Chapter 9

Parenting and Child Development: Exploring the Links with Children’s Social, Moral, and Cognitive Competence

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INTRODUCTION

As Pope John Paul II has stated, “The future of humanity passes by way of the family” (John Paul II, 1981, 886). The family is both foundational and fundamental to our viability as a society and as a Church. Furthermore, a family is “our first community and the most basic way in which the Lord gathers us, forms us, and acts in the world” (National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1975, p. 92). Within this first community, parents are undoubtedly their children’s first teachers. As models and guides, parents provide the first crucial underpinnings that will support children’s development in the years ahead. However, families today, and parents in particular, are faced with challenges and complexity manifested through society’s continual social, economic, moral, and political changes (National Conference, 1972). While some critics have gone so far as to question whether parents matter in the lives of children (Harras, 1998), the research reviewed throughout this chapter illustrates the myriad ways that parents are truly instrumental in fostering child and adolescent development.

THE PROCESS OF PARENTING

Psychologist David Goldenberg has written, “For most adult humans, parenthood is still the ultimate source of the sense of meaning. For most adults the question ‘Who do I care about?’ is automatically answered once they have children. Better yet, how does one define oneself as a parent” (1978, p. 1790). This statement begins to capture the depth and importance of the multifaceted commitment that is parenthood. Despite recent mainstream media contentions that the influence of parents is negligible (Cohen, 1999), parents foster all aspects of children’s growth through
nourishing, protecting, and guiding new life through the course of human development (Hamner & Turner, 1996; Jaffe, 1997; Lamb, Ketterlinus, & Fracasso, 1992). Brooks (1991) has summarized the main tasks of parents as establishing warm, nurturant, emotional relationships with children and providing opportunities for the development of competence and individuality. Through these processes, the ways that parents may influence their children are many and varied.

Research on parenting and child socialization for decades has attempted to delineate and understand the myriad pathways through which parents influence their children. Today, it is almost taken for granted that an interactional model of growth, suggesting that both biology and rearing guide children's adjustment, best explains overall development (Brooks, 1991; Kagan, 1994). This review focuses on one environmental factor, the process of parenting, which influences child and adolescent development. Specifically, findings are presented on the associations between parental factors and three distinct domains: children's social, moral, and cognitive competence.

Parenting and Children's Social Development

The analysis of children's interpersonal relations and their capacity for social interaction and relationships are the foci of social development research (Damon, 1983). Viewed from a developmental perspective, it is evident how varied and diverse children's social relationships can be. An infant's early attachment to a caregiver, a preschooler's emerging relationships with peers, a middle schooler's close bond with a sibling, an adolescent's first intimate relationship—each of these social relationships is characterized by a distinct purpose, quality, intensity, and emotional tone. In short, there is an incredible breadth in the nature and quality of children's relationships. Therefore, for the purposes of this review, the domain of peer relationships, and parents' influence upon children's development in this area, will be the primary focus.

One of the most critical psychosocial tasks of childhood is the development and maintenance of successful peer relations (Cohn, Patterson, & Christopoulos, 1991) and friendships (Sullivan, 1953; Youniss & Haynie, 1992). Moreover, a great deal of research supports the notion that children who adjust poorly to their peer groups are at risk for later social and academic problems. In their review, Parker and Asher (1987) documented that children who are rejected by their peers are at greater risk for a variety of difficulties, including increased risk of school dropout, poorer academic performance, increased delinquency, and mental health problems.

Despite the intriguing question of how children develop the knowledge and skills necessary to manage relationships with others, research documenting the role of parenting in children's social development is a fairly recent phenomenon. As Hartup wrote, "Quite possibly the most serious oversight in the literature on social development is the absence of information concerning the interdependen-
cies existing between experiences in one social world and experiences in others" (1979, p. 944). However, two decades after that proclamation, the knowledge base on the family–peer linkage has absolutely burgeoned. Scholars have begun to describe and explain the interface of parenting and children’s social development.

In a tripartite model of the connections across family and peer contexts (see Figure 9.1), Parke and colleagues outlined three general categories that are inclusive of the multitude of research studies undertaken in the study of the linkages between family and peer contexts (Parke, Burks, Carson, Neville, & Boyum, 1994; Parke, Cassidy, Burks, Carson, & Boyum, 1992). Direct effects on children’s peer–peer interaction are operationalized when parents serve as direct instructors for their children’s social behavior. Direct instruction can take the form of advice, social coaching, or simply serving as a supervisor of peer play. Parents as providers of opportunities is constituted by such factors as the neighborhood context that parents provide for children and the arrangement of social contacts with other play partners. Finally, parents are viewed as influencing their children’s peer relationships indirectly through their child-rearing practices and interactive styles. This pathway is generally described as
an indirect influence on peer behavior because parents are not explicitly guiding or instructing their children on appropriate peer social behavior. Research in accord with each of these components of the tripartite model is reviewed here.

**Parents as Managers of Children’s Peer Relationships**

Parents can influence their children’s relationships through their role as direct instructors who facilitate peer relations by means of monitoring, supervision, and advising (Hartup, 1979; Parke, 1978). Monitoring refers to parents’ efforts to closely observe, regulate, and supervise children’s choices of social settings, activities, and friends. Monitoring exerted by parents in the family context has long been studied and its impact is well documented (Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1986; Rollins & Thomas, 1979). Lack of child monitoring has clearly been linked to child conduct problems (Patterson, 1986; Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992; Patterson & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1984; Rutter & Garmezy, 1983). Monitoring, as a form of parental management, is particularly evident as children move into preadolescence and adolescence, since this period marks a transition in the relative importance of family and peers as sources of influence on social relationships (Parke et al., 1998). Research has revealed that the more parents monitored their sons’ behavior and whereabouts, the less likely it was that the adolescents engaged in court-reported delinquency, attacks against property, and rule breaking outside the home (Patterson & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1984). Finally, Patterson and colleagues (Dishion, Reid, & Patterson, 1988; Snyder, Dishion, & Patterson, 1986) argued that ineffective parenting, especially ineffective parental monitoring, leads children to acquire poor social skills, which in turn leads to association with deviant peers in childhood and adolescence.

Research has also been directed at a particular aspect of the role of parent as direct instructor, namely, as a supervisor of children’s peer play. Based on observed sessions in a laboratory playsroom, Bhavnagir and Parke (1985) found that 2-year-old children’s social competence with an unfamiliar peer was rated higher during periods of parental (mother) supervision. When assisted by a parent, children exhibited more cooperation, turn taking, and longer play bouts than when playing without assistance. In a similar investigation, both mothers and fathers were effective facilitators of children’s play with peers (Bhavnagir & Parke, 1991). Supervision had less impact on the quality of play for older (3½ to 6 years of age) than for younger (2 to 3½ years of age) children. This indicates that parental supervision and active facilitation may be most salient for younger children as they are beginning to acquire social skills. Among older children, “greater supervision and guidance of the part of parents of children’s peer relationships may function more as a mediating factor” (Parke et al., 1998, p. 93).
As children develop, the primary aspects of parental management shift from direct involvement or supervision of ongoing activities to a "less public form of management, involving advice or consultation concerning appropriate ways of handling peer problems" (Parke et al., 1994, p. 129). Ladd, LeSueur, and Proffitt (1993) have termed this form of direct parental management consultation. In their role as consultants, parents may initiate conversations about many aspects of peer interactions and social relationships, including how to manage conflicts, start friendships, react to peer pressure, and deal with teasing. Parents may also react to a specific interpersonal problem that a child is experiencing with a friend or peer and offer assistance with problem solving (Kuczynski, 1984; Ladd, Proffitt, & Hart, 1992). Cohen (1989) found that during middle childhood, some forms of mothers' consulting were associated with positive outcomes, whereas other forms were linked with poor social relationships. Specifically, when mothers were supportive and non-interfering, the outcomes were positive. In contrast, mothers who were too highly involved (interfering) had children who were socially withdrawn. It appears that high levels of control may inhibit children's efforts to develop their own strategies for dealing with peer relations (Cohen, 1989).

Parents as Providers of Opportunities for Peer Contacts

Parents are the undisputed architects of the social environment that their children occupy. Young children are especially dependent on their parents to provide opportunities for social contacts. Consequently, one pathway by which parents may exert an influence on children's social development is choice of neighborhood (Parke & Bhavnaari, 1989). For example, research on neighborhood ecology demonstrated that children's opportunities for peer-peer contact are greater in neighborhoods that have flat landscapes, amenities such as sidewalks and playgrounds, and a dense child population (Berg & Medrich, 1980; Medrich, Rozzen, Rubin, & Buckley, 1982). Moreover, these investigations showed that children have larger friendship networks and more spontaneous play arrangements when houses are closely spaced and have few barriers between them.

Beyond selection of neighborhood, parents influence children's social development through the arrangement of informal peer contacts and regulation of peer play partners. Ladd and colleagues (Ladd, 1992; Ladd & Golter, 1988; Ladd & Hart, 1991) hypothesized that by initiating play opportunities with peers, parents may facilitate children's entrance into the peer culture. In research with preschool children, parents who initiated and arranged peer contacts, as compared to those who did not, had children with larger networks of playmates and more consistent partners (Ladd & Golter, 1988). Further, boys with more parent-initiated contacts were more likely to be accepted by their classmates following entrance into kindergarten.
Parent–Child Interaction

A third distinct line of research has documented that parents influence their children's social relationships indirectly through ongoing parent–child interaction patterns. This pathway is generally described as an indirect influence on peer behavior because parents are not explicitly guiding their children's social development. However, as articulated by Parke et al. (1994), "the foundation of this line of research has been the assumption that parent child face to face interaction may provide opportunities to learn, rehearse, and refine social skills that in turn will be useful in children's interactions with peers" (p. 116).

The linkage of the affective quality, or emotional expressiveness, of the parent–child relationship with children's social outcomes has received much attention. Parke and colleagues (Burks, Carson, & Parke, 1987; MacDonald & Parke, 1984) found that among 3- to 5-year-olds, popular boys have parents who are engaging, verbally stimulating, and who elicit positive affect during play; popular girls also tend to have affect-eliciting fathers. Another investigation showed that greater self-reported parental expressiveness is associated with children's greater peer competence; the more expressive the parents, the more prosocial and less shy the child (Cassidy, Parke, Bukovsky, & Braungart, 1992). Caron and Parke (1996) examined the extent to which affect displayed during parents' physical play with their children was related to their concurrent peer competence. Findings suggested that parents who were more likely to engage in negative affect sequences had children who were also likely to do so. Fathers who were more likely to respond to their children's negative affect displays with reciprocal negative affect had children who avoided others more, were more physically and verbally aggressive, and shared less (Isley, O’Neill, & Parke, 1996).

Investigators have also proposed that parents' disciplinary styles may influence the nature of children's social relations (Cohn et al., 1991; Putallaz & Heflin, 1990). Early studies demonstrated that parents who employed power-assertive disciplinary techniques (e.g., commands, physical force) tended to have children who were more aggressive and dominating with peers. In contrast, parents who utilized more inductive methods of discipline had children that exhibited more prosocial orientations toward peers (Becker, 1964; Hoffman, 1960; Zahn-Waxler, Radke-Yarrow, & King, 1979). More recent investigations have supported these findings, such that "extreme levels of control (both high and low levels), as expressed through disciplinary strategies, may have a deleterious effect on children's social competence" (Campbell, 1994, p. 17). Specifically, Hart, Reid, and Burleson (1993) found that children whose parents used power-assertive discipline strategies were more likely to believe that unfriendly strategies would lead to successful outcomes. These children were also more likely to be rejected by their peers. Finally, additional evidence of a connection between parents' disciplinary styles and children's social outcomes derives from a series of investigations by Dishion and colleagues (Dishion, 1990,
1994; Dishion, Patterson, Stoolmiller, & Skinner, 1991; Vuchinich, Bank, & Patterson, 1992). Taken together, these studies documented that coercive, inconsistent disciplinary styles would encourage children to develop antisocial behavior, which in turn would lead children to be rejected by peers.

**PARENTING AND CHILDREN'S MORAL DEVELOPMENT**

Empirical research has examined the association of parental characteristics and socialization practices with a variety of morally relevant behaviors in children. While not exhaustive, this review focuses on four critical aspects of parenting that have been linked with children's moral development: disciplinary practices, the affective quality of the parent–child relationship, parental modeling, and promotion of autonomous thinking.

**Parents' Disciplinary Practices**

Comprehensive reviews of modes of discipline and their relation to children's moral development have been published by Hoffman (1970) and Brody and Shaffer (1982). These reviews, as well as subsequent discussions of parental disciplinary practices, have made clear the differential effects of power-assertive versus inductive disciplinary techniques. Power-assertive disciplinary practices are those in which parents use threats, commands, or physical force to achieve compliance. In contrast, inductive discipline involves pointing out the effects of the child's misbehavior on others ("She feels so sad because you won't give her back her doll") (Hoffman, 1988). In general, Hoffman (1970, 1983) and Brody and Shaffer (1982) found that inductive reasoning practices are associated with higher levels of morality; power-assertive practices undermine children's moral reasoning.

More recent studies have upheld the positive association between inductive parental practices and moral reasoning in offspring (de Veer & Janssens, 1992; Janssen, Janssens, & Gerris, 1992; Janssens & Gerris, 1992). Further, parental inductions that underscore the consequences of the child's behavior for another (e.g., "Now you've made Matthew cry") have been associated with children's empathy and prosocial behavior (Karykowski, 1982; Moore & Eisenberg, 1984; Radke-Yarrow, Zahn-Waxler, & Chapman, 1983). One investigation found that for children as young as two years of age, mothers who reported using inductions had children who exhibited relatively high levels of prosocial behavior toward others (Zahn-Waxler et al., 1979). In sum, it appears that inductive techniques are related to higher levels of empathy in children, which in turn are related to children's prosocial behavior.

Power-assertive (physical punishment, deprivation of privileges) disciplinary practices, in contrast, exhibit negative associations with children's moral reasoning, prosocial orientation, and resistance to temptation (Brody & Shaffer, 1982; Hoffman, 1983; Moore & Eisenberg, 1984). Using both maternal reports
and observations of mother-child interaction, Kochanska (1991) examined mothers' disciplinary practices in toddlerhood, then correlated these measures with children’s reports of moral behaviors at ages 8 through 10. Results indicated that mothers who emphasized power assertion and coercive discipline, rather than democratic modes of discipline, had children who manifested lower levels of guilt and moral orientation. Despite the evident trend in these findings, researchers have noted that the occasional, measured, and rational use of power-assertive techniques within the context of a positive parent-child relationship is associated with children’s socially responsible behavior (Bamurtz, 1971; Hoffman, 1983).

The Affective Climate of the Parent-Child Relationship

Theorists have emphasized the salience of the affective context in which parental socialization efforts are embedded (Dux, 1991; Hoffman, 1970). Quite simply, Hoffman postulated that the optimal environment for socialization is one in which the parents exhibit high levels of warmth. Children would be more likely to attend to and care about pleasing their parents in socialization environments that are warm and supportive (Eisenberg & Murphy, 1995). These theoretical suppositions have received some support (Buck, Walsh, & Rothman, 1981; Speicher, 1992). In one investigation, children’s moral growth was associated with a supportive and positive family environment during family discussions (Walker & Taylor, 1991).

Others studies have presented less definitive support for the role of parental warmth and nurturance upon children’s moral reasoning and development. For example, Hoffman and Saltzstein (1967) found that paternal affection was unrelated to children’s moral reasoning. Smart and Smart (1976), examining school-age children, uncovered differential effects of parental support on levels of children’s moral reasoning, documented by a significant association for boys but not girls. A longitudinal investigation of males from 10 to 30 years of age found that paternal affective involvement correlated with males’ moral reasoning until age 26, although significant relations were not found for mothers (Hart, 1988). Given the mixed support for the association between parental warmth and various moral outcomes, it has been suggested that warmth does not exert a direct effect on children’s moral development. Instead, parental warmth may function as a moderator variable, influencing the overall effectiveness of other parental strategies that exert direct effects on children’s moral development (Eisenberg & Murphy, 1995).

Parental Modeling

Parenting refers to providing examples of behaviors for others to imitate. Accordingly, a reasonable line of inquiry in this area of research would be whether the behavioral examples that parents provide for their children are related to aspects of children’s moral development. Unfortunately, few studies
Involving children and parents have directly examined this linkage. Results from laboratory studies have shown, however, that children exposed to dishonest models were more likely to act dishonest themselves (Burton, 1976). Furthermore, parental honesty was associated with children's honesty across situations (Hartshorne & May, 1928), and mothers of liars were more likely to report lying themselves than mothers of non-liars (Lewis, 1931; Stouthamer-Loeber, 1986).

It is clear from laboratory work, however, that subjects (children and adults) who have viewed a prosocial model are more prosocial themselves than are those that have not viewed a prosocial model (Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989; Moore & Eisenberg, 1984; Radke-Yarrow et al., 1983). Particularly compelling evidence of the effects of parental modeling upon children's moral outcomes derives from two real-life situations. First, studies of Europeans who saved Jews from the Nazis during World War II found that rescuers reported coming from families in which helpfulness and generosity were routinely modeled (London, 1970; Olner & Olner, 1988). Second, a study of the "freedom riders" of the late 1950s and early 1960s reported similar findings. Freedom riders were young adults who became involved in civil rights activities to increase opportunities for African Americans in the southern United States. Often at much danger to themselves, these individuals routinely sacrificed jobs and homes to support the civil rights cause. Rosenhan (1970) reported that these highly committed individuals described their parents as models of prosocial behavior who were devoted to working for worthy causes and often discussed their activities with their children. In sum, there appears to be sufficient evidence to contend that parental modeling of prosocial behavior is associated with children's willingness to demonstrate concern for others, even at a cost to themselves.

Promotion of Autonomous Thinking

A final research area considered here has demonstrated an association between parenting practices that promote children's autonomy and autonomous thinking and higher levels of children's moral reasoning. For example, parents who encouraged children's decision making and participation in discussions were more likely to have children with relatively higher levels of moral reasoning (Holstein, 1972). For adolescent boys, the level of moral reasoning increased when maternal permissiveness and control was low and when mothers placed little emphasis on maintaining boundaries between the child and others (Leahy, 1981). Eisenberg (1977) found that high school girls' increased reasoning about moral dilemmas was associated with their reports of maternal emphasis on autonomy granting.

Studies of observed styles of parent-child interactions have also supported this general trend. For example, Buck et al. (1981) examined parenting practices during a discussion of how to handle sons' aggression and linked these observations to preadolescent boys' moral reasoning. Results indicated that higher-reasoning boys had parents who used reasoning themselves, took into
consideration their son's view, and encouraged the son to express his view. Similarly, Walker and Taylor (1991) investigated parents' interaction style during a discussion of moral issues with their 1st, 4th, 7th, or 10th grade child and used this information to predict their moral reasoning two years later. A Socratic questioning style, supportive interactions, and the presentation of higher-level reasoning were the parenting behaviors that best predicted children's moral growth. Notably, parenting behaviors such as critiquing, directly challenging the child's reasoning, or simply providing information were not associated with children's moral growth. Thus, across several studies it appears that children's moral development is best facilitated when parents encourage the consideration of autonomous, higher-level moral thinking in a supportive, non-confrontational manner.

PARENTING AND CHILDREN'S COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

Studies reviewed by Plomin (1988) suggested that at least half the variance in general cognitive ability as measured by IQ is due to genetic factors. In contrast, Sternberg and Williams (1995) have made the contention that "the existence of a genetic contribution to intelligence does not prevent you [parents] from intervening in your child's cognitive growth" (p. 260). Regardless of the role of genetics, parents still exert an influence on the cognitive competence of children. This section presents two parenting research foci that have been associated with children's cognitive outcomes: child-rearing styles and parental involvement.

Child-Rearing Styles and Cognitive Development

In a series of landmark studies, Baumrind (1966, 1967, 1975, 1978) collected information on child-rearing styles through direct observations of parents and children in laboratory and natural settings, structured interviews, and standardized psychological tests. Cluster and factor analytic techniques applied to these observations yielded two broad dimensions of child rearing: demandingness (or control) and responsiveness (Baumrind, 1991). From these two dimensions, Baumrind created the widely known typology of parenting styles (see Table 9.1).

Authoritative parents are demanding and responsive, and they employ a rational, democratic approach in which parents' and children's rights are respected. Authoritarian parents are demanding but are low in responsiveness to children's rights and needs. Thus, conformity and obedience are valued over open communication with the child. Permissive parents are responsive but undemanding and they exhibit an overly tolerant approach to child rearing.
Table 9.1
A Two-Dimensional Typology of Parenting Styles

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Subsequently, an extensive line of research has linked authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting to child and adolescent cognitive competence (Melby & Conger, 1996; Wentzel, 1994). Using large samples of adolescents who varied in ethnicity, family structure, socioeconomic status, and community type, research has demonstrated that adolescents whose parents are accepting, firm, and democratic (i.e., authoritative) score higher on measures of academic performance (Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fruleigh, 1987; Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991; Steinberg, Elmen, & Mounts, 1989; Steinberg, Mounts, Lamborn, & Dornbusch, 1991). The authoritative style predicted higher grades, whereas authoritarian and permissive styles were associated with lower grades. Of all child-rearing styles, an inconsistent approach (a mix of authoritarian and permissive techniques) predicted the poorest school performance (Dornbusch et al., 1987). Finally, Patterson and colleagues (Dishion, 1990; Patterson & Bank, 1990) also documented significant associations between parenting styles and early adolescent boys’ school success. Their results indicated that inconsistent and harsh discipline is associated with the lowest levels of academic achievement.

What accounts for these associations between styles of parenting and child and adolescent cognitive competence? Authoritative parenting styles likely promote cognitive development by encouraging independent problem solving and critical thinking. In contrast, authoritarian styles are believed to detract from cognitive competence by discouraging active exploration and problem solving and encouraging dependence on adult control and guidance (Hess & McDevitt, 1984; Wentzel, 1994). Other explanations have been offered for the efficacy of authoritative parenting. Authoritative parents are most likely to adjust their expectations to match their children’s capacity to take responsibility for their own behavior. For example, parents who engage in joint decision making with their adolescents and gradually permit more autonomy with age, have children who achieve especially well (Dornbusch, Ritter, Mont-Reynaud, & Chen, 1990). Parental warmth and firmness, when accompanied by open discussion, contributes to adolescents’ constructive thinking and self-control and allows adolescents to feel competent and valued. Each of these factors is then related, in turn, to independent effort and achievement among high school students (Baumrind, 1991; Carlson, Hsu, & Cooper, 1990; Wentzel & Feldman, 1993).
Parental Involvement: Association of Specific Parenting Practices with Cognitive Development

Parental involvement in schooling is related to children’s achievement (Dornbusch et al., 1987), and consequently has been a key concern in research (Eccles & Harold, 1996; Epstein, 1987b). A diversity of definitions of parental involvement has emerged within this line of research. As Keith (1991) noted, some investigators have used parental involvement to refer to parental participation in school activities (Cervero & O’Leary, 1983), whereas others use the term to refer to a more general interest in students’ academic and social lives (Keith, Reimers, Fehrman, Potthast, & Aubey, 1986). However, despite methodological and definitional contrasts, research is generally consistent in suggesting positive effects for parental involvement on student learning (Keith, 1991). For example, in research on early adolescents, researchers proposed that authoritative parenting has its effects on adolescent achievement primarily by way of its relation to parental involvement in school activities (Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992). Results from that investigation showed that parents who attended school programs and extracurricular activities and participated in course selection had children who earned high grades, spent a significant amount of time on homework, had high expectations for their own achievement, and had strong academic self-concepts.

The following paragraphs review three areas of parent involvement and parenting practices that exhibit documented effects on children’s cognitive competence: literacy-related parenting practices, homework-related parenting practices, and parents’ educational expectations and aspirations for their children. Literacy-related parenting practices are one of the critical means through which parents can influence their children’s academic competence (Connors & Epstein, 1995; Scott-Jones, 1995). For example, professionals have urged parents to establish a rich oral language environment in the home from infancy in order to increase the chances of children’s school success (Morisset, 1993; Young & Marx, 1992). Further, researchers found that children’s reading ability was associated with the amount of reading material in the home (Hess, Holloway, Dickinson, & Price, 1984). Overall, the number and types of educational resources provided to elementary-aged children in the home have been linked to various aspects of academic and intellectual success (Hess & Holloway, 1984; Stevenson & Lee, 1990). Parents can also create a stimulating and rich print or written language environment by serving as model readers for their children (Nickerson, 1992; Strickland & Guthrie, 1999). Topping (1985) identified concrete practices that parents may employ to facilitate children’s reading success. The specific factors included (1) allowing more time for children to practice reading at home, (2) making reading more valued and enjoyable, (3) giving children feedback or praise, and (4) modeling reading and writing behaviors at home. Finally, parents may influence children’s reading skills through listening
to a child read and from exploring and sharing books (Evans, 1993; Wolfendale, 1985).

Another area in which parents exert an effect upon their children's learning is through homework-related parenting practices. Teachers often give homework to facilitate students' independence and responsibility in their academic endeavors and to share classroom activities with parents (Epstein, 1987a; Parsons, Adler, & Kaczmara, 1982). Moreover, parents and teachers are in agreement that parents have a role to play in children's homework (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Given these observations, findings on parents' involvement in and monitoring of homework activities are especially critical. Clark (1993) examined the parenting practices in predominantly African-American and Hispanic families with high- and low-achieving 3rd graders. The findings delineated the distinguishing qualities of the homes of high-achieving students, in that these parents: (1) checked homework for neatness and accuracy, (2) were knowledgeable about how to help with homework, and (3) demonstrated how to use the dictionary and reference materials. Generally, parents of elementary school children report spending more time helping their children and feel more capable of helping with homework than parents of students in the middle grades (Dauber & Epstein, 1993). For 8th graders in the National Education Longitudinal Survey of 1988, 45% reported that parents often checked their homework. Parental checking of homework was positively related to the amount of time students spent on homework, but was not related to students' grades (Muller & Kerbow, 1993). In sum, parental monitoring and involvement in homework-related activities contribute to children's achievement. Ideally, parental monitoring will eventually lead to self-monitoring and self-management strategies in the child (Scott-Jones, 1995).

A third research focus has examined the association of parents' beliefs about their children with their children's cognitive and academic accomplishments. Early work in this area documented significant relations between parents' educational expectations and aspirations and children's school performance (Crandall, 1963; Hess & Holloway, 1984; Miller, 1988; Seginer, 1983). Generally, high-achieving children tend to have families who hold high educational expectations (Seginer, 1983). For example, in an Australian sample, parents' expectations for post-secondary education were positively related to 9th graders' achievement, intentions to remain in school past 10th grade, and educational plans (Ainley, Foreman, & Sheret, 1991). Similarly, students' science achievement was correlated more highly with parental educational aspirations than SES (Reynolds & Walberg, 1992), and parental expectations were found to mediate the association between math and science achievement and prior achievement (Reynolds & Walberg, 1991). Parents' expectations for post-secondary education are also significant predictors of college attendance (Davies & Kandel, 1981; Hossler & Stange, 1992). Carpenter and Fleishman (1987) determined that students are more likely to attend college when their parents expect them to go to college, encourage them to explore options, and help them prepare for college. Lastly, one study demonstrated that a consistent "yes" response over three years...
to the question, "Is it taken for granted in your home that you will attend post-secondary education?" was positively associated with college attendance (Conklin & Dailey, 1981).

CONCLUSION

Underpinning all of this research, it is safe to say that we study parenting mainly because we are interested in, and concerned about, children's development. There are several beneficiaries of parenting research, perhaps most obviously, parents themselves (Jaffe, 1997; National Conference, 1972). Parents benefit from having good, sound information on topics such as effective discipline methods. Teachers, as interactors who work with both children and parents, benefit from parenting research through support they provide to parents and through knowledge of children's developmental capabilities. Knowledge that results from the study of parenting is of potential use to anyone who works with children and parents, including coaches, guidance counselors, psychologists, social workers, and pediatricians. Ultimately, however, the primary beneficiaries of parenting research are children themselves, especially when we utilize this knowledge base to create healthy, supportive, and nurturant family and community environments in which children are allowed to reach their full potential.

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