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Measuring the Effects of Parental Involvement in Academic and Extracurricular Activities on a

Child's Self-Efficacy

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to see what effect parental involvement in both academic and extracurricular activities had on the academic achievement and self-efficacy of students in a parochial middle school class in eastern Tennessee. The researchers hypothesize that parental involvement has a positive effect on a child's academic achievement and this study was conducted to provide evidence for this hypothesis. In this study, 39 parents and 16 students from an eighth grade classroom were surveyed. Among other things, the parents were questioned about how important they felt it was to do the following: attend extracurricular activities their child was involved in, help their child with homework, communicate to the child that he or she is smart and can succeed in school, and attend parent/teacher conferences. The researchers asked the students if they thought having their parents involved helped them in school, how they felt about their ability to perform well in school, and how motivated they felt to succeed. The results showed that most students felt confident in their ability to succeed in school and that most parents were supportive and involved.

Keywords: parental involvement, self-efficacy

Measuring the Effects of Parental Involvement in Academic and Extracurricular Activities on a Child's Self-Efficacy

One of the problems elementary school teachers often face is obtaining parental cooperation regarding things like homework, projects, field trips, and extracurricular activities. Some parents are involved in their child's education, some are too busy, others simply don't care, and some are too involved. The researchers hypothesized that a reasonable amount of parental involvement has a positive effect on a child's self-efficacy but they wanted some concrete evidence to support that theory. This study was designed specifically for a Seventh-day Adventist classroom. Seventh-day Adventist education is characterized by Christ-centered instruction, whole-person development, an attitude of service, and working together with the home and family to achieve a child's best learning. Since these attributes are different from those in public schools, this study is not intended to comment on the effects of parental involvement in a public school setting. It is only a study about Adventist schools.

Literature Review

Milton Chen, founding director of the KQED Center for Education (PBS), says that "we should acknowledge that parental involvement is probably the most important and least addressed factor in children's learning" (Chen, 2010). In fact, when asked what one thing is most important to tell parents, one grade-school teacher said, "Tell them they do more to affect their children's learning before they set foot in kindergarten than we do after" (Chen, 2010).

There has been research done already to suggest that parental involvement has a positive effect on students' motivation. A 2005 study done by Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, and Holbein reported that there was a "significant relationship between motivation and parental involvement" (Gonzalez-Dehass, 2005). They claimed that student motivation was most strongly affected by

parental views and the value they assigned to academic achievement (Gonzalez-Dehass, 2005). Not only was student motivation affected by parental involvement, but the reverse affect was also true – parental involvement was affected by student motivation. Parents whose children are motivated naturally become more engaged, many times at the very request of their children (Gonzalez-Dehass, 2005).

It has also been established that home-school connections can enhance students' academic success. "When parents are involved in their children's education, children may acquire skills and knowledge beyond those they would achieve through school experiences alone" (Ridnour, 2011). In fact, having a supportive home environment affects the child's school experience even more than factors such as the family's income, education level, or cultural background (Bokhorst-Heng, 2008).

However, studies have shown that parental involvement can be either positive or negative, depending on the child's interpretation of the involvement. Highly involved parents can be perceived as supportive and encouraging or as excessively pressuring their child to succeed (Kanters & Bocarro). Overinvolved parents can negatively affect their child's education by doing their homework for them, coming to school daily to talk to the teacher, asking for every detail of the day's events, and generally smothering both student and teacher (Wilke, 2005). It has been found that "children who reported higher pressure from parents were worried about meeting their parent's expectations and experienced higher levels of state anxiety" (Kanters & Bocarro). Therefore, it is important to not only test the parent's level of involvement, but also the child's perceptions about that involvement. This study has attempted to assess both these aspects by surveying both parent and child.

Not only does parental involvement have a positive effect on self-efficacy and motivation, but it can improve student behavior as well. Studies have shown that “students who attend schools with a strong sense of community are more likely to be motivated to perform, *and they tend to behave better both inside and outside of the educational setting*” (Schaps, 2003).

Despite all this, educators often forget the vital role the parents play in their child’s education. Rebecca Wilke, a university professor and educational and leadership consultant, says that one of the first things on a teacher’s agenda should not be lesson plans and instruction manuals, but “contemplating how the parents of your students can, should, and will influence these young lives during the academic year” (Wilke, 2005). Parents are the first and most influential teachers of their child’s life. They shape the child’s first thoughts about life, learning, and ethics. They are the first instructors of language and communication. They provide the child’s first impressions about culture. They are the first lens through which the child sees the world. Therefore, “when educators make positive connections with parents, they have powerful allies in the process of teaching and learning” (Wilke, 2005).

Methods

The primary method of collecting data was surveys distributed to both parents and students. With the parents’ surveys the researchers used a question format; for the students they had them respond to statements. The parent questions asked them to rate how important aspects of their child’s education were to them or how often they engaged in a certain activity. The students responded to statements about their feelings towards school and their parents’ involvement. The surveys were all anonymous. Consent forms for both students and parents were signed and collected before any surveys were taken. The consent forms can be found in Appendix A, B, and C. The surveys were distributed to 81 students and 81 parents. However,

only 39 completed parent surveys and 16 completed student surveys were received. One parent sent back a blank survey, writing that they preferred not to participate in this study. After the researchers received the completed surveys, the surveys were analyzed. First, each survey was assigned a number. Two different sets of numbers were used for the parent surveys and the student surveys. (e.g., there is a Parent Survey #1 and a Student Survey #1.) Then the researchers wrote down how many responses there were for each option for each question. For example, Parent Survey #1 responded “Very Important” 9 times, “Somewhat Important” 1 time, and “Not Important at all” 0 times. The same was done with the student surveys. Then, the researchers went back and wrote down the number of responses for each question. For example, for Parent Survey Question #1, 37 parents responded “Very Important”, 2 parents responded “Somewhat Important”, and 0 parents responded “Not Important at all”. This enabled the researchers to see which items were most important to the most amounts of people. After breaking down the data into these two categories, they then made two graphs depicting the information. These graphs can be found in Appendix D and Appendix E. Finally, the researchers wrote down all the comments that some parents had written on their surveys. Many of these comments addressed the fact that many parents have full time jobs and cannot be as involved in their child’s education as they would like to be. No student wrote any comments on his or her survey.

Results

Most students said that their parents are only “somewhat” or “not at all involved” in extracurricular activities such as sports, band, and gymnastics. However, the majority of students reported that their parents attended extracurricular activities that they participate in. So although most parents are not involved in extracurricular activities (such as coaching a team or driving for band tours), they do attend the activities their child is involved in. On one survey there was a

differing opinion between the mom and the dad. The mom felt that it was “Very Important” to attend extracurricular activities but the dad said it was only “Somewhat Important”. One parent wrote that their child is not involved in any extracurricular activities.

The overwhelming majority of students reported feelings of high self-efficacy about school. Only one student said that they only felt “Somewhat Strongly” that they could succeed in school. All of the students surveyed said that they believed they had the ability to learn. Similarly, all the students said that their parents felt that education is important. Not only does this tell us that the parents feel that way, but it tells us that they do a good job of communicating this feeling to their children. All but two students said they felt very motivated to perform well in school.

Most parents said it was very important to attend parent/teacher conferences; however, 11 parents said it was only somewhat important and 1 parent said it was not important at all. One parent also commented that the “information is not what it used to be”, indicating that perhaps providing more relevant information would make parents more willing to come to parent/teacher conferences. Another parent wrote that they only attend parent/teacher conferences “if requested by the teacher”.

Most parents said that it was very important that their child get good grades. However, one parent wrote, “I want them to do their best and learn. Grades [are] not as important.” All the parents said it was “Very Important” that their child’s homework be completed and turned in on time. Half the parents said they helped their child with homework “Very Often” and half said they helped their child with homework “Sometimes”.

Not many parents felt it was important to volunteer to help with classroom supervision or field trips. Several parents wrote that they would like to be more involved but their jobs did not

allow time for that. The majority of parents said they “Very Often” attend extracurricular activities in which their child is involved. One parent wrote that how often they attend extracurricular activities “depends on child’s involvement”.

35 parents said they “Very Often” told their child he/she was smart and could succeed in school and 4 parents said they did this “Sometimes”. This shows that all of the parents surveyed give their child verbal support and encouragement on a regular basis.

Discussion

One weakness of this study is that it relies almost entirely upon the honesty of the participants. If the parents or students were not honest in their responses, then many of the results could become invalid. Unfortunately, there is no way to ever know how honest the participants were on their surveys.

Half the students said that they thought having their parents involved in their education only somewhat helps them learn or does not help them learn at all. One possible explanation for this is that the students are entering puberty at this point and are becoming more independent. They are starting to value their relationships with their friends more than their relationship with their parents. This means they are less likely to want their parents involved in their education, especially in after-school activities when they just want to be with their friends. Another possible explanation could be that these particular students interpret their parents’ involvement as pressuring and therefore it becomes more of a stress than an encouragement.

Although 81 student surveys were sent out, only 16 came back completed. The researchers recognize that this is a very small percentage and that better results could have been acquired had the surveys been taken in class instead of sending them home with the students. In future studies, distribution of the surveys will be done more carefully to as to assure the most accurate and useful results.

Conclusions and Future Study

From the data, we can conclude that most, if not all, of the students surveyed come from a loving, supportive home environment and that this has reflected positively on their feelings of motivation and self-efficacy. We can also conclude that most parents are supportive and are willing to be involved in their child's academic and extracurricular career. Parental involvement is not the only factor that may play a part in students' high self-efficacy, but based on this study and other similar studies there is a correlation between parental involvement and student self-efficacy. Other factors that may apply in this particular study may be religion, culture, or the geographical area.

In order to gain a full understanding of this topic, it is necessary to conduct more studies that include the students' grades so that academic achievement, as well as self-efficacy, can be measured. To address the issue of students who did not feel supported by their parents even though their parents were involved, it would be useful to do a similar study but with a younger grade to see if the age of the students has any affect on their reactions toward parental involvement.

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Appendix A
Parent Consent Form (for student)

Project Title: Measuring the Effects of Parental Involvement in Academic and Extracurricular Activities on a Child's Self-Efficacy

Investigators: Adele Marsh and Brittni James

Your child has been invited to join a research study to look at the effects of parental involvement on how a child feels about their ability to succeed in school. Please take whatever time you need to discuss the study with your family and friends, or anyone else you wish to. The decision to let your child join, or not to join, is up to you.

Your child will be asked to take a short survey about their feelings towards school and their feelings about how their parents support them in academic and extracurricular activities. We think this will take him/her 5-10 minutes. Your child can stop participating at any time. However, we encourage as many to participate as possible, as others may benefit in the future from the information we find in this study.

Your child's name will not be used when data from this study are published. Every effort will be made to keep research records and other personal information confidential.

As parent or legal guardian, I authorize _____ (child's name)
to become a participant in the research study described in this form.

Parent or Legal Guardian's Signature

Date

Appendix B
Student Assent Form

Project Title: Measuring the Effects of Parental Involvement in Academic and Extracurricular Activities on a Child's Self-Efficacy

Investigators: Adele Marsh and Brittini James

We are doing a research study about **the effects of parental involvement on a child's feelings about their ability to succeed in school**. A research study is a way to learn more about people. If you decide that you want to be part of this study, you will be asked to take a 10-question survey about how you feel about school and how you feel about the way your parents support you in academic and extracurricular activities.

When we are finished with this study we will write a report about what was learned. This report will **not** include your name or that you were in the study.

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to be. If you decide to stop after we begin, that's okay too. Your parents know about the study too.

If you decide you want to be in this study, please sign your name.

I, _____, want to be in this research study.

(Sign your name here)

(Date)

Appendix C
Parent Consent Form (for parent)

Dear Parent,

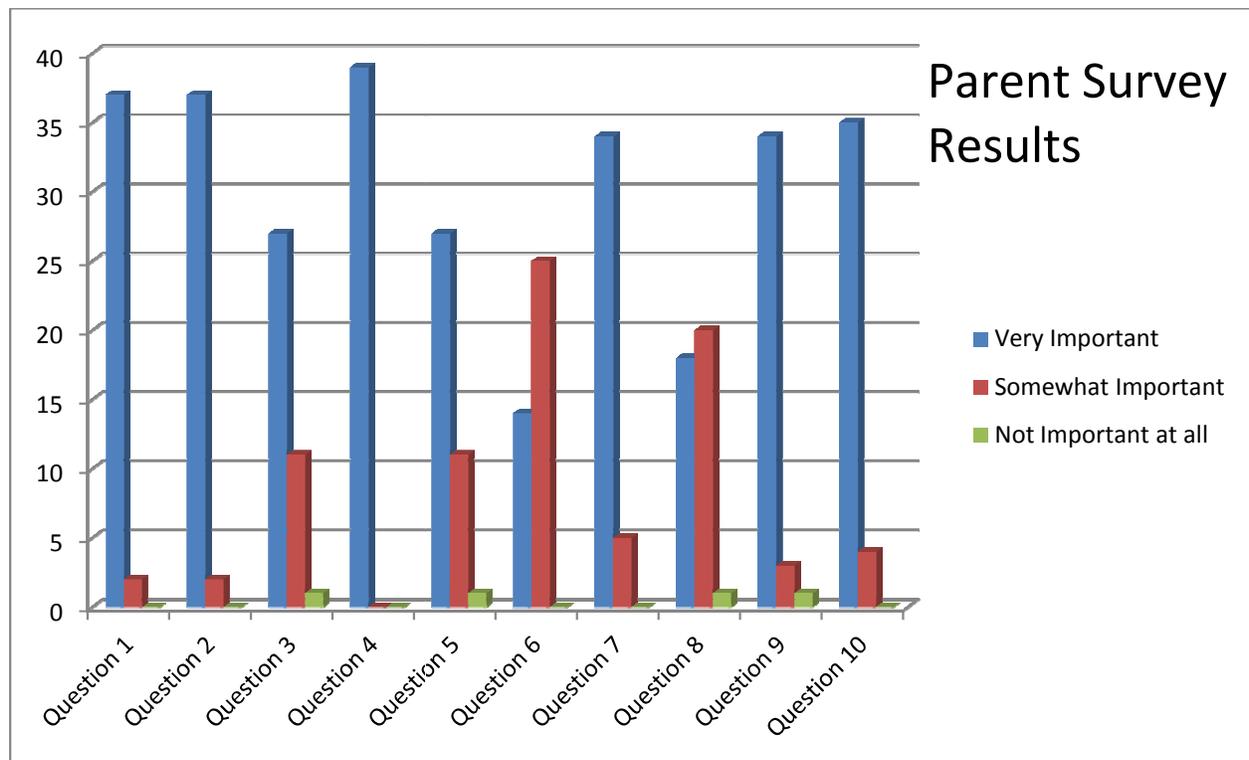
We are doing a research project about the effects of parental involvement on a child's self-efficacy. We ask that you take this short survey about your involvement in your child's education.

I, _____, agree to take this survey.

Signature

Date

Appendix D Parent Survey Results



Question 1: How important is it to stress the value of education to your child?

Question 2: How important it is to ensure that your child is well fed and rested for school?

Question 3: How important it is to attend parent/teacher conferences?

Question 4: How important is it to make sure your child's homework is completed and turned in on time?

Question 5: How important is attending school functions?

Question 6: How important is volunteering for school supervision or field trips?

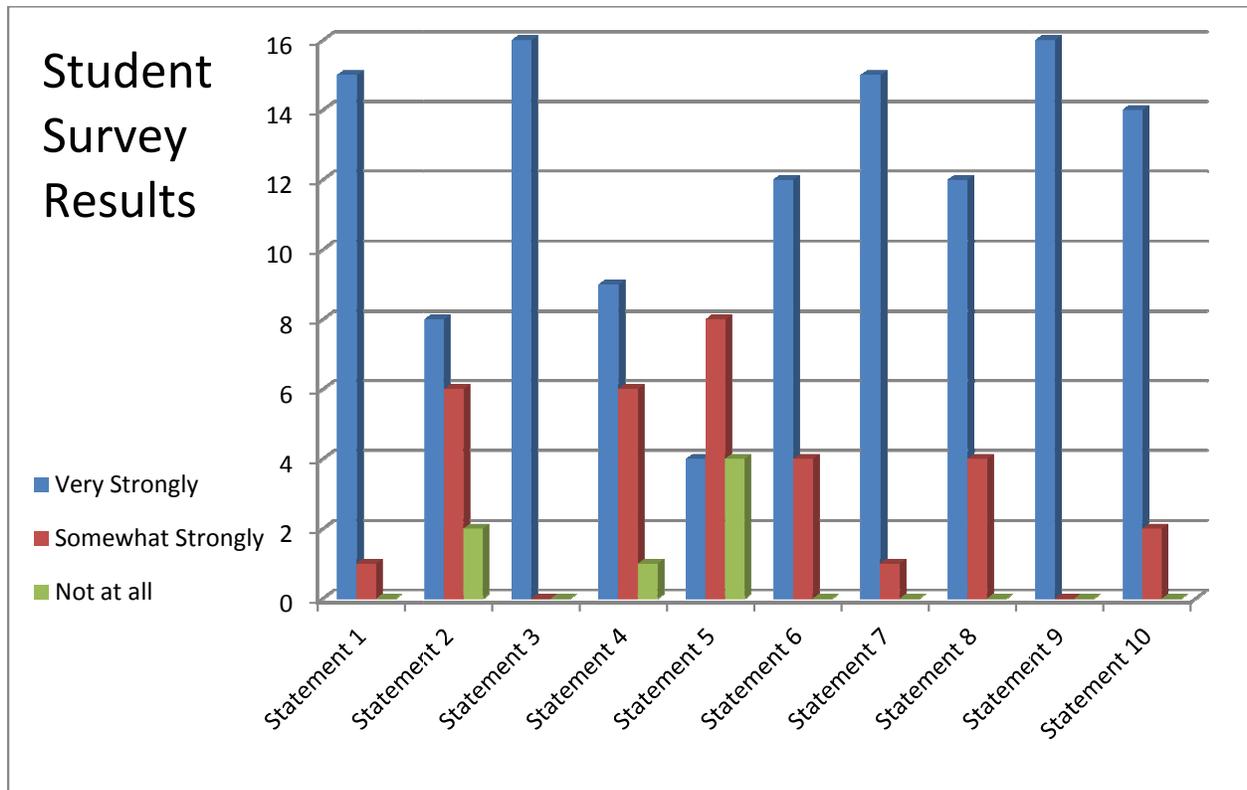
Question 7: How important is it that your child gets good grades?

Question 8: How often do you help your child with homework and projects?

Question 9: How often do you attend extracurricular activities that your child is involved in?

Question 10: How often do you tell your child that he/she is smart and can succeed in school?

Appendix E
Student Survey Results



Statement 1: I feel confident in my ability to succeed in school.

Statement 2: I feel that having my parents involved helps (or would help) me do better in school.

Statement 3: My parents feel that education is important.

Statement 4: My parents help me with homework and projects.

Statement 5: My parents in involved in extracurricular activities.

Statement 6: My parents attend most concerts/sports games/plays that I am involved in.

Statement 7: I feel that I can do well in school.

Statement 8: My parents support me in both academic and extracurricular projects and activities.

Statement 9: I believe I can learn.

Statement 10: I am motivated to perform well in school.