Original Paper

A Review Research of Collaborative Education among Families, Schools and Communities

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Abstract

Recent theoretical research on home–school–community collaboration remains limited in scope, primarily employing social capital theory and Epstein's framework of home–school partnerships to address educational inequities, such as racial disparities. Few studies explore how families and schools might effectively engage with communities and social organizations, and existing discussions largely focus on higher education contexts, emphasizing student employability. A synthesis of the literature underscores critical perspectives for meaningful collaboration, highlighting the need to center children's well-being and development while adapting interaction settings—such as parental involvement in homework within the home—to specific activities. Importantly, the diversity of family backgrounds complicates school-led initiatives, potentially leading to misconceptions among educators regarding partnership efficacy. This review calls for more nuanced approaches to collaborative practices that acknowledge contextual complexities.

Keywords

Collaborative Education, Families, Schools and Communities, theories and Differentiation

1. Conceptual Differentiation

1.1 Home-School Cooperation

In policies, research, and practices concerning family-school partnerships, a range of terms is frequently employed, including parent involvement (Daniel, 2015a; Epstein, 2011), parent engagement (Hong, 2012), and family-school partnership (Barker & Harris, 2020). While often used interchangeably, these terms carry distinct conceptual implications.

First, family-school partnership functions as an umbrella concept that encompasses collaborative efforts between schools and families with the primary aim of enhancing children's learning outcomes (Barker & Harris, 2020). Second, although parent engagement and parent involvement are often

mistakenly treated as synonymous (Harris, Andrew-Power, & Goodall, 2009), they reflect nuanced differences in the dynamics of home-school cooperation. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, involvement denotes "the act or process of taking part in something," connoting participation without necessarily implying agency. In contrast, engagement is defined as "the fact of being involved with something" and "the process of encouraging people to be interested in the work of an organization," thereby highlighting initiative and active participation.

Harris et al. emphasize that parents may be involved in their children's schooling without being engaged in their learning—for instance, by assisting with fundraising or contributing to school council decisions (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Conversely, parents may be engaged in learning-related activities without direct participation in school-based initiatives. Engagement can occur through shared storytelling, discussions, or participation in community events. Thus, family engagement in children's learning is not contingent on formalized home-school partnerships. In this sense, parent engagement underscores parents' proactive roles in fostering supportive relationships within both school and non-school contexts, whereas home-school cooperation is grounded in mutual commitment to the shared value of education (Barker & Harris, 2020; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014).

To further delineate these distinctions, Ferlazzo underscores the differing roles assigned to schools in the two concepts (Ferlazzo, 2011). In parent involvement, schools define the terms of cooperation, directing parents' participation (Daniel, 2015b), with parents positioned as followers of institutional expectations. In contrast, parent engagement entails parents contributing their own knowledge, cultural resources, and perspectives to support their children's development.

Auerbach's study of home-school cooperation in the United States demonstrates that strategies emphasizing parent involvement often impose uniform, school-centered expectations that neglect the diversity of family backgrounds (Auerbach, 2010). Because school-based activities—such as volunteering, fundraising, or attending school events—are frequently conducted in the dominant language (e.g., English) and scheduled during working hours, parents constrained by employment obligations, caregiving responsibilities, or linguistic barriers are disproportionately excluded (Fennimore, 2017). Such practices reproduce inequities in family-school collaboration. Moreover, instead of acknowledging structural barriers established by schools themselves, teachers frequently attribute limited participation to familial shortcomings (Mapp & Hong, 2010).

1.2 School-Community Collaboration

Key terms frequently employed in this domain include community involvement, community engagement, community participation, and community partnership. Compared with home-school cooperation, however, research on school-community collaboration remains relatively limited and is largely concentrated in the context of higher education. Existing studies primarily emphasize the promotion of student employability, resulting in the development of university-industry partnerships designed to provide students with practical work opportunities, enhance skill acquisition, and cultivate social awareness (Alemán, Freire, & McKinney, 2017).

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Morses, Shaw, and Elmore cited a noteworthy study on the characteristics of high-performing school districts in Texas, USA. The study found that most school board members involved in governance exhibited a strong sense of urgency regarding academic achievement. Furthermore, districts that demonstrated effective school-community collaboration placed considerable emphasis on parental involvement in students' home learning. Based on these findings, the authors hypothesized that when schools focus on improving instructional effectiveness, while community businesses and organizations assume responsibility for non-academic activities, both student academic performance and attendance rates are enhanced (Merseth, Schorr, & Elmore, 2000).

In conclusion, schools may derive substantial benefits from externally organized community activities without devoting excessive resources to orchestrating such initiatives themselves.

2. Theoretical Perspectives

Research on home-school-community collaboration emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, and its theoretical foundations have since evolved and diversified, offering multiple perspectives for understanding such partnerships.

2.1 Deficit Theory of the Family

The Deficit Theory of the Family, introduced by Riessman in 1962, provides an explanatory framework for the intergenerational transmission of educational disengagement within families of low socioeconomic status. Children raised in low-income and low-education households are often shaped by their parents' limited educational attainment and lack of cultural capital. Consequently, these families are more likely to demonstrate indifference toward formal education, placing children at greater risk of school dropout (Riessman, 1962). In a subsequent 1965 article, Riessman further argued that school structures and evaluation methods exert a significant influence on students' academic outcomes (Riessman, 1965).

Within the context of home-school collaboration, this theory suggests that parents from disadvantaged backgrounds are frequently perceived as lacking the requisite experiences, skills, or resources to support their children's learning. Such parents are often characterized as either undervaluing education or being incapable of meeting educational demands (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). From the perspective of educators, parental involvement is generally defined in school-centered terms, with teachers expected to convey school-designated activities to families. However, limited by their own cultural and cognitive frameworks, teachers may struggle to engage meaningfully with families whose perspectives diverge from institutional norms. As a result, parents from lower socioeconomic strata are more likely to be regarded as disengaged from their children's education (Epstein, & Dauber, 1991; Vincent, 1996).

In effect, deficit theory risks distorting teachers' perceptions of parental involvement, obscuring the actual conditions of diverse households and disregarding the varied ways in which families contribute to children's learning (Motkuri, 2018). Thus, when schools adopt a one-size-fits-all approach to

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home-school collaboration within socioeconomically heterogeneous contexts, many families inevitably encounter difficulties in meeting institutional expectations, leading to frustration and limited effectiveness.

2.2 Theory of Social Capital

Since Bourdieu first introduced the theory of social capital, its nature and definition have been widely debated within academia. The prevailing interpretation generally encompasses four key dimensions: (1) social or network structures; (2) social relations that facilitate access to resources; (3) trust, shared norms and values, reciprocity, and cooperation; and (4) the interwoven character of social and market interactions ((Motkuri, 2018; Jelena & Maja, 2023). According to social capital theory, social relations constitute resources that enable the development and accumulation of human capital (Bourdieu, 1985; Burt, 1992) Adler and Kwon further argue that social relations are intertwined with markets and hierarchies, and these dimensions are embedded within relational structures, wherein actors achieve mutual familiarity and recognition (Adler & Kwon, 2000).

Coleman's seminal work (Coleman, 1988; Coleman, 1990) explored the intersection of social capital theory and family background. He identified three key elements of family background—human capital, financial capital, and social capital. While acknowledging the significance of financial capital (e.g., household income and wealth) and human capital (e.g., parental education and cognitive skills) for children's educational outcomes, Coleman introduced family social capital as the connective dimension linking individual attributes with the immediate social environment. Unlike financial and human capital, which pertain to individual resources, social capital is embedded in the structure of interpersonal relationships. Within families, social capital is transmitted through close adult–child interactions, fostering productive activities that shape children's intellectual and educational development. Parental investment is often driven by emotional bonds, with parents devoting time, energy, attention, knowledge, and material resources to support their children's growth (Adler & Kwon, 2000).

Coleman also examined the relationship between the quantity and quality of parental investment and the family's socioeconomic environment. Counterintuitively, families with abundant social capital may not always translate human and financial capital into effective child-rearing practices, whereas parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may compensate for limited resources by investing greater time, energy, and relational effort. Sustained family interactions—such as helping with homework, joint study, leisure activities, or everyday conversations—play a critical role in shaping developmental expectations, future career trajectories, and the intergenerational transmission of knowledge. Coleman contends that the greater the parental investment in children, the smoother the intergenerational transfer of family capital.

Accordingly, children's developmental outcomes are also shaped by family structure. In single-parent households, time constraints often limit opportunities for engagement in family activities and child-rearing, thereby weakening the transmission of norms, expectations, and achievement orientations. Empirical studies demonstrate that children from separated or non-traditional families tend

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to exhibit lower levels of educational attainment (Bernardi & Boertien, 2017; Francesconi, Jenkins, & Siedler, 2010; Ginther & Pollak, 2004; McLanahan, Tach, & Schneider, 2013; Steele, Steele, & Murphy, 2009) and face more challenging transitions into the labor market (Klein, Driesel-Lange, & Ohlemann, 2022). Conversely, in large families, parental resources—time, energy, and finances—must be distributed among multiple children, necessitating careful allocation to ensure equitable support for each child (Sven, Michael, Marie-Luise, & Martin, 2022).

2.3 Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence

Professor Joyce L. Epstein of Johns Hopkins University has made sustained and influential contributions to the field of home-school collaboration. In the 1980s, she proposed the Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence, which systematically conceptualizes the collaborative relationships among schools, families, and communities. In her 2011 work, Epstein further refined this framework into a theoretical model that delineates both the internal and external structures of overlapping roles between families and schools (Epstein, 2011).
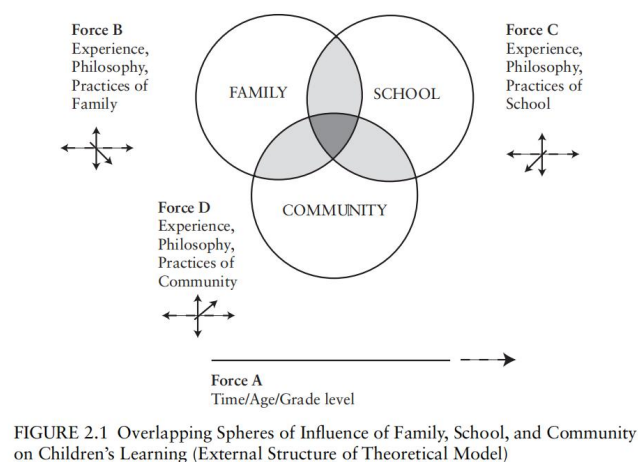

FIGURE 2.1 Overlapping Spheres of Influence of Family, School, and Community on Children's Learning (External Structure of Theoretical Model)

Figure 1. External Structure (Epstein, 2011)

Figure 1 illustrates the external structure of the overlapping spheres, represented by three intersecting circles—family, school, and community. The degree of overlap is shaped by three forces: time, family experience, and school experience. Force A reflects the developmental trajectory of students, families, and schools, indicated by factors such as a child's age and grade level. During infancy, the spheres are largely separate, with caregiving centered in the family; however, particular circumstances, such as the need for special education, may necessitate early collaboration between parents and professionals. As children enter school, the overlap between family and school typically increases. With further development and participation in community activities, the three spheres enter into dynamic interaction. The overlap between family and school generally peaks in the early school years (e.g., first grade) and gradually declines as parental involvement diminishes. Nevertheless, strengthening Forces B and C—family and school experiences—can expand the areas of overlap, underscoring the critical role of

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schools and teachers in integrating multidimensional support for student development.

FIGURE 2.2 Overlapping Spheres of Influence of Family, School, and Community on Children's Learning (Internal Structure of Theoretical Model)
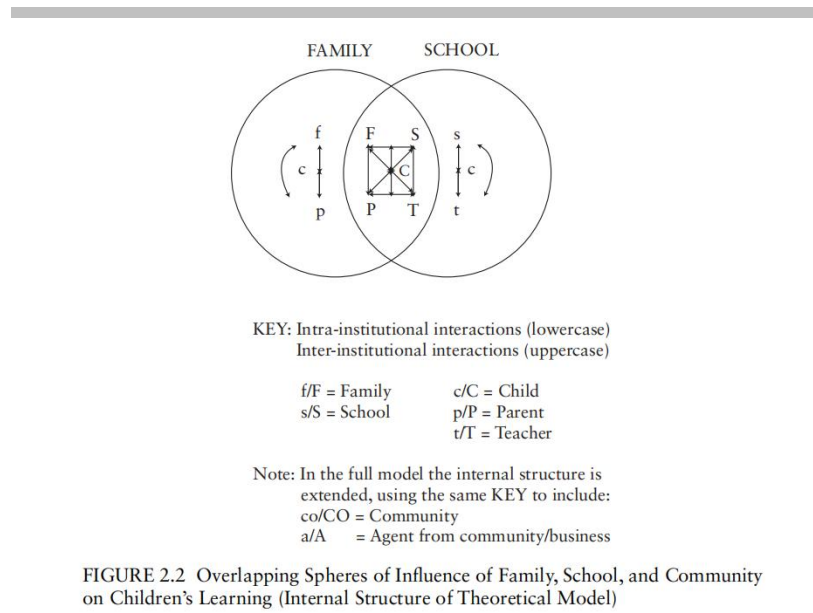
Figure 2. Internal Structure (Epstein, 2011)

Figure 2 presents the internal structure, highlighting the interactive mechanisms among stakeholders. At the institutional level, represented by capital letters F (family) and S (school), interactions concern the provision of learning resources, program development, management, and policy-making. At the individual level, represented by lowercase letters f (family), p (parents), s (school), and t (teachers), interactions occur in everyday practices, such as a teacher communicating with parents about homework completion or academic performance.

Across all forms of interaction, the child (C) occupies the central position, with their well-being and holistic development serving as the ultimate purpose of home-school collaboration. Policies, the quality of adult relationships, and the child's own perceptions and responses collectively influence academic achievement and shape future developmental trajectories.

In Epstein's theoretical framework, a greater degree of overlap among the spheres is associated with stronger support systems for children's development. Achieving such overlap requires schools to establish systematic structures and effective communication channels that sustain collaborative practices (Sanders, 2009).

To this end, Epstein proposed a framework of six types of involvement, designed to guide schools in structuring interactions and creating opportunities that advance key learning goals (Epstein, Sanders, Salinas, Simon, VanVoorhis, & Jansorn, 2002):

    1.   Parenting: Assisting families in understanding child and adolescent development and fostering home environments that support student learning.

2.   Communicating: Establishing effective two-way channels for sharing information on school programs and students' progress.

3.   Volunteering: Recruiting, organizing, and coordinating parental participation to support school programs and student activities.

4.   Learning at Home: Providing families with strategies and resources to assist students with homework, curriculum-related tasks, and educational decision-making.

5.   Decision Making: Involving parents in school governance and fostering parental leadership in decision-making processes.

6.   Collaborating with the Community: Mobilizing and integrating community resources and services to strengthen the support system for schools, students, and families ((Epstein, Sanders, Salinas, Simon, VanVoorhis, & Jansorn, 2002).

3. Summary

In recent years, theoretical research on home–school–community collaboration in international scholarship has remained limited. Existing studies predominantly draw on social capital theory and Epstein's framework of home–school partnerships, with particular attention to educational inequities, such as those related to race.

By contrast, relatively little attention has been given to how families and schools might collaborate with communities and social organizations. Where such discussions exist, they are often concentrated in the domain of higher education, focusing primarily on enhancing students' employability.

A review of the theoretical literature highlights several key perspectives essential for effective collaboration. When the child's well-being and development are placed at the center, the settings and forms of school–parent interaction vary according to the nature of specific activities. For example, parental involvement in monitoring homework completion typically occurs within the home environment. At the same time, the heterogeneity of families presents significant challenges to school-led collaboration initiatives, which may foster misconceptions among schools and teachers regarding the nature and effectiveness of partnerships.

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