASD, why children behave better at JASD in some instances than at home, and how this information can be used to improve children's learning.

We intend to foster more opportunities for parents to talk positively about their children and their hopes for them, as well as to engage them in reflecting with us about "what we did and why we did it," so that parents and their children can begin to see JASD as not just a place to play and do homework, but a place tied to NLC's core values of connection, co-creation, and public work. We also will continue involving parents in evaluating programming, as involvement helps parents better understand the program's goals, begin to take ownership of the program, and assist program staff in co-creating the program.

Lessons for Evaluators

Our experience suggests the following lessons for evaluators:

- *Be flexible and expect the unexpected.* When parents "digress" into stories, we can learn from them in their own voice.

Related Resources

Harvard Family Research Project's Fall 2002 issue of the *FINE Forum* e-newsletter, focused on the Jane Addams School for Democracy. www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/fine/fineforum/forum5/director.html

O'Donnell, S., & Scheie, D. (1999). *Putting families at the center of community action.* Minneapolis, MN: Rainbow Research. www.rainbowresearch.org

Scheie, D., Robillos, M., Bischoff, M., & Langley, B. (2003). *Organizing for youth development and school improvement.* Minneapolis, MN: Rainbow Research. www.rainbowresearch.org

Ongoing Evaluations of Programs in Parent Leadership and Family Involvement

Kelly Faughnan and Cassandra Wolos of HFRP present a listing of upcoming program evaluations in parent leadership and organizing, and another in family involvement in education (page 18). When available, links to the most recently completed evaluations are provided, either in HTML format or as PDFs (Acrobat files). These listings are among the many family involvement resources available at HFRP's Family Involvement Network of Educators (FINE) website: www.finenetwork.org.

PARENT LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZING

Program/Initiative	Evaluation	Evaluator	Timeline	Most Recent Evaluation Completed
Achievement Through Partnership at the Institute for Responsive Education trains teams of school administrators, teachers, and parents during a 3-day summer institute and two full-day sessions. The goal is to help schools develop meaningful school, family, and community partnerships. www.responsiveeducation.org/current.html#atp	This program's annual evaluation uses a variety of methods, including a review of preevaluations and postevaluations completed during each training session, a year-end evaluation, and interviews with participants. Each training session uses a pre/postevaluation tool.	Institute for Responsive Education. www.responsiveeducation.org	Evaluation report expected winter 2004/2005	Forthcoming
Eight community organizing groups working for local urban school reform: **Austin Interfaith**; **Chicago ACORN**; **Community Coalition for Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment, Los Angeles; Eastern Pennsylvania Organizing Project**; **Milwaukee Inner-City Congregations Allied for Hope; Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition; Oakland Community Organizations; People Acting for Community Together, Miami.**	This 6-year longitudinal evaluation uses a case-study methodology involving qualitative interviews with key stakeholders, participant observation, and archival research to examine the links between community organizing and school/district capacity for improving student achievement.	Community Involvement Project, Institute for Education & Social Policy, New York University. www.nyu.edu/iesp	First report published 9/04. Three additional reports expected by 2006, including one on youth organizing. A final report, expected by 2008, will present findings on the relationship between community organizing and the development of school/district capacity to improve student achievement outcomes.	Mediratta, K. (2004). *Constituents of change: Community organizations and public education reform.* New York: New York University, Institute for Education and Social Policy. www.nyu.edu/iesp/publications/cip/Mott%20Report%20Final.pdf
The **Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership** brings up to 32 parents together for three 2-day intensive leadership experiences over the course of 3–4 months, then coaches parents as they design and implement a project in their own schools over a 2-year period. www.cipl.org	Data are collected at program entry, end of first year, and at program completion. Data consist of self-reports by participants focusing on actual leadership experiences in schools during this period. Quantitative and qualitative data are analyzed.	Thomas Y. Hiter, 544 Shawnee Bay Road, Benton, KY 42025. Tel: 270-354-8819 Email: tyhiter@wk.net	Data collection is ongoing. A baseline descriptive study was completed in 2001 and interim reports produced in 2002 and 2003. A final report will be completed in winter 2004/2005.	Corbett, D., & Wilson, B. (2000). "*I didn't know I could do that*": Parents learning to be leaders through the Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership. Lexington, KY: Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence. www.cipl.org/pubs/cipl_didnt_know.pdf

The **Parent Leadership Exchange** training program at Northeastern University's Institute for Responsive Education consists of the Leaders for Change Certificate Program and the Family Involvement Certificate Program. Both train parent leaders to promote school reform issues or family involvement activities that support student learning. www.responsiveeducation.org/ parentExchange.html	Annual evaluation uses a variety of methods, including workshop evaluation forms, post workshop surveys, focus groups, and questionnaires.	Institute for Responsive Education. www.responsive education.org	2003–2004 evaluation report expected winter 2004/2005	Institute for Responsive Education. (2003). *Parent Leadership Exchange: Three-year evaluation report.* Boston: Author. www.responsiveeducation. org/pdf/pleFinalReport.pdf
Parents for Public Schools is a national organization of community-based chapters working to strengthen public schools by encouraging enrollment and parent participation in district decision making. Its mission is to help public schools attract all families by making sure schools serve all children effectively. www.parents4publicschools.com	This evaluation uses in-depth fieldwork in six chapters and surveys of all chapter leaders to gain an understanding of the work being done locally, determine how efforts were received, and assess impact on the communities.	Brigham Nahas Research Associates, 2 Waterman Road, Cambridge, MA 02138. Tel: 617-868-6508	Report to be issued 1/05	Forthcoming
The Public Education Network's **public engagement initiatives** seek to mobilize public support for education reform through local education funds (LEFs), which are nonprofit organizations that collaborate with school systems and local communities. Current initiatives focus on reforming standards and accountability, schools and community services, and teacher quality. www.publiceducation.org/ inioverview.asp	This evaluation uses case studies and yearly data collection. In addition, LEFs will actively participate in the evaluation by gathering data and developing their own indicators of expected results.	Policy Studies Associates. www.policystudies. com/studies/ community/ PEN.html	Ongoing, 2001 through 2005	Russell, C. A., & Turnbull, B. J. (2004). *Mobilizing the public for education reform: Challenges for a program and its evaluators.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA. www.policystudies.com/ studies/community/ AERA.html

Learning From Parents
continued from page 15

- *Use both closed- and open-ended questions.* We may revise our survey to include open-ended questions, because parents like that format. At the same time we'll continue some closed items for easy quantification.
- *Create teams to multiply insight.* We really began to learn from parent comments when our two front-line surveyors did a reflective debrief with another evaluation-team member. We processed both parent comments and surveyors' perceptions, cross-checking among ourselves.
- *Use program staff and volunteers as data collectors to foster learning.* Survey administrators' familiarity with the program helped them create rapport that invited richer parental reflection.
- *Harness linguistic and cultural affinity to gather richer informa-*

tion. Both of our parent surveyors were Hmong women who knew the language and culture of the immigrant parents they were surveying. We suspect this helped parents to open up.

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FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION

Program/Initiative	Evaluation	Evaluator	Timeline	Most Recent Evaluation Completed
Families and Schools Together is a three-part family support program that includes outreach, 8 weekly engagement sessions, and 20 monthly parent-led sessions. Program activities are designed to build protective factors against the negative influences of poverty, drugs, etc., to increase children's school success through improved classroom behavior and increased family-school connections. www.familiesandschoolstogether.org	Four randomized control trials were recently completed with inner-city, suburban, and rural schools. All implementations of the program's 8-week component were evaluated with pretests and posttests. Outcome and process evaluations include quantitative and qualitative data.	Wisconsin Center for Education Research, University of Wisconsin. www.wcer.wisc.edu	Ongoing, with expected completion dates in 2004 and 2005	Wisconsin Center for Education Research. (2003). *Aligning best practices to maximize outcomes: A collaboration between Early Head Start, Parents as Teachers, and Families and Schools Together (FAST).* Madison, WI: Author. Wisconsin Center for Education Research. (2003). *The Asian-American FAST project: Hmong adaptation of Families and Schools Together.* Madison, WI: Author.
Math and Parent Partnerships (MAPPS) offers math awareness workshops, where parents learn math along with their children and other families, and take math minicourses for parents, as well as leadership development sessions, where they learn to promote and facilitate the workshops themselves. www.math.arizona.edu/~mapps	As a National Science Foundation grantee, from 1999–2003, MAPPS conducted formative and summative evaluations. Under a supplementary grant (2003–2005), results of follow-up interviews with parent participants in Tucson will be analyzed. As new MAPPS sites are established, data on the impact of MAPPS will be collected.	Marta Civil, Professor of Mathematics, University of Arizona Tel: 520-621-6873 Email: civil@math.arizona.edu	Next report due 1/05	Allexsaht-Snider, M., & Bernier, E. (2003). *MAPPS evaluation report 3/03.* Tucson: University of Arizona.
Parent Information and Resource Centers provide parents, schools, and organizations working with families with training, information, and technical assistance to understand how children develop and what they need to succeed in school. www.pirc-info.net	The Federal Register specifies the use of objective performance measures that relate to intended outcomes and periodic assessment of progress toward achieving intended outcomes.	Local independent evaluators in funded states	Annual performance evaluations	N/A
Parent Institute for Quality Education provides morning or evening sessions for parents with credentialed teachers, which focus on topics like home/school collaboration, motivation in school, creating a home learning environment, the school system, and college preparation. www.piqe.org	A 3-year evaluation will be conducted in Los Angeles Unified School District schools, K–12. Data will be collected from pre/postsurveys and focus group interviews with parents, classroom teachers, and students, as well as from student achievement data. The analysis will include mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative).	Janet H. Chrispeels and Margarita González, University of California, Gevirtz Graduate School of Education, Santa Barbara, CA 93106 Tel: 805-893-4850 Email: jchrisp@education.ucsb.edu; gonzalez@education.ucsb.edu	The study will be conducted from 2004 to 2006. Findings will be reported annually, and the final report is expected in 2007.	Chrispeels, J., González, M., & Arellano, B. (2004). *Evaluation of the effectiveness of the Parent Institute for Quality Education in Los Angeles Unified School District September 2003 to May 2004.* Santa Barbara: University of California. www.piqe.org/Assets/SpecialPrj/PIQE%20 2004%20Evaluation/Piqe%20 Evaluation%202004.htm

Promoting Quality Outcome Measurement: A Home-Visitation Case

Audrey Laszewski, project director of the Early Years Home Visitation Outcomes Project of Wisconsin, describes how a stakeholder collaboration resulted in a common outcome measurement process.

The Early Years Home Visitation Outcomes Project of Wisconsin[1] is an initiative to measure common outcomes across various home-visitation program curricula and model types. Over the course of 5 years, the Project has grown into a broad collaboration involving service providers, and public and private funding entities, who want to speak with a unified voice about the impact of home visitation in Wisconsin. With the goal of developing a common outcome measurement process, the Project is measuring six outcomes in 10 pilot sites across the state, using the State of Wisconsin Department of Public Health's web-based data collection system. The pilot sites represent various program models and sizes and are located in both urban and rural settings. Sites will collect outcome data over a 5-year period.

Unique aspects of this project include (1) its promotion of a model-free outcome measurement system that allows programs to use the model/curriculum that best meets their community needs, (2) participants' agreement that program activities logically impact the project outcomes, and (3) voluntary participation.

Stakeholders representing funding entities, home-visitation programs, and quality assurance and evaluation met to select, design, and implement the common outcome measurement system. The opportunity to develop a system for accountability based on sound evaluation methods that would be acceptable to multiple funding entities served as a key impetus for participation among home-visitation programs. In addition, the collaboration afforded programs access to research-based training on various data collection tools and methods, thus offering professional development opportunities to enhance individual program quality.

These key stakeholders identified several criteria for selecting outcomes. They specified that outcomes should be common across multiple home-visiting programs, critical to healthy families, reasonable to measure, useable for decision making and program improvement, and consistent with "best practice." Using these criteria, stakeholders arrived at six common outcomes:

1. Parents interact with their children in ways that enhance children's development and early learning.
2. Children are healthy.
3. Children live in a safe environment.
4. Families access formal and informal support networks.
5. Children achieve optimal milestones in development and early learning.
6. Children with developmental delays receive appropriate intervention services.

[1] The Project receives financial and in-kind support from Children's Hospital, Health System's Child Abuse Prevention Fund, and Parents Plus of Wisconsin (in partnership with the state's Department of Health and Family Service, Division of Public Health.

Several factors played a significant role in establishing the Project's collaborative infrastructure: shared focus on common outcomes for children and families rather than on differences between program models and components, common vision for potential legislative change in funding and policy for family support programs, and program readiness to conduct outcome measurement but limited resources to conduct solid evaluation. From the beginning, an emphasis on active participation by stakeholders representing various organizational levels secured the necessary buy-in for successful implementation. Decision making by consensus resulted in shared ownership of the Project. In 2005 the Project plans to document the process used and identify key components of successful infrastructure building.

By working together and discussing issues that are important in Wisconsin, we have built relationships among various stakeholders based on trust and common ground. The specific outcomes, tools, and indicators we selected make sense for our state; however, each state or community must engage in dialogue to articulate its particular values and common ground. For an initiative of this type to succeed, its strength must come from active participation of its stakeholders and from the alignment of program strategies to desired outcomes.

The Early Years Home Visitation Outcomes Project of Wisconsin began collecting outcome data in July 2004. Over the next 5 years, the Project will focus on supporting pilot sites in their outcome measurement process, determining the process for aggregate data analysis, and exploring the use of the findings to strengthen the participating programs' performance. In addition, the Project will seek funding to expand participation to more home-visitation programs in Wisconsin. Our hope is that the Project will serve as a model for use by other states.

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Key Components of the Early Years Home Visitation Outcomes Project of Wisconsin

- Engage and re-engage stakeholders throughout the process.
- Be reasonable in your expectations.
- Invest resources and time to establish common ground/vision.
- Allow ample time for organizations to make project requirements operational within their program.
- Invest resources, especially training and technology, to support programs in measuring outcomes.
- Provide a safe and neutral environment to meet with other professionals, share challenges, and find solutions.

Perspectives on Family Involvement

Nancy Hill, Amy Baker, and Kevin Marjoribanks discuss the present state and future direction of family involvement research and evaluation, from the perspectives of developmental psychology, evaluation, and education, respectively. (See the end of the article for their affiliations.)

What is the present knowledge base of and future directions for family involvement research and evaluation?

Nancy Hill: The most important findings to date include the consistent evidence that parents and families matter for children's achievement across developmental levels from preschool through college; identification of the multiple dimensions of family involvement, such as involvement in academic activities at home, volunteering at school, and participating in school governance and communication between parents and teachers; and socioeconomic and ethnic variations in family involvement in education and its impact on achievement.

A recent study found that, across socioeconomic status (SES) levels, parental involvement in seventh grade was positively associated with students' educational and occupational goals in eleventh grade.[1] However, the mechanisms of this relationship differed across SES levels. For the higher SES families, family involvement in the seventh grade was associated with eleventh-grade educational and occupational goals through its influence on school behavior and academic performance. In contrast, for the lower SES families, while there was a strong direct relation between family involvement and educational and occupational goals, family involvement was not associated with academic behavior or achievement. These findings suggest that while parents from all backgrounds may understand the importance of involvement, and may indeed become involved, they vary in their effectiveness across SES. The research on ethnic differences in parental involvement demonstrates differences among Whites, African Americans, and Hispanics on the types of involvement strategies engaged in, their mechanisms of influence, and their effectiveness. These findings across demographic backgrounds are important for translating research to programs and policies.

Additional research is needed to identify mechanisms that explain ethnic and socioeconomic variations in family involvement in school. Although the literature is consistent about mean-level differences in involvement and about differences across SES and ethnicity in the effectiveness of involvement, we still need a better understanding of the underlying mechanisms of these differences that would inform intervention programs.

Additional research also is needed to better understand developmental variations in appropriate family involvement between elementary and middle schools. Although some research finds that parental involvement declines between elementary and middle school, family involvement still matters for adolescents. Much of the research, theory, and program development for family involvement in education are based on elementary-school based models, including a single teacher with whom to develop a relationship and a welcoming environment. Current theory and research do not include aspects of family involvement that are unique to middle school, such as involvement in course and track placement. It is these types of involvement strategies—those unique to the middle school level—that open or close doors of opportunity for adolescents when they graduate from high school.

With regard to evaluation, scientists and practitioners need to pay particular attention to the effectiveness of programs for families from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and ethnic minority backgrounds. Impoverished families are less likely to become involved in schooling than wealthier families, and schools in impoverished communities are less likely to promote family involvement in education than schools in affluent communities. Disadvantaged families need more information than their more affluent counterparts. Intervention programs, therefore, may be more effective in promoting and enhancing parental involvement for more affluent families than for lower SES families. Differential effectiveness of an intervention program for enhancing family involvement could, consequently, result in an *increase* in demographic gaps in achievement. It is therefore important for intervention studies to investigate how to reach out to disadvantaged families in order to promote involvement among families from all backgrounds.

Amy Baker: Decades of developmental theory and basic research have documented that parental involvement in children's social, emotional, and cognitive development is of paramount importance for children's well-being and attainment of positive long-term outcomes. Nonetheless, applied evaluation research has been much less successful at making the case for the effectiveness of specific parent involvement programs and practices.

Although this "evidence gap" is generally attributed to the inability of educational and evaluation researchers to employ random assignment designs, other methodological limitations are equally problematic. These include the use of nonobjective measures and inconsistent definitions, and failure to isolate the effects of parental involvement from other components of intervention programs or parenting practices. It is likely, for example, that the effects of parental involvement are mediated by ecological and contextual factors, such as the quality of the parent-child attachment relationship, educational philosophy of the school, practices of specific teachers, children's individual learning styles, and variation within parent involvement programs and practices.

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[1] Hill, N. E., Castellino, D. R., Lansford, J. E., Nowlin, P., Dodge, K. A., Bates, J., et al. (2004). Parent academic involvement as related to school behavior, achievement, and aspirations: Demographic variations across adolescence. *Child Development*, 75(5), 1491–1509.

However, too often evaluation research is insufficiently theory driven to measure these contextual variables. Moreover, the small samples typical of evaluation studies tend to prohibit a thorough analysis of within-group differences on outcomes due to preexisting characteristics or intervening experiences. The multisite evaluation of Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters is illustrative.[2] The impact of the program's parent-child educational activities on children's academic achievement was found to vary both within and across sites. However, the significant intervening factors could not be identified, because the sample size did not allow for analysis of interaction effects and mediating processes.

A further challenge for the field is that although policymakers call for increased parental involvement, practical and valid guidance is generally not available to help schools, teachers, and parents realize this goal. Qualitative research has demonstrated that, despite sharing the belief that parental involvement is a worthy objective, parents, teachers, and school administrators have very different ideas about what parental involvement means in the day-to-day life of schools and families, and about how to achieve it. Far too little attention has been paid to facilitating this process on the front line.

Parent involvement research needs to take better advantage of evaluation science, be more theory driven in selection of measures and testing of hypotheses, and be more willing to incorporate the perspectives of children, parents, and teachers. Only with the combined strengths of scientific rigor and practical applicability can the promise of parental involvement be achieved.

Kevin Marjoribanks: Research and evaluation suggest that parents have a major role to play in their children's learning and in creating educational opportunities. We know that an academically oriented family environment for elementary school children tends to be one where parents have high aspirations for their children, provide stimulating reading and other learning experiences,

[2] See www.hippyusa.org.

have an understanding of the importance of schooling, and have knowledge of their children's schoolwork. We also know that high school students benefit when parents provide, or are assisted in providing, a family setting in which they encourage their children to stay on at school, talk about the importance of schooling, praise children for schoolwork and homework, show interest in what their children are doing at school, and have high aspirations for their children. However, we also know that for some families, supportive learning environments do not translate into children's school success. Students from certain cultural and social groups receive fewer rewards for their interactions with parents and other adults than do students from other groups.

School organizational and academic structures can create constraints on the educational opportunities of students, depending on family background. Although programs may be developed to assist parents with the enrichment of learning experiences in the home, it may be just as important for parents to be actively involved in decisions that schools make about their children. The placement of students into certain schools or in ability groups within schools, for example, may relate as much to family-background considerations as to children's academic potential. Parents may need to become more socially and politically active to ensure that their children receive school experiences that are related to meaningful educational outcomes.

Family involvement research and program practice have tended to concentrate on individual-family factors, such as encouragement, support, opportunities, and aspirations. It is likely, however, that for children from certain family backgrounds there exist group-family factors, such as group sharing of economic resources for children's education, the premium placed by the group on education, and group solidarity, that are of major importance; these factors must be better reflected in research and practice.

Parent involvement programs are unlikely to reduce substantially family-background inequalities in educational outcomes until they enhance individual-family factors, incorporate group-family factors, and involve parents meaningfully in school decisions about their children's educational experiences. As such, intervention studies need to consider parent involvement programs in light of those family-background characteristics that influence children's life chances.

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agents in mediating the home-school relationship. These issues underscore the need for a continuing dialogue about a research and evaluation agenda that can engage families and schools in meaningful, effective, and sustained partnerships.

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comes; reviewing data collection instruments; and assisting in the development, screening, and refinement of items for surveys, focus groups, and interviews, with particular attention to the contextual and cultural responsiveness of data collection protocols. During the formative evaluation, HSAT members also provided feedback on FSCPP implementation, allowing evaluators to make immediate changes for program improvement. They also reviewed written documents, such as students' school attendance logs and logs that recorded student, family, and community members' attendance at school events; conducted interviews with program participants; distributed and collected surveys from stakeholders; and participated in quarterly focus groups.

The complex and dynamic nature of urban schools and communities makes the implementation and evaluation of reform efforts a formidable challenge. However, we view the Talent Development approach as particularly invaluable when participants are low-income persons of color who are oftentimes disenfranchised from both evaluation and service-delivery systems. Based on our experiences working in low-income urban school settings, we believe that program planning, implementation, and evaluation can be significantly enhanced by front loading implementation and evaluation efforts, engaging stakeholders in meaningful ways throughout the entire process, and co-constructing intervention and evaluation activities. Giving back to the community in both tangible and intangible ways, ensuring that field implementers and evaluators are culturally competent, and showing a high tolerance for ambiguity and change are also critical.

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The New & Noteworthy section features an annotated list of papers, organizations, and initiatives related to the issue's theme.

Barton, P. E. (2003). *Parsing the achievement gap: Baselines for tracking progress.* Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service. This report synthesizes a large body of research on home and school factors associated with educational attainment, including parent availability, parent participation, and reading to young children. The report then looks at the differential impacts for each factor by racial/ethnic and socioeconomic group. www.ets.org/research/pic/parsing.pdf (Acrobat file)

Boethel, M. (2004). *Readiness: School, family, and community connections.* Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. This report synthesizes 48 research studies on the contextual factors associated with children's school readiness and discusses the effectiveness of a variety of early childhood or preschool interventions that include a family or community focus. www.sedl.org/connections/research-syntheses.html

Dearing, E., McCartney, K., Weiss, H. B., Kreider, H., & Simpkins, S. (2004). **The promotive effects of family educational involvement for low-income children's literacy.** *Journal of School Psychology, 42*(6), 445–460. This study analyzes longitudinal data on the impact of family educational involvement on the literacy achievement of low-income children. Findings show more positive associations between involvement and children's literacy for children of less educated mothers, and associations were mediated through children's feelings about literacy.

The December 2004 issue of *Pediatrics* features two studies that found benefits to mothers years after participation in home-visiting programs: Olds, D. L., Kitzman, H., Cole, R., Robinson, J., Sidora, K., Luckey, D. W., et al. (2004). **Effects of nurse home-visiting on maternal life course and child development: Age 6 follow-up results of a randomized trial**; and Olds, D. L., Robison, J., Pettitt, L., Luckey, D. W., Holmberg, J., Ng, R. K., et al. (2004). **Effects of home visits by paraprofessionals and by nurses: Age 4 follow-up results of a randomized trial.** pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/vol114/issue6

Desforges, C., & Abouchaar, A. (2003). *The impact of parental involvement, parental support, and family education on pupil achievements and adjustment: A literature review* (Research Report No. 433). London: Department for Education and Skills. This report reviews research on the impact of spontaneous parent involvement in education and evaluations of parent involvement programs and interventions. www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR433.pdf (Acrobat file)

Evidence & Policy: A Journal of Research, Debate, and Practice. This new journal focuses on the relationship between research evidence and the concerns of policymakers and practitioners across a wide range of social and public policy issues. The first issue is being released in January 2005. www.policypress.org.uk/evidenceandpolicy.htm

James, D. W., & Partee, G. (2003). *No more islands: Family involvement in 27 school and youth programs.* Washington, DC: American Youth Policy Forum. This report reviews 27 evaluations of school and youth programs with family involvement components, describes effective family involvement strategies, and concludes that family context is important to school and youth programming. www.aypf.org/publications/nomoreisle/index.htm

Kalafat, J. (2004). **Enabling and empowering practices of Kentucky's school-based Family Resource Centers: A multiple case study.** *Evalu-*

Communicating Evaluations

The Evaluation Exchange emphasizes the importance of communicating evaluation findings to practitioners and consumers of programs. Such information must be clear and concise, and delivered in a variety of media. The resources below are examples of communication activities to help practitioners use the research and evaluation knowledge base in implementing their own family-centered interventions.

The **Division of Adolescent and School Health** of the United States' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) features research-based recommendations for school health programs in a series of publications called the "guidelines for school health." "Guidelines" focus on such topics as tobacco-use prevention and the promotion of healthy eating and physical activity. Each contains recommendations covering a range of areas, including policy development, instructional strategies, staff training, family and community involvement, and evaluation. Along with the guidelines, the CDC provides a four-page summary and a two-page "how you can help" flyer for parents, teachers, students, and others working with youth. www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/about/mission.htm#2

The results from a 7-year national evaluation of Early Head Start (EHS) have important implications for program practices. To make these implications widely available and easily applicable for continuous program improvement, the Administration for Children and Families of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has developed an information kit for EHS staff, trainers, and technical assistance providers: **Early Head Start Information Kit: Research to Practice Addendum—Multimedia Kit** includes a four-page research brief, two PowerPoint presentations, and talking points based on the overall evaluation findings. www.headstartinfo.org/cgi-bin/pubcatstore.cfm?CatID=301&do=detail

The Orelena Hawks Puckett Institute's **Research and Training Center on Early Childhood Development** has created a series of publications that promote research-based effective practices and interventions in early childhood development. Publications include the series *Bridges,* which synthesizes practice-centered research on topics related to early childhood development, including parent-child relationships. Each issue is accompanied by a summary of the research syntheses, a practice guide brochure, and may include an ideas page. These last two resources offer solutions for practice, such as guiding principles, action steps, suggested phases of implementation, and evaluation ideas. www.researchtopractice.info/products.php

ation and Program Planning, 27(1), 65–78. This article describes a multiple case study that was one component of a multimethod evaluation of Kentucky's statewide, school-based Family Resource Centers program. The case studies, which describe family interventions and their outcomes, were used to develop training materials for program coordinators.

Penuel, W. R., Kim, D., Michalchik, V., Lewis, S., Means, B., Murphy, R., et al. (2002). *Using technology to enhance connections between home and school: A research synthesis.* Prepared for the Planning and Evaluation Services, U.S. Department of Education. Menlo Park, CA: SRI International. Intended to serve as a guide for policymaking and future evaluation, this report synthesizes research and evaluations on the use of technology to link home and school. www.ctl.sri.com/publications/downloads/Task1_FinalReport3.pdf (Acrobat file)

Sheldon, S., & Van Voorhis, F. (2004). **Partnership programs in U.S. schools: Their development and relationship to family involvement outcomes.** *School Effectiveness and School Improvement, 15*(2), 125–148. This article examines the characteristics of schools that develop high quality family, school, and community partnerships. Analyses indicate the importance of collegial support and onsite evaluations for developing quality programs.

Shepard, J., & Carlson, J. S. (2003). **An empirical evaluation of school-based prevention programs that involve parents.** *Psychology in the Schools, 40*(6), 641–656. This review of 20 prevention programs involving parents provides evidence for the effectiveness of incorporating parental involvement in school-based programs.

Solloway, M., & Girouard, S. (2004). *Voices of change for Connecticut's children: Promoting parent leadership and civic literacy: An evaluation of the Connecticut Commission on Children's Parent Leadership Training Institute.* Hartford: Connecticut Commission on Children. The Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI) seeks to enable parents to become leading advocates and change agents for their children through a 20-week course on leadership and civic engagement. According to the evaluation, participants reported becoming empowered as a result of the training and many reported positive child outcomes. For more information on PLTI go to www.cga.ct.gov/coc/plti.htm.

U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Deputy Secretary. (2004). *Evaluation of the Public Charter Schools Program: Final report.* Washington, DC: Author. Using data from 1999–2002, this national evaluation looks at how the Public Charter Schools Program works, the characteristics of students and families served by charter schools, and how well students perform in charter schools. www.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/choice/pcsp-final/index.html

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Evaluation Position

Harvard Family Research Project is looking for a project manager to work on our evaluation-related projects focused on children, youth, families, and communities, with management responsibilities in field operations, select issues of *The Evaluation Exchange,* and HFRP-wide strategic planning.

To learn more about this position and how to apply, see www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/about/jobs.html.

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