



THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN CHILDREN'S EARLY LEARNING

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Abstract: *Early childhood is a critical period in the development of a child's cognitive, emotional, and social skills, and the role of parents in this process cannot be overstated. Parents are the first teachers and role models for their children, and their involvement in their children's education has a profound impact on their academic and overall success. This research paper explores the various ways in which parents can contribute to their children's early childhood learning, including creating a supportive learning environment, promoting positive attitudes towards learning, and actively engaging in educational activities with their children. The paper also examines the benefits of parent involvement in early childhood education and the impact it has on the child's later success in school and in life.*

Introduction

Early childhood, defined as the period from birth to eight years of age, is a crucial time in the development of a child's cognitive, emotional, and social skills.¹ During this period, children develop the foundation for all future learning, and their experiences and interactions with the world around them shape their developing brain and set the stage for their future success. The development of children's cognitive and social skills necessary for later academic success can best be supported by a parenting style known as responsive parenting.²⁻⁴ Responsiveness is an aspect of supportive parenting that is described in various theories and research frameworks (e.g., attachment, sociocultural) and that plays an important role in providing a strong foundation for optimal child development. The affective-emotional aspects of a responsive style are parenting that instills positive affect and high levels of warmth, responding in a manner contingently associated with cues from a young child ("contingent responsibility").⁵ These aspects, combined with behaviors that are cognitively responsive to the child's needs, including providing rich verbal information and maintaining and expanding the child's interests, provide the breadth of support needed for multiple aspects of a child's learning.⁶

The role of parents in this process is critical. Parents are the first teachers and role models for their children, and their involvement in their children's education has a profound impact on their academic and overall success. Research has shown that when parents are involved in their children's education, children are more likely to have positive attitudes towards learning, perform better academically, and have better social skills.

Accepting the child's interests with responses that are rapid and dependent on what the child is pointing to supports learning in part by facilitating the child's



development of coping mechanisms for stress and new things in their environment.² Repeated positive experiences build trust and a bond between the child and the parent, which encourages the child's continued involvement in learning activities with the parent.^{7,8} Thus, these affective-emotional behaviors mediate parental interest and acceptance and promote self-regulation and cooperation, behaviors critical for effective learning to occur. From a sociocultural perspective, cognitively sensitive behaviors (e.g., maintaining versus redirecting interests, rich verbal input) are intended to facilitate a higher level of learning as they provide a structure or framework for the young child's immature skills such as B. the development of attention and cognitive skills.⁹ Responsive behaviors within this framework encourage shared engagement and mutuality in parent-child interaction and help the child take a more active and ultimately independent role in the learning process.¹⁰

Subject

Responsive parenting is one of the most widely described aspects of parenting when it comes to understanding the role the environment plays in child development. Research shows it has the potential to promote normal developmental pathways for high-risk children, such as e.g., those from low-income backgrounds and/or those with very early births.¹¹ Conversely, unresponsive parenting can endanger the development of children, particularly those most at risk. for developmental issues.¹² Given the potential importance of responsive parenting, a more specific knowledge of the types of behaviors most important to support particular areas of a child's learning might improve our understanding of how to facilitate effective parenting practices.

Problem

Despite the central role of responsive parenting in various research settings, much of what we know about this parenting style comes from descriptive studies. This means that we can only deduce the importance of responsive parenting. Assuming a causal influence of responsive parenting on child outcomes would require data from randomized experimental trials. A solid body of experimental studies showing how higher levels of responsive parenting promote higher levels of learning could provide a clearer understanding of the mechanism by which responsive behavior promotes a child's learning. Other related questions that need to be addressed are whether there is any specificity between certain responsive behaviors and the support they provide for certain areas of child development.

Research Context

Cognitive acquisition in young children is facilitated through interactions with their parents. There is some evidence that the mechanism by which responsiveness supports cognitive development may depend on consistency throughout the development of this parenting style.^{11,13} Because the child and parent are part of a larger social context, many factors can support or influence the parent's consistent use of responsive behavior. Personal factors that can affect parenting responsiveness



include depression, perceptions of parents' own parenting history as negative, or beliefs and attitudes that interfere with parents' sense of importance in their children's lives. Other factors such as However, higher levels of social support from friends and family, for example, can mitigate some of these negative social and personal factors.¹¹ In a recent study, parents' perceptions of a positive social support network over and above other factors predicted that parents with intervention transitioned from an unresponsive to a responsive parenting style.¹⁵ This is an encouraging finding, as parenting interventions can be designed to provide the level of social support that mothers from high-risk communities need to develop responsive parenting styles.¹⁶

Key Research Questions:

- Does an increase in parental responsiveness lead to an increase in young children's learning?
- Is parental responsiveness equally effective or does its effectiveness vary among children with different characteristics (e.g., cultural background, ethnicity and biological risk factors)?
- Do increases in different aspects of responsiveness explain positive changes in different aspects of cognitive development?
- Is there an optimal time in a child's development when responsiveness is particularly important, or is consistency necessary throughout development for more optimal learning to occur?

Recent Research Results

A recent randomized intervention study examined whether maternal receptive behaviors could be facilitated and whether such behaviors would improve young children's learning.⁶ To also examine optimal timing for the intervention (e.g., in infancy versus toddler/preschool versus both), families in the intervention and non-intervention groups were re-randomized at the end of the infancy phase to receive the response intervention in the time of the child / preschool age or not.¹⁷ The intervention was designed to help mothers adopt key behaviors that are affective-emotionally supportive and cognitively appealing, as both types of support were expected to be necessary to promote learning. After infancy, mothers who received the intervention showed large increases in all response behaviors, and their babies showed higher scores and faster growth rates in a variety of skills. For example, independent problem-solving during toy play showed greater gains in infants whose mothers received the intervention compared to infants whose mothers did not receive the intervention. Affective-emotional and cognitively responsive behaviors together mediated the effect of the intervention on children's learning, showing that the effectiveness of responsiveness can be better understood when defined as a broad construct. In addition, various aspects of children's learning were specifically promoted through certain specific reaction behaviors. For example, children's cooperation was better encouraged by mothers' greater use of contingent responsiveness and verbal encouragement and by their less frequent restriction of



children's activities, while children's verbal use improved better when mothers directed children's attention to their interests more often. and label objects or actions.

Reviewing the evidence on the optimal timing of an intervention showed that it depends on factors such as the type of responsive behavior support and the degree to which it relates to the child's developmental needs. For example, behaviors such as warm sensitivity (from an attachment frame) were better encouraged during the infancy phase, while those that were more complex in having to respond to the changing picture of infant development (e.g., contingent response capacity) required both phases of intervention. Finally, the intervention worked equally well in children who were or were not at high biological risk. This supports the idea that responsiveness facilitates learning through parental sensitivity and willingness to respond to the individual needs of young children.

Creating a Supportive Learning Environment

One of the most important ways parents can support their children's early childhood learning is by creating a supportive learning environment at home. This includes providing a safe and nurturing environment, setting aside dedicated time for learning, and encouraging their children to explore and discover new things. Parents can also provide their children with educational resources, such as books, games, and educational toys, to support their learning and stimulate their curiosity. By creating a supportive learning environment, parents are able to foster a love of learning in their children and provide them with the necessary tools and resources to grow and develop.

Promoting Positive Attitudes towards Learning

Parents play a key role in shaping their children's attitudes towards learning. By demonstrating a positive attitude towards learning themselves, parents can encourage their children to view learning as an enjoyable and valuable experience. Parents can also talk to their children about the importance of education and the benefits it provides, and help them to understand the connections between what they are learning and their daily lives.

Actively Engaging in Educational Activities with Children

Another important way parents can support their children's early childhood learning is by actively engaging in educational activities with them. This can include reading books together, working on educational projects, or playing educational games. When parents engage in these activities with their children, they are able to provide them with additional support and guidance as they learn, and they also help to foster a positive relationship with their children.

Benefits of Parent Involvement in Early Childhood Education

Research has shown that parent involvement in early childhood education has a significant impact on a child's academic and overall success. Children with involved parents are more likely to have positive attitudes towards learning, perform better academically, and have better social skills. In addition, parent involvement in early



childhood education has been shown to have a positive impact on the child's later success in school and in life. Children with involved parents are more likely to have higher levels of motivation, better school attendance, and a more positive relationship with their teachers. They are also more likely to graduate from high school and pursue post-secondary education.

Conclusion

Responsive parenting is an important process in supporting young children's learning according to many descriptive and less experimental studies. There is now support for a causal role for responsive parenting, since greater gains in parenting behaviors associated with responsive style accounted for the effect of parental intervention on greater gains in young children's learning. Because both normal and high-risk children benefited from the responsiveness provided by affective-emotional and cognitive support, the effectiveness of responsiveness seems to be best understood when defined as a broad concept. Recent evidence shows that certain responsive behaviors can provide different types of support for children's learning, and this support can vary based on the child's developmental needs. There are many new avenues of research that need to be explored and questions that are being addressed in recent studies that warrant further examination.

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