Chapter 4
Continuities and Consistencies Across Home and School Systems

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Over the last two decades, the intense focus of research and policy on parental involvement in education has evolved into greater discussion of family–school partnerships. This trend reflects arguments that the prevalence and effectiveness of parents' engagement in their children's educational careers are, in part, predicated on what schools are doing. In other words, parental involvement in education—despite the sole emphasis on parents in the very term—has always been a two-way street between home and school (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). A watershed moment in this gradual transition from models of parental involvement to models of family–school partnership came with the passage of No Child Left Behind in the early 2000s. Among many other things, this overhaul of federal educational policy directed schools to build compacts of collaboration with families (Epstein, 2005).

Yet, despite this progress in the conceptualization of both research and policy, the promise of family–school partnerships has not been fully realized. One issue is that, despite the rhetoric about the need to incorporate both sides of the family–school exchange, research still tends to focus on one side or the other, as does the actual execution of policy on the ground. The congruence between the two sides is often obscured. Another issue is that, even when both sides of the family–school exchange are considered, the focus is often on a narrow reading of what that congruence entails. Often, direct contact between parents and teachers has been prioritized at the expense of more indirect ways that families and schools can be working on the same page even when not explicitly working together. For example, children may learn more if they engage in complementary activities in the classroom and at

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S.M. Sheridan, E. Moorman Kim (eds.), *Processes and Pathways of Family-School Partnerships Across Development*, Research on Family-School Partnerships 2, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-16931-6_4

home, even if parents and school personnel are not in regular contact (Crosnoe, 2012; Crosnoe et al., 2010).

Perhaps these lacunae exist because the insights of developmental theory are often lost in the translation between the "talk" of family–school partnerships and the "action" of family–school partnerships. After all, developmental systems perspectives clearly argue for the need to consider children's developing capacities at the nexus of interacting ecological systems, with those transactions being direct and active as well as indirect and passive. Such perspectives also highlight the ways in which inequalities among diverse groups of children are often rooted in disruptions within those direct and indirect transactions (Lerner, 2006). Thus, developmental systems—which provided a great deal of the push towards family–school partnerships—direct researchers and policymakers to more thoroughly consider the ways that developing children's family and school systems are congruent and how that congruence reflects, exacerbates, and reduces educational and behavioral disparities in child outcomes at the population level.

In this chapter, therefore, I advocate for the consideration of synergies and disconnects between the educational environments of home and school as an emergent area of interest within the broader field of family–school partnerships. In discussing what has been done and what needs to be done, I focus primarily on research and secondarily on policy.

Bridging the Family and School Silos

Parental Involvement in Education

The US educational system emphasizes active parental involvement. The general argument is that children learn more in their classes and have more positive adjustment in school when their parents actively manage their educational experiences in the home, at school, and in the community (Eccles & Harold, 1993). On the side of parents, the mechanisms underlying these benefits are thought to be modeling of the value of schooling by involved parents, increased motivation and efficacy that involved parents have advocated for their children, enhanced understanding that involved parents have of the written and unwritten rules of schools, and the supplemental nature of academic opportunities outside school. On the side of schools, the mechanisms are thought to be greater awareness of the special needs and talents of the children of involved parents, deeper understanding of the desires and circumstances of involved parents, deference to parents who are involved, and differential investment in children as a reaction to parental involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007). Given the many disadvantages that children from families of low socioeconomic status (SES), especially racial/ethnic minorities, face in school, they are widely viewed as having more to gain from parental involvement than children from families in higher socioeconomic strata, especially Whites (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Consequently, parental

involvement has been a mainstay of educational research and policy for years (Domina, 2005).

A strong base of empirical evidence supports this position, with numerous studies across disciplines indicating that, on average, children benefit when their parents are involved in their educational careers in developmentally appropriate ways. More specifically, children do better—in terms of grades, test scores, advanced coursework, educational expectations, academic attitudes, and in-school behavior—when their parents engage them in learning activities at home and in the community, provide instrumental assistance with academic activities and decisions, volunteer at school, connect with other parents at school, and regularly interact with teachers. Moreover, children from socioeconomically disadvantaged and/or racial/ethnic minority backgrounds tend to benefit the most from having involved parents. Some of these observed effects of parents' involvement behaviors on their children's academic and behavioral outcomes are due to selection—when factors that lead parents to be more involved also support children's academic progress, creating the appearance of an association between the two even if it is not real. Still, the consensus is that these observed effects are at least in some part causal (Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, 1997; Hill, 2001; Pomerantz et al., 2007; Raver, Gershoff, & Aber, 2007).

This evidence suggests that encouraging parental involvement in education—especially among lower-SES and racial/ethnic minority parents—is an appropriate goal of educational policy and school practices. Indeed, the parental involvement provision of No Child Left Behind crystallized just how powerful this policy argument is (Epstein, 2005). Yet, what works in theory is not always borne out in reality. Whether parental involvement programs have resulted in meaningful improvements in schools' academic bottom lines, especially relative to investment, has been widely debated (Domina, 2005). Moreover, qualitative evidence suggests that parental involvement is often a source of tension between lower-SES parents and their children's schools (especially among racial/ethnic minorities), chipping away at the academic advantages of such involvement and helping to explain occasional findings in quantitative studies that parental involvement may be associated with greater rather than weaker socioeconomic and racial/ethnic disparities in child outcomes (Crosnoe, 2012; Lareau, 2003).

One explanation for this apparently problematic translation of empirical evidence into policy results is that the entire idea of parental involvement ignores the realities of education. It emphasizes what parents are doing in a de-contextualized way. The degree to which parents' involvement "works" depends, in part, on how it is interpreted and received by schools and how it lines up with school agendas (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Epstein et al., 2002). Discontinuities between what parents are doing or trying to do (or not) and what school personnel are saying and doing (or not) can undermine the educational process even when both parties are pursuing the same goal of helping children learn and achieve. Such disconnects are more common among children from lower-SES and racial/ethnic minority families (Lareau, 2003).

Reflecting the overly simplistic logic behind parental involvement in education, the concept has slowly given way in both research and policy to family–school

partnerships, a term that recognizes the overlapping contexts of home and school in which children live their lives. Discussion of family–school partnerships has become de rigueur—in research studies and reports and school policies and programs. Returning to the theoretical traditions that helped to inform the initial conceptualization of family–school partnership can help to deepen that discussion.

Theoretical Guidance on Family–School Partnerships

The developmental systems perspective represents one major way that developmental insights have been incorporated into the discussion of parental involvement (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). It emphasizes how development occurs at the intersection of multiple systems within and outside the child. The direct and indirect transactions among systems are particularly important to the pathways that children take and how well they adapt to their environments, and so developmental maladaptation is often traceable to problems in these transactions. Moreover, group disparities in developmental outcomes reflect systematic differences across groups in the balance between problematic or positive transactions (Lerner, 2006).

In systems terms, then, children learn more and do better overall when the transactions between themselves and their families are supportive, the transactions between themselves and their schools are supportive, and the transactions between their families and their schools are supportive. This argument is at the core of contextual systems theory, which is a direct application of developmental systems ideas to the issue of educational inequality in the United States (see Pianta & Walsh, 1996). This theory, which was formulated around the transition into formal schooling, is broadly relevant to the full preK-12 educational career.

Contextual systems theory uses the phrase "conversation" to capture the kinds of systemic transactions that promote educational success and that might be more or less free to emerge across different groups. When systems are in conversation, they directly and indirectly reinforce each other—from actual coordination to emergent continuity. When systems are not in conversation, they actively or passively work at cross purposes, from discord to distance. To elaborate, we can say that the family and school systems are in conversation if they engage in multiple interactions that eventually regularize into expected patterns of behavior and contact that support and constrain both sides. If parents and school personnel come to an agreement about children's educational needs and then work out a plan about how to ensure those needs are met, then they are clearly in conversation. On the other hand, we can say that family and school systems are not in conversation when their interactions are one-sided, adversarial, or apathetic. If parents and school personnel disagree about what children need and then act in contradictory ways and eventually stop interacting at all, then they have clearly fallen out of conversation. Effective conversation can be threatened when parents and school personnel are not working with the same schema about child development and learning, when they misperceive each other, and when they fall back on different worldviews and storehouses of information

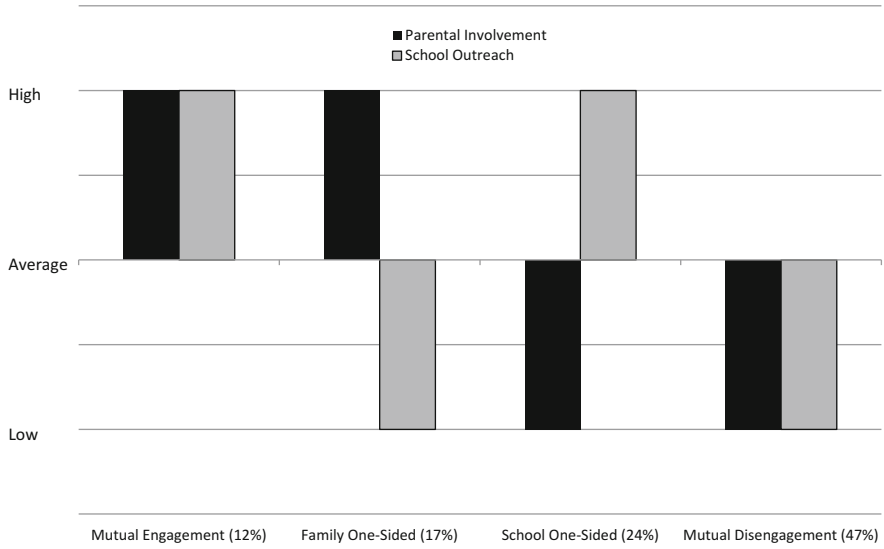
about schooling. Unfortunately, such disconnects are more common in schools with status and power imbalances between middle class and often White school personnel and lower-SES and often racial/ethnic minority parents, so that conversation becomes a factor in group disparities in child outcomes and not just a factor in child outcomes themselves (Pianta & Walsh, 1996).

The concept of family–school partnerships captures conversation by emphasizing transactions between home and school, whether positive (in effective conversation) or negative (in ineffective conversation or out of conversation altogether). Yet, discussion of such partnerships—and action taken to build such partnerships—usually focuses on the most explicit and intentional kinds of exchanges between home and school, when such exchanges can be, in fact, much more nuanced. Consider two kinds of family–school exchanges that are directly derived from contextual systems theory, one concerning actual engagement or disengagement *between* systems and another concerning parallel or contradictory activities *across* systems. In both cases, the focus is on what each side is doing, of course, but, perhaps more importantly, on how congruent or incongruent the activities of the two systems are in relation to each other.

First, *direct* partnerships deal with the interactions between people in the home with people in the school. For parents, what matters are their attempts to participate in the activities of the school and to engage with school personnel. For schools, what matters are their attempts to assist and involve the parents of their students. Each of these two sets of activities is significant in its own right, but the significance of one activity in part depends on the nature and frequency of the other activity. Here is where the issue of congruence is important. As one example, parental behaviors aimed at engaging schools may be undermined or diluted when they are incongruent with schools' attempts to engage parents, but they may be reinforced or even magnified when better matched with what schools are doing.

Figure 4.1 depicts a typology of direct partnerships between parents and school personnel. In mutual engagement, both sides are high on their respective activities—parents high in school-based involvement, schools high in outreach to parents. They reach out to each other. On the opposite end of the spectrum is mutual disengagement, when both sides are low on their respective activities towards the other—parents not reaching out to schools, schools not reaching out to parents. Such family–school system interactions are disconnected. In between these two extremes are what might be thought of as one-sided direct partnerships, when efforts by one side to reach out to the other are not reciprocated. In some cases, parental efforts to participate in schools are not reciprocated by school efforts to engage parents. In other cases, school efforts to engage parents are not reciprocated by parental efforts to participate in schools (Crosnoe, 2012).

Certainly, mutual engagement would be expected to be the optimal direct family–school system transaction for supporting the school success of children, as it maximally facilitates the flow of academically relevant information and support across the settings of children's lives. Given that such a flow would likely do more to introduce nonredundant social capital to children from lower-SES or otherwise disadvantaged families, mutual engagement would be expected to have a protective



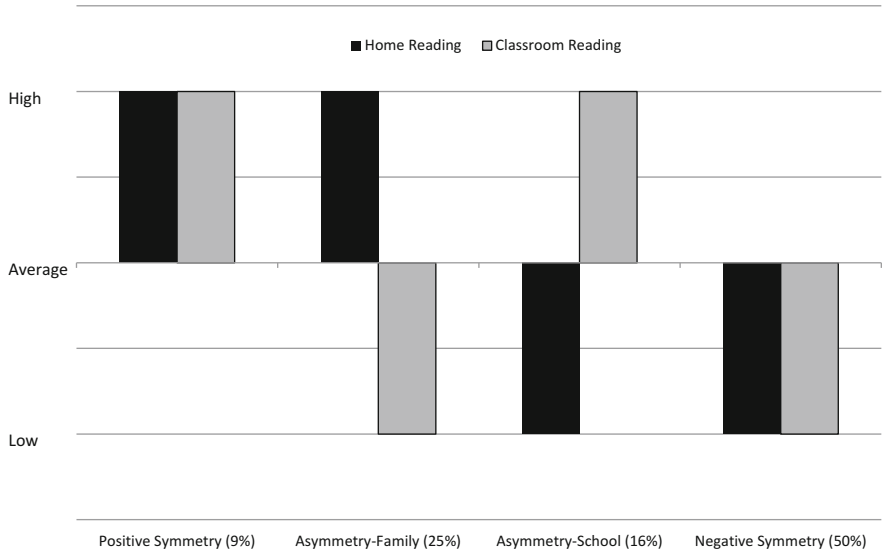
Data: 14,887 childrenin Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Cohort(from Crosnoe, 2012)

Fig. 4.1 A typology of direct engagement between home and school systems during kindergarten year. *Data*: 14,887 children in Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Cohort (from Crosnoe, 2012)

role in academic disparities. Even if such children are less likely to experience mutual engagement overall, they would benefit more when exposed to mutual engagement, which would help them make up ground with their peers. If one side was trying to engage the other without reciprocation, however, children—from all backgrounds—would derive little benefit. In such cases, engagement efforts from one system matched with disengagement from the target of those engagement efforts would represent alienation. Such alienation could be quite similar to mutual disengagement in terms of its role in children's academic progress (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Lareau, 2003; Pianta & Walsh, 1996; Pomerantz et al., 2007).

Second, *indirect* partnerships concern the degree to which parents and teachers each engage children in learning activities in their own context. How much and how well are parents organizing cognitively stimulating activities for their children at home or in the community, and how much and how often are teachers scaffolding the development of critical thinking and academic skills in their classrooms? Again, the congruence between activities across systems is just as important to consider as each activity on its own. For example, children may benefit less from teachers leading them through a specific skill-building curriculum at school if parents are not helping children find ways to enact and practice those skills outside school (and vice versa).

Figure 4.2 depicts a typology of indirect partnerships between parents and school personnel. In instances of positive symmetry, both sides are engaging in enrichment activities that mirror each other—children have no fall-off in how they are being



Data: 14,887 children in Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Cohort (from Crosnoe, 2012)

Fig. 4.2 A typology of learning symmetry between home and school systems during kindergarten year. *Data*: 14,887 children in Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Cohort (from Crosnoe, 2012)

scaffolded and stimulated as they move between the major settings of their daily lives. Negative symmetry is the opposite, when children are not being adequately stimulated in either system. They experience no drop-off, but that is because they are getting so little as they move from one setting to the other. Asymmetrical partnerships, on the other hand, involve cognitive stimulation and learning activities in one system that are not matched with what is going on in the other system. No supplementary or complementary learning processes are occurring in parallel, although children are getting something in at least one setting (Crosnoe, 2012).

Positive symmetry would be assumed to be the optimal indirect family–school system transaction for supporting the school success of children, as it involves the most consistent reinforcement of skill-building. Even though children from lower-SES families or other disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to experience cognitive stimulation at home or in their classrooms, they stand to benefit the most from experiencing stimulation and support in both. Continuity in learning environments could mitigate many social psychological risks of economic hardship and other structural and institutional disadvantages that disrupt learning in this population, thereby protecting them against the impact of factors that help to create academic disparities across diverse groups. Unlike in direct partnerships, however, the difference between incongruous and negatively congruous indirect partnerships is likely significant, with asymmetry less problematic than negative symmetry in terms of children's learning and achievement. In cases of asymmetry, the potential for alienation is lower than in cases of one-sided engagement, and resources in one

system may protect against a lack of resources in another system (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2007; Hamre & Pianta, 2005; La Paro & Pianta, 2000; Lareau, 2003; Magnuson, Meyers, Ruhm, & Waldfogel, 2004; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2002).

These two partnership typologies represent different ways to conceptualize the family–school exchanges at the heart of the family–school partnership concept. They are not mutually exclusive, of course, as one type of exchange could support the other (e.g., direct engagement increasing the likelihood of symmetry). Indeed, my argument is that both need to be considered in tandem. Weakness in one kind of partnership might dilute the effectiveness of the other, undermining the aims of policies and programs that aim to build only one type. Generally, the emphasis of research and policy has been on direct partnerships, but indirect partnerships need to be more explicitly brought into the discussion. Moreover, when considering direct partnerships, we need to consider how well attempts by one side to interact with the other are congruent with the other sides' attempts (or lack thereof), rather than simply focusing on one side or the other.

Empirical Evidence on Family–School Partnerships

In recent years, I have conducted several investigations of the role of family–school partnerships in relation to achievement and to socioeconomic disparities in achievement. The goal was to examine the similarities and differences between direct and indirect family–school partnerships that emphasize congruence across systems and, furthermore, to explore different dimensions within the generally understudied rubric of indirect family–school partnerships. The results have fairly consistently supported theoretical expectations, with mutual engagement and positive symmetry related to higher levels of and growth in academic achievement. The results have not consistently supported theoretical expectations about disparities in children's outcomes, however, leading to a more critical evaluation of the transactions (especially indirect) between home and school (Crosnoe, 2012; Crosnoe et al., 2010).

For example, drawing on data from nearly 15,000 US kindergartners in the nationally representative Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K), I measured both direct and indirect partnerships. For the former, I counted the school-based involvement activities (e.g., participating in PTA, volunteering at school, attending open house) that parents reported in the past year and took the mean of parent reports of how often schools engaged in outreach towards them (e.g., providing information on what children were doing in class, alerting them to when they could participate in school activities, inviting them to workshops). Both scales were dichotomized, capturing parents who engaged in school-based activities at least twice per year and schools viewed by parents as solid on the majority of outreach items. I cross-classified these two markers of engagement to identify children whose family–school systems fit the profile of mutual engagement, one-sided engagement (both types), and mutual disengagement.

As depicted in Fig. 4.1, mutual disengagement was the most common direct partnership, and mutual engagement was the least common. In instances of one-sidedness, unreciprocated school outreach was more common than unreciprocated parental involvement. For indirect family–school partnerships, I followed a similar strategy—measuring home learning activities in terms of parent reports of weekly frequency of shared reading, measuring school learning activities in terms of teacher reports of weekly frequency of phonics instruction in the classroom, dichotomizing both in meaningful ways, and then cross-classifying these two binary markers into the typology of positive symmetry, asymmetry (both types), and negative symmetry. The distribution of this typology of indirect family–school typology was similar in rank order to the breakdown for the direct family–school partnerships (refer back to Fig. 4.2), except that, within the two asymmetry categories, the category weighted towards family activity was more common than the category weighted towards school activity (Crosnoe, 2012).

Perhaps not surprisingly, growth curves of standardized test scores in reading revealed more acquisition of reading skills between kindergarten and third grade when the direct and indirect transactions between children's parents and school personnel took the form of mutual engagement and positive symmetry, once many other child, family, and school factors were taken into account. The observed effects of these two sets of family–school partnerships were fairly similar and peaked in second grade, and the differences between each of these partnerships and their counterpoint (mutual disengagement and negative symmetry, respectively) were on par with the differences in test scores between children with college-educated parents and children whose parents did not go to college. Where the results diverged from theory was when considering the observed effects of indirect (but not direct) family–school partnerships on socioeconomic disparities in children's test scores, with SES measured in terms of whether families had incomes below the federal poverty line and parents had low educational attainment. The hypothesized pattern of protection would be supported by evidence that children from lower-SES families benefited more from positive symmetry than children from higher-SES families, allowing them to make up some ground and narrow overall achievement disparities. The actual evidence, however, indicated that children from higher-SES families benefited the most from positive symmetry, expanding the overall achievement disparities. What might be thought of as a tool for promoting equality and equity, therefore, appeared to be related to divergent educational trajectories for children from more and less advantaged backgrounds.

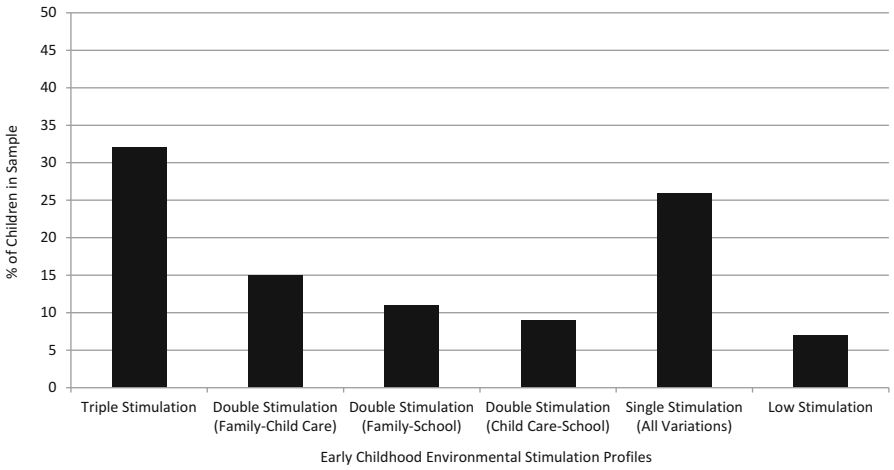
This unexpected pattern of indirect family–school partnerships and cumulative advantage could have emerged for several reasons. One is the tendency for some interventions aiming to close gaps among diverse child groups to actually widen them, as they do not adequately recognize that some children need a certain amount of resources before they can capitalize on the introduction of a new set of resources (Ceci & Papierno, 2005). In other words, indirect family–school partnerships would have the most impact on learning when situated within a host of other advantages and resources afforded by parents' higher-SES, such as safer communities with dense ties among families and schools with a great deal of material support. Two other

reasons concern the translation between conceptualization and operationalization. Parent and teacher reports may do less to accurately gauge the processes children are exposed to in their family and school systems everyday than more independent evaluations of those systems. Thus, measurement in ECLS-K may not have adequately captured the conceptualization of indirect family–school partnerships derived from contextual systems theory. At the same time, that theory situates the transactions between families and schools within a broader set of systems. Consequently, measuring aspects of families and schools only—and not linking them to other important organizational settings of learning and stimulation—may have been limiting.

For further exploration of these complexities of indirect family–school partnerships, I and my colleagues drew on data from over 1,300 children in the NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development. These data contained evaluations by trained observers of children's learning environments at home, elementary school classrooms, and child care arrangements. Specifically, I used the home enrichment subscale of the Home Observation of Measurement of the Environment (Bradley & Caldwell, 1979) to measure cognitive stimulation in the home at the time of school entry, the instructional quality subscale of the Classroom Observation System (Pianta, Belsky, Houts, Morrison, & The NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2007) to measure cognitive stimulation in the first-grade classroom, and the cognitive development subscale of the Observational Rating of the Care Environment (Belsky et al., 2007) to measure cognitive stimulation in preschool child care. These scales were split at the median to identify markers of high cognitive stimulation in each and then cross-classified into a typology of cross-system environmental stimulation around the transition into school, an expansion of the concept of indirect family–school partnerships (Crosnoe et al., 2010).

Figure 4.3 depicts this typology. It is bookended by triple stimulation (high stimulation in all three systems) and low stimulation (not high in any). The former was most common and the latter least common, in stark contrast to the ECLS-K pattern that indicated the reverse. Between these two ends were the children who had high stimulation in at least one but not all systems. Most commonly, they had high stimulation in one and only one system (regardless of which one it was). The remainder had high stimulation in two but not three systems; family and child care, family and school, and child care and school, in order of prevalence.

When this typology was used to predict growth curves of reading test scores from preschool through elementary school, we found that children did better when they started school enjoying cognitive stimulation in all three systems or, if not in all three, in the family and child care systems (net of numerous controls). Children did notably poorer if they had stimulation in any extra-familial system (i.e., child care, school) that was not coupled with stimulation at home. What was going on at home seemed to be the linchpin. Unlike in ECLS-K, examination of the link between indirect family–school partnerships and socioeconomic disparities in children's outcomes followed a pattern of protection rather than cumulative advantage. When the observed effects of indirect family–school partnerships differed by family income or parent education, they tended to be more pronounced among children from more



Data: 1,364 children in NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development (from Crosnoe et al., 2010)

Fig. 4.3 A typology of cross-system environmental stimulation during transition into elementary school. *Data*: 1,364 children in NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development (from Crosnoe et al., 2010)

disadvantaged backgrounds, thereby helping to reduce the achievement gap between lower- and higher-SES children over time.

For the most part, then, the results from the two studies that I have highlighted here were consistent, pointing to the added value of considering indirect family–school partnerships alongside the more commonly studied direct ones and of conceptualizing and operationalizing both types of partnerships to emphasize consistency (e.g., mutuality, symmetry) across systems. Where the results diverged concerned the moderating role of indirect family–school partnerships in links between family background and children's outcomes, calling for more attention to the particular issue of family–school congruence and inequality that addresses some of the common limitations of the research literature on family–school partnerships more generally.

Moving forward, research in this area needs to broaden in both scope and depth. To begin, measurement needs to improve in practical ways, such as (a) investing in more standardized observation protocols for studying what goes on at home, in school, and between the two; (b) using ethnographic observational protocols to get a sense of the substance of family–school interactions, beyond simply counting their frequencies, that can support survey instrument design; (c) collecting data about activities and interactions from specific parent–teacher dyads, rather than questioning parents about their children's teachers as a general class and teachers about their students' parents as a general class; and (d) directly assessing whether home activities and classroom activities are tapping the same child skills, rather than assessing the relation between them on face value. Other methodological and conceptual directions for future research include the vital need to import techniques

for improving causal inference from other fields (e.g., instrumental variables, fixed effects regression) to better gauge whether family–school congruence does actually affect children, expanding the scope of data collection on family–school partnerships to include specific characteristics of the larger community context that increase or decrease their congruence, and extending the age range beyond the most common childhood focus to consider a possible developmental gradient in family–school congruence.

Research, Action, and Special Populations

Focusing on Vulnerable Children and Families

In research and practice, family–school partnerships are often deeply connected to issues of social class and race/ethnicity. As my discussion so far indicates, family–school partnerships are thought to be a tool for reducing inequalities in the educational system, not just for promoting school success overall. Yet, that potential for family–school partnerships to be leveraged to help children from historically disadvantaged segments of the population make up ground with their peers is more complicated in reality than in theory (see Hill & Chao, 2009). In short, we are more likely to see schools be out of conversation with lower-SES parents and parents of color, and so more must be done to support conversation between the two. Perhaps the greatest need is more concrete advice about new avenues of research to achieve this goal. In the sections that follow, therefore, I discuss some basic issues concerning family–school partnerships in special populations and give advice about new research directions associated with each.

Importantly, lower-SES parents and parents who are from minority race/ethnic groups tend to have lower levels of involvement in school and weaker connections to schools than parents who are White or who are in more advantaged socioeconomic circumstances. These disparities tend to be more pronounced for aspects of family–school partnerships that involve direct interaction between parents and schools, especially on school grounds, than for aspects that are more indirect or symmetrical and involve parental activities outside of schools. Consequently, many policy efforts to build family–school partnerships focus specifically on low-income and/or race/ethnic minority parents (Crosnoe, 2012; Domina, 2005). These efforts can be supported by a more careful consideration of why these socioeconomic and racial/ethnic gaps in family–school partnerships occur in the first place. Research that unpacks the mechanisms underlying links between sociodemographic factors and family–school congruence and underlying the effects of such congruence on child outcomes is needed. The first phase of research was to examine if family–school congruence is connected to disparities among children, and now the second phase should begin examining why. One way to do so is to mix methods—using quantitative data to test hypotheses about intervening factors identified and measured in rigorous ways based on grounded theory from qualitative exploration.

Motivation and values do little to explain these socioeconomic and racial/ethnic gaps. Instead, practical constraints are important. Money allows parents to purchase goods and services for children to support their educational experiences and helps them overcome everyday obstacles to being involved at school and home (e.g., transportation costs, inflexible work schedules). How much human capital parents have also factors into how they understand what is needed for their children to succeed. Money and human capital also bring status, which gives parents power in school, so that that their demands are taken seriously and their input and collaboration is elicited. A lack of money or human capital, therefore, can hinder family–school partnerships through disincentives and constraints on the part of parents, school personnel, or both. Given that socioeconomic disadvantages are disproportionately higher in racial/ethnic minority populations, this link between family SES and family–school partnerships weighs more heavily in these populations (Cheadle, 2008; Crosnoe, 2012; Lareau, 2003; Mayer, 1997). Here is where concerted instrument development is needed. Socioeconomic status is often measured in a global and static way (e.g., income and parent education reports), but economic hardship is a daily experience with many seemingly minor things becoming cumulatively problematic. Those stressors are rarely measured in studies of family–school partnerships, which also rarely adequately account for the volatility in family finances or the discontinuous fashion in which many parents get education and training. To understand these important contextual dimensions of family–school congruence, we need research that demonstrates how to measure them.

Yet, the forces underlying socioeconomic and racial/ethnic gaps in family–school partnerships are not entirely practical. They also arise because of disconnects in the ways that families and schools view the expectations and obligations between them and the distrust that may mark relations over time. Extensive research has revealed that lower-SES parents tend to view schools (and be viewed) differently than more affluent parents. They have lower expectations of how schools should involve them and of what they can demand from schools, and they tend to be more deferential to school personnel. Thus, they may be less likely to interact with school personnel or to think that they have the ability to complement school activities at home. Because middle class school personnel tend to have different expectations of how concerned and invested parents are "supposed" to act, they may view lower-SES parents as uncaring or disengaged when they are not. Although Lareau's (2003) pioneering ethnographic work revealed that race/ethnicity did not matter to family–school partnerships in these ways once SES was taken into account, subsequent quantitative work indicated that similar differences occurred between African-American and Latino/a parents (and, to a lesser extent, Asian-American parents) on one hand and White parents on the other hand, even within the same socioeconomic strata (Bodovski & Farkas, 2008; Cheadle, 2008). Both lower-SES parents and racial/ethnic minority parents (especially when lower-SES) have ample experience in an educational system that has long underserved and marginalized children and families who are poor and/or of color, and this history can alter the working model of family–school partnerships that such parents have. They tend to approach schools with less of the sense of trust and equal footing that is so common among White middle class parents (Hill, 2011; Lareau, 2003).

The views that parents and teachers have of each other—how one side views the other and what that side expects—are rarely studied, possibly because researchers are more focused on capturing actual activities and interactions. Yet, those views likely undergird such activities and interactions and help to shape whether they are effective. In the future, more data collection explicitly exploring how to measure discordance and concordance in views across family–school lines is needed to guide hypothesis-testing about what does and does not work.

One lesson from family–school partnership research is that bringing parents and educators together may have less of an impact on children if each side comes in with different orientations and agendas. One successful intervention targeting low-income parents offers some insights into how getting parents and educators on the same page can be achieved, but we need more research to explore this potential. HIPPY (Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters) involves a series of home visits and support groups to enhance parental knowledge about child development and early education and to increase their construction of and engagement in cognitively stimulating activities with children (Baker, Piotrkowski, & Brooks-Gunn, 1999; HIPPY, 2010). Such a program might empower parents in their efforts to manage their children's educational careers at home and support their images of themselves as the agents of their children's success, encouraging them into more direct and active interactions with schools. A potentially valuable direction for future research related to this important policy agenda is to use a mixed methods model to determine how such efforts to empower low-income parents can be supported by linked efforts to also change the ways that educators view and approach them.

The Special Case of Immigrant Families

The vulnerabilities of family–school partnerships related to SES and race/ethnicity intersect within the growing population of immigrant families. These families are disproportionately poor and racial/ethnic minorities (Hernandez, Denton, & Macartney, 2007). As a result, they acutely experience many of the issues that can interfere with families and schools being in conversation that I have discussed so far. Yet, immigration itself introduces new issues, beyond SES and race/ethnicity, that need to be better understood. Because research on family–school partnerships in immigrant communities is still underdeveloped even as policy action in this area increases (Crosnoe, 2010), this topic is a way for social scientists to get in on the ground floor of a major policy agenda. What is needed is deep description of how these issues can play out in diverse subgroups of the immigrant population—who is most and least likely to experience family–school congruence and what mechanisms underlie such patterns?—before taking a more comparative approach that captures unique vulnerabilities and resources among immigrant parents, relative to nonimmigrant families of varying SES and race/ethnicity.

In terms of practical matters, language barriers can keep immigrant families and their children's schools from being more consistent in their exchanges. When parents do not speak (or are uncomfortable speaking) English, they are less likely to access information about what schools are doing, and they may have trouble interacting with school personnel or digesting school-related materials, especially if schools do not have bilingual or multilingual personnel or distribute materials in multiple languages. In these ways, they are more cut off from schools than the average low-income and/or racial/minority parent, creating greater distance between home and school and disrupting both direct and indirect partnerships with schools (Lopez, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orosco, 2001). Within this topic, one issue that needs to be explored more thoroughly in the future is the connection between English literacy and literacy more generally. If general literacy skills are a barrier to family–school coordination in some immigrant groups above and beyond English proficiency, then translating materials and hiring bilingual personnel will only take schools so far. These kinds of assessments of parents are often absent from child-focused studies, and that should change.

Although rates of parent education vary across different immigrant groups, immigrant parents' tenure in the US educational system is consistently low. Consequently, they have less understanding of their children's schools and may not grasp how much school personnel expect of them. In turn, they are often viewed as uninvested in their children's educational experiences by teachers, administrators, and other parents (Crosnoe, 2010). Cultural disconnects between home and school also matter. Immigrant parents have often been socialized into approaches to parenting children that differ from the White middle class models that have cultural power in many American schools. For example, *educaciòn*, common among immigrants from Latin America, views moral socioemotional development as the primary foci of parenting, with academic development more the province of teachers in a parallel partnership (Lopez, 2001; Reese, Balzano, Gallimore, & Goldberg, 1995). Such an approach would seem to place less emphasis on interacting with school personnel, and constructing symmetrical learning environments at home, not because parents devalue education or their role in it but because they believe that a parallel partnership is the best way to produce well-rounded successful children. Yet, schools do not always discern this distinction (Crosnoe, 2010). As another example, immigrants from Asia tend to be less visible in school, but they often actively construct and support learning activities and opportunities outside of school. Indeed, many Asian immigrant parents spend a great deal of time and money sending their children to after-school and weekend enrichment activities, including tutoring, weekend schools or after-school, and lessons (Kao & Thompson, 2003; Zhou, 2009). Thus, their approach to parenting may not prioritize direct family–school partnerships while prioritizing indirect family–school partnerships. Yet, that lack of direct interaction with schools may reduce the degree to which parents and school personnel are on the same page, decreasing symmetry between home and school (Crosnoe, 2010).

As a suggestion for future research, I return to my call to explore the symmetry of views across systems and not just behaviors. To my knowledge, no large-scale

quantitative data speak to how well views about learning, development, and schooling align in parent–teacher dyads involving immigrants. Such a data collection, therefore, would be a great service to the field.

Even though these immigration-related issues tend to diminish over time (Glick, Bates, & Yabiku, 2009; Goldenberg, Gallimore, & Reese, 2005), they still undermine consistency and continuity between family and school systems today. Fortunately, numerous organizations have attempted to address these issues, especially in the Latin American immigrant population. One theme among these programs has been their focus on more indirect family–school partnerships, especially symmetry, as an avenue for supporting immigrant families and then shifting towards more direct family–school partnerships; in other words, creating continuity between home and school in terms of learning environments and approaches to supporting learning and then using that continuity to support productive mutually engaged interactions (Crosnoe, 2010).

Abriendo Puertas, a California program that targets Latino/a parents with support groups and instructional activities, is one program. It focuses on helping parents build home learning environments for their children, so that the classroom will be familiar to them and activities at home and school will overlap. The goal is to create consistency across children's environments, but parents do feel more empowered dealing with school personnel. Thus, indirect partnerships can eventually support direct ones (Bridges, Cohen, Fuller, & Velez, 2009). Another program, Lee y Seras, goes further. Sponsored by the National Council of La Raza and targeting Latino/a parents of young children, it also focuses primarily on building home learning environments that are more symmetrical with classroom activities but also explicitly uses instructional workshops to cultivate direct interactions between parents and school personnel. Importantly, this program has parallel workshops for teachers, so that they can better understand parents, support what they are doing at home, and coordinate with them at school (Goldenberg & Light, 2009).

These programs represent just two examples of how broader and more holistic conceptions of family–school partnerships (i.e., supporting indirect partnerships alongside direct family–school partnerships, emphasizing congruence in direct and indirect partnerships) can help immigrant parents and school personnel effectively work together over time. Yet, more needs to be done. Here is a very specific place in which researchers can take advantage of extant programs—and, to be clear, such programs are proliferating (Crosnoe, 2010)—to build a line of study specifically focused on family–school congruence. Although these programs are often evaluated, they tend to be evaluated in a more descriptive way. Assessing confidence in their observed treatment effects is important but not the sole purpose of such research. Given the intensity of activities in these programs, evaluations of them offer an opportunity to collect rich data about the nuances and contexts of family–school congruence that are often lacking in more general studies, especially national studies. Thus, program-research partnerships may be a way forward for meeting some of the research needs in this area.

Conclusion

In terms of family–school partnerships, developmental theory focuses on active transactions that involve explicit contact between family and school systems, more passive interactions that involve symmetry between them, and the connections between the two. The sum of these transactions determines whether families and schools are in conversation.

For the most part, policy and programs focusing on family–school partnerships have recognized this conception of family–school partnerships, but they have not always acted on it. Many efforts still highlight the most visible means of parents and schools connecting, to do so in highly quantitative ways (e.g., increasing the frequency of contact), and to focus on what one side or the other is doing rather than consistency and continuity in the actions of both sides. Yet, such connections can take many forms, and even the same quantitative metric of activity or behavior may subsume great variation in the nature and substance of that activity or behavior.

If we are to improve the overall effectiveness of family–school partnerships, therefore, we need to recalibrate how family–school partnerships are studied and enacted. Contact and direct interactions between home and schools should certainly not be de-emphasized, but it should "share space" with discussion and action focusing on creating more continuity and consistency across home and school environments, both because such indirect family–school partnerships are important in their own right but also because they help to support direct family–school partnerships. In other words, I am not advocating more research and policy attention to some new take on family–school partnerships but instead more fully recognizing the original theoretical insights that advocated our concern with family–school partnerships in the first place. That conception was holistic, and so the activities it generates should be holistic too.

Given the centrality of issues of socioeconomic and racial/ethnic disparities to the research and policy agenda on family–school partnerships, the potential added value of returning to the more theoretically grounded conception of family–school partnerships that emphasizes consistency and continuity in direct and indirect transactions is likely to be more fully realized. After all, the kinds of obstacles that hinder indirect and direct family–school partnerships in general are often more pronounced when lower-SES, racial/ethnic minority, and immigrant parents come into contact with an educational system that has historically been organized around White middle class interests. Helping families and schools understand and respect each other across these potential boundaries and helping both support children while this understanding and respect emerges are perhaps the best ways to ensure that opportunities for children to learn and be successful are seamless no matter where they are at any time during the day, week, or year.

Acknowledgements The author acknowledges the support of grants from the Foundation for Child Development and the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (R01 HD055359-01, PI: Robert Crosnoe; R24 HD42849, PI: Mark Hayward). Opinions reflect those of the authors and not necessarily the opinions of the granting agencies.

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