Final Paper

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**Abstract**

Researching the dynamics of lower class parent involvement is relevant to understanding the changing aspects of the education system in the world today. The purpose of this study was to evaluate how parent involvement was influenced by the family fun time activities sent home with students. The participants in this study consisted of families with children ages three to five enrolled in the Head Start Program. The sample in this study consisted of three rural southern Virginia counties, which included 86 families. The data collected consisted of surveys filled out voluntarily by the parents who participated in the study. This was a mixed methods study, the surveys contained both qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data comes from the open-ended survey questions while the quantitative data comes from the close-ended survey questions, which included scale questions, and demographic questions at the end of the survey. There were several themes throughout the study, pertaining specifically to the qualitative data, which included overall enjoyment of the activities, applying what respondents learned for future use, and spending time together with family. The primary statistical results found in this study were that parents who spent the most time partaking in the activities indicated enjoying the activities the most. This study has several implications pertaining to the real world, some of which include the importance of time spent with family on children’s education, the multitude of barriers that prevent lower SES parents from being fully involved in their children’s education, and how parent involvement can look different to families of different backgrounds.

**Introduction**

The research problem in this study was to identify how the SES of parents impact their involvement, particularly in their child’s education. Previous studies have attempted to address this problem by studying the ins and outs of parent involvement. However, there’s a gap in the literature pertaining to the lower class parent involvement experience. Several studies have attempted to diminish this gap. Specifically, Pomerantz, Moorman, and Litwack (2007) researched how, whom and why parents get involved in their children’s education and attempted to distinguish the difference between home involvement versus school involvement. Their research supported the idea that parent involvement enhances children’s achievement whether in the home or at school. This study could have better considered what signifies at home parent involvement versus at school parent involvement. Thankfully, Nokali, Bachman, and Votrubadrzal (2010) expanded the research of their past colleagues by going further into depth regarding this very issue, what constitutes at home parent involvement versus at school parent involvement? This question depends immensely on the SES of parents, which was illustrated throughout this study. It is difficult to produce valid findings when the SES of parents isn’t being deliberated. Future research in this area should carefully consider the impact SES has on parent involvement when combined with factors such as participation, educational attainment, among others. Many of the deficiencies in these studies revolve around the concept that the middle class experience is the average experience. However, the lower class experience (specifically regarding parent involvement) is not uncommon. This needs to be more clearly portrayed in the literature. This study will be meaningful for many families of lower SES who feel as though they are not properly represented in the literature. Additionally, low income children deserve the same educational opportunities as middle/upper class children. This study will highlight some of the discrepancies between lower and middle/upper class parental involvement that has an impact on academics. The purpose of this particular study was to evaluate parent involvement and how SES impacts it.

**Literature Review**

Due to the impact poverty has on children and families, educational programs like Project Head Start have been implemented nationwide to offer support and services to lower class families with young children (Mendez, 2010). Unfortunately, there is not a wide array of literature on parent involvement and lower-class families, as many authors have chosen to write about the middle-class experience. With this being said, parent involvement varies within classes, both by definition and by attainment. A broad characterization of parent involvement according to Mendez (2010), “Parent involvement is a multidimensional construct and is affected by personal characteristics, contextual factors, and opportunities for learning” (p. 26). In this review, I primarily focus on what parent involvement looks like, how the concept of parent involvement varies by SES, and the potential benefits of parent involvement.

**What Does Parent Involvement Look Like?**

Parent involvement can look different depending on race, SES, and ethnicity. However, there are some norms of parent involvement. By drawing on several different articles and literature to defend their claims, Pomerantz, Moorman, and Litwack (2007) laid down the guidelines of how, whom, and why parents get involved in their children’s education. The authors asserted that “The distinction between involvement on the school front and that on the home front is of importance because the two may embody distinct ways that parents become involved in children’s schooling, with distinct effects on children” (p. 374). Some ways that parents can get involved on the school front include being present at school meetings, talking with teachers, attending school sponsored events, and volunteering at the school. These are typically dominated by higher SES families who have more time and money and therefore more flexibility. Some ways that parents can get involved on the home front include assisting children with homework, talking with children about school, engaging children in intellectual activities (reading books, taking trips to museums). No matter how parents are able to get involved, according to Pomerantz, Moorman, and Litwack (2007), “Parents’ involvement enhances children’s achievement because it provides children with a variety of motivational resources” (p. 376).

**Variation of Parent Involvement by SES**

Previous research has shown that authors tend to stray away from analyzing parent involvement in lower class families, but why is that? It could be because parent involvement in middle class families is easier to dissect. You don’t have to consider financial, racial, class status, time management concerns, etc. as much as you would with lower class families. In an ongoing longitudinal, multi-method study of 1,364 children and their primary caregivers by Nokali, Bachman, and Votrubadrzal (2010), the authors deduced that “Parent involvement typically involves parents’ behaviors in home and school settings meant to support their children’s educational progress” (p. 989). What constitutes parent involvement in a home setting? What about in a school setting? All of this depends entirely on how we define parent involvement. I’ve already demonstrated that this definition varies depending on your race, class status, ethnicity, etc. Therefore, it would be extremely hard to determine if a parent from a low SES is demonstrating the same involvement as a parent from a higher SES. Thus, emphasizing the lack of literature on the topic at hand.

**Potential Benefits of Parent Involvement**

The wide array of potential benefits of parent involvement have been expressed in previous research. In one specific article, authors Hornby and Lafaele (2011), present a model whose purpose is to expand on the barriers of four specific areas of parent involvement: “parent-teacher factors, individual-parent factors, child factors, and family factors. Within this model, benefits of parent involvement are highlighted. These include but were not limited to “improved parent–teacher relationships, teacher morale and school climate; improved school attendance, attitudes, behavior and mental health of children; and, increased parental confidence, satisfaction and interest in their own education” (p. 42). However, the authors also brought up how there are a range of barriers that parents of lower SES face, which directly ties in with what the Mendez (2010) article was supporting regarding the pervasive impact of poverty on parent involvement.

According to Bower and Griffin (2011), “In the era of accountability, the promise of increased academic achievement, especially with regards to the achievement gap, places the need to increase and improve parent involvement in children's education in a powerful position” (p. 77). Previous research has shown that SES plays a big role in how much a parent can get involved. Research has also shown that not every parent defines involvement the same, especially when it includes both school and home involvement. Additionally, the potential benefits of parent involvement are widely agreed upon in the literature. With all of this being said, some limitations/suggestions for future research that were discussed in the literature included the differences between parents and teachers in their goals for parent involvement, parents perceptions of invitations for involvement, the effects of parents home based involvement, what lower SES parent involvement looks like, children’s social and emotional benefits from parent involvement, and motivations for high parent involvement. Future research should look to delve into these topics if possible.

**Data & Methods**

**Study Design and Sample**

The data collected in this study was considered evaluation research, which is undertaken for the purpose of determining the impact of some type of social intervention. Specifically, the intervention is aimed at solving a social problem. In this case, the intervention was the activities being sent home with the children and the social problem was a lack of parental involvement. The activities sent home included the Thankful Turkey Activity, the Animal Dice Activity, the Noodle Necklace Activity, the Stress Ball Balloon Activity, and the Sugar Tray Writing Activity. These activities were all chosen with the intent to evaluate parent involvement. The population in this study consisted of families with children ages three to five enrolled in the Head Start Program. The sample in this study consisted of three rural southern Virginia counties, which included 86 families. The participants completing the activities were the three to five year old children, while the rest of the family was encouraged to be involved. The term family could comprise of moms, dads, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, or anyone else who lived in the household. After completing the activities, the parents of the three to five year old children were encouraged to fill out a survey focused on parental involvement. The overall compliance rate of the survey was 44 out of 84.

**Procedure**

All participants were given a survey containing a consent form that followed the human subject’s protection by the Institutional Review Board. The survey was sent to the Head Start facility teachers, who then sent the activities, survey, and an attached five dollar incentivizing gift-card home with the children. The survey was then brought back by the children to the Head Start facility. The survey comprised of different open and close ended questions for each activity sent home.

**Quantitative**

There were at least six close-ended questions, but no more than seven, included for each activity. To measure improvement of parent/child relations, participants answered the question, “*How much did this activity help to improve you and your child/children’s relationship?*” Responses were on a 10 point scale (0 = Not at all, 10 = Very much). Additionally, to measure the length of time it took, participants were asked, “*How long did it take you and your child/children to complete the activity?*” There were four possible responses: 0-10 minutes, 11-20 minutes, 21-30 minutes, and more than 30 minutes. These two questions were used for a mean test analysis to determine what affect the amount of time had on the improvement of relationships. The survey also included a demographic section on the last page which consisted of questions about who lived in the household, the highest level of education completed, the race or ethnicity of the family, and more.

**Qualitative**

There were only four open-ended questions included in the survey. Their purpose was to invite a longer, more detailed response from participants. To measure what families took away from the activities sent home, participants were asked, “*Please explain what your family gained from these activities. How will you use what you gained in the future?*” To measure which activities were affective in captivating the whole family, participants were asked, “*What was your favorite activity and why?*”

**Quantitative Analysis**

The data in this study was measured through the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) issue 25. The SPSS analyzed the level of enjoyment, the improvement of parent/child relations, and the smart objectives of each individual activity. Descriptive statistics was used throughout the study in order to collect data.

**Qualitative Analysis**

The four open-ended questions served to accentuate reoccurring themes throughout the survey. These themes pertained to parent and/or family involvement.

**Mixed Methods**

The survey sent home with the participants consisted of both quantitative and qualitative methodology. This was most affective as it combined inductive and deductive thinking and it appealed to a wider audience. Additionally, it offset the potential weakness of only using one methodology.

**Quantitative Findings**

Both the independent and dependent variables are from the animal dice activity. The independent variable was measured by how long did it take you and your child/children to complete the activity? Five participants (15%) answered 0-10 minutes, nine participants (27%) answered 11-20 minutes, nine participants (27%) answered 21-30 minutes, ten participants (30%) answered longer than 30 minutes. The dependent variable was measured by on a scale from 0-10, how much did this activity help to improve you and your child’s/children’s relationship? (0 = Not at all, 10 = Very much). One participant (2.9%) answered 2/10, two participants (5.9%) answered 5/10, one participant (2.9%) answered 6/10, three participants (8.8%) answered 7/10, two participants (5.9%) answered 8/10, two participants answered 9/10, twenty-two participants (64.7%) answered 10/10.

After conducting a mean test analysis, the participants who spent 30 minutes or more doing the animal dice activity had an average of 10/10 for how much the activity helped to improve their relationship with their child/children. Thus, the data supports the idea that the group who spent the most time (30 minutes or more) doing the activity got the most out of it and enjoyed what they were doing . However, the group that spent the least amount of time (0-10 minutes) had an average of 9.8/10 for how much the activity helped to improve their relationship with their child/children. One potential reason for this supported by the data is that families who spent the least amount of time on the animal dice activity simply achieved the SMART objectives really fast, and therefore enjoyed the activity almost as much as the group who spent 30 minutes or more. While the groups who spent 11-20 minutes and 21-30 minutes may have struggled to complete the SMART objectives, making the activity less enjoyable.

Table 1

*Level of Improvement of Relationships*

Score Frequency Percent

2 1 2.9

5 2 5.8

6 1 2.9

7 3 8.8

8 3 8.8

9 2 5.8

10 22 64.7

Total 34 100.0

Table 2

*Level of Improvement of Relationships*

Mean 8.85

Median 10.0

Mode 10

Table 3

*Time Spent on Animal Dice Activity*

Amount of Time Count Percent

0-10 Minutes 5 15.1

11-20 Minutes 9 27.3

21-30 Minutes 9 27.3

30 < Minutes 10 30.3

Total 33 100.0

Table 4

*Averages of Time Spent and Improvement of Relationship*

v8 v11 Mean N Standard Deviation

0-10 Minutes 9.80 5 .447

11-20 Minutes 7.67 9 2.872

21-30 Minutes 8.33 9 1.803

30 < Minutes 10.0 10 .000

Total 8.88 33 1.980

**Qualitative Findings**

Qualitative data was collected through Family Fun Time Activity surveys. Nineteen surveys were returned from the participants, with four open-ended questions to collect qualitative data from. Of these nineteen surveys, there were several commonalities between the participants responses. These themes (overall enjoyment of the activities, applying what respondents learned for future use, and spending time together with family) reoccurred throughout a majority of the nineteen surveys collected.

The first reoccurring theme was overall enjoyment of the activities. This could include fun times, happiness, expressed interest in the activities, and more. There was enjoyment from the child’s standpoint as well as from the parent’s standpoint. Respondent #4 said, “(My favorite activity was the) animal dice because my daughter had the most fun with it and didn’t want to stop playing it.” This emphasized the fun times her daughter had with the animal dice activity. Additionally, Respondent #6 said, “(My daughter) really enjoyed the sugar writing tray and the stress ball balloon activity. Everything had yellow so of course she loved it.” This illustrated what the child enjoyed about the activities. While Respondent #6 also said, “The sugar tray was my favorite because it helped (my daughter) with writing her name.” This emphasized what the parent enjoyed about the activity, which differed from what her daughter enjoyed. Additionally, there was enjoyment from the whole family. Respondent #7 said, “We enjoyed sitting down together doing the activities as a family.” This response highlighted the entire family’s enjoyment in regard to the activity.

The second reoccurring theme was the idea of applying what respondents learned from the activities for future use. This idea came up several times, as many respondents spoke of what they took away from the activities and how they could apply it to their daily life. For instance, Respondent #7 said, “(My child) felt like a big boy doing homework and making something with his own hands. We will allow him to do more activities.” This statement highlighted the fact that these parents intended to provide their son with more activities in the future. Moreover, Respondent #10 said, “The animal dice game got the family physically active. (It was) a great way to promote healthy family activities.” This response indicated that this family learned being physically active could be fun and beneficial to their child’s learning. They seemed eager to try this again in the future (given all the exclamation points they included in their response). Lastly, Respondent #5 said, “Our family was able to bond. We learned that we can learn and have fun at the same time.” All of these responses indicate that families took away something valuable from these activities that they can put to use in the future.

The third reoccurring theme was spending time together as a family. This was mentioned in twelve out of nineteen surveys, so clearly it was an important take away from these activities. Some respondents mentioned an increase in working together, like Respondent #15 who said, “We all gained experience in following directions and working together.” This indicated an increase in beneficial family time. Other respondents referenced simply being around family members, like Respondent #13, who said, “We were together doing these activities: my brother, me, and my son. We don’t usually do these kinds of things together. I want to continue doing things together.” This respondent clearly experienced an increase in time spent together as a family as a result of these activities.

These three overarching themes were prevalent throughout the qualitative data analyzed and are indicative of the main takeaways from the surveys. Overall enjoyment of the activities, applying what the respondents learned from the activities for future use, and spending time together as a family were all important recurrences to note from the qualitative data collected. This pertains to the research question in this study as these three themes represent potential ways parent involvement can vary by SES. For instance, time spent with family is subjective to the amount of hours a parents works per week.

**Conclusion**

The main point of this study was to identify factors that influenced parent involvement, specifically pertaining to SES. The main findings of this study included how parents who spent the most time partaking in the activities with their child/children indicated enjoying the activities the most. This statistical finding has implications for parent involvement in the real world: the more time you spend with your child/children, the more you both will enjoy the time. If more parents spend their free time (however limited) doing activities with their child/children, the data supports the idea that it will be enjoyable for both the parent and the child. Additionally, through qualitative analysis, the main findings supported the idea that parents overall enjoyed the activities, wanted to apply what they learned for future use, and wanted to spend more time together with family. These findings matter for several reasons. First, since data from this study supports the idea that spending more time together as a family positively impacts a child’s academic performance, questions need to be raised regarding why some families can spend more time with each other. If families of lower SES have less free time than families of middle and upper SES, then children of the latter families will experience more academic benefits in this regard. Additionally, if parents of lower SES are working multiple jobs to pay the bills, they have less free time to spend with their children than their middle/upper class counterparts. Second, the qualitative finding that indicated parents wanted to apply what they learned for future use supported the idea that parents want to be more involved. This advocates for the idea that parents would be more involved if certain boundaries weren’t preventing them. Lastly, the qualitative finding that indicated that parents overall enjoyed the activities supports the idea that these activities were a successful way to implement family fun time (for these particular families). Therefore, the data supports implementing more of these activities during family time in the future. All of these findings endorse being a more involved parent and illustrate the potential benefits of parent involvement in the real world.

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