The Role of Parents' Motivational Beliefs and Relationships with Teachers in Children's Social and Emotional Functioning

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Abstract：This study builds on prior research by examining the role parents' motivational beliefs play in promoting the quality of parents' relationships with teachers. Additionally, this research highlights the central role of the relationship between parents and teachers in promoting children's social and emotional functioning.   That is, parents' motivation to be involved in children's education may not only work to heighten parents' involvement, as established in prior research, but such motivation may also work to enhance parents' relationships with teachers to the benefit of children's social and emotional functioning. These results also suggest it may be beneficial to examine and reinforce parents' views of their role in children's education as well as their efficacy regarding educational involvement when working with parents of children with behavior problems.
Keywords: motivational beliefs, parents, teachers

Introduction

The importance of connections between home and school for the promotion of children's social and emotional functioning has never been clearer (for reviews, see Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Pomerantz & Moorman, 2010).   There is a need to understand what facilitates high quality relationships between families and schools and the role these relationships play in promoting children's developmental outcomes. One factor influencing family-school relations is parents' motivational beliefs (e.g., Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

When parents believe it is their role to be involved in children's schooling and feel efficacious to do so, they are more likely to be involved (e.g., Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007).

Such involvement, in turn, is related to children's enhanced social and emotional functioning (for a review, see Pomerantz & Moorman, 2010), including decreased behavior problems and heightened social skills, self-esteem, and emotion regulation (Fantuzzo, McWayne, Perry, & Childs, 2004; Hill & Craft, 2003; McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen, & Sekino, 2004; Shumow & Lomax, 2002).

Less clear is whether parents' motivational beliefs shape the quality of the relationships parents establish with teachers.   Parents' motivational beliefs may be associated with enhanced relationships with teachers.   For example:

When parents believe it is their role to be involved in children's learning, they may be more likely to align their educational goals for children with those of children's teachers (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001).

When parents feel efficacious they may be more comfortable sharing their goals with teachers in a constructive way (Clarke, Sheridan, & Woods, 2009).

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Parents who are highly motivated for involvement may participate more often in children's schooling and hence have additional opportunities to establish positive relationships with children's teachers (Kohl, Lengua, & McMahon, 2000).

Enhanced parent-teacher relationships may serve as a mechanism by which parents' motivational beliefs are related to children's enhanced functioning. High quality relationships between parents and teachers foreshadow children's enhanced social and emotional functioning (Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow, & Fendrich, 1999).

Connections between home and school may be particularly relevant for children with behavior problems for whom the promotion of social and emotional competencies is of particular import, and for whom relationships between parents and teachers may be strained.

Purpose of Study and Study Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine whether the quality of the parent-teacher relationship serves as a mediator between parents' motivational beliefs and children's social and emotional functioning for children with behavioral problems.

Are parents' motivational beliefs (i.e., role construction and self-efficacy) related to the quality of parent-teacher relationships?

Is the quality of parent-teacher relationships associated with children's social and emotional functioning?

Does the quality of parent-teacher relationships serve as a mediator between parents' motivational beliefs and children's social and emotional functioning?

Methodology

Participants

Participants were 207 Kindergarten through third grade children identified with behavioral problems, their parents, and teachers from 21 elementary schools in the Midwest. See Table 1 for demographic information.

This report is based on data from measures administered at pre-test as part of a randomized trial assessing the efficacy of a school-based intervention program (Conjoint Behavioral Consultation; Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2008).

Measures

Parent Role Construction Scale (Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005) parent report (α = .79)

6-point Likert scale (1 = Disagree very strongly; 6 = Agree very strongly)

e.g., "I believe it is my responsibility to volunteer at the school" and "I believe it is my responsibility to talk with my child about the school day"

Parent Efficacy for Helping the Child Succeed in School (Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Brissie, 1992; Walker, et al., 2005) parent report (α = .82)

6-point Likert scale (1 = Disagree very strongly; 6 = Agree very strongly)

e.g., "I know how to help my child do well in school" and "I feel successful about my efforts to help my child learn"

Parent-Teacher Relationship Scale Joining Subscale (Vickers & Minke, 1995) parent and teacher reports (αs = .98)

5-point Likert scale (1 = Almost never; 5 = Almost always)

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e.g., "We trust each other" and "We cooperate with each other"

Social Skills Rating System (Gresham & Elliott, 1990) total score, teacher report

Standard score, $M = 100$, $SD = 15$

Assesses children's cooperation, assertion, responsibility, and self-control

Behavior Assessment System for Children – Second Edition (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004), teacher report, internalizing problems subscale

T-score, $M = 50$, $SD = 10$

Assesses children's anxiety, depression, and somatization

Results

Are parents' motivational beliefs (i.e., role construction and self-efficacy) related to the quality of parent-teacher relationships?

To examine whether parents' role construction and efficacy were related to the quality of parent-teacher relationships, bivariate correlations were computed.

Parents' role construction and efficacy were positively related to both parent and teacher reports of the quality of the parent-teacher relationship

Table 1. Demographic Information

Children ($N = 207$)	Parents ($N = 207$)	Teachers ($N = 82$)
Gender **Female: 25%** **Male: 75%**	Gender Female: 90% Male: 10%	**Gender** **Female: 97%** **Male: 3%**
Grade **Kindergarten: 26%** **Grade 1: 35%** **Grade 2: 26%** **Grade 3: 13%**	Education Less than high school: 5% High school/some college: 50% College: 37% Advanced graduate degree: 8%	**Years in current position** $M = 9.38$ ($SD = 10$)
Ethnicity **White: 75%** **African-American: 9%** **Other: 16%**	Ethnicity White: 87% African American: 4% Other: 9%	**Ethnicity** **White: 100%**
Free/reduced lunch **Eligibility: 49%**	**Age** $M = 34.73$ ($SD = 7.83$)	

Is the quality of parent-teacher relationships related to children's social and emotional functioning?

Parent reports of the quality of their relationships with teachers were positively associated with children's social skills and negatively associated with children's internalizing problems, albeit marginally

Teacher reports of the quality of their relationships with parents were positively associated with children's social skills and negatively associated with children's internalizing problems.

Table 2. Correlations and Descriptive Statistics

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
Parent						
1. Role construction	--					
2. Efficacy	.34***	--				
3. Relationship quality	.24**	.23**	--			
Teacher						
4. Relationship quality	.25**	.15*	.50***	--		
Child						
5. Social skills	.17*	.12	.26***	.39***	--	
6. Internalizing problems	-.06	-.07	-.14+	-.26***	-.34***	--
Mean	5.21	4.56	4.33	4.14	84.42	**59.91**
SD	.48	.72	.70	.78	10.88	**13.19**

$+p < .10.$ $*p < .05.$ $**p < .01.$ $***p < .001.$

Does the quality of parent-teacher relationships serve as a mediator between parents' motivational beliefs and children's enhanced functioning?

The mediating effect of parents' motivational beliefs on children's social and emotional functioning through parent-teacher relationship quality was examined in the context of Structural Equation Modeling. A two-level modeling strategy was employed to take into account the nested structure of the data (i.e., two to three children nested within each classroom).

Parents' role construction and efficacy were used as indicators of a latent variable representing parents' motivational beliefs; both parent and teacher reports were used as indicators of parent-teacher relationship quality. Teachers' reports of children's social skills and internalizing problems were used as outcomes in separate models.

**Children's social skills**

The proposed model demonstrated an excellent fit to the data

(see Figure 1). There was a significant and positive indirect effect ($\beta = .26$, $p < .05$) of parents' motivational beliefs through parent-teacher relationship quality on children's social skills.

Children's internalizing problems

The proposed model demonstrated an excellent fit to the data. There was a significant and negative indirect effect ($\beta = -.18$, $p < .05$) of parents' motivational beliefs through parent-teacher relationship quality on children's internalizing problems.

Figure 1

χ^2 (8) = 11.57, p = .17
CFI = .968, RMSEA = .047,
SRMR = .044
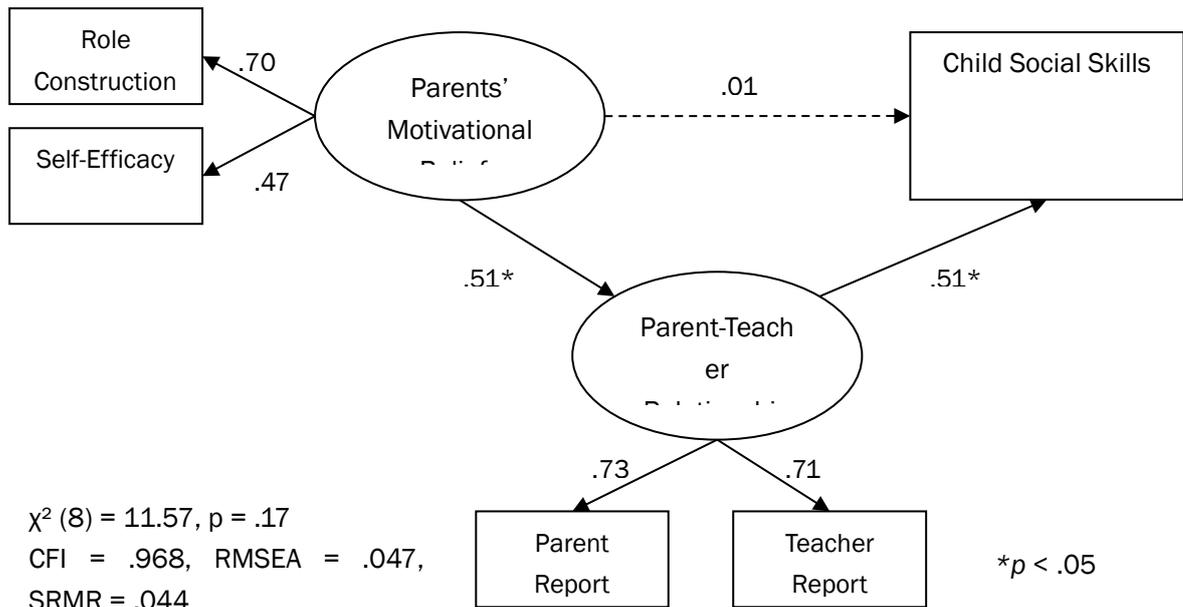
Discussion

Parents who believed it was their role to be involved in children's education and felt efficacious to do so had higher quality relationships with their children's teachers as reported by both parents and teachers.

High quality relationships between parents and teachers were, in turn, related to heightened child social skills and dampened child internalizing problems.

Furthermore, parents' motivational beliefs were indirectly associated with children's social and emotional functioning through the parent-teacher relationship. This is consistent with the notion that parent-teacher relationship quality may serve as one mechanism by which parents' motivational beliefs are related to children's social and emotional functioning.

This study builds on prior research by examining the role parents' motivational beliefs play in promoting the quality of parents' relationships with teachers. Additionally, this research highlights the central role of the relationship between parents and teachers in promoting children's social and emotional functioning. That is, parents' motivation to be involved in children's education may not only work to heighten parents' involvement, as established in prior research, but such motivation may also work to enhance parents' relationships with teachers to the benefit of children's social and emotional functioning.

These results also suggest it may be beneficial to examine and reinforce parents' views of their role in children's education as well as their efficacy regarding educational involvement when working with parents of children with behavior problems. Enhanced beliefs may feed forward to benefit parents' relationships with teachers and, in turn, children's functioning.

Limitations and Future Directions

The cross-sectional analysis did not allow for examination of the direction of effects. Although our findings are consistent with theoretical models of parents' involvement indicating that parents' motivational beliefs shape their behavior (e.g., Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997), it remains to be seen whether the quality of parents' relationships with teachers may in fact drive parents' motivational beliefs.

his research did not examine how parents' motivational beliefs and the quality of their relationships with teachers are related to parents' involvement.

Prior research indicates that parents' motivational beliefs are related to their involvement in children's schooling (e.g., Green, et al., 2007) as well as higher quality relationships with teachers (Kohl, et al., 2000).

As such, it would be of interest in future research to examine whether parents' involvement may mediate the effects of their motivational beliefs on the quality of their relationships with teachers.

Findings from this study pertain to parents of children with behavior problems. It is not clear whether the mechanisms by which parents' motivations influence child behaviors are similar for all children, or for children experiencing other concerns including academic problems or developmental delays.

This study investigated parental motivations and parent-teacher relationships primarily from the perspectives of mothers. The manner in which role construction, parental efficacy, and parent-teacher relationships operate for fathers was not investigated.

This research leaves open the question of how the quality of parent-teacher relationships affects children's social and emotional functioning. Future research is needed to understand how these high quality relationships work to shape children's social and emotional functioning.

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