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Examination of congruence of reported parenting behaviors between parents and kindergarten teachers

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EXAMINATION OF CONGRUENCE OF REPORTED PARENTING BEHAVIORS
BETWEEN PARENTS AND KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS

A Graduate Research Paper

Submitted to the

Division of Early Childhood Education

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Early Childhood Education

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by

Marsha Fisher

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Parents and Kindergarten Teachers

has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the
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Examination of the Congruence

Introduction

Family and school represent the primary environments in which young children grow and develop. Today, the link between these institutions has taken on added significance as the benefits of effective collaborations between home and school are well documented in current research. When home and school collaborate to help children adjust to the world of school, bridging the gap between the culture at home and the mainstream American school, children of all backgrounds tend to do well (Comer, 1988). If children know that their parents and teachers understand and respect each other and that they share similar expectations and stay in touch, children feel comfortable with who they are and can more easily reconcile their experiences at home and school.

However, educators express concern about the lack of congruency between the parents' belief systems and parenting behaviors and the belief systems and teaching practices of early childhood educators. As quoted recently from a third grade teacher in an urban elementary school: "It's not nice to say this, but they come with no socialization skills. I think they keep them in a closet until they come to school."

In the researcher's previous position as Parent Liaison Coordinator of a similar urban elementary school, the following comment from a frustrated parent was noted: "She don't like Eric, anything he does isn't right. He don't know what he's 'pose to do on his work." When home and school have different approaches to learning, children's achievement may be affected (Kellaghan,

Sloane, Alvarez, and Bloom, 1993). Ideally, home and school should play complementary, mutually reinforcing roles in education, but major differences seem to exist between the two institutions.

The situation is complicated with the theory of culture of capital or power which argues that schools draw unevenly on resources of their students' families. Children from families of higher social economic status enter school familiar with the language, authority structure, and curriculum, an advantage that pays off in academic achievement (Lareau, 1987). Considering the continuing financial retreat of many American families and their corresponding loss of health services, families are increasingly viewed as disruptive, disorganized environments at odds with the culture of school.

Background of Parenting Style

Bronfenbrenner's theory (1979) of the ecology of human development emphasizes the importance of the relationship between home and school and the effect of that interactive relationship. Believing the home to be the principal context in which human development takes place, Bronfenbrenner brings to examination the impact of other settings of his/her life on the development of the child. The interrelations of these settings particularly influence development of the child during the process of transition from home to school. Its developmental effects are influenced by the the presence or absence of prior connections between the two settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). These connections may be linkages of previous socializing interactions and socializing expectations in the existing settings. These linkages are called spheres of overlapping influence.

Examining the complex parent/child socializing interactions of the home, Baumrind defined four types of parenting: authoritarian, permissive, authoritative, and rejecting/neglecting (Baumrind, 1970, 1973). These four parenting types were identified through multimodal research techniques, including the interview technique of Q-sort. Baumrind used an orthological design of parenting styles which intersect on an x-y axis of demandingness and responsiveness which, when crossed, yield the four styles. According to Smetana (1994), conceptualize demandingness in terms of the parents' willingness to make and enforce conventional rules (x-axis) and responsiveness (y-axis) indexes the parents' willingness to recognize their child's individuality and autonomy.

Areas of parental concerns are mentioned in various forms in the works of Bronfenbrenner, Baumrind and Smetana. The researcher has identified the following areas of parental actions: love/affection, discipline, general welfare/basic needs, emotional responsiveness/sensitivity and education. These are home processes or actions which the literature shows play an important role in children's development.

Also building on the work of Baumrind, researchers have found an association between the authoritative style of parenting and the successful performance of children in cognitive tasks (Dornbusch, Sanford, Ritteer, Leiderman, Roberts & Fraleigh, 1987). Home processes or activities developed through particular parenting styles play an important role in children's development (Kellaghan, et al., 1993).

According to Lareau (1987), middle-class culture and social networks build connections between home and school, reinforcing teachers' positive attitudes. Working class culture emphasizes separation between home and

school, reducing opportunities for collaboration and lowering teachers' expectations for children. Societal factors of decreasing jobs and services, economic class, minority culture, and single-parent families have been quoted in recent research to be increasing the gap between the process by which parents prepare their children for school and teachers' developmental expectations (Lewis, 1992). As noted by Wiseman (1964), such families show no open hostility to the schools; however, the problem often is a sheer inability to cope, because of low intelligence and almost complete lack of organizing ability. Education is not especially valued, but active hostility is absent (Wiseman, 1964).

Much of the literature addresses what parents should do and the assumption is that parents are teaching attitudes or skills that are counterproductive to academic success--a deficit model orientation (Iglesias, 1992; Labov, 1969). Recently, however, Kellaghan, et al. (1993) reviewing approximately 300 studies on home-school relations, stated that it is the home-school variables, rather than the social or economic status of parents that determine how well children do at school. These studies note that home processes are very important precursors of academic achievements.

However, various ideas regarding parenting have not defined what exact activities professionals expect parents to do in the context of their parenting role (Mowder, Harvey, Pedro, Rossen, & Moy, 1993). More research is needed to clarify what professionals are asking parents to do in their parent role. This study will attempt to address that issue, in part. Bronfenbrenner (1986) noted the lack of process-oriented field studies in the area of family and school that look beyond the parents as educators and trace a broader range of characteristics and intersetting relationships that influence the process of

transition and its developmental effects.

The question to examine is the degree of congruency between the reported behaviors of parents and the judgments of appropriate parenting behaviors by teachers. In this paper, I will examine research information I gathered from parents and teachers of kindergarten students to determine the amount of overlap in dimensions of belief about parenting behavior, between home and school environments. I hope to help to increase the amount of information available about the spheres of overlapping influence important to the development of the child.

Twenty-five parenting activities were examined to determine how time and space were organized, how parents and children interact and spend time together, and how basic needs of the child were met. The twenty-five activities were operationalized by the researcher from five areas reflected in the review of the research literature as important in the paradigms of parenting style (Baumrind, 1991, Bronfenbrenner, 1986, & Smetana, 1994). The areas and twenty-five parenting actions are listed in Table 1.

Definitions

In order to clarify terminology of this paper, the following definitions have been provided for the reader:

culture of power: cultural behaviors, language, and non-verbal nuances
of the majority population

mesosystem: a pattern of interrelations among two or more settings in
which the developing person actively participates, such
as, for a child, the relations among home, school, and

neighborhood peer group, referred to in this paper as spheres of overlapping influence

parenting style:

authoritarian-total parental control; parents tell children not to argue with or question adults; demanding, not responsive

authoritative-parental boundaries with reasoning; parents tell children to look at both sides of an issue and encourage all family members to participate in decisions; both responsive and demanding

permissive-no parental control: parents seem indifferent, detached and uninvolved with children, establish no clear rules; may be responsive, but not demanding

SES: socioeconomic status (SES) consists of a cluster of variable which may include mother's education level, father's education level, family income, father's occupational status, and number of major possessions

Categories of Parenting Actions

Love and affection

In the area of love and affection, the stress of single-parent child-rearing in low-SES conditions encourages an authoritarian model often with a confrontational, aggressive emphasis. The study of Miller and Sperry (1987) of interactions between single, working-class mothers and their two-year-old

daughters indicated the mothers were insulting the girls with increasing intensity in trying to get them angry enough to strike back. The mothers' interpretation of this behavior was that they were preparing their daughters to take care of themselves in a society that was hostile and harsh so that a rule of fighting back to protect oneself was adaptive.

The constructs of social behavior are built on agendas of nuances, accepted interpersonal interactive styles and patterns of communication, reprimand, control and survival. Striking out when not provoked was not allowable, but fighting back when sufficiently provoked was warranted and required. Aggressive, oppositional style of adult interaction and the expectation of obedience from children is also a background many students bring to the early childhood classroom (Youniss, 1994). This is definite departure from the developmentally appropriate practice view of conflict resolution based in purported middle-SES rules of emotional expression. Yet, the practices of these single, working-class mothers were shaped by an assessment of the social situation their daughters were likely to face.

Discipline

In the area of discipline, minority parents and parents with lower income and fewer years in school scored high on authoritarian versus authoritative progressive educational attitudes and beliefs and high on conformity versus self-directing values (Schafer and Edgerton, 1979). The authoritative mode of interaction with reasoning seems to be one afforded to higher SES families because the stress of survival is not as imminent. Children are operating under social constructs that parents prefer and that have been operationally effective in their circles of influence.

Middle-class parents place greater emphasis on fostering autonomy and

independence in their children than do members of many other cultural groups, who may place greater value on family or community identification and affiliation (Schafer & Edgerton, 1979).

Allowing time for processing and inferring of possible choices of solutions is valued by middle SES and their lifestyle allows time in daily life for those choices. The process of operating with "close procedure" is more prevalent. Children are allowed to practice the tendency of the human mind to perceive things as the whole and complete answer, even with gaps and missing elements (Malmstrom, 1977). The characteristics of the authoritative parent, i.e., that of considering both sides of an issue in Piagetian reflective abstraction and comparison are not often shown by parents of low-SES, but rather the characteristics of the authoritarian parent, i.e., that of considering only one answer as possible to all questions. This is not necessarily a function of SES, but a function of parenting style and home processes and that parenting style is paired with academic achievement (Kellaghan, et al., 1993, Dornbusch, et al., 1987).

Also noted by Schafer and Edgerton (1979), minority parents and parents with lower income and fewer years in school favor authoritarian educational attitudes and beliefs and also favor conformity versus self-directing values. In 1924, 24% of parents surveyed through the National Opinion Research Center (Russell, 1995) cited "independence" as one of the most important traits they wanted to instill in their children. In 1989, 81% of parents surveyed by the center thought "independence" one of the most important traits. In another set of surveys by the Mayo Clinic (Russell, 1995), in 1940 and 1990, Americans were asked whether they agreed with the statement, "I am an important person." In 1940, 20% of men and 11% of women agreed; in 1990,

62% of men and 66% of women agreed to the statement. We are seeing a trend of far-reaching consequences in our mainstream society. The attitude of individualism is increasing in our society and with it has come a change in child rearing practices. Middle-SES parents are raising their children to think for themselves with increasing determination (Grusec, 1994). Many lower SES parents continue to value obedience and conformity (Baumrind, 1991).

"Black children expect an authority figure to act with authority" (Delpit, 1988). The more egalitarian attitude of a middle-class teacher embodies another notion of authority by virtue of her role instead of her operational characteristics that give authority. The indirectness and soft-spokenness to reduce the authoritarian atmosphere of the classroom is perceived as weak, ineffectual and incapable of taking on the role of being the teacher (Delpit, 1988).

The challenge of single-parent and lower-SES families facing the stress of child-rearing has been shown in a study (Segal, 1978) to be demonstrated by the following findings:

1. Mothers in single-parent families stress obedience and competition more than mothers in two-parent families.
2. Income and educational level are associated with child-rearing values; high-income and better educated parents give greater emphasis to process goals than parents with less income and lower education.

The constraints on the low-income, single-parent family, operating in a survival mode, prevent the time of process-oriented discussion and choice factors identified with authoritative parenting and instead encourage the directive methods of authoritarian parenting.

General Welfare/Basic Needs

Courser and Rosier (1992) also stated that families with a pattern of recurrent difficulties with housing, income and family relationships have often compromised the ability and desire to do the best for the children. The kinds of jobs available for the unskilled labor force today pay wages that fail to keep pace with the costs of raising a family. One of every five children in the U.S. lives in a family whose income is below the poverty level; the rate doubles among blacks and Hispanics. Lack of adequate health care, poor nutrition, and homelessness are factors of poverty. Within Iowa, children made up 53% of the homeless in 1994, ("Homelessness Rising," 1995). These facts undermine the strengths and efforts of poor families.

Emotional responsiveness/sensitivity

There are differences of language usage between middle SES and lower SES families (Sigel, 1982). One of the differences is the distancing strategy as noted by Sigel (1982) and paired with the authoritative style of parenting noted by Baumrind. The explanation of distancing is the willingness of parents to recognize the child's individuality and autonomy by responsiveness to the personalized situation of each child and customize a response to the child and situation. This response is usually given after parental consideration at an emotionally objective "distance."

Smetana (1994) reinforces the middle-SES concept of modification of parent response dependent on the parents' conception of appropriate parental authority in the specific situation. The authoritarian parenting model, however, has a concrete, prescribed response without modification. This lack of consideration of the situation and factors of convention, morality, and prudence of particular issues deny families and children the opportunity to experience

and model the complexities of interrelationships. The balancing of demandingness and responsiveness by the parent to the child in particular situations cannot be modeled by the parent in authoritarian terms.

Demandingness can be conceptualized in terms of parents' willingness to make and enforce moral and conventional rules, while responsiveness represents the willingness of the parent to analyze the situation and the child's individuality and autonomy (Smetana, 1994).

The distancing strategy and the strategy of indexing demandingness and responsiveness has far-reaching effects in not only the moral training of the child in evaluation of specific situations of behavior, but also in the practice of making relational connections, an important Piagetian task on the way to reflective abstraction. Problem-solving is an educational goal for much of school curriculum today and is experienced initially in the integrated home processes of the child prior to entering school.

Education

Parental expectations for kindergarten often clearly differentiate between social growth and cognitive growth. Graue's (1993) assessment of parental views in a medium-sized town in the Midwest indicated that parents assumed that play was social and work was academic, that moving and exploring were social and that sitting still was academic. The student population was 86% white with only 6% qualifying for the federal free and reduced lunch program. In the opinion of the middle-class family as researched by Graue it is the job of the school to prepare the child for the competitive world of work.

The escalation of curriculum to increased academic demands in early schooling is a focus due to a variety of factors, including the economic reduction of skilled labor jobs in a technological society. The perception by parents of

what is "academic" in kindergarten may lead to different formal activities in the home for kindergarten readiness rather than the informal questioning activities emphasized by developmentally appropriate educators.

The nature of the literacy and language interactions in which the children are engaged at home has a considerable effect on the communication skills they acquire before entering school. Children's acquisition of these communication skills is gradual, and their communication system will change as the interaction is modeled by exchange with significant others in the informal home processes (Iglesias, 1985).

For example, those children involved in reading routines with their parents are expected to first be passive listeners, then to be active, nonverbal listeners, pointing to pictures and finally verbal participants interacting with their parents in labeling pictures and answering questions. The nature of these interactions, if perceived as important by the parents' beliefs is almost identical to the interactions that the children will later experience in the classroom. This informal instruction in reading a book is not often recognized by low-SES parents as a means to prepare children for kindergarten (Graue, 1993).

Background of Teacher Expectations

The stated belief system and teaching practices of most early childhood educators are rooted in "developmentally appropriate practice" (Bredekamp, 1987). Developmentally appropriate educational theory is based on the premise that children learn best when educational goals are process-oriented and related to the developmental sequence based on Erikson's and Piaget's theories of growth. Piaget outlined the development from the sensorimotor

intelligence of infancy to preoperational thought in the preschool years to the concrete operational thinking exhibited by primary children. Throughout this process, Piaget's theory interprets assimilation of information as seeing coherent relationships. The term used for this inferential thinking is reflective abstraction. Reflective abstraction happens when children have the time and encouragement to explore the functional relations between subsystems or categories. Children's play and verbal interaction are the facilitators of their mental growth and indicate their progress along this sequence (Bredekamp, 1987). One pedagogical method of developmentally appropriate practice is based on respect for children's rights which leads to the expanded feature of conflict resolution and the role of conflict in development, as well as the cooperative forms of alternatives to discipline (DeVries & Zan, 1994). The growth of the whole child is considered to be integrated within the four domains of physical, emotional, social and cognitive development.

Defining "developmentally appropriate practice" with clarity is difficult for early childhood educators as well as parents. Lillian Katz (1987) makes the distinction between academic and intellectual rigor. Too often the choices conceived for kindergarten curriculum are on an either-or dimension: either a "traditional" laissez-faire, play-based program, or a formal, academic one. Developmentally appropriate practice goes beyond "just" play to intellectually challenge children through the use of problem-solving materials. The investigation of projects developed through the interests of the students encourages growth in knowledge, skills and the disposition to learn itself. Without clear explanation of early childhood curriculum, some parents can't understand how experiential activities can be more valuable than structured, paper-and-pencil based "prereading" and "pre-math" worksheets.

Hypothesis

This study will view the amount of congruence in the parenting practices of parents of kindergarten students and what kindergarten teachers consider to be the best parenting practices to prepare children for school. The relationship of actions or behaviors representing beliefs will be demonstrated in the Q-sort of actions during a "typical" day in the home. The data will be examined to determine trends. It is my hypothesis that the parents will choose different parenting behaviors as "typical" during a day in their home than the teachers would indicate as appropriate to prepare children for school.

Methods

Setting

Lionel Elementary is located in a medium-sized Midwestern city. One of 14 elementary schools, with a population of approximately 400 students, it operates as a part of a total-city school district. It is considered an "at-risk" school with 95% of the population eligible for the free and reduced federal lunch program, 67% of the population minority students, a mobility rate of approximately 45% and a homeless rate of 31% as identified in a survey of families at the school. Many of the students come from single parent families; some have a background of substance abuse and domestic violence.

Participants

Parents of forty beginning kindergarten students at Lionel Elementary were asked to participate voluntarily during the period of time their child was being given a readiness test prior to the beginning of the school year, 1995-96. Each student and parent were scheduled to attend at half-hour periods to allow

each kindergarten teacher to test the student. During this time, the parent(s) are asked to wait in another area of the building.

At this time, I asked the parent to participate in this study. All participants were informed of their right to refuse to participate and were asked to sign a form consenting to be in the study with an understanding of their rights and of the purpose of the study. All of the parents agreed to participate in the study. The consent form and survey questionnaire, given approval by the University of Northern Iowa Human Subjects Review Board, are in Appendix A, B, C, and D.

The parents were scheduled with four kindergarten teachers at the same time intervals. I provided space for two parents to complete the Q-sort, therefore the selection of the parents was random, depending on space and parent available. Each parent was not paired with child's own teacher to measure 1:1 discrepancies. This deviation from the standard Q-sort technique protected the parents' anonymity which was an important trust factor, considering the nature of the activities and the SES of the Lionel School.

Materials

The method used to examine the parenting behaviors of parents of Lionel kindergartners and the four kindergarten teachers was the Q-technique. The Q-sort requires a "forced choice" of behaviors to fit prescribed squares arranged in a bell curve on a nine-point scale. The "simple structure" of the Q-sort provides complex interrelations of responses (Stephenson, 1953). The observation of an interrelated effect on the behaviors as choices of "more like" and "less like" a typical day are made. Each behavior is chosen within the frame of reference of the other behaviors. The histogram analysis of the Q-technique provided a tool to perceive different trends of behaviors to be evaluated in narrative discussion. This is a research method that has been

used by Baumrind (1991a) in as a part of her multimethod approach to assess parenting styles and most recently used by Smetana (1994) to assess parental beliefs about parental authority.

This Q-sort is a compilation of 25 parenting actions which could occur during a "typical" day in the family's household. The choices of these behaviors were based on the work of Baumrind (1967). The theories of Bronfenbrenner, Baumrind and Smetana of socializing interactions are operationalized and can be examined in relation to concrete actions of behavior (see Table 1). These actions had been designed by the researcher to represent the following areas of parental actions: love/affection, discipline, general welfare/basic needs, emotional responsiveness/sensitivity, and education. These are home processes or actions which the literature shows play an important role in children's development. Parents and teachers were asked to sort the activities into piles by a nine-point rating scale ranging from "most like a typical day" to "most not like a typical day". Each of the twenty-five activities must be placed in only one of the allocated squares. Each square is in line with one point in the nine-point rating scale, indicating the frequency of the action being taken in a typical day. (See Appendix C and D)

The decision to use a Q-sort as a way of collecting information was based on four considerations. First, the desire to keep the parent physically active and an involved decision-maker. Each parent was given the stack of twenty-five cards on which the action was printed. They were asked to spread the cards out on a table and read over them to compare them with actions of a typical day in their home. This kinesthetic involvement was to focus the attention of the parent on the task. Secondly, the administration of the Q-sort, because of its "forced choice" feature involves less time than an oral interview.

The parents were under relative time constraints of one-half hour. Thirdly, sorting the cards elicits indigenous classification schemes as each action is evaluated by the participant for its relationship with the other actions. This metacognition about the sorting of the parenting actions encourages the evaluation and reevaluation of the action. In addition, as the participant becomes familiar with the form of the Q-sort, the participant may pay more attention to the order. In reevaluating the substance of the actions, the participants may think about parenting more fully and systematically.

Procedure

The Q-sort was administered on an individual basis, during the time the parent's child was being tested by the kindergarten teacher to begin the school year. The timing of the research process is essential to obtain information from the parents and teachers as uncontaminated by contact with each other as possible. The fact the students had not yet attended school prevented the parents' beliefs from being altered in the mesosystem of the the school setting and prevented the teachers' beliefs to be altered in the mesosystem of association with yet another group of parents.

Individual appointments are arranged by the school at one-half hour intervals to facilitate the student testing procedure. Parents were asked to complete the manipulation of the Q-sort cards during the half-hour time frame, by responding to the question: "What activities would describe a 'typical day' with your child?" This concrete question of specific recall of events in the recent past was to reduce the factor of social desirability which could be attached to broad parenting belief statements.

The investigator introduced the instrument and asked the interviewee to

sign a form of understanding of confidentiality and consent. All Q-sorts were anonymous, including the teacher responses. The teachers of the four kindergarten classrooms were also asked to manipulate the Q-sort cards, responding to the question: "What are the appropriate parenting actions for kindergarten readiness?"

Following the Q-sort, the information was coded by hand and tallied with a simple frequency count. A stem and leaf plot of each parenting action or variable was made showing the minimum, maximum, lower and upper hinge and median. The responses were superimposed on the plots in order to see the degree of congruence.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data collected by the Q-sort is based on the narrative comparison design model (Gleason & Peshkin, 1992). The physical representation of the data collected was plotted in the frequency distribution of a histogram. This statistical summary gave a visual frequency distribution of the responses of the parents of the kindergarten students and the kindergarten teachers. This descriptive statistic was available through a stem and leaf plot of variables for both groups. This provided distribution comparison of upper and lower hinges and median scores for both groups. The median describes the central tendency of the ordinal-level measurement of the Q-sort. These groupings were then observed as qualitative variables summarized by the histograms.

Results and Discussion

Results

The twenty-five parenting actions represented five areas of parental care giving: love/affection, discipline, general welfare/basic needs, emotional responsiveness/sensitivity and education. Each area will be examined with relation to the specific action(s) that highlighted differing values in the comparison of responses of the parents of kindergarten students to responses of teachers of kindergarten students. See Table 1.

Table 1

Five Areas of Parenting with Actions:

Comparison of Mean Performance of Parents and Teacher Range

	<u>Parent Mean</u>	<u>Teacher Range</u>
1. Love/affection		
Kissed child good night	7	7-8
Gave child a hug	7	7-9
Called child a loving, teasing name or nickname	5	2-7
Said "I love you" to child	8	7-9
2. Discipline		
Explained "why" I said "no"	5	3-7
Told child to "shy" or "shut up"	4	3-6
Shamed child for doing something wrong	2	1-3
Spanked child for doing something wrong	2	1-3
Used "time-out" for doing something wrong	4	2-6
Yelled at child for doing something wrong	4	2-4

3.	General Welfare/Basic Needs		
	Fixed child a meal	8	5-7
	Helped child dress self	2	1-3
	Child dress self	6	5-7
	Washed child's hands and face	6	5
	Child washed own hands and face	4	2-5
4.	Emotional responsiveness/sensitivity		
	Looked at child's face while		
	talking to child	6	5-6
	Worked on chores while		
	talking to child	5	4-7
	Asked child to say "magic		
	words": please & thank you	5	4-6
	Ate a meal sitting down with child	6	5-9
	Turned off T.V. and talked with		
	child during meal	4	4-5
5.	Education		
	Read child a story	5	8-9
	Helped child learn the meaning of		
	a new word	5	4-5
	Watched T.V. with child and talked		
	about the program	5	3-6
	Helped child use crayons and name		
	colors	4	5-6
	Helped child sort toys into bins		
	or shelves	3	3-6

Discussion

Collectively, the responses, as shown in Table 1 were not as disparate as would be expected, given the literature indicating an increasing gap between the process by which parents prepare their children for school and teachers' developmental expectations, as noted by Lewis (1992). The parent mean fell within the teacher range of responses for eighteen of the twenty-five actions.

The perception of positive parenting actions seems similar in both the higher SES of the teachers and the lower SES of the majority of parents of Lionel school. Considering the factor of ethnicity, the perception of positive parenting actions seems similar in both the Caucasian kindergarten teachers and the minority parents. The hypothesis of lack of congruency of the parenting beliefs of parents and kindergarten teachers has been disconfirmed. The spheres of overlapping influence are much larger than most educators and the literature seem to represent. The mesosystem of the child for the home and school is more in line than out of line.

The question remains then, why do educators have increasing concern about the lack of appropriate home "processes" that "prepare" the child for school? That question will be discussed as we examine the individual areas of parenting actions and look for an overall pattern of the individual actions within the areas that represent the lack of congruence in parenting beliefs that educators assume exists.

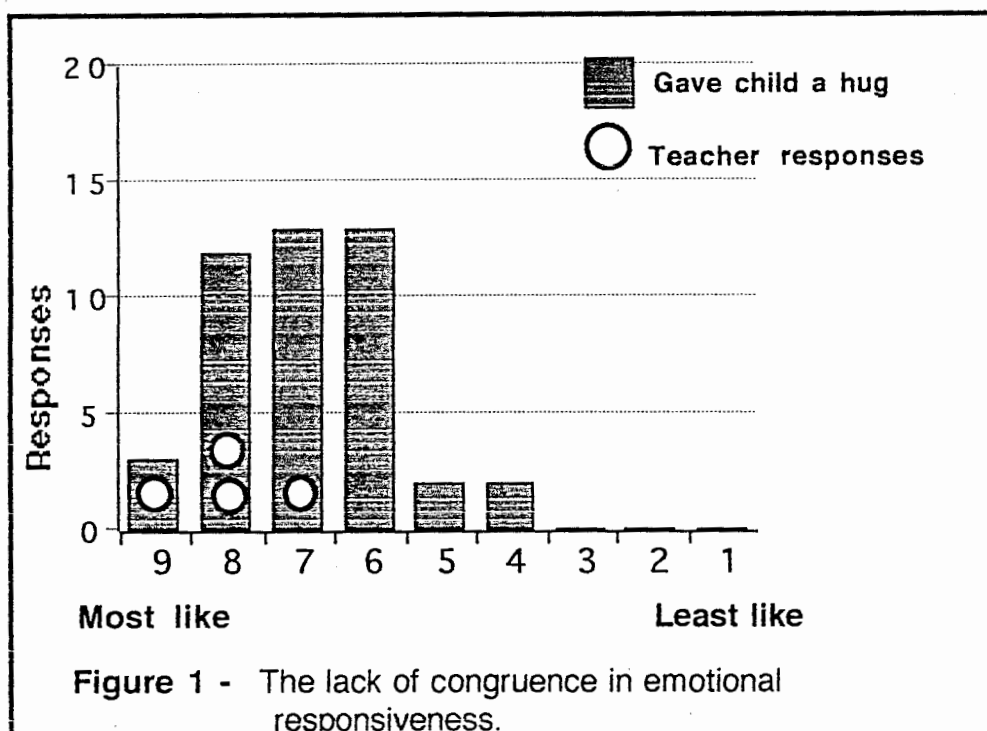
I. Love/affection

In the area of emotional nurturance, the parents and teachers showed almost complete congruence, with the teachers' responses hovering at the

mean of the parents' responses. The basic need of love and affection would be fulfilled for the child according to the parental belief system shown on the responses to these items. A slight difference was noted in the distribution of the teacher responses in the item showing physical demonstration of affection, i.e., "gave child a hug," showing higher value given to action by the teacher (see Figure 1). This is in contrast to the verbal demonstration of affection, i.e., "said 'I love you' to child", in which the parents showed slightly higher importance of value in action.

The greatest lack of congruence in this area was with regard to the action, "called child a loving, teasing name or nickname." The mean response of parents was five on the nine-point scale, a response indicating "Not Sure" if the action was like a "typical day." The teachers' responses, conversely, ranged from two, "Very Much Not Like Day" to seven, "Like Day." This would indicate a discrepancy on the part of the four teachers regarding the appropriateness of a teasing, loving nickname. There may be cultural, as well as SES basis for this slight variance.

Name-calling for most middle-SES teachers has a negative connotation as a means to hurt other people, especially children. From my experience with low-SES and minority parents, nicknames and name-calling is a form of endearment. Babies, toddler and preschool children often have nicknames that are used exclusively until they are school-age. Some children don't recognize their given name as their own until after kindergarten.



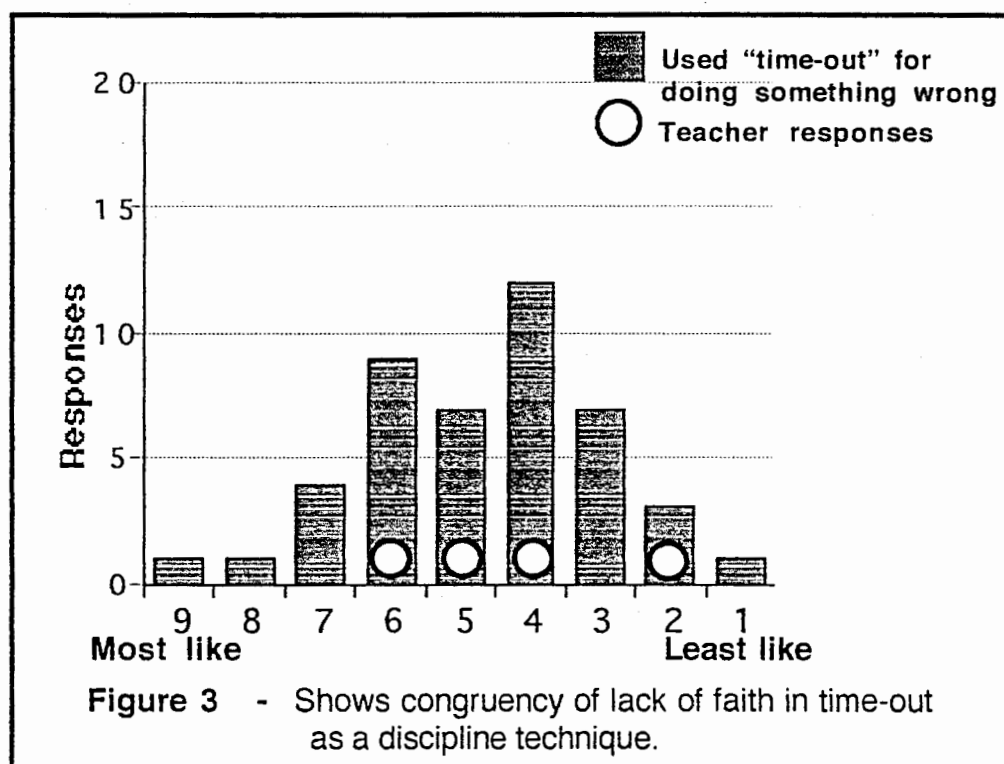
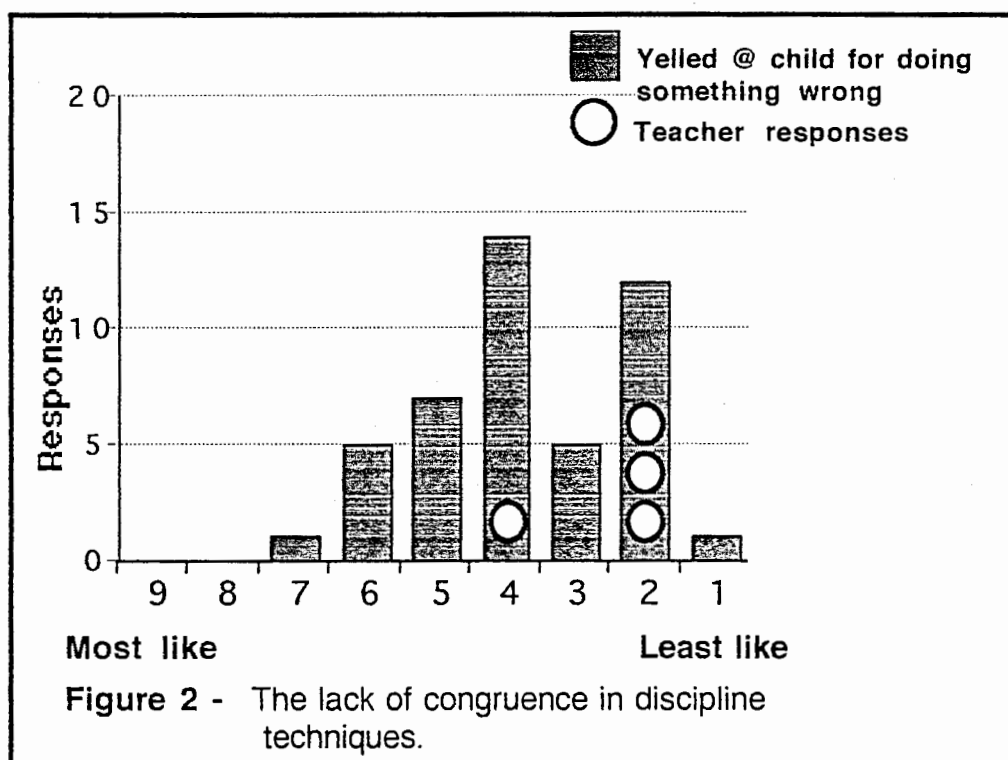
2. Discipline

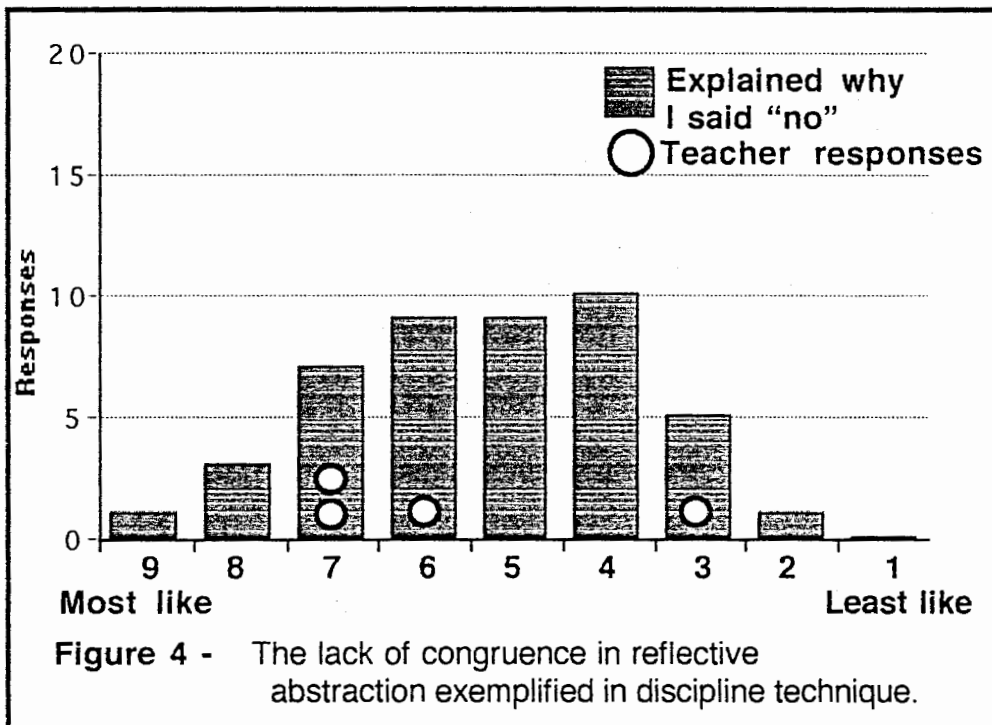
In the area of discipline and establishing rules for behavior, the gap in congruence between parents and teachers widened. The means of training in rules and moral conduct showed three of the teachers giving a higher degree of importance to "explained 'why' I said 'no'", at one to two points above the mean of the parents' responses, as shown in Figure 2. This is a significant result for a variety of reasons. entering school. This item may be an indicator of an important lack of congruence in the parenting beliefs of teachers and parents across all areas in demandingness and responsiveness, as noted in Smetana (1994).

In other areas of establishing limits and rules for behavior, teacher responses showed congruence with parents in not recognizing the following actions as those of a "typical day": "spanked child for doing something wrong," "shamed child" and told child to "shut up." This would indicate congruent parental belief in recognizing the importance of respect for the individual child and would indicate the basic need of love and safety being important for both parents and teachers.

Two other responses regarding training indicated variance, however. "Used 'time out' for doing something wrong" was not universally recognized by teachers as an effective parenting strategy. Two teachers were below the mean of parent responses as even less likely to use this strategy, one teacher was at the mean of parent responses, which was "A Little Not Like Day"--indication of not strong usage, and one teacher was two points above the mean response, "A Little Like Day". This would indicate a general lack of usage for the discipline strategy of time out from both the kindergarten parents and teachers.

Another area of lack of congruence in discipline responses was in the following item: "yelled at child for doing something wrong." Parents indicated a mean response of "A Little Not Like Day", with one teacher at the mean response of parents. Three teachers indicated responses two points below the mean of "Very Much Not Like Day." This might indicate the discipline technique of yelling is more acceptable in the perception of the parents than in the teachers.





3. General Welfare/Basic Needs

In the area of basic needs, protection and safety, parents and teachers generally agree. Teachers were actually less likely to assign importance to the action "fix child a meal" than parents, with responses two points or more below the mean of parent responses. The responses of self dress compared to dressing child, indicate the teachers and parents generally agree the child should be working on that task independently. Parents preferred to wash the child's hands and face, rather than have the child do it him/herself., a skill the teachers saw as appropriate to develop. This area again indicates the parents' belief in the responsibility of the parent to provide for and nurture the child. The routine responsibility of fixing a child's meal ranked higher in the parents' belief system, alluding to the difference in the regard for autonomy that may be a

distinct difference in the parental and teacher belief systems.

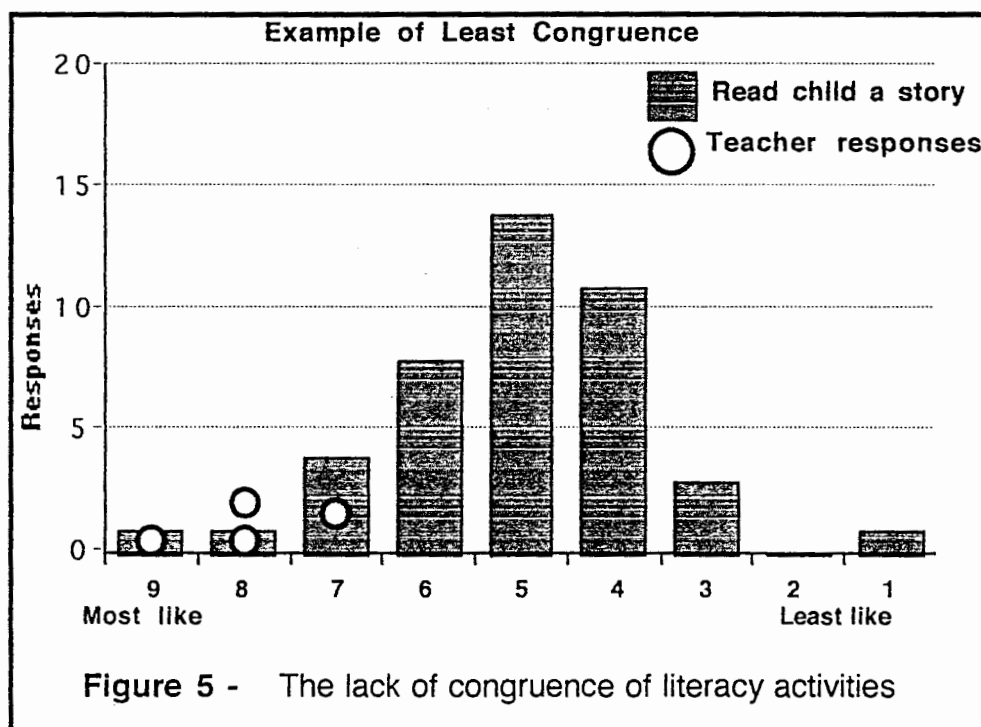
4. Emotional responsiveness/sensitivity

Teacher responses (see Table 1) indicated that although the teachers thought it was less important to fix the meal for the child, they were much more likely to encourage the importance of eating a meal sitting down with a child. This is a recognizable difference in responding to the communicative needs of the child. Three of the teacher responses were above the mean of the parents' responses, with the fourth at the lower hinge of the range of responses within the median range. Also significant is the slight difference in congruence of the teacher and parent response to the action statement, "worked on chores while talking to child." Teachers indicated less importance to readiness attributed to this action. The attention to the child is recognized by both parent and teacher, as shown by the importance given by both to eye contact in the response to the item, "looked at child's face while talking to child." The difference in eye contact while doing chores, could be attributed to the difference in SES and time available for chores, wage-earning and family interaction.

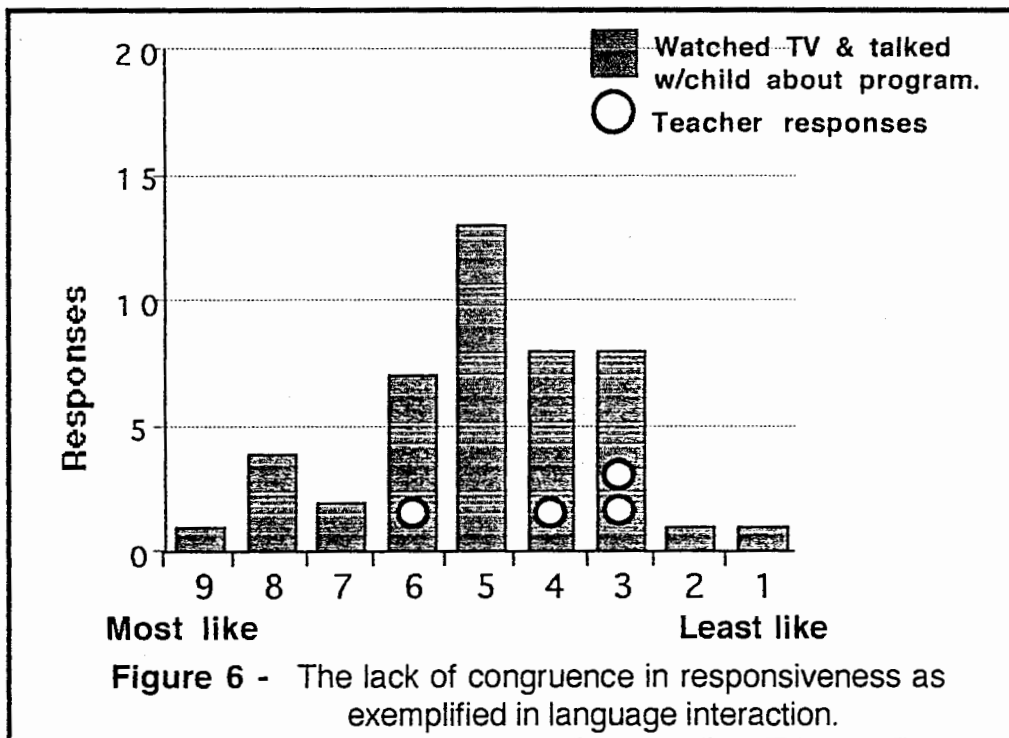
5. Education

In the area of educating children through daily care giving actions and parental role modeling, the greatest difference between the parents' and teachers' responses was shown in one important area, that of "read child a story." All of the teachers were from two to four points above the mean parent response, indicating that reading a story to a child was "Like Day, Very Much Like Day, and Most Like Day," an indication by the teachers of their judgment it is a high priority as a parenting action for appropriate kindergarten readiness. The mean parent response was "Not Sure", indicating that reading a story to their child was not a priority in parenting actions of a typical day.

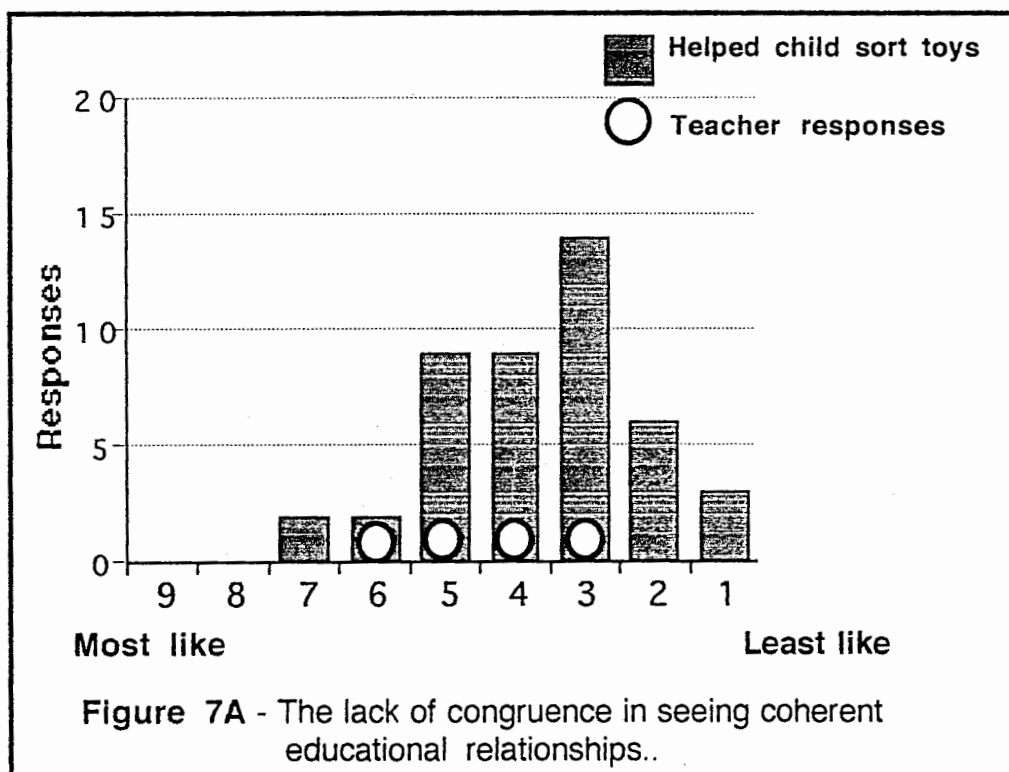
This was the item of the research with the most significant lack of congruency and as noted in research is a clear indicator of academic success (Iglesias, 1985).



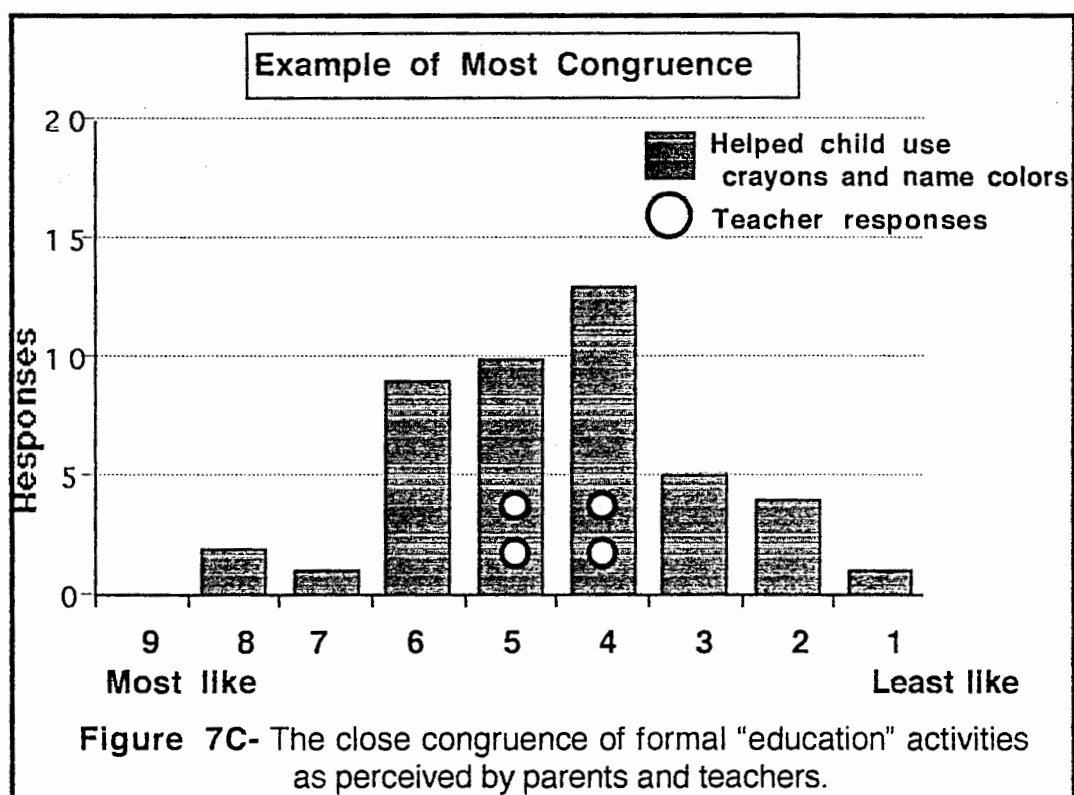
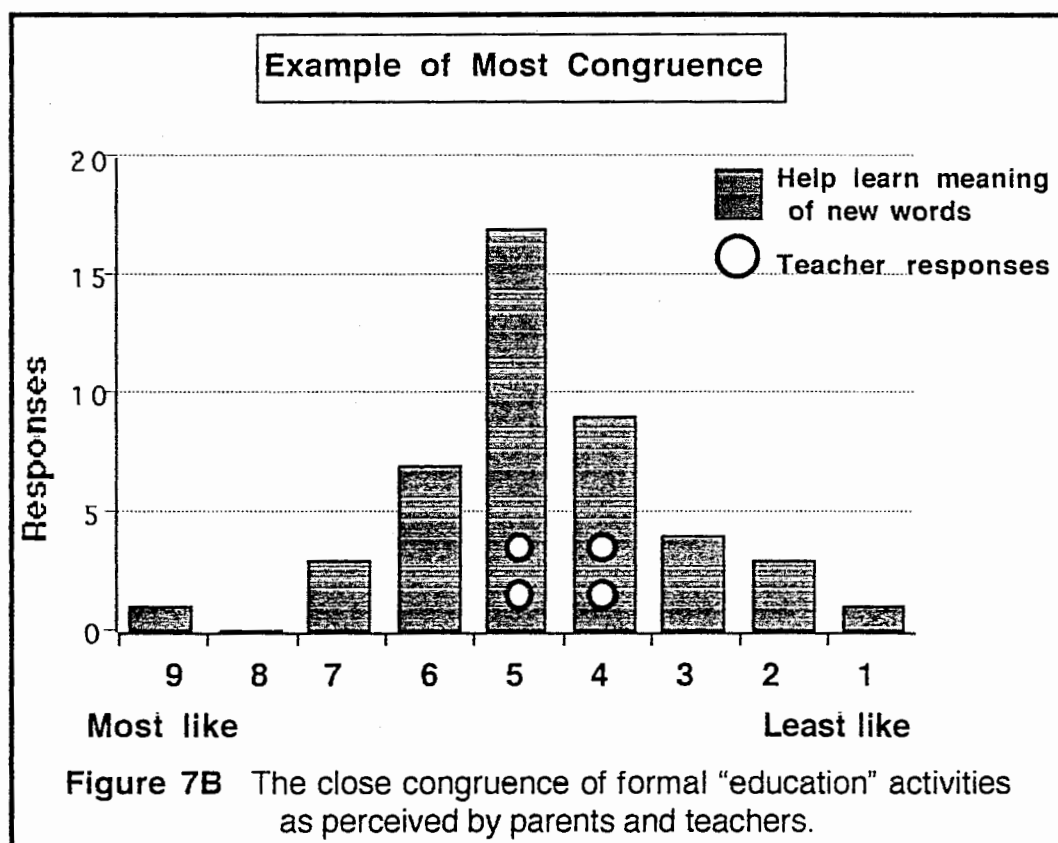
The teachers were less likely to place high value on the parent behavior: "watched T.V. with child and talked about the program," showing responses at least two points below the mean of parent responses. The teachers' perception of the discussion of watching T.V. may be negative; however in the context of storyline discussion, it shows educational merit. It may be the watching of T.V. has replaced the leisure time activity of reading a book with the child.



The item of helping the child to sort toys into bins or shelves was to determine the amount of classification experience parents may provide for the child. An interesting finding was the relatively low importance rating one of the teachers also showed for this item.



In other educational activities, teachers and parents showed congruence of responses. Teachers were at the mean of parent responses for "helped child learn the meaning of a new word" and "helped child use crayons and name colors." As noted by Iglesias (1985), as a result of their experiences with particular educational systems, parents make assumptions about the communication and academic skills that will be demanded of their children in the school situation (1985). The rote learning of definitions of color words fits the question-answer mode that most parents personally experienced in the school setting.



Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The perception of positive parenting actions generally seems congruent in both the teachers of high-SES and the parents of low-SES of Lionel School. The majority of items evaluated by the Q-sort showed that both sets of participants had congruent parenting beliefs. The hypothesis formed from the majority of literature that there would be lack of congruence of parenting actions was disconfirmed.

This expected lack of congruence was observable in certain parenting actions, as shown in Figures 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, and 7A. By regrouping these parenting actions and looking for commonalities, one can recognize a common theme of "responsiveness" (Smetana, 1994). It does not only refer to emotional warmth, but in all areas of responding to the child to expand the child's boundaries of language, understanding and information. Iglesias (1993) and Kelleghan, et al. (1993) indicated that what the parents do in the home is more important than SES.

This difference in approach is indicated in the parenting action of "explained 'why' I said 'no.'" The characteristic strategy of questioning by children is valued as a key element in developmental models of early childhood education. This technique may need to be understood by lower-SES parents and students and explained explicitly. Delpit would suggest the directives of teachers need to be explicit and not implicit for students of minority cultures. Students need to understand allowing questions and exploring answers is not an indication or weakness in authority, but a mode of education (Delpit, 1988).

In the realm of education, teachers responded as much more likely to indicate the great importance of reading a story to the child on a daily basis, confirming Graue (1993). This is the item with the greatest degree of lack of congruence in the survey. The value of this in the future education of the child is apparent to educators, but not to parents. The future development of academic achievement may not be the consideration given to reading a book for the majority of parents surveyed at Lionel School. This informal intellectual activity rather than formal academic rigor needs to be emphasized by the school to inform parents of its importance (Katz, 1987).

One of the key differences in congruence in parenting actions is in the area of responsiveness especially in the area of literacy and language. Children from homes with greater opportunity for communication and decision-making have greater school achievement, as noted by Epstein (1983).

Programs for children should recognize their individual differences, including those arising from the demographic, socio-moral backgrounds of their preschool years. The responsibility of the early childhood educator is to evaluate the prior experiences of language, process-oriented questioning, and parental interaction styles of the student in the classroom. The possible lack of congruence of the spheres of influence operating on the child may exclude him/her from the unstated expectations of the "culture of power."

We must increase the amount of overlap by being clear about the perimeters of the circles. This study was to open for discussion the outlines of those circles and examine the possibilities of moving those spheres into more of an alignment of overlap for the good of the child. We have disconfirmed the hypothesis that there is a general lack of congruency between the parents and the teachers in parenting beliefs in this population studied. The need for future

study would be to clarify the area of responsiveness in home processes and its effect on school achievement. The increasing concern of educators may reflect the increasing disparity in that area. As middle-SES parents continue to increase efforts to instill individualism, decision-making and problem-solving in their children, parents of low-SES children, unaware of the change in academic expectations will continue to parent in an authoritarian mode. The learning that occurs in everyday interactions in the home, however, may be different from the modes of learning and thinking required in school (Scott-Jones, 1987).

However, these variables should not be viewed from a deficit model of only the remediation of the family unit's educational ecology, but with a more diverse and holistic realization of how learning is influenced within specific families. It is the responsibility of the school to provide appropriate education for low-income children and children of color by consultation with adults who share their culture. By the sharing of differing educational, SES and cultural backgrounds and how the family shapes the context of learning (Iglesias, 1992), communication across economic and minority cultures can begin, with the voices of the low-income families and children of color being heard.

A mismatch between parents' child socialization practices and school expectations does not necessarily imply that parents' attitudes and behaviors are not conducive to academic achievement. An alternative view is that schools have not adapted their instruction to a variety of child socialization practices. Parents' interpretations of the society and its harsh realities of living have not been examined. We often hear educators marvel about how "street smart" a child may be as compared to the lack of achievement in the classroom. This is not to devalue the current beliefs about child learning, but rather to suggest that the parents' understanding of society and their views of necessary choices of

child-rearing are more than a deficit background of their children's academic readiness. As shown by the results in Table 1, the parents do have caring beliefs consistent with the teachers.

Developmentally appropriate early childhood education is based on the two dimensions of age appropriateness and individual appropriateness. The concept of age appropriateness is emphasized in the the whole realm of readiness and age-grade activities. We have neglected to emphasize the second dimension of individual appropriateness. In the holistic sense of the child operating in overlapping circles of influence, we must look to the individual child and its individual family and background. The function of individual parents in their disposition of their perception of their parenting beliefs is not an automatic function of class or culture (Scott-Jones, 1987).

Recommendations

The results of this study have led to the following recommendations:

1. Increase the spheres of influence for both teachers and parents by more clearly defining the perimeters of each sphere:

A. Inservice kindergarten teachers on the congruency of the parents' actions for a "typical day." The actions are more like the teachers' judgments of appropriate parenting actions for kindergarten readiness than unlike them.

B. Communicate more clearly to the parents the current emphasis on problem-solving and decision-making in the early childhood curriculum.

Teaching the color words is admirable, however, understanding the reflective abstraction of relationships of ideas and concepts by answering the question "why" is probably more valuable.

C. Parent workshops and family "read-in" sessions could be designed to

encourage the importance and method of reading to children on a daily basis. The teachers could model the reading to the large group that is often done in the kindergarten classrooms.

2. Suggestions for future research using the instrument designed by the researcher:

- A. Study a larger sample population of equal number of parents and teachers.
- B. Compare the teacher and parent responses through the matching of one teacher and one parent and their responses and the child's behavior in classroom.
- C. Use the instrument designed by researchers to examine the congruence of reported parenting behaviors of parents and the expectations of best parenting practices to prepare children for school as evaluated by kindergarten teachers in an elementary school with a high-SES profile.

3. Suggestions for other research:

- A. The need for future study would be to clarify the area of responsiveness in home processes and its effect on school achievement.
- B. Investigation of the lack of congruency regarding the item: "called child a loving, teasing name or nickname". Investigate with regard to SES and race.
- C. Investigation of parenting actions and time constraints of differing SES, options the differing SES provide to repair damaging parenting actions done under stressful situations.

4. Teacher preparation programs

A. One course should be required on the contribution of the home environment to the achievement of children. It should include not the deficit model of viewing family systems, but the strengths model and should feature the diversity of parenting style due to SES.

My role as parent liaison coordinator is now over. However, I hope to share the results of this research with the four kindergarten teachers with whom I remain in contact. I hope it will help to answer the question I have heard repeatedly, "Where DID these kids come from?!" Looking at Table 1, they came from homes and family not too different from what the teachers judge to be needed for kindergarten readiness. The differences shown in certain items are the important modes of interaction that translate into literacy, abstract conceptualization and academic success.

I have taken a new position involved with preservice teacher education. I intend to use this research to help preservice teachers to better understand the children they will be teaching and the families from which they come.

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Appendix A

Home-School Communication

Thank you for agreeing to do the interview.

I am taking classes toward a Master's Degree in Early Childhood Education. As part of a class, I would like to use the results of this interview. Hopefully, the information will improve the communication styles used with students to their educational benefit.

All of the information that you share with me will be kept confidential. Neither your name or other uniquely identifiable information will appear in the report that I do. This permission form is an ethical obligation that my professor and I take very seriously. We do not foresee risks arising from this interview beyond the risks normally anticipated for sharing interests and reactions.

Your participation in this interview is voluntary, and you should feel free to decline to answer any of the questions. Whatever you are willing to share will be helpful.

If you have any questions, please call my professor, Dr. Linda May Fitzgerald, Asst. Professor of Early Childhood Education, Dept. of Curriculum and Instruction, University of Northern Iowa, (319) 273-2214 or (319) 266-6186. For answers to questions about the research or about the rights of research subjects, you may also contact the Office of Human Subjects Coordinator, UNI, (319) 273-2748.

Your help is greatly appreciated!!

Signature of Investigator

____MarshaFisher____

Printed Name of Investigator

Home-School Communication Interview Appendix B

Consent Form--Interviewee's Copy

I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks arising from it. I hereby agree to participate in this project. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent statement.

Signature of interviewee

Date

Printed Name of interviewee

Signature of principal investigator, Marsha Fisher

Home-School Communication Interview

Consent Form--Interviewer's Copy

I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks arising from it. I hereby agree to participate in this project. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent statement.

Signature of interviewee

Date

Printed Name of interviewee

Signature of principal investigator, Marsha Fisher

Appendix C

Home-School Communication Questionnaire

Using the following nine-point scale, parents will be asked to rank the following activities according to how like or unlike the activities are in their "typical" day's activities with their child.

Scale: 1. Most like day

2. Very much like day

3. Like day

4. A little like day

5. Not sure

6. A little not like day

7. Not like day

8. Very much not like day

9. Most not like day

Activities:

1. Kissed child good-night
2. Gave child a hug
3. Called child a loving, teasing name or nickname
4. Said "I love you" to child
5. Looked at child's face while talking to child
6. Explained "why" I said "no"
7. Worked on chores while talking to child
8. Read child a story
9. Asked child to say, "magic words": please & thank-you
10. Child dressed self
11. Told child to "shh" or "shut-up"
12. Fixed child a meal
13. Ate a meal sitting down with child
14. Turned T.V. off and talked with child during meal
15. Shamed child for doing something wrong
16. Helped child learn the meaning of a new word
17. Spanked child for doing something wrong
18. Helped child to dress self
19. Used "time out" for doing something wrong
20. Watched T.V. with child and talked about the program
21. Helped child use crayons and name colors

Appendix C (continues)

- 22. Yelled at child for doing something wrong
- 23. Helped child sort toys into bins or shelves
- 24. Child washed own hands and face
- 25. Washed child's hands and face

These activities will be on cards to be arranged in piles. This is a "hands-on" questionnaire to be done manually for more complete results and to be less intimidating for the population.

Please place these activities in the squares provided. Try to match the activities to how like or unlike they are in a "typical" day with your child.

				Not sure					
			A little like day			A little not like day			
		like day					Not like day		
	Very much like day							Very much not like day	
Most like day									Most not like day

Appendix D