

Why Do Parents Become Involved in Their Children's Education?

Kathleen V. Hoover-Dempsey and Howard M. Sandler
Vanderbilt University

This article reviews psychological theory and research critical to understanding why parents become involved in their children's elementary and secondary education. Three major constructs are believed to be central to parents' basic involvement decisions. First, parents' role construction defines parents' beliefs about what they are supposed to do in their children's education and appears to establish the basic range of activities that parents construe as important, necessary, and permissible for their own actions with and on behalf of children. Second, parents' sense of efficacy for helping their children succeed in school focuses on the extent to which parents believe that through their involvement they can exert positive influence on their children's educational outcomes. Third, general invitations, demands, and opportunities for involvement refer to parents' perceptions that the child and school want them to be involved. Hypotheses concerning the functioning of the three constructs in an additive model are suggested, as are implications for research and practice. Overall, the review suggests that even well-designed school programs inviting involvement will meet with only limited success if they do not address issues of parental role construction and parental sense of efficacy for helping children succeed in school.

Parental involvement in education has long been a topic of interest among those concerned with optimal developmental and educational outcomes for preschool and elementary school children. With increasing frequency, issues related to parental involvement have also been examined with reference to adolescent outcomes. Across a range of studies, there has emerged a strong conclusion that parental involvement in child and adolescent education generally benefits children's learning and school success (e.g., Chavkin, 1993; Eccles & Harold, 1993; Epstein, 1989, 1991, 1994; Hess & Holloway, 1984; Hobbs et al., 1984; U.S. Department of Education, 1994).¹ Recent work describing the correlates and forms of parental involvement, as well as teacher and school influences on involvement, has been an important part of the current effort to understand why parents choose to become involved and why their involvement often functions to create positive outcomes for their children of all ages (e.g., Eccles & Harold, 1993, 1994; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995).

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) suggested that specific variables create patterns of influence at critical points in the parental involvement process. Their model includes parents' choices of involvement forms, major mechanisms through which parental involvement influences educational and related developmental outcomes in children, the major mediating variables that enhance or diminish the

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influence of involvement, and major outcomes for child learning (Figure 1). Although this model of the involvement process suggests that the process is composed of several levels of constructs operating between parents' initial choice to become involved (Level 1) and the beneficial influence of that involvement on student outcomes (Level 5), this review is focused on the first level of the model, which seeks to explain parents' fundamental decision about involvement. The explanation at this level draws on constructs that are focused primarily on the person—the individual parent. Given this focus, we review recent psychological

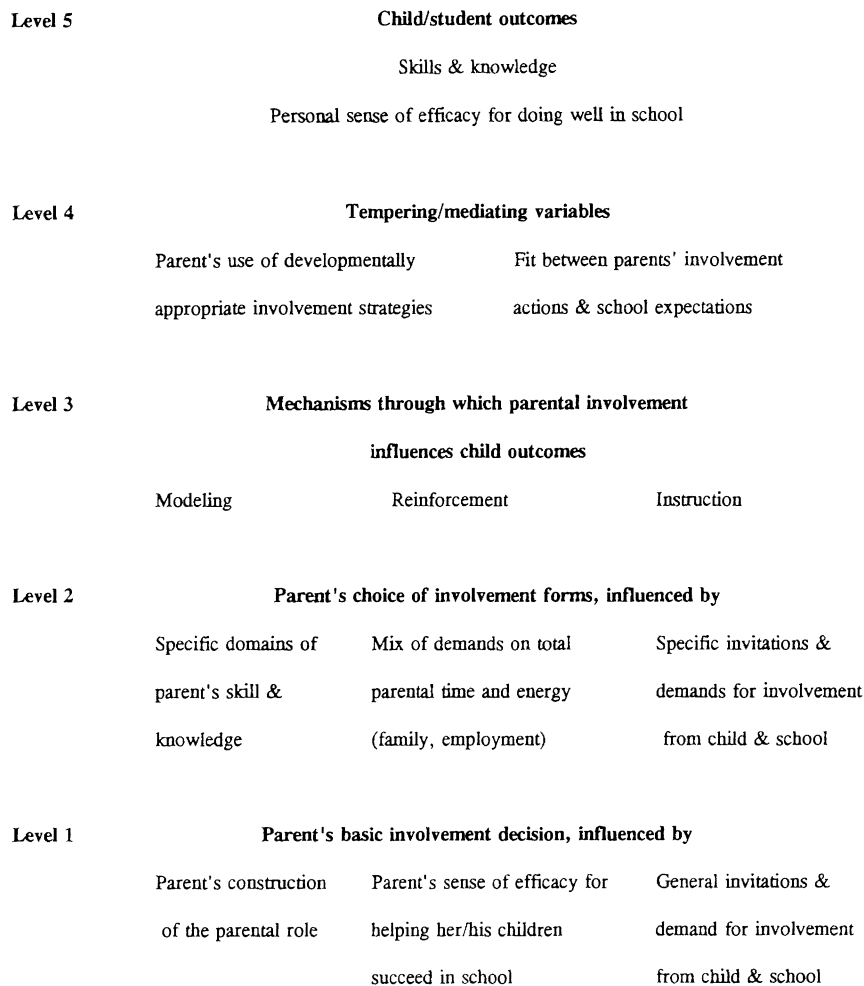


FIGURE 1. *Model of the parental involvement process*

Note. From "Parental Involvement in Children's Education: Why Does It Make a Difference?," by K. V. Hoover-Dempsey and H. M. Sandler, 1995, *Teachers College Record*, 95, p. 327. Copyright 1995 by the President and Trustees of Teachers College. Adapted with permission.

literature defining the constructs that are included in the first stage of the model. In doing so, we address the critical question: Why do parents become involved in their children's education?

Assumptions

We have grounded this review in several specific assumptions. First, we consider the involvement process from the perspective of parents. We are interested in the processes and mechanisms most important to parents' thinking, decision-making, and behaviors underlying their decisions to become involved in their children's education. We focus, in other words, on the major psychological constructs that appear to influence parents' fundamental involvement stance. To this end, we examine literature primarily from psychology, with full appreciation that other disciplines (e.g., anthropology, economics, education, sociology) offer significant information about critical and contextual elements of the involvement process.

Indeed, while we emphasize the parent and his or her decisions about involvement, our findings are best understood within the context of the model (Figure 1) and the broader social ecology of parents' lives. As Bronfenbrenner (e.g., 1979, 1986) and others (e.g., Jessor, 1993; Slaughter-Defoe, 1995) have argued eloquently, human development cannot be adequately understood without significant reference to the proximal and distal social systems that work to limit or enhance both developmental processes and outcomes. The general model (Figure 1) includes specific dimensions of several of these systems (e.g., the parent's full familial and employment-related circumstances at Level 2, and the fit between the parent's choice of involvement strategies and both the child's developmental level and the school's expectations at Level 4). The implications of our findings about these constructs with reference to some aspects of the broader ecology of parental involvement are suggested in the final section of the article.

Although we make use of work from both education and other social science disciplines, the body of theory and research that we review is grounded in psychology. The perspectives and assumptions of psychology thus shape our analysis and the suggestions we derive from that analysis. While we believe strongly that psychological inquiry has much of value to offer understanding of parental involvement in child and adolescent education, we are also mindful that our psychological perspective does not give us access to the full set of issues involved in a comprehensive understanding of parental involvement. Specifically, because the questions and methods of inquiry that guide much psychological research (a) focus on learning more about the individual and (b) characteristically employ carefully limited (often experimentally controlled) methods of investigation, they do not, for example, offer information about the historical context of school-family relations or about the significant impact that political, economic, and social events may have on family-school relations. The outcomes of psychological inquiry (and any policy suggestions that may be derived) are thus limited to the individual and to selected elements of the individual's environments; they offer one window on the full range of issues influencing parental involvement in child and adolescent education.

Our definition of parental involvement incorporates the range of parental activities cited in the involvement literature. Broadly categorized, they include

home-based activities related to children's learning in school—for example, reviewing the child's work and monitoring child progress, helping with homework, discussing school events or course issues with the child, providing enrichment activities pertinent to school success, and talking by phone with the teacher. They also include school-based involvement, focused on such activities as driving on a field trip, staffing a concession booth at school games, coming to school for scheduled conferences or informal conversations, volunteering at school, serving on a parent-teacher advisory board (e.g., Baker & Stevenson, 1986; Clark, 1993; Comer & Haynes, 1991; Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Epstein, 1986; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Brissie, 1987, 1992; Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Burow, 1995; Lareau, 1989; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992; U.S. Department of Education, 1994). This full range of parental activities related to children's schooling and school outcomes is reflected in studies reviewed.

Throughout the article we refer to parents' *choice* of involvement. We believe that parental decision-making about involvement occurs in both explicit and implicit ways. Parents are sometimes explicitly reflective, aware, and active in relation to their decisions about being involved in their children's education; in other circumstances, they appear to respond to external events or unevaluated demands from significant aspects of the environment. We argue that the latter circumstances also represent parental choice, even if implicit. While several variables other than those reviewed here may also influence parents' decisions about involvement (e.g., a parent's need for affiliation or power, a parent's personal reinforcement history), we focus on those that appear within this literature to exert most influence over the decision. Both types of parental decision-making for involvement—implicit and explicit—are the focus of this review, as we examine constructs that appear to explain best the fundamental choice for involvement. Following this interest, and building on the foundation of Hess and Holloway's comprehensive 1984 review of the role and influence of parents in the school performance of elementary and secondary school children, we have examined theoretical as well as empirical literature published generally within the past decade on parental involvement.

As evident throughout the review, research on parental involvement has focused preeminently on its influence on children's educational outcomes. There have been suggestions of benefits to others involved in the process; for example, Comer and Haynes (1991) noted improved parent-staff relationships as a function of parental participation in school activities, while Hoover-Dempsey et al. (1995) reported that mothers appeared to derive information about their own success as parents from their involvement efforts with children. Examinations of benefits to other than children, however, are clearly exceptions to the norm in this literature. In general, the questions that have been consistently asked in the literature, as well as the prevailing definitions of important outcomes, have been shaped by a strong empirical and societal focus on educational benefits to children. As we suggest in the concluding section of the article, however, knowledge of parental involvement and its influence on educational outcomes for children is likely to be enhanced as researchers and policymakers focus on the benefits it may create for all involved in the process—child, parents, school, and the community as a whole.

The specific parents of whom we speak in this review must also be noted. In

general, we refer to mothers and fathers (although at times, other family members such as grandparents or siblings are included in the research on parental involvement). However, literature in the area has generally focused on the involvement choices, activities, and influences of mothers. Across a variety of disciplines, observers have noted that mothers are the parents most closely involved in children's education, a pattern that appears related to traditional beliefs about gender roles, sociocultural prescriptions, and gender-linked patterns of power distribution in society (e.g., Hochschild, 1989; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1995; Juster, 1985; Lareau, 1989; Leitch & Tangri, 1988; Lightfoot, 1978; Smith, 1985). Because we believe that the constructs examined in this review apply well to all family members who may become involved in children's schooling, because fathers' involvement is included in some of the research reviewed, and because shifting patterns of social and economic circumstances may support change in some traditionally gender-linked child-rearing tasks, we use the term *parents* in this review to refer to both mothers and fathers.

Finally, although we use the term *children* to refer to the beneficiaries of parental involvement as examined in this article, our observations—insofar as the literature examines both elementary and secondary school students—include children and adolescents.

On Dynamic (Process) Variables

The variables examined in this article are primarily *dynamic* in character; that is, they are realistically amenable to growth and change over the period of a parent's own adult development. While several are clearly grounded in events preceding the parent's assumption of responsibility for rearing children (i.e., outside of their immediate control), all are subject to influence and alteration by the primary characters in the involvement process: parents, their children, and school personnel.

The decision to focus on such dynamic variables grew from specific observations about the literature. It has been well established, for example, that family status variables (e.g., income, education, ethnicity, marital status) are often related to parental involvement and, in turn, to children's school success. In fact, Hess and Holloway's (1984) review described as "overwhelming" (p. 187) the evidence for linkages between family socioeconomic status and children's school achievement. Other investigators, often building on Kohn's (1963) assertion that social class is the most powerful variable underlying parents' influence on their children, concluded that family status variables are positively related to parents' ideas about child-rearing, their child-rearing practices, and children's school performance (e.g., Entwisle, 1990; Goodnow, 1984; Hoffman, 1984; Keating, 1990; Lareau, 1987, 1989; Thompson, Alexander, & Entwisle, 1988). Still others have suggested that the realities inherent in varied statuses influence the resources—such as income, time, energy, and community contacts—that parents bring to their involvement decisions and influence (e.g., Baker & Stevenson, 1986; Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Hobbs et al., 1984; Lareau, 1987, 1989; McDermott, Goldman, & Varenne, 1984).

It has been equally well established, however, that family status variables do not explain fully parents' decisions to become involved in their children's education, nor do such variables explain the linkages between parents' involvement and child and adolescent school outcomes. Status does not determine parents' think-

ing, actions, or influence related to their involvement in children's schooling (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Slaughter-Defoe, 1995). Even as it may define limits around family resources and may predispose certain attitudes and approaches, status requires activation (e.g., Lareau, 1987, 1989)—parental choices and activities that put into action intentions for their children and children's schooling. Predispositions grounded in status do not always result in easily predictable outcomes. They do not, for example, appear to determine the value parents put on education, their wishes to be involved or their involvement in children's school progress, their interest in having their children succeed in school, or their aspirations for their children's achievement (e.g., Chavkin & Williams, 1993; Clark, 1983, 1993; Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Eccles & Harold, 1993, 1994; Lareau, 1989; Lee, 1985; Lightfoot, 1978, 1981; Moles, 1993; Saxe, Guberman, & Gearhart, 1987; Scanzoni, 1985; Spencer, 1985; Spencer & Dornbusch, 1990; Stevenson, Chen & Uttal, 1990). They do not explain many parents' abilities to nurture positive educational outcomes in spite of difficult and presumably discouraging circumstances (e.g., Brody & Stoneman, 1992; Clark, 1983; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992). Further, several studies enabling examination of the relative power of status and process variables in predicting school-related outcomes have often found process variables to be the more powerful (e.g., Clark, 1983; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Dornbusch & Ritter, 1988; Epstein, 1983, 1985, 1986, 1994; Hess, Holloway, Dickson, & Price, 1984; Scott-Jones, 1987; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992).

This article assumes a primary focus on process variables (i.e., what parents think and do, across status groupings) that have been associated with parental decisions about involvement in their children's education. It does so because of the evidence suggesting that process variables are significant to outcomes in this area, and in part because they—unlike their status counterparts—are theoretically within the purview of school-initiated influence (e.g., Epstein, 1989; Gotts, 1990). While elementary and secondary schools cannot realistically hope to alter a student's family status, schools *may* hope to influence selected parental process variables in the direction of increased parental involvement; indeed, some have a growing tradition of doing so, especially during the elementary years (e.g., Anson et al., 1991; Cochran & Dean, 1991; Comer, 1985). The dynamic variables implicit in parents' thinking and behavior choices related to involvement may help us understand more precisely why parents make their involvement choices. Ultimately, this information may help us understand how a parent's involvement choice may be linked to educational outcomes, and how those who wish to improve the parents' involvement and success may reasonably act to do so.

Parents' Decisions to Become Involved in Children's Education

The model of the parental involvement process under consideration here suggests that parents' involvement decisions and choices are based on several constructs drawn from their own ideas and experiences as well as on other constructs growing out of environmental demands and opportunities (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). At the first level, the model suggests that most parents' fundamental decision to become involved in children's education is a function primarily of three constructs: (a) the parent's construction of his or her role in the child's life, (b) the parent's sense of efficacy for helping her or his child succeed in school, and

(c) the general invitations, demands, and opportunities for parental involvement presented by both the child and the child's school.

Consideration of the recent research in each of these three areas suggests that these constructs are each composed of specific sets of beliefs, experiences, and behaviors that serve to position parents in terms of their own answer to the question, Should I, and will I, become involved in my child's education?

Parents' Construction of the Parental Role

The model suggests that one major contributor to parents' positive decisions about involvement in children's education is to be found in their construction of the parental role. In short, what do parents believe that parents are supposed to do in relation to their children's education and educational progress? Examination of psychological and educational research suggested that parents' construction of the parental role is likely to be influenced by general principles guiding their definition of the parental role, their beliefs about child development and child-rearing, and their beliefs about appropriate parental home-support roles in children's education.

In general, parental role construction appears important to the involvement process primarily because it appears to establish a basic range of activities that parents will construe as important, necessary, and permissible for their own actions with and on behalf of their children. Parental role construction and functioning clearly begin before and extend beyond the child's years in school and, during those years, influence and are influenced by other domains of the child's life as well. Interest here, however, is focused specifically on parental role as it influences parental decisions about involvement in children's schooling.

General Role Construction

Roles generally are considered to be sets of expectations held by groups for the behavior of individual members—for example, a family's expectations for a mother's behavior, a community's expectations for the behavior of schoolchildren's parents—or sets of behaviors characteristic of individuals within a group—for example, fathers of school-age children, mothers of high school students (e.g., Babad, Birnbaum, & Benne, 1983; Biddle, 1979; Forsyth, 1990; Gross, McEachern, & Mason, 1958; Wheelan, 1994). Both aspects of roles are incorporated into the construct as we use it in this review; thus, it includes both (a) the expectations (explicit and implicit) that parents and those in their significant groups hold for their behaviors in relation to children's schooling and (b) the behaviors they enact in relation to their children's schooling.

The role definition process is characterized by interaction between individuals and their groups over time; it is also characterized by varying degrees of stability and change over time. Three aspects of the role process have been implicated in role stability and change: (a) structurally given demands, or the group's expectations and norms for an individual member's behavior; (b) personal role conceptions, or an individual member's ideas about what he or she is supposed to do as a group member; and (c) role behavior, or the actual behaviors of individual group members, which usually conform to, but may at times violate, the expectations of the group (Harrison & Minor, 1978, drawing on Levinson, 1959). When consonant, these variables tend to yield role stability; that is, when the group's expect-

tations match individual members' expectations for personal behavior and individual members' behavior, roles tend to be stable. When these variables are dissonant—that is, when the group's expectations do not match individual members' expectations or the behaviors of individual members—they tend to create changes in roles and role expectations.

In general, the more a group and its members agree on an individual member's roles and role behaviors, the more productive is the group (e.g., Wheelan, 1994). Conversely, the more ambiguity associated with a member's roles (i.e., lack of clarity in expectations associated with roles) or the more conflict among the varied roles held by an individual, the more likely are negative outcomes for the group and its members—for example, dissatisfaction with the group or oneself, higher stress, poor participation, lower commitment, and lower productivity (e.g., Fisher & Gitelson, 1983; Forsyth, 1990; Gilbert, Holahan, & Manning, 1981; Kemery, Bedeian, Mossholder, & Touliatos, 1985; Wheelan, 1994).

When applied to parents' choices about involvement in their children's education, these basic tenets of role theory suggest that the groups to which parents belong (e.g., the family, the child's school, the workplace) will hold expectations about appropriate parental role behaviors, including behaviors related to involvement in children's educational processes, and will communicate their role expectations to parents. The groups' expectations may be quite similar, in which case parents will likely experience not only clarity about the behaviors they are supposed to perform but also consistent environmental pressure and support for performing those behaviors. Where these expectations call for positive involvement in children's education, parents are likely to become involved to some degree; for example, Epstein and Dauber (1991) reported that where all constituents agreed on parental involvement, school involvement programs were stronger than was true when such agreement was missing. Conversely, of course, if the groups to which a parent belongs expect little or no parental involvement in children's education, parents will be much less likely to choose to become actively involved.

The expectations for appropriate parental involvement behaviors may also be quite varied across the groups to which a parent belongs, in which case parents are likely to experience conflict about appropriate role behaviors or, at the least, lack of consensus about what the most appropriate parental behaviors are. Such conflict may occur, for example, when a family or school expects parental involvement activities, but the parent's workplace expectations preclude active involvement in conferences (e.g., no time-off policies) or homework supervision (e.g., evening shift work). Parental role expectations may transcend gender (e.g., parents of both genders are generally expected to protect children from harm, for example, on the way to or from school) or may be particular to one gender or the other; for example, mothers often experience stronger role expectations than fathers for day-to-day involvement in children's schooling, such as homework help or signing off on project completion checklists, while fathers may experience stronger expectations for involvement in children's athletic activities or "big" decisions involving such issues as major disciplinary action (e.g., Eccles & Harold, 1994; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1995; Lareau, 1989; Leitch & Tangri, 1988; Lightfoot, 1978; see also Greenberger & Goldberg, 1989; Greenberger & O'Neil, 1993).

Although parents' role construction (i.e., parents' beliefs about the actions they should undertake for and with their children, developed as a function of their membership in varied family, community, and school groups) has been examined in the literature only tangentially with reference to parental involvement in children's schooling, role construction appears logically related to parental beliefs and actions regarding involvement in children's schooling. Several investigators' work has suggested that role construction is influential in parents' involvement decisions. Ritter, Mont-Reynaud, and Dornbusch (1993), for example, included parental attitudes of "deference toward the school" and parental beliefs that teaching "is best left up to teachers" (p. 115)—both variables that may be seen as components of parents' role construction—in their examination of differences among ethnic groups in parental involvement. Similarly, Chavkin and Williams (1993) reported differences among ethnic groups in endorsement of the belief that teachers, rather than parents, should be in charge of involving parents in the school; they also reported that parents, across the ethnic groups examined, expressed interest in a variety of potential involvement roles (e.g., "audience," "home tutor," "school-program supporter" [p. 77]). Neither set of researchers, however, explicitly addressed the specific influence of parents' role ideas on their involvement decisions. Other investigators have simply alluded to the potential influence of parental role construction on parents' involvement decisions. Eccles and Harold (1993), for example, included parents' assumptions about their roles in children's education in their model of parental involvement during children's early adolescent years. Scott-Jones (1991) noted the importance of parental beliefs about linkages between parent responsibilities and teacher responsibilities in young children's literacy learning. Clark's (1983) work certainly suggested strong assumptions among parents of high-achieving students of a *personal* role to play in the education of their adolescent children. These observations suggest that role construction and its constituent variables be given explicit attention in continued work focused on parents' reasons for becoming involved in their children's education.

Parents' Beliefs About Child Development and Child-Rearing

Work pertinent to understanding parents' role construction is thus drawn largely from theory in social psychology that explains the emergence and influence of role concepts on human behavior. While several researchers in the area of parent involvement have alluded to the potential importance of parental role construction in understanding parents' involvement decisions and choices, the work has not yet suggested explicitly how parents' constructs of the parental role in relation to children's schooling are created nor how these constructs might work to influence parents' involvement decisions and behavior. The literature in developmental psychology, however, points in some potentially fruitful directions as we seek to tease out why and how parents' role construction may influence their involvement in their children's education. Work in one area in particular—parental beliefs about child development and parents' related beliefs, goals, and outcome priorities for child-rearing—seems helpful to understanding parents' decisions about that portion of child-rearing related to children's school performance and behavior. Writing on role theory has linked role definition, group membership, and personal beliefs (e.g., Forsyth, 1990), while varied investigations in developmental

psychology and parent-school relationships have identified relationships between parental beliefs, values, goals, or knowledge on the one hand, and a variety of parental behaviors pertinent to children's development on the other (e.g., Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Goodnow, 1984, 1988; Lightfoot, 1978; Miller, 1988). In keeping with both literatures, we assume that parents' beliefs about children's development will exert influence on the parenting role they and those significant to them envision for themselves.

Parents' child-rearing beliefs and general ideas about child development have been studied often in relation to children's school outcomes. The sample of studies considered here illustrates some of the connections between this set of parental ideas and the parents' assumptions about their roles in relation to children's schooling.

Assumed in many earlier investigations to develop primarily as a function of parents' socioeconomic status (e.g., Kohn, 1963), parental beliefs about child development and child-rearing have been examined recently to some extent independently of socioeconomic status. These beliefs have been operationalized in various ways—for example, as parental beliefs about the importance of developing conforming behavior in children (Okagaki & Sternberg, 1993); as parental beliefs about the qualities parents should nurture in their children, such as respect, independence, good manners, and happiness (Brody & Stoneman, 1992); as beliefs about the ways children learn (Schaefer & Edgerton, 1985); and as beliefs about the mechanisms responsible for children's competence (McGillicuddy-DeLisi, 1992). Findings in these representative areas have suggested a general pattern in which child-rearing beliefs appear likely to influence parents' choice of behaviors with their children—some of which are pertinent to parental involvement in children's education.

Parents' beliefs in the importance of developing conformity, obedience, and good behavior in children, for example, have been related to poorer school outcomes, while beliefs in the importance of developing personal responsibility and self-respect have been associated with better school performance. Specifically, among younger elementary students, parents' valuing of conformity, neatness, good manners, and good behavior has been linked to lower levels of achievement (in language, reading, and math), lower overall intellectual performance (Okagaki & Sternberg, 1993; Schaefer & Edgerton, 1985), poorer classroom behavior, and lower self-confidence (Okagaki & Sternberg, 1993). Among older elementary school children, strong parental endorsement of children's being respectful and well-behaved has been linked to poorer cognitive competence, lower self-esteem, higher rates of conduct disorders, and increased withdrawal at school (Brody & Stoneman, 1992). Parental beliefs in "traditional" educational aims and goals—for example, beliefs that children learn passively—have been associated with poorer achievement, poorer classroom behavior, and lower task orientation. The same student outcomes have also been linked to high parental valuing of family privacy with reference to the school (e.g., "Teachers should not need information from the home") (e.g., Schaefer & Edgerton, 1985). Stronger academic performance, on the other hand, has been linked to parents' beliefs in independent thinking, personal responsibility, and valuing children's development of self-respect (Schaefer & Edgerton, 1985; Brody & Stoneman, 1992); higher levels of maternal involvement in children's schooling have also been

related to mothers' valuing of children's self-respect (Brody & Stoneman, 1992).

McGillicuddy-DeLisi (1992), taking an alternative approach to parents' child-rearing beliefs, examined parents' ideas about the mechanisms responsible for children's personal and social competence in the elementary grades. Among six alternative orientations or beliefs about the ways children develop competence, she reported that parents generally endorsed attribution explanations of competence development (e.g., children develop competence through their active consideration of ideas about the causes of their performance) or constructivist explanations (e.g., children develop competence through their active construction of ideas and explanations for events). She found, too, that parents' endorsement of the belief that "gender differences are responsible for much of children's competence development" was linked to lower child achievement levels (math and composite test scores) and lower teacher ratings of child academic performance, intelligence, and creativity (teacher ratings of children did not differ by gender, leading her to suggest that mothers' beliefs were not based on accurate observations of gender differences). The assumption in the pattern of findings that parental beliefs precede child outcomes and the correlational nature of her findings led McGillicuddy-DeLisi to test the possibility that the reverse might pertain, that is, that child behaviors might influence parents' beliefs. Reasoning that parental beliefs should change across grade levels as parents gain more information about children's achievement and classroom behavior *if* they respond to child behavior more than their own belief systems, she found no relationship between mothers' beliefs and child grade level. While the analyses produced some negative linkages for fathers, McGillicuddy-DeLisi concluded overall that parents' beliefs "continue to persevere" (p. 136) even when available information offers little validating, and sometimes even contradictory, evidence. Goodnow's (1988) review offered similar and substantial support for both the consistency of many parental beliefs and the observation that beliefs are often "received knowledge" (p. 296) from the culture, persisting across time relatively independent of variations in experience (see also Parsons, Adler, & Kaczala, 1982).

The pattern across these varied studies suggested that parents' endorsement of more conforming or traditional behaviors in children—as well as beliefs in the power of such "givens" as gender—are consistently associated with lower levels of achievement and poorer classroom behavior among younger and older elementary students. Further, they yielded evidence supporting the proposition that parental child-rearing beliefs precede and influence parental, and thus child, behavior, rather than the reverse (i.e., child behavior influences parental beliefs and related behaviors). Perhaps because the nature of parent-child relationships changes in adolescence as peers come to add their important influence to adolescent children's development and behavior, parents' child-rearing values in relation to secondary school outcomes have not been well examined. Parents' beliefs about child-rearing and desirable child outcomes, however, would appear logically to influence parental behaviors relevant to selected school outcomes well into adolescence, thus underscoring the importance of extending parent values-child outcomes research into the secondary years (see, e.g., Steinberg, Elmen, & Mounst, 1989; Youniss, 1989).

Despite some of the clear patterns in findings for parents of young and elementary-age children, there continue to be apparent uncertainties in this body of work

about the nature of parents' child-rearing and child development beliefs on the one hand, and the relationships that may pertain among parental beliefs, parental actions, and child outcomes on the other (e.g., Goodnow, 1985; McGillicuddy-DeLisi, 1992; Sigel, 1985, 1992; Sigel, McGillicuddy-DeLisi, & Goodnow, 1992). McGillicuddy-DeLisi, in addressing the uncertainties about paths of influence and causation, contrasted her own constructivist view of parents' child-rearing beliefs—which suggests that parents construct their beliefs and tend to hold them across time, regardless of evidence about their continued accuracy—with an attributional view, which would assert that child-rearing beliefs are not consistently held truths but rather ideas about the causes of specific behaviors at particular points in time and are therefore susceptible to change. McGillicuddy-DeLisi suggested that both perspectives may ultimately be helpful in identifying how parental beliefs are related to varied parental practices and child outcomes (see also Sigel, 1992; Youniss, DeSantis, & Henderson, 1992).

How does this body of work, then, inform understanding of parents' role construction and its contribution to parents' involvement decisions? Fundamentally, it suggests that among the ingredients of parents' role construction as it relates to their decisions about involvement in children's schooling, specific sets of beliefs are quite important: (a) parents' ideas about child development (that is, parents' beliefs about how children grow and develop, their beliefs about what children need from parents); (b) their beliefs about specific, desirable child-rearing outcomes; and (c) their beliefs about the effectiveness of specific child-rearing practices in promoting desired outcomes.

A parent who believes, for example, that children need external structure and discipline in order to learn, who believes in the primacy of children's respectful and conforming behavior, and who construes children's learning as a primarily passive and receptive process would seem most likely to incorporate into his or her parental role construct the importance of personal behavior intended to create and reinforce children's overt respect, conformity, and focus on getting right answers. A parent whose role construct incorporates these social beliefs would seem most likely, for example, to construe parental involvement not as an active decision to engage in the educational process with the child but as a background process manifested in such behaviors as reminding children to "Sit down and mind," or "Say 'Yes, ma'am' when your teacher talks to you." Similarly, a parent who believes that children need nurturing and encouragement in order to develop well and who believes that the purpose of education is to support individual children's curiosity, skill development, and creativity would seem most likely to incorporate into his or her role construct the importance of behaviors intended to assess and develop the child's unique skills and talents, to ask for the child's opinions and evaluations, and to seek information from teachers about the school-based development of children's thinking processes.

While parents' role constructs would appear to be created from the host of social values held by the significant groups to which they belong, parents' ideas about child development, child-rearing, and child outcomes would appear to be among the most important components from the perspective of the parent involvement process. Further, if Goodnow's (1988) and others' observations (e.g., McGillicuddy-DeLisi, 1992; Parsons et al., 1982) are correct in identifying these beliefs as remaining relatively constant across the child's development, one may

reasonably conclude that parents' role construction may continue, across childhood and adolescence, to be shaped in part by their fundamental ideas about how children develop.

Beliefs About Parents' Home-Support Roles in Child and Adolescent Education

One further area of inquiry in the educational literature—examinations of parents' beliefs about their roles at home in supporting children's education—offers additional perspective on parents' role construction and its potential influence on parents' involvement decisions. Lareau (1987, 1989), for example, contrasted the beliefs of parents in a predominantly working-class school with those of parents in a predominantly upper-middle-class school and found what she characterized as distinctly different understandings of family support roles in young elementary children's education. Working-class parents had what she termed a "separated" view of home and school. They tended to believe that their roles involved getting children ready for school—for example, ensuring that children have good manners and getting them to school on time—but did not believe that their roles in children's education extended far beyond these basic preparations. These parents had a strong tendency to accept the school's decisions about their children (e.g., regarding classroom placement or retention) because, she argued, they believed that the schools—not parents—were primarily responsible for decisions about educational progress. Upper-middle-class parents, on the other hand, were characterized as having an "interconnected" view of home and school. These parents tended to see themselves as having an integral role, together with the school, in educating children. As they construed it, their parental roles involved active monitoring or "keeping on top of" children's progress; they also saw themselves as responsible for intervening in school decisions as necessary. In part because of their consistent monitoring, these parents appeared to exert more control over their children's educational progress than most working-class parents assumed or retained over theirs.

Rather than contrasting groups within a culture as did Lareau (1987, 1989), Stevenson and his colleagues examined national cultures as implicitly homogeneous entities and drew comparisons among them (e.g., Stevenson, Chen, & Uttal, 1990; Stevenson, Lee, Chen, Lummis, et al., 1990; Stevenson, Lee, Chen, Stigler, et al., 1990; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992). Stevenson's observations about parents' views of appropriate roles in elementary children's education suggested strongly that his sample of parents in the United States viewed the home as offering emotional support, encouragement, and supplementary or social and nonacademic experiences for their children. The parents did not, however, envision home support as including articulation of the importance of achievement, monitoring of children's work, or active help with homework. Stevenson and his colleagues concluded, in general, that parents in their U.S. group seemed to abdicate some parental responsibilities to teachers once their children entered elementary school (Stevenson, Lee, Chen, Stigler, et al., 1990).

Although the U.S. parents in the Stevenson group's studies constituted a large and socioeconomically diverse sample from a major urban area, they did not appear to manifest much variability in beliefs about appropriate parental home-support roles. As a group, they seemed to fit Lareau's (1987, 1989) description of working-class parents; despite higher-income parents' appearance in the Stevenson

sample, the group as a whole did not appear to manifest the characteristics seen by Lareau in her sample of upper-middle-class parents. Some of the apparent differences between the two sets of work may be related to variations in method and approach (Lareau conducted an ethnographic analysis of two elementary schools, while Stevenson and colleagues conducted broadly based surveys of large multinational samples), but it seems likely that parents' beliefs about their roles in children's schooling have simply not been sufficiently well articulated or examined as yet to permit definitive conclusions about the function of parents' home-support beliefs or their parental role construction in general in their involvement decisions. In contrast to both Lareau's and Stevenson's conclusions, for example, Clark's (1983) and Segal's (1985) work with low-income families implied that low-income parents of similar status varied considerably in beliefs about parents' home-support roles and in their involvement decisions. Clark found high achievers' parents comfortable with their reasonably well articulated parental roles as active educators and preparers of their children; they believed that they had strong home-based educational responsibilities with their children, and they worked consistently and hard to meet these responsibilities. Segal's examination of low-income families also suggested several variations in parental role beliefs within the group, and found these variations correlated with important differences in parents' involvement behaviors (see also Scott-Jones, 1987).

This sample of studies thus offered rather contradictory information, suggesting that variables associated with social class influence parents' beliefs about their home-support roles in children's education (Lareau, 1987, 1989), or that such variables do not exert significant influence over such beliefs (Clark, 1983; Segal, 1985), or that variations among U.S. parents are not as important as the general cultural orientation in the United States toward relatively passive parental roles in children's education (Stevenson, Chen, & Uttal, 1990; Stevenson, Lee, Chen, Lummis, et al., 1990; Stevenson, Lee, Chen, Stigler, et al., 1990; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992). It appears likely that important information about parents' role construction may be gleaned from each set of findings. Thus, many parents in the United States may indeed construe their roles as incorporating relatively low levels of active involvement in children's education, especially as compared to some parents in other cultures. Such a finding may reflect a broadly held social belief in the United States that parental roles and responsibilities with children do not extend into the activities and mission of formal education. If this belief is held, it would, according to role theory, influence individual parents' ideas about what they and other parents are supposed to do in relation to their children's education. The set of findings may suggest, also accurately, that many parents of lower socioeconomic status in the United States experience the cumulative effects of low education, low income, and the frequently accompanying higher levels of general environmental stress as depressing the probability of constructing an active view of parents' roles in children's schooling (e.g., Eccles & Harold, 1994). Some parents' general life experiences may have taught them that "parents like me don't get active—they send their children to school and hope for the best." However, the findings that *some* parents of lower socioeconomic status in the United States do construct positive, active views of their roles in children's education and act on those beliefs suggest that varied role constructions may be created in the context of specific personal and family groups even within the

limitations imposed by broader social groupings.

Conclusion: Parents' Role Construction

Overall, theoretical and empirical work in these three areas suggests that parents develop beliefs and understandings about the requirements and expectations of the parental role as a function of their membership and participation in varied groups pertinent to child-rearing (e.g., families, schools, churches, the broader culture). Further, parents' actions related to their children, including their decisions about educationally related involvement in their children's lives, will be influenced by parents' role constructs and by the dynamic processes that involve them in confronting complementary (or competing) parental role expectations held by the varied groups in which they hold membership. Parents' ideas about child development, child-rearing, and appropriate roles in supporting children's education at home appear to constitute important specific components of the parental role construct as influential particularly in parents' decisions about involvement in their children's education. Parents' role construction appears overall to offer some portion of the answer to the question, Why do parents become involved in their children's education?

Parents' Sense of Efficacy for Helping Children Succeed in School

A second major construct influencing parents' decisions about involvement is their sense of efficacy for helping their children succeed in school (see model in Figure 1). As applied specifically to the issue of parent involvement, this construct raises the question, Do parents believe that, through their involvement, they can exert a positive influence on children's educational outcomes? Examined only recently in regard to parental involvement, parents' sense of efficacy for helping children succeed in school is drawn from the general foundation of personal efficacy theory, but also appears related to work on attributions for school success as well as personal theories of intelligence. Finally, a small group of studies in the educational literature that have focused on parental strategies for solving school-related problems appears to offer information instructive in thinking about specific manifestations of parental efficacy that may be related to parents' involvement decisions.

Personal Efficacy in General

Parents' sense of efficacy for helping children succeed in school has been set within the general body of literature examining the power of self-regulation or thoughts about one's own role and influence in a situation in determining one's behavior choices within that situation (e.g., Bandura, 1977, 1986b; Grusec, 1992). Work in this area has assumed a strong role for cognitive processes through which individuals interpret the meanings of varied experiences, and through which the relationship between their interpretations and their behavioral choices is mediated. These processes have to do most centrally with individuals' beliefs about their abilities to exercise and maintain some level of control over events that affect their lives (Bandura, 1989a).

Applied to parental involvement in children's education, self-efficacy theory suggests that parents will guide their actions (i.e., make their involvement choices) by thinking through, in advance of their behavior, what outcomes are likely to

follow the actions they might take. They will develop goals for their behaviors, based on these anticipations, and will plan actions designed to achieve these goals (Bandura, 1989b). Their goal-setting process will be influenced by their own appraisals and estimates of their capabilities in a situation; for example, the stronger their perceived self-efficacy in the situation, the higher the goals they will set and the firmer will be their commitments to realizing their goals (Bandura, 1989b). Individuals' self-efficacy beliefs undergird in part the challenges they decide to undertake, how much effort they are willing to put into the situation, and the extent of their persistence and perseverance in working to overcome difficulties in the situation (Bandura, 1989b). Of critical importance to understanding the varied involvement choices that individuals make is the fact that self-efficacy beliefs are concerned not with skills "but with beliefs about what one can do with the subskills one possesses" (Bandura, 1986a, p. 368). Findings that persons with apparently lower resources and skills (e.g., lower-income parents, parents with relatively low levels of education) can and do act efficaciously and effectively in involvement activities intended to help their children gain school-related skills make sense in this context (e.g., Clark, 1983; Scott-Jones, 1987; Segal, 1985).

In general, the stronger individuals' self-efficacy beliefs, the higher the goals they are willing to set for themselves, and the higher is their commitment to meeting those goals (Bandura, 1989a). If individuals have strong self-efficacy beliefs, they will tend to put forth even greater effort in response to difficulty or less than satisfactory performance on their part; they approach difficulties as challenges to be mastered rather than threats to be avoided (Bandura, 1989a, 1989b; Schunk, 1989). This affirmative orientation fosters their involvement; they set challenges, tend to visualize paths to achieving success in the challenges they take on, commit to achieving their goals, and are usually efficient in the analytic thinking they bring to dealing with complex situations related to their goals (Bandura, 1989a, 1989b). Because they believe that they *can* exercise control over adverse events, they do not "conjure up apprehensive cognitions, and are therefore not perturbed by them" (Bandura, 1989a, p. 1177). They tend to respond to difficulties or failures in the particular domain with increased effort, partly because they believe failure is due to insufficient effort rather than lack of ability (Bandura, 1989b).

Individuals low in self-efficacy for a given domain of activity, on the other hand, tend to believe that they cannot cope with difficulties in that domain. They tend to avoid situations in the area, slacken their efforts, or stop trying altogether when they are involved in activities related to that area (Bandura, 1989a; Bandura, 1989b, p. 730; Schunk, 1989). Low-efficacy individuals will tend to avoid difficult tasks, which they believe will exceed their abilities (Bandura, 1989a, 1989b), and when difficulties emerge, they tend to focus on their deficiencies, the difficulty of the task, or "the adverse consequences of failure" (Bandura, 1989b, p. 731; Grusec, 1992)—responses which further detract from their ability to act on the task at hand (Bandura, 1989b). Persons with low efficacy in a given domain who experience failure will experience drastically reduced motivation to become involved. They tend to give up and are slow to recover; because they perceive failure as caused by personal deficiencies, failure may readily cause them to "lose faith in their capabilities" (Bandura, 1989b, p. 731). At its most extreme, perceived self-inefficacy brings about a sense of "vulnerability to total loss of personal control"

(Bandura, 1986a, p. 369)—a consequence consistent, for example, with Alexander and Entwisle's (1988) assertion that "underlying structural conditions" may diminish many minority parents' "efficacy as agents of academic socialization" (p. 110). Bandura (1989a) also suggested that perceived self-inefficacy may cancel out even the attraction of positive anticipated outcomes from specific behaviors; thus, parents with low efficacy for helping their children in school would likely find this low efficacy itself interfering with involvement intentions aimed at achieving even highly desired goals, such as improved performance for their children.

Parents' Sense of Efficacy for Helping the Child Succeed in School

Efficacy theory in general thus offers specific suggestions related to parents' sense of personal efficacy in the domain of helping their children succeed in school. It suggests, for example, that parents with a higher sense of efficacy for helping the child succeed will tend to see themselves as capable in this domain; thus, they are likely to believe that their involvement will make a positive difference for their children. They are likely to believe in their own ability to overcome challenges that may emerge during the process, and to believe that they can deal successfully with any problems that may arise. They are also likely to persevere when faced with difficulties related to their own achievement of successful involvement or their children's difficulties in meeting current school demands. Parents low in efficacy in this domain, on the other hand, are likely to avoid involvement for fear of confronting their own perceived inadequacies or because of their assumptions that the involvement will not produce positive outcomes for themselves or their children.

Work to date in the specific area of parents' efficacy beliefs related to helping children succeed in school is limited but suggestive of the construct's potential usefulness in understanding more about parents' involvement decisions and behaviors. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (1987), drawing on Bandura's efficacy theory and on work linking teacher efficacy to varied indicators of teaching effectiveness (e.g., Ashton, Webb, & Doda, 1983; Dembo & Gibson, 1985), reported that teacher efficacy and school socioeconomic status predicted parents' conference participation and classroom volunteer work, as well as teacher perceptions of support from parents. Two elements of parent involvement carried out at home (help with homework and involvement in home instructional programs designed by teachers) were not related to socioeconomic status but fluctuated with variations in teacher efficacy and principals' perceptions of teacher efficacy.

Building on these findings, Hoover-Dempsey et al. (1992) examined parents' sense of efficacy for helping children succeed in school in relation to parent involvement. They defined parent efficacy as parents' beliefs about their general ability to influence their child's developmental and educational outcomes, about their specific effectiveness in influencing the child's school learning, and about their own influence relative to that of peers and the child's teacher. Results revealed positive linkages between parents' sense of efficacy and involvement with children in educational activities at home and volunteering time at the school; efficacy was negatively related to reported parent-teacher phone calls. Parents' efficacy levels showed some linkages to general level of education (e.g., parents with a grade school education had significantly lower efficacy scores than parents

with any amount of college education), but the relationship was not completely linear (e.g., efficacy levels did not differ significantly between parents with a high school education and those with some college or a college degree); importantly, efficacy was not significantly related to income, employment status, or marital status.

Eccles and Harold (1993) defined parents' efficacy beliefs as composed of three variables: "parents' confidence that they can help their children with school work" (p. 572), parents' views of their competence as their children progress to higher grades, and parents' beliefs that they can influence the school through school governance. Noting that parents of secondary students are usually less involved than are parents of elementary students, Eccles and Harold suggested that lower involvement (or noninvolvement) may be due to a decrease in parents' feelings of efficacy as children's work becomes more advanced. Eccles and Harold (1994) subsequently reported a portion of their findings from a longitudinal sample of over 1,000 predominantly White, lower-middle- to middle-class children and their parents. They observed, among other things, that parents' efficacy was positively related to mothers' involvement in children's mathematics and reading education. Eccles and Harold's (1994) report also included variables potentially related to efficacy, most notably "intellectual confidence" (apparently, mother's confidence in her own intellectual abilities), achievement motivation ("liking intellectual challenges and sticking with hard problems rather than giving up" [p. 15]), and "family's valuing of mastery (importance of learning, sticking with problems and using time productively)" (p. 15). They reported that mastery and achievement beliefs—among the set of efficacy and efficacy-related beliefs they examined—were the most strongly linked to parents' involvement.

The lower potential explanatory power here for efficacy may have been related in part to issues of definition and measurement. As measured by Hoover-Dempsey et al. (1992), for example, efficacy for helping children succeed in school was assessed by several questions related to parents' beliefs about their influence over children's learning and school success as well as their beliefs about their own influence in this process relative to that of teachers and peers. Eccles and Harold (1994) defined efficacy somewhat differently; they included parents' confidence in helping children with schoolwork, views of personal competence as their children moved through the grades, and beliefs about their ability to influence the school through governance involvement. These two operational definitions of efficacy were thus different, and some variables that appear to have been treated as separate from efficacy in the Eccles and Harold investigation (e.g., parents' intellectual confidence) appear quite close to concepts included in Hoover-Dempsey and colleagues' definition of efficacy.

Further, other investigators in the area have also examined constructs similar to parents' sense of efficacy for helping children succeed in school. Clark (1983), for example, reported ethnographic findings suggesting that higher-achieving high school students' parents, compared to lower-achieving students' parents, saw "themselves as wiser (if not 'smarter') than the children" (p. 122). Wisdom here seemed to involve parental beliefs that they could help their children, that their children would benefit from their involvement, and that their children would pick up what they had to offer and learn from them—all elements of a parental sense of efficacy for helping children succeed in school. Presumably in part as a

consequence of these beliefs, parents of higher-achieving students assumed active involvement, guidance, and teaching functions with their children, behaviors that were not evident among parents of lower-achieving children. Clark's (1993) later report of survey data from 460 ethnically diverse parents of third graders included information from a two-point scale of parents' sense of efficacy, which he defined as "felt knowledge of how to help" (p. 95); included among his findings was the fact that high achievers' parents showed significantly higher efficacy scores than did low achievers' parents.

In general, sense of efficacy for helping children succeed in school appears linked to parents' involvement decisions because it enables parents to assume that their involvement activities will positively influence children's learning and school performance. Parents who hold such positive efficacy beliefs seem more likely than their low-efficacy counterparts to assume that the time and effort they allocate to involvement are well spent because of the positive child outcomes they are likely to create. They also seem much more likely to assume that if they encounter new demands or difficulties in the course of involvement activities, they will be able—through effort, skills, and other resources they may access—to meet and master those difficulties.

Consideration of this perspective also suggests an alternative understanding of findings that parents with less education are less likely to become involved than are parents with more education (e.g., Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Lareau, 1987; Ritter et al., 1993). Specifically, these findings may be tapping lower-education parents' sense of inefficacy—a judgment that, given their skills and knowledge level in general, they are unlikely to be successful in involvement. Such low efficacy might operate effectively to keep some low-education parents from a positive decision to become involved. Indeed, as representative of such findings, Lareau's (1989) report that parents with less education expressed doubts about their own abilities to help their elementary children in school, as well as their hope that their children's teachers would assume full responsibility for teaching those skills, suggests low efficacy and relatively clear judgments that involvement would most likely not produce improved school learning for children. It must be noted, however, that other researchers have reported variability in involvement decisions within relatively homogeneously low-education parent groups (e.g., Clark, 1983; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992), which suggests that efficacy operates to at least some extent (or perhaps within certain boundaries) independently of education level.

Work in the area of parents' sense of efficacy for helping children succeed in school, although largely correlational and only suggestive at this point, appears well complemented by research in two other areas: (a) parents' beliefs or attributions about the roles of ability, effort, and luck as causes of children's school performance and (b) parents' implicit theories of intelligence.

Beliefs About Ability, Effort, and Luck as Causes of Child and Adolescent School Success

Just as the parental sense of self-efficacy in this domain is predicated on a fundamental belief in the power of one's own parental efforts to make a difference in children's educational outcomes, work in the area of attributions has examined the relative influence that parents perceive in varied potential sources of children's

school performance as perceived by parents. Work in this area has suggested in general that parental attributions to child effort are often associated with higher levels of school success among children, while parental attributions to child ability or luck are often associated with poorer school performance.

In one program, for example, Hess et al. (1984) included parents' thinking about specific causes of school outcomes in longitudinal studies of parental variables implicated in elementary children's school performance. Focusing on specific parental perceptions of sources of children's school success—parent's help and encouragement, teacher's help, child ability, and luck—Hess et al. asked mothers to weight the four general attributions by assigning some portion of 100 points to each. They examined attributions to luck in particular, because they assumed these attributions would indicate mothers' uncertainties about the effectiveness of their own efforts with children. Consistent with predictions, they found attributions to luck negatively related to both elementary school readiness and later elementary achievement.

Stevenson and his colleagues focused attention on parents' beliefs about the relative importance of ability and effort to children's school success. In a primarily descriptive study of Chinese and U.S. parents' attitudes toward elementary children's mathematics performance, U.S. parents were reported to be satisfied with what they believed to be good school performance by their children (Stevenson, Lee, Chen, Lummis, et al., 1990). The children's actual performance, however, was well below that of their Chinese counterparts. The discrepancy led the authors to speculate that U.S. parents' low standards for achievement were responsible for their satisfaction with less than optimal performance. They suggested that U.S. parents' low standards, combined with their positive attitudes toward whatever work the children produced, discouraged the children from investing more effort in improved achievement.

Another report by the Stevenson group focused on family variables associated with elementary children's achievement in the United States, China, and Japan (Stevenson, Lee, Chen, Stigler, et al., 1990). Reporting that the achievement of U.S. children was again well below that of their Japanese and Chinese counterparts, the authors suggested that the differences grew from several parental variables. Parents of the U.S. children tended to hold low standards for performance and overestimate children's abilities; further, they expressed general satisfaction with children's current performance levels. All of these parental attitudes, the authors suggested, conveyed to children the impression that further effort on schoolwork was not needed. The authors went on to suggest that U.S. parents also emphasize the role of innate abilities when they think about children's performance (see also Spencer & Dornbusch, 1990). Then, believing that ability sets a cap on attainment, these parents deemphasize the value of effort. Thus, rather than encouraging their children to work harder when they perform poorly (and rather than working harder themselves to help their children more effectively) they tend to assume that poor performance cannot be changed because it is rooted in the unchanging quality of ability. Further, wanting to support their children, they hold relatively low standards and expectations and praise modest accomplishments. This praise communicates anew that satisfactory rather than optimal performance is acceptable. When children observe their parents' beliefs and related behaviors, the authors suggest, they find little reason to believe that success is linked to effort.

Bracey (1996) raised important cautions about appropriate interpretations of some of these findings, noting that some of the data appear to suggest that U.S. parents' effort beliefs actually parallel (rather than far exceed) their ability beliefs. Even taking these cautions into account, however, the findings raise the important suggestion that parents in the U.S. sample considered ability—a characteristic that is usually not seen as amenable to change—to be a significant variable in accounting for children's achievement.

Taken together, this body of work suggests that parents' ideas about effort and ability in academic success may well play an influential role in parents' decisions about appropriate involvement and, ultimately, in children's school attainments. Related work by Alexander and Entwisle (1988) underscores the possibility. Their study of young elementary children found that parents' estimates of their children's ability to do schoolwork (assessed through comparisons of one's own child's ability relative to other children's abilities) were positively linked to their expectations for children and to some child grades.

The descriptive and correlational nature of many of the findings in this area underscores the still speculative nature of many assumptions regarding the influence of parental beliefs about the roles of effort, ability, and luck in children's school performance. Further, as true in other domains of parental involvement, the ideas have not been well explored in relation to adolescents' schooling. Nonetheless, the ideas seem potentially quite useful in understanding further the role and influence of parents' sense of efficacy for helping children succeed in school. In general, this work on attributions suggests that parents who have a strong sense of efficacy for helping their children succeed in school would also be most likely to attribute to effort much of a child's success as well as their own success in helping the child. In acting on their beliefs that they can exert positive influence over the child's learning, they act to exert effort through their involvement on behalf of increased child learning. They would seem most likely to view the child's ability as a quality to be increased, enhanced, or made the most of, rather than a given guarantee of success or a given limitation on performance. Similarly, believing that they can act effectively to help their children learn, they would seem most likely to view luck as largely irrelevant or, at worst (for example, in the case of a child being assigned to a teacher with a bad reputation), as a challenge to be worked with and overcome. Conversely, a parent with a poor sense of efficacy for helping the child succeed in school would seem likely to make few attributions to effort; not believing that personal efforts will be effective in influencing child outcomes, the low-efficacy parent would seem likely to assume that child ability or luck (for example, associated with tests or teachers) exerts the most important influence over child learning.

Work in attributions (e.g., Brookover, Beady, Flood, Schweitzer, & Wisenbaker, 1979; Dix & Grusec, 1985; Hartman & Maehr, 1984; Henderson & Dweck, 1990; Weiner, 1974) also suggests that parents will tend to persist, put forth significant effort, and expect success *if* they believe that they have some control over desired outcomes, in this case, children's school success. In fact, a specific sequence of events might be suggested as experienced by parents during their decision-making about involvement: Parents observe their children's performance, make attributions about its causes, develop expectations for future behavior and outcomes, experience affective reactions to their attributions and expectations, and respond

behaviorally (e.g., Dix & Grusec, 1985). Extrapolating from this set of suppositions, parents' involvement decisions might be influenced by their attributions in several ways. For example, parents would seem more likely to involve themselves and persist until they experience success if they believe that unstable and controllable factors (e.g., effort) are responsible for poor school performance (e.g., the child—or the parent—didn't put forth enough effort); if this were the parent's attribution, pressing himself or herself as well as the child to more effort would be a likely response of choice. Alternatively, parents might opt not to involve themselves if they attribute a child's poor performance (or their own) to stable or internal factors (e.g., the child has low ability, or the parent doesn't have enough knowledge).

Although seldom linked to this literature on parental attributions for school success, work in the related area of parents' implicit theories about intelligence also offers important perspectives on parents' sense of efficacy for helping children succeed in school. Just as the attributions literature suggests that parents will differ in their beliefs about the sources of children's school success, the literature on implicit theories of intelligence suggests that parents will differ in beliefs about the malleability of their children's intelligence—that is, the extent to which children's intelligence is fixed or susceptible to change through effort.

Implicit Theories of Intelligence

Theoretical work on implicit theories of intelligence has suggested that individuals tend to hold either an entity theory or an incremental theory of intelligence (e.g., Henderson & Dweck, 1990). An entity theory assumes that intelligence is fixed and not easily changed, while an incremental theory assumes that intelligence is malleable and subject to change, most notably through effort and persistence. Individuals holding an entity theory tend to develop performance goals, focused on doing the best one can and on gaining positive judgments of performance given the fixed abilities that one has (e.g., "she's doing the best she can," "it's great work, considering her ability," "you can't expect much more from him"). Individuals holding an incremental theory, on the other hand, tend to have learning goals that are oriented toward increasing abilities and improving competence. Because they believe that performance and intelligence can be improved through effort, incremental theorists' behaviors tend to reflect a strong focus on effort and persistence (e.g., "she can do it; she just has to keep working on it," "this is hard work and it takes a lot of effort, but you can do it").

In general, theory in this area suggests that parents who hold an incremental theory of intelligence, regardless of their confidence in their own intelligence, would most likely emphasize the role of effort (their own and the child's) in the child's learning. (Such a perspective may in fact offer insight into the occurrence of high efficacy among some parents with relatively low levels of education.) Incremental theorists' learning goals would motivate them to increase the child's competence as well as their own. These goals would enable parents to focus on gaining new ideas about helping children, maintain relative openness about their own perceived shortcomings, construe errors and difficulties (their own and their children's) as part of a learning process, and to encourage children not only to do the work assigned but to think about the issues and principles underlying specific assignments—that is, reaching toward higher levels of competence (see also

Elliott & Dweck, 1988). Far more than entity theorists, parents holding an incremental theory would likely assume that they, and their children, can play a significant role in controlling outcomes.

Alternatively, parents who are at risk for low or less productive involvement would seem to hold an entity theory of intelligence; that is, they believe strongly in the preeminence of ability over effort and often lack confidence in their own intelligence. Such parents would seem most likely to take actions designed to minimize external judgments that they are not capable—for example, keep a low profile, stay away from school, refrain from asking for help (fearing negative judgments of their own or their child's abilities), and avoid questioning school decisions about children. Children's difficulties with learning would most likely be perceived as reflecting low child ability and as being relatively impervious to significant change; they would also be seen, therefore, as requiring little active involvement or intervention by the parent.

The work also suggests that parents with a strong sense of efficacy for helping children succeed in school may well hold an incremental theory of intelligence—that is, they believe that their involvement will make a difference for the child, improving and enhancing the child's competence and performance. Parents with a low sense of efficacy, on the other hand, would seem likely to hold an entity theory of intelligence, believing both that the child's ability is not likely to change and that any involvement efforts the parent might put forth would have little impact on the child's learning.

Strategies for Solving School-Related Problems

One further area of educational research, focused on specific strategies that parents pursue in helping their children solve school-related problems, appears to offer information potentially pertinent to understanding parents' sense of efficacy for helping their children succeed in school. Baker and Stevenson (1986), for example, studied mothers' approaches to helping eighth graders manage the transition to high school. Defining "general academic strategies" as including use of a tutor, making a child change friends, denying privileges, preparing for high school entry, and contacting teachers, the authors reported that the full group of strategies was negatively related to student grades; that is, mothers of lower-performing students reported implementing more strategies overall than did mothers of higher-performing students. They suggested that lower performers' parents may have developed and used a broad mix of strategies in response to children's poor performance. The authors also asked mothers what they would do in hypothetical problem situations (e.g., the child is doing poorly in math); they found in this circumstance that the number of solutions suggested was positively linked to student grade point average. In speculating on reasons for this finding, the authors suggested that mothers who generated more solutions to the hypothetical problems may have been more successful in solving real problems earlier in the child's school careers, thus promoting current levels of child of success. Alternatively, they may have been more persistent than those who suggested fewer solutions to hypothetical problems, or may have found better matches between school demands and their own strategy choices.

One of Baker and Stevenson's (1986) conclusions was that parents reported varied management strategies related to their children's schooling, and that these

strategies influenced their young adolescents' school outcomes. Useem (1991) built on this suggestion and examined parents' efforts to influence seventh graders' mathematics course placement; she found important relationships between parent strategies and eventual child placement. Implicit in her findings was the suggestion, reminiscent of Lareau's (1989) conclusions, that more involved parents—those who persisted in efforts to influence placement even when they confronted school barriers to involvement—created more effective and more appropriately demanding school situations for their children than did parents who were not active managers of their children's schooling. Other investigators have offered intriguing looks at parents' hypothetical decision-making in other situations related to school outcomes (e.g., Youniss et al., 1992), but parents' thinking about strategies related to child and adolescent school success does not appear to have been examined substantially beyond the small sample of studies noted here.

The studies suggest overall that parents who are higher in efficacy for helping children succeed in school may manifest efficacy in behaviors specifically focused on helping children solve current and anticipated problems in school. Believing that their efforts will make a difference for the child, high-efficacy parents would seem likely to generate strategies to solve current problems, anticipate problem situations in which they might become productively involved, and persist when faced with difficulties in solving problems. Parents low in efficacy, on the other hand, would seem much less likely to step into the problem-solving arena in the first place. Doubting their own ability to have an impact, they seem much more likely to rely on the child or the school to deal with problems, and to trust in others' intervention or luck to ameliorate difficult situations for their children.

Conclusion: Parental Efficacy for Helping Children Succeed in School

Although primarily suggestive and correlational at this point, work applying efficacy theory and related constructs to parental involvement in children's education appears to offer potentially important access to understanding why, at the level of individual parental choice, parents decide to become involved in varied aspects of their children's schooling. The construct appears also to explain at least some of the consequent influence of parental involvement on children's educational outcomes. It does so in part because Bandura's theoretical work identifies specific paths of influence among variables important to the development of a sense of personal efficacy, and in part because it identifies likely paths between an individual's sense of efficacy and the actions that he or she is most likely to take in given situations. Thus, it suggests connections among causes of self-beliefs, self-beliefs, and patterns of action. While examined primarily to this point in relation to varied specific forms of involvement, parental self-efficacy for helping children succeed in school appears pertinent, because of its grounding in parents' beliefs about their personal capabilities and likely effectiveness within the area, to their fundamental decisions about the wisdom and likely pay-off of involvement.

This body of theory, when combined with relatively recent empirical work, suggests that parental efficacy, attributions, implicit theories of intelligence, and strategies for solving school-related problems may offer useful explanations of parental decisions about involvement in their children's education. Efficacy theory and related research suggests that parents with a stronger sense of efficacy for

helping their children succeed in school will be those most likely to decide that involvement will yield positive outcomes for their children. Pertinent research within an attributions framework suggests linkages between parental efficacy and parents' focus on the value of effort, rather than ability or luck, as critical to children's school success. Work on implicit theories of intelligence suggests further that parental endorsement of an incremental, rather than an entity, theory of intelligence may also be positively related to a strong sense of efficacy for helping one's children succeed in school; the underlying logic of the position suggests that parental involvement in children's schooling will be seen as valuable *if* the target of the parent's effort—the child's intelligence, ability, or school performance—is believed to be fundamentally alterable. Finally, research on parental strategies aimed at improving school-related outcomes for children suggests that higher-efficacy parents are more likely to develop and act on strategies intended to solve current or anticipated problems related to school success.

Weaving together theoretical and empirical observation in all three areas, it appears that parents with a strong positive sense of efficacy for helping children succeed in school are also likely to believe *both* that effort is preeminent in explaining success (attributions to effort) and that intelligence is malleable (an incremental theory of intelligence); we also suggest that parents holding this belief set will, further, tend to develop and implement proactive strategies designed to help children succeed in school. Conversely, parents with a weak sense of efficacy for helping children succeed in school are likely to believe *both* that intelligence or ability is fixed (an entity theory of intelligence) and that ability and luck are the preeminent sources of school success (attributions to ability and luck); parents holding this belief set will tend to be relatively passive, rather than planful or proactive, in responding to children's school problems.

In sum, a stronger sense of efficacy, as augmented by the related variables noted here, seems essential to a positive parental decision about involvement. This is because a sense of efficacy for helping children succeed in school fundamentally predisposes a parent to choose (or not choose, in the case of low efficacy) an active involvement role in the child's education. The predisposition is grounded in the parent's belief that personal actions related to the child's schooling will be effective in improving school outcomes. Rooted in this belief about the likely outcomes of personal involvement, parents who hold a positive sense of efficacy for helping children succeed in school are likely to choose involvement. This is particularly true, according to the model proposed, if parents also hold a role construction affirming the importance and appropriateness of involvement in children's schooling and if they perceive general opportunities and demands for involvement from both the child and the child's school.

General Invitations, Demands, and Opportunities for Parental Involvement

The model suggests that the third major construct influencing parents' involvement decisions consists of general opportunities, invitations, and demands for involvement. The fundamental question examined with reference to this construct is this: Do parents perceive that the child and the school want them to be involved?

Effective general invitations and demands may come both from children and their schools. Children may hold more emotional influence over parental deci-

sions because of the personal relationship involved, but inviting school environments appear to be similarly influential because of schools' authority and power in children's lives. At this general level, invitations, opportunities, and demands may consist of a child's overt affirmation of the importance of parental approval and participation, a school climate that is inviting, and teacher behaviors that are welcoming and facilitating. (Specific invitations to become involved in particular events and activities are included at the second stage of the model, which is focused, as noted below, on parents' choice of particular forms of involvement.)

General Opportunities, Invitations, and Demands Presented by the Child

Although work on the influence of invitations and demands from children for parental involvement is relatively sparse, some indications of the presence and influence of child-generated invitations are available. This evidence appears in several areas.

The potential influence of child age and developmental level on parents' involvement decisions, for example, has been suggested, in a pattern generally reflecting a greater tendency toward involvement among parents of younger as opposed to older children (e.g., Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Eccles & Harold, 1993, 1994). Efforts to explain declines in involvement often associated with child age usually point to changes in the level of academic work required across the span of school years (e.g., Chavkin & Williams, 1993; Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Scott-Jones, 1991), changes in parents' beliefs about their ability to help when their children are having problems (e.g., Dauber & Epstein, 1993), and specific developmental changes in children (for example, younger children generally express more interest than older children in parental involvement; adolescents' emergent focus on independence and autonomy usually depresses active interest in overt parental involvement; Eccles & Harold, 1993, 1994).

A child's overall level of performance may also influence parents' decisions about involvement, although the evidence here is mixed. Dauber and Epstein (1993), for example, reported that parents of elementary and middle school children who were doing better academically reported more school-related involvement than did parents of children who were doing less well. Similarly, Delgado-Gaitan (1992) reported that parents of better early elementary readers, when compared to parents of poorer readers, were more likely to undertake specific involvement actions with and on behalf of their children. Baker and Stevenson (1986), on the other hand, found that mothers of lower-performing young adolescents used more involvement strategies than mothers of higher-performing students (see also Eccles & Harold, 1993). The varied pattern of findings may be reflective of developmental influences (e.g., parents of younger children may be motivated toward involvement in part by the prospect of improving and affirming positive performance, while parents of older children may be more motivated toward involvement if adolescent performance is poor). It may also be related to simple variability in student and parent responses to performance levels. For example, some children may invite or demand help when they are struggling with work, while others may attempt to hide or ignore poor performance; similarly, some may see good performance as an incentive to invite parental involvement and enjoyment, while others may see it as an opportunity to allocate potential involvement time to other pursuits.

Children's personal qualities—aspects of personality, learning style, and preferences—may also influence parents' general predisposition toward involvement in their children's education. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (1995), for example, found that parents of elementary children conveyed strong awareness of their children's unique characteristics and related these qualities to decisions about their involvement, for example, describing a child as "slow" and needing a lot of parental help, another child as "demanding a lot of herself" and succeeding apparently independently of active parental involvement. Eccles and Harold's (1993) review related to their broad model of parental involvement also suggested that how well a parent likes a child may influence involvement decisions: Positive relationships are likely to encourage involvement, they suggested, while more conflicted relationships seem likely to discourage involvement. A test of this hypothesis with a sample of 1,400 seventh and eighth graders supported the prediction that parents with more positive views of the child would be more involved (Eccles & Harold, 1994).

Across the elementary and secondary age span, it appears that such variables as children's developmental levels, performance patterns, qualities of personality, and learning style may function as important influences on parental decisions about involvement. Their importance is suggested not only by the research and informed speculation noted above, but by the general observation, well supported in developmental literature, that child characteristics often influence varied dimensions of the child's environment, including parents' behavior (e.g., Maccoby, 1980; Stern, 1977; Thomas & Chess, 1977).

General Opportunities, Invitations, and Demands Presented by Schools and Teachers

Invitations and opportunities for involvement presented by the child appear well complemented by the evident influence of school and teacher invitations on parents' involvement decisions. The importance of school practices to parents' involvement decisions has been well noted in the literature (e.g., Bauch, 1993), and at least one major program of research on parent involvement has long focused on the potential power of school and teacher invitations for involvement (e.g., Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Epstein, 1986, 1991, 1994; Epstein & Dauber, 1991). This program has consistently produced evidence that patterns of teacher attitudes and invitations are important to many parents' decisions about participation in children's schooling (see also Eccles & Harold, 1993). In one survey of elementary parents, for example, Epstein (1986) compared teachers who engaged in many parent involvement activities (*high-involvement* teachers) with teachers who engaged in few such activities (*low-involvement* teachers); teachers were matched for experience, grade level, student achievement, and average parental education. She found that parents with high-involvement teachers were more positive about school and more aware of teachers' interest in their involvement than were parents with low-involvement teachers. Further, the high-involvement teachers themselves, unlike their low-involvement counterparts, worked to involve *all* parents, regardless of socioeconomic level (see also Becker & Epstein, 1982; Epstein, 1994). Finally, positive parental involvement practices were found to characterize elementary schools more than middle, junior high, or senior high schools (see also Eccles & Harold, 1994).

The significance of these teacher efforts to create inviting climates for parent involvement are underscored by related findings. For example, Epstein has found that parents were most involved when teachers actively encouraged involvement (Epstein & Dauber, 1991), that stronger teacher involvement practices were positively related to higher reading achievement among children (Epstein, 1991), and that parents who recorded stronger beliefs in the school's efforts to involve them also believed strongly in the "goodness" of school (Dauber & Epstein, 1993). Similarly, Eccles and Harold (1994) reported that parents who held more positive views of the school's concern, accountability, and desire for parents' involvement were more involved in the school. Important in this sample of findings is the fact that the parents involved had children in grades ranging from elementary through middle school and represented varied socioeconomic circumstances.

Comer's work examining schools as communities (e.g., Anson et al., 1991; Comer & Haynes, 1991) has suggested similarly that school organizations oriented toward understanding students' families often experience success in increasing parents' involvement and in improving students' performance. These analyses have suggested that the results occur in large part because schools include parents in a variety of meaningful roles and, in so doing, increase communication and trust among parents and school staff—an accomplishment particularly important for traditionally disenfranchised parent groups, including parents of color and low socioeconomic status (see also Cochran & Dean, 1991; Powell, 1991).

The value of intentionally creating a climate of opportunities and demands for parent involvement in a school is also supported by role theory, described above. As group members (in this case, parents, school personnel, and students) communicate frequently and come to consensus on appropriate role expectations and behaviors, clarity and agreement on member roles is likely to increase all members' successful and satisfying performance of their own roles (see also Comer & Haynes, 1991). Indeed, Epstein and Dauber (1991) reported that schools where teachers *and* parents reported strong feelings about the importance of parental involvement were also the schools with stronger parent involvement programs and practices.

Overall, these varied strands of work suggest that a school climate of invitations to involvement influences parents' understanding of teachers' interest in parental help and support, parents' feelings of being needed and wanted in the educational process, and parents' knowledge about their children's schoolwork. Particularly given findings that many parents criticize home-school contacts as being empty (characterizing them, for example, as contrived, insubstantial, or awkward, mainly offering opportunities for teachers to talk and parents to listen; e.g., Harry, 1992; Lareau, 1987; Lightfoot, 1978, 1981) and want more meaningful contacts with the schools (e.g., Eccles & Harold, 1994; Epstein, 1994; Leitch & Tangri, 1988; Moles, 1993), the general invitations and demands presented by schools seem potentially very influential in parents' decisions about involvement in their children's education.

Conclusion: General Opportunities and Demands

The overall value of multiple invitations, opportunities, and requests presented by children and their schools appears to lie in the welcoming and proactive demand they create for parents' involvement. The extent to which parents believe

themselves to be invited to participate actively in the educational process will, the model suggests, exert important influence on their basic decisions about involvement. This influence may be particularly important if a parent's role construction or sense of efficacy for helping children succeed in school does *not* encourage involvement. The considerable evidence on teacher practices intended to support parental involvement, and parents' sensitivity to teacher attitudes about their involvement, underscores the importance of school-generated invitations and opportunities for positive parental decisions about involvement.

Summary and Conclusions

Among the many sources of influence on parents' decisions to become involved in their children's education, we have suggested that the three most influential psychological constructs characterizing parents' lives are (a) parental role construction, (b) parents' sense of efficacy for helping children succeed in school, and (c) parents' perceptions of the general invitations, demands and opportunities for involvement presented by children and their schools. Parents' role construction is described in part by general role theory and appears to be influenced also by parents' beliefs about child-rearing as well as beliefs about their home-support roles in child and adolescent education. Parents' sense of efficacy for helping children succeed in school is, similarly, described in part by theory and research on personal efficacy in general, and in part by parents' beliefs about ability, effort, and luck as causes of child and adolescent school success, as well as parents' implicit theories of intelligence. Parents' perceptions of the general opportunities and demands for involvement from children and from their schools emerge from characteristics of children as they interact with parents and from teachers' general involvement practices as well as schoolwide efforts to create a generally inviting climate for involvement.

In focusing on these origins of parental involvement, the general model outlining the importance of these constructs (Figure 1) assumes that the parental involvement process is linear; that is, the model assumes that parents first make a decision to become involved and, having made that decision, move on at the second level of the model to choose among specific forms of involvement and activities. In reality, the involvement process is probably much more recursive and more complex, and its elements at times more nearly simultaneous for parents than is suggested by the apparent linearity of the model. Further, variables other than those incorporated within the constructs of the model are likely also to influence parents' basic involvement decisions (e.g., wishes for affiliation or control, affective variables related to feelings about one's history in school). Nonetheless, it seems valuable both to identify constructs of primary importance to the involvement process and to separate varied dimensions of the process (the latter largely because the constructs appear to be influenced by different variables).

According to the argument of the full model (Figure 1), parents become involved in their children's education *because* they have developed a parental role construction that includes involvement, *because* they have a positive sense of efficacy for helping children succeed in school, and *because* they perceive general opportunities and invitations for involvement from their children and their children's schools. This model suggests that parents, having made the basic decision to

become involved, then choose specific involvement activities. These specific choices are shaped by three major constructs operating at the second level of the process: (a) parents' perceptions of their own skills, interests, and abilities; (b) parents' experience of other demands on time and energy; and (c) parents' experience of specific invitations to involvement from children, teachers, and schools. The model suggests that parents' involvement then influences children's educational outcomes through the mechanisms suggested at the third level (modeling, reinforcement, and instruction), as mediated by the constructs included at the fourth level (the developmental appropriateness of parents' strategies and the fit between parents' actions and the school's expectations). The involvement process finds its end in this model in its influence on the child's educational outcomes, most notably the child's knowledge, skills, and personal sense of efficacy for succeeding in school.

Combining Elements of the Basic Involvement Decision

This review has focused on theory and research related to the first level of the model, the level at which parents make the fundamental decision about involvement. We believe that the three constructs reviewed above function together in a generally additive fashion to create the likelihood of a parent's positive decision to become involved in his or her child's education. (We believe the constructs do not function multiplicatively in part because the absence of one construct [a value of 0] does not appear to negate the possibility of a positive involvement decision.)

The most important construct in this decision appears to be the parent's role construction. Absent a firm and well-constructed belief that she or he *should* be involved in the child's education, the parent's status in the areas of efficacy and perceptions of general invitations appear insufficient in most circumstances to predict an affirmative decision for involvement. Sense of efficacy, however, appears very important to the basic involvement decision; the parent's belief that she or he is indeed capable of helping the child certainly augments the power of role construction to enable a positive decision. Perceptions of general invitations and opportunities appear to have a more limited role; they appear likely to have the strongest impact when either or both role construction and sense of efficacy are at moderate to low (rather than strong) levels. In Table 1, we have illustrated specific combinations of the three constructs that appear likely to be associated with strong, moderate, and weak likelihoods of a positive decision for involvement.

As indicated, the highest likelihoods of a positive involvement decision would appear to occur when role construction is strong and sense of efficacy is strong to moderate. General invitations, however, appear to have much less influence on the basic involvement decision under these conditions, simply because the parent with a strong positive role construction and a strong sense of efficacy is likely to decide in favor of involvement whether or not general invitations are received. Under conditions of strong role construction and weak efficacy, however, general invitations may well increase the probability of an affirmative involvement decision.

Moderate likelihoods of involvement would appear to occur under varied combinations of moderate to strong role construction and moderate to weak self-efficacy. It seems probable that strong general invitations within this level of role construction have the power to move parents from moderate to high likelihood of

TABLE 1
Schematic representation of hypotheses concerning the likelihood of parental involvement by level of role construction

Level of invitations and demands from children and school	Level of parental efficacy		
	High	Medium	Low
High/strong role construction			
High	H	H	M
Medium	H	H	M
Low	H	M	M
Medium/moderate role construction			
High	H	H	M
Medium	M	M	M
Low	M	M	L
Low/weak role construction			
High	M	L	L
Medium	L	L	L
Low	L	L	L

Note. H = high, M = moderate, L = low.

involvement (or from low to moderate likelihood of involvement). This seems especially true if invitations are focused at least in part on enhancing parental role construction and sense of efficacy. The middle panel of Table 1 also suggests that parents who hold a moderate role construction and a weak sense of efficacy and perceive low levels of general invitations are unlikely to make an affirmative decision for involvement; they seem more likely, instead, to remain inactive while experiencing guilt about their failure to be involved (“I *should* do something, but...”).

The lowest likelihoods of involvement would seem to occur when role construction is weak; that is, if a parent does not believe that he or she *should* be involved in his or her child’s education, involvement is unlikely. An exception may be found when level of efficacy is high (“I *could* be effective if I decided to be involved”) and level of general invitations is high and focused on constructing a more actively engaged role. However, even high to moderate levels of invitations, if combined with weak role construction and low efficacy, would appear insufficient to create a positive decision for involvement.

The most important observations to be derived from the varied conditions illustrated in Table 1 are these. First, positive role construction, at strong or moderate levels, seems essential for high likelihood of involvement; parents must feel that they *should* be involved in their children’s education if the basic involvement decision is to be affirmative. Second, parents’ sense of efficacy for helping their children with schooling appears to be a very close second in importance; for example, a strong sense of efficacy added to a moderate level of role construction

appears likely to produce a positive involvement decision. Third, sense of efficacy by itself, without moderate to strong role construction, does *not* appear likely to yield a strong affirmative decision for involvement; this is because the belief that “I could help” must be combined with the sense that “I *should* help” if it is to have substantial positive impact on the involvement decision. Fourth, invitations appear to have power to make a difference in the fundamental involvement decision; they appear to increase the chances of positive involvement decisions within various moderate-to-low combinations of the other two constructs (see upper two panels of Table 1), particularly when developed with the intention of increasing parents’ positive role construction and sense of efficacy. Well-designed invitations hold this power because role construction and efficacy are both, to an important extent, socially constructed. Invitations to involvement, if well-designed, create opportunities for the social construction—by parents, teachers, schools, and children—of parental roles that include involvement and an enhanced sense of efficacy.

Recommendations for Research

A broad test of the hypotheses implicit in Table 1 would be strengthened by specific prior attention to the actual contributions of variables treated in the review as conceptually—but not yet empirically—related to the three major constructs. For example, linkages among variables conceptually related to parental role construction (parental beliefs about child-rearing, ideas about home-support roles) and parents’ sense of efficacy for helping their children succeed in school (beliefs about ability, effort, and luck as causes of children’s school success; implicit theories of intelligence; reported strategies for solving school-related problems) should be examined.

Specific issues related to each of the three major constructs warrant investigation. Parents’ role construction is socially defined; specific examination of the evolution of parents’ role construction as related to helping children succeed in school would be useful, as would the influence of explicit efforts by schools to help parents create an active, affirmative role construct for involvement in their children’s education. Parents’ sense of efficacy should be examined further with specific reference to parental involvement. For example, as this review was being revised, Bandura and colleagues reported an important investigation of child and parental variables, including parental efficacy, as related to child achievement (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996). Their measures of parent academic efficacy should be examined in relation to others reported in the literature, and hypothesized linkages among efficacy, role construct, invitations, and children’s academic success should be tested with extended elementary and secondary populations. Specific questions to be addressed might include these: How do the various sources of efficacy (direct experience, vicarious experience, persuasion, and emotional arousal) contribute to a strong sense of parental efficacy in the domain of helping children succeed in school? Can schools successfully offer direct and vicarious efficacy-enhancing experiences that would complement the more generally used approach of persuasion (e.g., “Please come,” “It’s important to help your child”)? Similarly, the role of well-designed invitations and opportunities to enhance role construction and increase parents’ sense of efficacy for helping children succeed in school should be addressed systematically, as

should the power of general invitations from children, across the school age span, to influence parents' involvement decisions.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

This article has focused on parents' perspectives on involvement, primarily with reference to the theory and research in psychology. Our recommendations for policy and practice are necessarily, then, focused on parents and on schools' interactions with parents. We strongly assume, however, that these recommendations must be set within the broader ecology of school policy and social values; that is, they must be set within the context of recommendations for action from other domains important to understanding and supporting the family-school relationship. As noted at the outset of the review, psychological inquiry offers a powerful explanation of parents' involvement in children's education, but the results of psychological inquiry must be combined with knowledge derived from other disciplines if full explanations are to be crafted. The suggestions that we offer below thus focus primarily on only one portion of the full parental involvement picture, namely, parents' perspectives and thinking about whether they should become involved.

Efforts to involve parents should be grounded in the knowledge that parents' beliefs about their roles in children's schooling and their effectiveness in helping their children succeed are the primary points of entry into increased, and increasingly effective, involvement. If schools do not take these parental contributions to involvement seriously, the likelihood of any policy or practice having significant influence on involvement practices or outcomes seems very low. The parent-school relationship, particularly in the domains we have discussed, is created within the historical and contemporary interactions among the parties involved. If children are to realize the benefits of constructively involved parents, parents must have—or be enabled to create—a personal role construction that calls for active involvement in children's education. Similarly, parents must have, or be enabled to create, a strong sense of efficacy for helping children succeed in school. If parents come to the school-family relationship with strong to moderate standing in both areas, they will likely find—through parent-initiated interactions with schools—ways to be effectively involved in their children's education. If they do not come to the parent-school relationship with fairly strong role construction and efficacy, however, schools and communities wishing access to the benefits of parental involvement must work specifically to enhance parents' standing within both areas.

This might be accomplished in several ways, the first of which is likely to be explicit recognition that part of the goal of educating children resides in efforts to enhance parental role construction and parental efficacy for involvement in their children's schooling. Clearly, not all parents have important needs in this area; those whose current standing in these constructs places them in the high-likelihood-of-involvement category are likely to find school efforts and invitations helpful but not essential to useful participation. However, parents whose own histories or current standings place them in the moderate-to-low-likelihood categories would appear most likely to benefit substantially from effective school and community efforts to enhance parental role construction and efficacy.

At the community and school district level, efforts to include parents as an

explicit part of the schools' mission would be helpful. The social construction of parental roles means that parents and the group most pertinent to children's education, the school, should work together to define parents' roles. Specifically, this means that schools and teachers should be enabled—through reduced hours with students in class, other released time, or part-time help—to spend at least a portion of the work week interacting with parents. Some of this time might be well spent creating a feasible, mutually constructed set of expectations for the parent's role in relation to the child's schooling; some of it might be similarly well spent in devising specific ways for parents to offer limited but academically useful help to their children. At the same time, community employers should be encouraged with all reasonable strength to offer released hours for parents to spend (limited) time in school, talk with the teacher(s), pick up homework help instructions, observe the child, and so on. Similarly, efforts to increase teachers' and parents' access to each other would be helpful. Such efforts might include allocating time for meetings with parents as part of teachers' regular (and paid) responsibilities; hiring a parent-community liaison professional to facilitate increased parent-school interaction; installing telephones in classrooms so that simple parent-teacher communications are facilitated; and hiring someone to help format, produce, and distribute regular communications from teachers to parents about learning goals, activities, and focused suggestions for parental help. The latter may be particularly helpful at the middle school and secondary school levels, where such regular communications might include specific, succinct information on opportunities and needs for parental guidance in such areas as course selection, major projects, and help or participation in supporting extracurricular activities.

The review suggests strongly that those who wish to increase parental involvement and extend the benefits it offers must focus at least in part on the parent's perspective in the process. Parents who believe they should be involved in their children's education and schooling *and* who have a positive sense of efficacy about the usefulness of their involvement are likely to be involved. The most effective efforts to improve involvement must incorporate invitations that support and build these two socially constructed qualities, particularly among parents whose experiences have resulted in relatively weak role construction or efficacy. Absent specific attention to these parental components of involvement, the best and most well financed school efforts to invite involvement are likely to fall frustratingly short of success.

Note

¹While the literature suggests strongly that parental involvement in general has positive effects on children's educational outcomes, it is important to note that parental involvement may also have no consequences or even negative consequences for some children. For example, as suggested by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995) full model, if parental involvement is either developmentally inappropriate (e.g., the parent of an adolescent actively helps the child complete homework every day) or constitutes a poor fit with school expectations for involvement (e.g., the parent expects to sit in on class every day), children, parents, and teachers may experience negative outcomes (see also Lightfoot, 1978). Further, there are clearly circumstances in which children of uninvolved parents do well, often because of personal strengths or interests and alternative environmental support. The model and this article focus on the literature describing the many circumstances in which parental involvement is present and appears to lead to positive developmental and educational outcomes for students.

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Authors

KATHLEEN V. HOOVER-DEMPSEY is Associate Professor, Department of Psychology and Human Development, 202 Hobbs Building, 18th Ave. and Horton, Peabody College, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN 37203; hooverkv@ctrvax.vanderbilt.edu. She specializes in child and adolescent development and family-school relations.

HOWARD M. SANDLER is Professor, Department of Psychology, 202 Hobbs Building, 18th Ave. and Horton, Peabody College, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN 37203; sandlerh@ctrvax.vanderbilt.edu. He specializes in quantitative methods.

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