

PARENT INVOLVEMENT PARTNERSHIPS AND
PERCEIVED CHANGES IN PARENTS
INFORMATION AND BEHAVIOR

By

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Historically, the education of young children has always involved their parents. Parents were responsible for the education of their young before schools were available, and parents eventually formed the first formal school setting. The notion of parent involvement is not new, and even the earliest early childhood programs included this in their philosophies. Founder of the kindergarten program, Friedrich Froebel, was a student of Johann Pestalozzi's principles (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2000), which supported the notion that the first agent in a child's education is the mother. Froebel continued with this belief and first brought parents and educators together by planning mother-infant activities. During World War I, Margaret McMillan (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2000), viewed as an expert on the "nursery school" saw the need to educate teachers and formed a three-year training program. At this "college", a sustained involvement of the home was valued, where teachers and parents were seen as partners in the preparation of children. Maria Montessori, founder of the Montessori program, (Decker & Decker, 2001) continued with the partnership notion as she felt the mission of both parents and teachers was saving children and improving society by uniting and working together.

Today, the push for parent involvement continues and federal funding is often contingent upon this involvement. The Head Start programs have relied upon parent involvement since their implementation, and have regarded such involvement as an integral piece for the growth of families and children (Castro, Bryant, Peisner-Feinberg, & Skinner, 2004). Oklahoma's "Reaching for the Stars" program also requires that child care centers and homes wanting to increase their star level, thereby increasing their subsidy reimbursement, involve parents in several areas (Norris, Dunn, & Eckert, 2003). Examples of this may include involving parents in developing program goals, annual parent teacher conferences, and parents volunteering within the program. In Australia, funding to child care centers is contingent upon parent involvement similar to that of Oklahoma's through the Quality Improvement & Accreditation Scheme, sponsored by the federal government (Hughes & MacNaughten, 2001).

The benefits of parental involvement with their children's education have been well documented. Research has supported that greater gains in a child's socio-emotional, cognitive, and language domains occur when their parents are involved in their early childhood program (Castro et al., 2004). Fullan (1982) compiled a broad review of the research and found a similar theme: "The closer the parent is to the education of the child, the greater the impact on child development and educational achievement" (p. 16). The benefits increase for children considered disadvantaged, greater parent participation in both preschool and kindergarten has been associated with lower rates of grade retention, fewer years in special education and higher reading achievement in later years (Miedel

& Reynolds, 1999). The literature explains that children seem to learn and grow in schools where parents and teachers collaborate on guidance and share similar visions (Kasting, 1994). Researchers have also claimed that parent involvement in their children's early education increases parents' understanding of children's development and appropriate educational practices (Gelfer, 1991). Kasting (1994), while studying programs guided by the principles of mutual respect, shared responsibility and reciprocity towards parent involvement, ascertained that most parents found the sharing of different perspectives to be especially useful as it provided exposure to other ways of acting and thinking.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine parent-caregiver communication in child care centers representing the first level of Joyce Epstein's model (Epstein, 1986), which expects teachers at school to share information with parents about child development, discipline, and the learning process. This study also explored whether parents report learning from the information shared by staff at the child care center. Little research has been done to link specific parent involvement practices with the parents who experience them or to measure differences in attitudes and reactions of parents whose children are in classrooms with different philosophies and practices (Epstein, 1986).

The specific research questions addressed in this study were:

1. From the perspective of directors, did their programs provide resources and

information to parents for working with their child at home on matters relating to guidance, child development and learning activities? What strategies were used for sharing this information?

2. Were there associations between the types of parent involvement techniques offered for Level One Partnership Involvement and the auspice of the facility?
3. In programs offering these resources, did parents report changes since their child entered the program, in their own understanding and behaviors towards their children in (1) guidance and behavior, (2) teaching and learning, and (3) child development?

Definitions

For the purpose of this study, **directors** are individuals employed at child care programs that are responsible for the day-to-day operations of the center.

Auspice refers to program sponsorship and whether a program is intended for profit or not for profit.

Parent Involvement is defined as parent's participating in the policy and planning of their child's program, receiving newsletters,

informational material, going on field trips, helping in the classroom,

communicating with their child's caregiver and so forth. Ghazvini and Readdick

(1994) are also cited in this paper and for their research, they use the following

terms and definitions: **subsidized programs** are those where cost of the child's

care is paid for by the state or federal government; **non-subsidized programs** are

those where the cost of the child's care is typically paid for by the parent or

guardian, this is often referred to as "private pay"; **contract-subsidized**

programs are those programs that are funded through a combination of both subsidized payment and private pay.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This review includes the theoretical framework used in this study. The prevailing theory used in this study was that of Joyce Epstein, a leader in the field of research involving parents and educators (Eldridge, 2001). Six levels of parent involvement and partnerships will be identified, with further elaboration on level one. The next area of discussion involves characteristics of program quality and sponsorship or auspice in relation to parent involvement. A brief review of barriers to successful implementation of parent involvement strategies follows. Finally, a conclusion of the research relating to the purpose of this study will be offered.

Theoretical Framework

Bronfenbrenner (1979) formulated a theoretical framework that acknowledged the various interdependent influences of multiple contexts on children's development. This theory recognized that in human development, many different systems would interact with one another. These systems include, but are not limited to families and schools.

The existence of such systems and the reality that they do not exist in a vacuum must also be considered. A growing amount of research suggests that the overlapping of such systems and the influence thereof will have an impact on

children's learning and development (Epstein, 2000). As teachers include parents in their ongoing teaching practices, parents gain confidence in their ability to help their children at home. This results in improved student attitudes and achievement, as well as higher teacher ratings. Thus, a reciprocal relationship or shared partnership is formed.

Epstein has formulated a framework of six major types of parent involvement to assist programs and parents in identifying their responsibilities toward a shared partnership (Epstein, 1986). A description of these partnerships will be outlined. The depiction of parent involvement will also serve as the definition in respect to this paper.

Epstein's Parent Involvement and Partnership Model Overview

The first type of partnership involvement includes basic obligations of families, such as providing for children's health and safety, developing parent skills and child rearing approaches. Each program can assist families to develop their knowledge and skills needed to understand their child at each grade and developmental level. This assistance can come through various techniques, such as family support programs, education and training programs, workshops, home visitor programs, and providing resource information, etc (Epstein, 1986).

The second type of partnership involvement refers to the basic obligations of the school/program, which includes communication with the families about school programs and children's progress. This would include memos, notices, bulletins, phone calls, parent conferences, etc. The method and frequency of such communications will vary among the many schools and programs. The format

and delivery method may assist or deter the parents' ability to understand the information provided (Epstein & Dauber, 1991).

The third type of partnership involvement includes parents and other volunteers who assist in classrooms and other areas of the program. This may also include volunteering for special events, and supporting student performances. Success at this level involves the school encouraging parents' participation. This can be accomplished by making parents feel welcome and providing training so the parents feel more efficient and useful during their volunteer time. In addition, schools can improve and vary schedules so that more families are able to participate as both volunteers and audience members (Epstein & Dauber, 1991).

The fourth type of partnership involvement supports learning at home. At this level, teachers help parents assist their child in specific learning activities at home, which are coordinated with their activities in the classroom. This is especially helpful in long-term success for the student. Information is provided to the parents regarding the skills required of students to pass each grade. This also informs the parent of the teacher's methods, expectations and curriculum (Epstein, 2000).

The fifth type of partnership involvement is in decision-making, advocacy, governance, and includes parents and others in the community through advisory councils and organizations. This level of involvement may be at the local, state or even national level. The school partners with the parent and may even provide training to help develop communication techniques in order to represent the child, school, or programs needs (Epstein & Dauber, 1991).

The final type of partnership involvement was not identified in earlier research and is not always included in all of the studies utilizing Epstein's models of involvement (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). This model suggests collaboration and exchanges with community organizations to share the responsibilities and the successes of children's education. This includes providing children and families access to health services, after school care, and community resources which support children's learning.

Parent Involvement at Level One

The preparation of the child for school through the development of positive home conditions that support learning are the focus at this level (Epstein, 1986). As mentioned earlier this can be accomplished through a variety of activities, such as workshops and parent education forums. Less time intensive methods are also available by using brochures, handouts and tip sheets on related topics. The main focus at this level is parental efficacy by offering support with parenting issues, nutrition, behavior and guidance and home learning activities (Epstein, 1986; Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Katz (1980) further advocates programs that facilitate parents understanding in issues involving their child. These programs actually arm the parents with knowledge and encourage them to apply their own preferences and logic when making decisions that affect their child. This would suggest ongoing benefits to the parent and the child as well as younger siblings.

Research also indicates that programs, which offer Level One resources to parents and assist parents in meeting their basic obligations, can increase the

amount of parent involvement at even higher levels. Comer and Haynes (1991) found that parents in low-income housing had become substantially more involved in their child's education after Level One techniques had been utilized. "The reputation of the school as a caring and enabling place spreads into the community and leads to even greater participation" (p. 276).

Program Quality and Parent Involvement

The subject of parent involvement in early care and education is often considered a quality indicator. Castro et al. (2004) concluded that classroom quality was the strongest predictor of parent involvement. Is it the involvement that leads to quality or is it the quality that promotes the involvement? Research cited above has definitely demonstrated that greater parent involvement in children's early childhood programs leads to greater gains in the child and later overall success. Accordingly, the research field is moving from the question "Is parent involvement important or beneficial for children's development and school success?" to the question, "How can we make parent involvement happen?"

Oklahoma's Reaching for the Stars program (Norris et al., 2003) includes four star levels, with one star programs meeting minimal criteria required for obtaining a License. Each level thereafter includes parent involvement strategies, which are required before being awarded the higher stars level. The Early Childhood Collaborative of Oklahoma study asked the question, "What requirements of the stars program are most important for center quality?" The "Reaching for the Stars" criteria were compared to a model of global center

quality, specifically the Environmental Rating Scales. Strong parent involvement was identified as one of the best predictors of center quality.

Program Auspice and Parent Involvement

Some differences in parent involvement methods have also been examined under different program auspices. Ghazvini and Readdick (1994) examined parent-caregiver communication and quality of care in several childcare settings. An equal number of subsidized programs, nonsubsidized programs and contracted subsidized (private pay mixed with subsidy) programs were considered. The study revealed that significantly higher frequencies of parent communication occurred at both subsidized and contracted subsidized settings than from non-subsidized settings. In addition, significant differences in quality ratings were found by center type. The tool used for this study was the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale, which uses a scale of zero to seven. The higher number indicates a higher level of quality in the environment. In this study, they totaled the scores and the higher number remains the better quality indicator. The contracted subsidized average quality rating was 212.24 while the subsidized rating was 159.45 followed by non-subsidized average rating of 130.70. One conclusion Ghazvini and Readdick (1994) ascertained was private non-profit settings were most likely to offer environments low in quality and less likely to have higher frequencies of parent communication and the children attending these programs were possibly at developmental risk. This distinction is important for states such as Oklahoma, where the primary recipients in the “Reaching for the Stars” initiative discussed earlier receive subsidized payment.

However, pre-conceived notions towards parents of children in subsidized care are a factor, which must be considered. Ghazvini and Readdick (1994) sent surveys to parents about their perceptions of parent-caregiver communication to twelve facilities. Four of these facilities were completely subsidized. The director and head teacher in these subsidized settings expected a low parental response rate and commented on the difficulty to get parents to respond to requests. They appeared to consider these parents as “unresponsive” and “unavailable” (Ghazvini & Readdick, 1994).

Considering program auspice and the subsequent relationship to parent involvement and quality is critical for several reasons. Kagan (1991) reminds us that expansion is occurring in every sector of the early care and education market, thus competition is increasing and cooperation is decreasing between nonprofit and profit programs. Early care and education have also become prominent; hence, its value is more widespread. In addition, Kagan (1991) indicates the belief in privatization and the debates thereof, as well as the lack of understanding regarding the impact of mixed sectors offering childcare services will only be resolved with continued examination.

Barriers to Implementation of Parent Involvement

While the benefits of parental involvement in their child’s education and experiences outside the home are abundant, the challenges of developing such involvement are also abundant. Parent employment was the top predictor of parent involvement or lack thereof. Employment overshadowed maternal

education and parents' attitudes toward the program and childrearing behavior (Castro et al., 2004).

Ghazvini and Readdick (1994) looked at both parent's perceptions and caregiver's perceptions of different communication methods used between school and home. As expected, the greater importance placed on a particular form of communication the greater the increase on communication frequency. However, the form of communication most valued by both caregivers and parents was two-way communication, actual conversations between the caregiver and the parent. Unfortunately, availability for such communication is often at different times of the day for parents and caregivers, morning for caregivers and afternoon for parents.

Parental Perceptions

Parents and caregivers can also feel vulnerable when sharing information or becoming a parent-caregiver team. The challenges to preserve their self-importance and still develop a working relationship can be daunting (Kasting, 1994). Additionally, in some cases, both schools and families operate under the general notion that they have basically different responsibilities.

Parent involvement literature reflects three general themes in regards to the role of the parent (Hughes & MacNaughton, 2000). The first theme indicates parental knowledge is considered unimportant, as parental viewpoints are not included in a good portion of the existing literature. The second theme is that parental knowledge is supplementary. This literature suggests that parents' information on their children is only supplementary to the educator's knowledge

of the same child. The final theme is that parental knowledge is inadequate and parents are unable to teach their children. This reflects that parental inadequacy can only be corrected with teacher involvement. Such biased schools of thought only lend to forming additional barriers between parents and teachers.

Teachers' Perceptions

Teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards parent involvement and the respective parents impact the success or lack of success when implementing involvement methods. Teachers considered leaders of parent involvement practices involve parents from all educational backgrounds. According to parents, these teachers established more equitable programs, unlike the teachers who were not considered leaders in parent involvement (Epstein, 1986). Other teachers, utilized practices that emphasized the separation of home and school. They reported that children would not receive help at home on learning if their parents had a low education level (Becker & Epstein, 1982).

Conclusion

The barriers mentioned previously must be considered and eventually overcome for successful implementation of all levels of parent involvement partnership strategies. However, the first level of involvement partnerships does not appear to be as vulnerable to barriers such as attitudes, time and availability of communication, planned meetings, sporting events, etc. These communications can rely on teachers and program administrators providing information relative to parents. Positive attitudes from these efforts may be the end result (Epstein, 1986).

Epstein (1986) learned that teachers rated by principals and parents as leaders in parent involvement methods, sent home more ideas for parents as opposed to teachers not considered leaders. Further, these same high parent involvement teachers also had parents who tended to be more positive about school than the other parents. Teachers providing resources and useful information to parents received higher ratings from these parents in their overall classroom quality and interpersonal skills. These practices influenced parents' reactions in a consistent and favorable manner towards the schools program and on teacher evaluations.

Although a good deal of research on parent involvement has been completed, there have been very few linkages between teachers' practices and the parents who experience them or to measure reactions of parents whose children are in the classroom (Epstein, 1986). The majority of the research focuses on parent involvement and the elementary school setting. Parent involvement in the childcare spectrum appears to be an area needing further research.

Parent involvement is often defined as parent's participating in the policy and planning of their child's program, receiving newsletters, going on field trips, helping in the classroom and so forth. Castro et al. (2004) recommended a broader definition of parent involvement to include activities parents' conduct at home to support their children's development and education. Providing parents with resources and ideas to promote activities they can do with their child at home, as well as foster their understanding of their child's development and education would have lasting effects for both the parent and the child.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Sample

Data from 387 mothers randomly selected from 76 child care centers as part of a larger study of child care quality was used in this study. The larger study completed by Dr. Deborah Norris and Dr. Lorraine Dunn, was funded by Oklahoma's Division of Child Care. The average age of the mothers was 30.5 years with a range from 20 to 49 years. According to responses to demographic questions, almost two-thirds (64.8%) of the mothers were married or living with a partner and 23% were divorced. Almost three-quarters (72.4%) of the mothers were Caucasian, 10.4% Black, 7.8% American Indian, 3.4% Hispanic/Latino and the remaining 6% identified themselves as other. The median level of completed education for these mothers was an Associates Degree with a range from less than 9th grade to post-graduate work. The median family income was between \$36,000 to \$40,999 although some families earned less than \$5,000 annually and others earned more than \$250,000. Specific demographic information is reported in Table 1.

Seventy-six directors were interviewed by data collectors about the family partnership activities utilized at their centers.

Table 1
Demographic Information for Sample

Characteristic	n	%	mean	sd
Mother's marital status				
Single/never married	46	12.2%		
Separated/divorced/widowed	87	23%		
Married/Living with partner	245	64.8%		
Mother's employment out of the home				
None	36	9.3%		
Part-time only	43	11.1%		
Full-time	301	77.8%		
Seasonal/variable	6	1.6%		
Mother's ethnicity/race				
African American/black	40	10.4%		
American Indian	30	7.8%		
Hispanic/Latino	13	3.4%		
Asian/Pacific Islander	5	1.3%		
Caucasian	278	72.4%		
Bi-racial	14	3.6%		
Other	4	1%		
Mother's age (years)			30.56	5.99
Number of hours per week that child attends the center			36.64	10.44
Number of month's child has been attending the center			19.35	14.73

Procedure

Data for the current study came from a larger study involving research in child care quality. Child care centers were randomly selected which represented the range of quality for the state of Oklahoma. Parents from these programs were asked to complete demographic information and parent involvement surveys. The classroom teachers sent the surveys home to the parents and they were returned in sealed envelopes and collected by members of the research team.

A member of the research team interviewed the child care center directors about the parent involvement strategies utilized by the center. They were asked to share documentation of the different strategies employed in the center with the interviewer.

Instruments

Questions about center parent involvement practices were taken from the family partnership assessment checklist. To address the sharing of information related to child development and guidance directors were specifically asked “*Do you offer families information or make suggestions on how they can work with children on issues such as bedtime routines, discipline, eating habits, toilet training, etc.?*” Directors were also asked to identify which of the following delivery methods they used to share information: informal discussion, written information, video or audio tapes, workshops, books or parent library, newsletters, fliers or brochures. To address the sharing of information related to learning activities at home directors were specifically asked “*Do you provide information, ideas, or materials to families for home learning activities such as*

language, math, art, music, science, and problem solving?” Directors were also asked to identify which of the following delivery methods they used to share information: informal discussion, written information, video or audio tapes, workshops, books, activity packets, toy lending library, newsletters, fliers or brochures.

Items on the family questionnaire were used to help parents identify changes in their own behaviors and understanding since their child entered the program, specifically in their knowledge of child development, learning and behavior and guidance. Parents indicated how much they agreed with the following statements: *“I have learned better ways to discipline my child,” “I spend more time playing, talking, or reading with my child,”* and *“I have a better understanding of how my child is growing and developing.”* Parents were also asked how they learned this new information: by watching the teacher, talking with the teacher, using materials provided by the teacher, following suggestions of other parents, or information found in books or on the internet.

Data Analysis Plan

To answer the first research question this study explored the frequencies of parent involvement practices as reported by the director. Chi square analyses were used for program’s auspice and the categories of parent involvement delivery methods to answer the second question. Correlations between the total number of practices reported and the amount of change reported from the parents in their knowledge of child development, learning, and behavior and guidance were conducted to answer the third question.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The first research question addressed was: *From the perspective of directors, do programs provide resources and information to parents for working with their child at home on matters relating to guidance, child development and learning activities? What strategies were used for sharing this information?*

Responses from 59 directors were analyzed regarding parent information resources and delivery techniques. Of the 76 directors interviewed, there were 17 responses to the questions were missing. Fifty-seven (96.6%) of the directors said they offered suggestions and/or resource information to parents on child development and behavior and guidance. Frequencies for each delivery method have been reported in Table 2. The delivery method of informal discussion was utilized by almost 85% of the programs. Written systems had an average use of 76.3%, while 24% reported offering video and audiotapes to parents. Workshops were used by 20% of the respondents, while 12% used other methods to share information on child development and behavior and guidance.

Table 2

Delivery Methods for Sharing Child Development & Behavior and Guidance Information

Method Used	Number	%
Informal Discussion	50	84.7

Table 2 (*continued*)

Method Used	Number	%
Written Information	45	76.3
Video/Audio Tapes	14	23.7
Workshops	12	20.3
Books/ Parent Library	34	57.6
Newsletters	39	66.1
Fliers/Brochures	42	71.2
Other	7	11.9

As reported in Table 3, the use of handouts, fliers and newsletters was the most frequently utilized delivery method to share information with parents on home learning activities. This was followed by the use of informal discussion and other written methods. Books and activity packets were utilized when sharing this information, unlike with child development and behavior and guidance.

Table 3

Delivery Method of Sharing Home Learning Activities Information

Method Used	Number	%
Informal Discussion	31	59.6
Written Information	30	57.7
Newsletters/handouts/fliers	35	67.3
Video/Audio Tapes	11	21.2
Workshops	7	13.5
Activity Packets	14	26.9

Table 3 (*continued*)

Method Used	Number	%
Books	20	38.5
Toy Lending Library	3	5.8
Other	3	5.8

For the purposes of exploring a relationship between the parent involvement techniques offered and program auspice, specifically for profit or not for profit programs, a chi-square analysis was utilized to answer research question 2. In order to maximize the number of responses per cell, the original eight delivery methods were collapsed into four categories. Written information, books/parent library, newsletters, and fliers/brochures were combined into “written materials” for the child development question and the low frequency item (other) was dropped.

No significant results were found for the delivery methods for sharing child development information by auspice. One significant result was found for the delivery methods of sharing home learning activities information by auspice. Directors of nonprofit centers reported offering more workshops with information about home learning activities to parents than directors of for-profit centers. The result for each topic by the four categories of delivery methods has been presented in Table 4. One association between the types of parent involvement techniques offered for Level One partnership involvement and the auspice of the facility was identified.

Table 4

Delivery Methods of Information Sharing by Program Auspice

	Profit		Non-profit		Chi-Square
	n	%	n	%	
Delivery Methods for Child Development					
Written Materials	31	88.6	22	91.7	$\chi^2(1)=.149$ p=.699
Informal Discussion	30	85.7	20	83.3	$\chi^2(1)=.062$ p=.803
Video/Audio Tapes	8	22.9	6	25.0	$\chi^2(1)=.036$ p=.849
Workshops	5	14.3	7	29.2	$\chi^2(1)=1.946$ p=.163
Delivery Methods for Home Learning Activities					
Written Materials	23	69.7	15	78.9	$\chi^2(1)=.524$ p=.469
Informal Discussion	18	54.5	13	68.4	$\chi^2(1)=.964$ p=.326
Audio/Video Tapes	7	21.2	4	21.1	$\chi^2(1)=.000$ p=.989
Workshops	2	6.1	5	26.3	$\chi^2(1)=4.247$ p=.039

Research question number 3 examined parent's reported changes in their behaviors and understanding in specific childrearing issues. Specifically, *do parents report changes since their child entered the program in their own understanding and behaviors towards their children in (1) guidance and behavior (2) teaching and learning, and (3) child development.*

Questions were posed to parents about their own changes since their child entered these childcare programs. Specifically, parents were asked to respond to the following questions, "*I have learned better ways to discipline my child*"; "*I*

spend more time playing talking or reading with my child”; “ *I have a better understanding of how my child is growing and developing*”. Parents were given the option to respond (1) strongly agree, (2) somewhat agree, (3) no opinion, (4) somewhat disagree, and (5) strongly disagree. The mean response to the statement “*I have learned better ways to discipline my child*” was 2.51 (sd=1.074). The statement “*I spend more time playing, talking or reading with my child*” had a mean response of 1.95 (sd=1.016) while the statement “*I have a better understanding of how my child is growing and developing*” had a mean response of 1.90 (sd=1.002). The closer the mean was to a score of 1 indicated a stronger agreement. Descriptive data for this question have been reported in Table 5.

Table 5

Changes Reported by Parents

	I spend more time talking or reading with my child.		I have a better understanding of how my child is growing and developing		I have learned better ways to discipline my child	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
<i>Strongly Agree</i>	142	38.9%	155	42.2%	72	19.3%
<i>Somewhat Agree</i>	141	38.6%	127	34.6%	110	29.5%
<i>No opinion</i>	56	15.3%	63	17.2%	145	38.9%
<i>Somewhat disagree</i>	11	3.0%	9	2.5%	21	5.6%
<i>Strongly disagree</i>	15	4.1%	13	3.5%	25	6.7%

Table 6 indicates which variables impacted the parents reported changes in understanding and behaviors. Of the 371 parent responses, parents reported that talking with their child’s teacher or caregiver had the greatest influence in their changed behaviors and understanding regarding specific childrearing issues as indicated on the following table. The second and third highest sources were other parents and information in books or on the internet.

Table 6

Sources of Influence for Parent’s Reported Change

	Influenced change: more time spent reading or talking with my child.		Influenced change: understanding of child development		Influenced change: Discipline/behavior & guidance	
	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
Watching child’s teacher and caregiver	84	22.6%	71	19.1%	83	22.2%
Talking with my child’s teacher and caregiver	134	36.1%	195	52.5%	171	45.8%
Using educational material provided by teacher	79	21.2%	79	21.2%	60	16.0%
Following suggestions of other parents and families	103	27.7%	84	22.6%	114	30.5%
Information found in books or internet	114	30.7%	123	33.1%	99	26.6%
Other	64	17.2%	49	13.2%	37	9.9%

CHAPTER V

Discussion

The results of this study showed that directors do provide a variety of methods for sharing information with parents on subjects related to child development, behavior and guidance, and child learning processes. Also supported by this study is the clear benefit that parents feel from this sharing of information. This is reported in their own changes in understanding and behaviors since their child entered their respective child care program. It should also be noted that only one significant relationship was identified between the sharing of such information and the program's auspice or sponsorship status, which was non-profit programs offering more workshops. Although considered significant, the overall number was still low, with only two for-profit programs and 5 non-profit programs offering workshops. However, the current study involved over 300 childcare programs, while the study conducted by Ghazvini and Readdick (1994), which identified a relationship between auspice and parent involvement involved only 12 facilities. Differences in sample size and parental involvement focus could contribute to the differences in the findings.

Directors in this study used a variety of methods to share information with parents utilizing Epstein's Level One Parent Involvement Partnership. One can conclude that the preferred delivery method when sharing information regarding

child development and behavior and guidance is that of informal discussion (84.7%), followed by written information (76.3%) and fliers and brochures (71.2%) respectively. However, when sharing information regarding learning activities, newsletter, handouts, and fliers were used by 67.3% and informal discussion was used by 59.6%. It becomes obvious when reviewing the data that most programs offer this information in a combination of methods and do not rely on just one.

The use of several delivery methods appears to be successful in providing parents with the tools necessary to make changes in their own understanding and behaviors towards their child. The majority of the parent's "strongly agreed" that since their child entered their respective childcare program, they spent more time talking or reading with their child as indicated by 38.9% and that they had a better understanding of how this child is growing and developing, indicated by 42.2% (See table 5). These findings further concur with Gelfer's (1991) research indicating parental involvement in their children's early education increases parents' understanding of their child's development. Interestingly, such changes were not reported regarding learning better ways to discipline their child. The majority of the parents, specifically 38.9% reported no opinion that the program influenced them in areas relating to discipline.

The methods that parents reported influenced their change in behavior and understanding of all three topics, child guidance, discipline and learning, was unanimously that of talking with their child's teacher and caregiver. That was the number one influencing factor in change reported in all areas. According to

Bryan (2004), this is a communication technique that requires very little time. After studying parent-caregiver communication, her research found that the average length of communication is 116 seconds long and ranges between 5 and 332 seconds. A technique that averages less than 2 minutes in time appears to make a great impact on the parents involved. This was also the method most used by the childcare programs in this study, one could assume that is the reason it provided the greatest influence.

Implications

This current study can help facilities and parents see how effective parent involvement partnerships are, even at Level One of Epstein's model. The parents reporting of their changes in behavior and understanding regarding issues as critical as child development, learning and discipline due to informal discussion gives validity to the value of these discussions. Realistically, it appears to be the simplest method to convey pertinent information to parents and does not require the use of any materials. However, it does require the teacher or caregiver's time, which admittedly is not in abundance in most situations.

Suggestions for Future Research

More research is needed on parent involvement methods in relation to child care programs. The vast majority of the research surrounding parent involvement is directly related to the ages of kindergarten and older. In the event that it does focus on the years prior to Kindergarten, it appears to be geared towards the Head Start programs and public schools. More research should focus

on specific delivery methods of sharing information with parents and the effectiveness of such methods.

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Scope and Method of Study: The purpose of this study was to examine parent-caregiver communication in child care centers and their sharing of information with parents on the topics of child development, discipline, and the learning process. This study also explored whether parents report learning from the information shared by staff at the child care center. 387 mothers were randomly selected from 78 child care centers. Interviews and questionnaires were utilized with the directors of the child care centers as well as the mothers participating.

Findings and Conclusions: This study indicated that child care centers do provide a variety of methods for sharing information with parents. Also supported by this study is the clear benefit that parents feel from this sharing of information, as reported in their own changes in understanding and behaviors since their child entered their respective child care program. The preferred method of sharing information with parents on the subject of child development and behavior and guidance was that of informal discussion.

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