Parent-child reading: voyage between home and school

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Abstract
This study aims to explore how the socially deprived parents teach reading at home and at school, as well as the school measures that can raise their role awareness and support them in children’s reading. Role construction and modeling of parents are the focuses of this research since they can account for the ways parents get involved. Using mixed methods, parents of the second graders in Hong Kong were found to be supportive at home. Though they might not be able to identify the roles clearly, many of them were aware of their importance. School strategies remained more remote to influence parents’ belief and behaviour. On the other hand, more socially disadvantaged families were usually more reliant on the school to promote students’ reading interests as they treated school as authoritative in teaching. These families would benefit from active home-school interaction with the trust. In order words, school has the capacity to engage the parents to read with children at home and at school.

Introduction
Parents accompanying their children to read is crucial to nurture reading interests. The provision of opportunities, interaction, recognition and modelling are the roles of parents can perform in the teaching of reading. Once the children start schooling, the teaching duty is shared between the family and school, and a partnership should be built. Nevertheless, parents remain as a key stakeholder for they can provide the individual attention and bonding that is impossible for teachers to achieve. As a result, many schools and researchers are interested in engaging parents to read with the young at home and at school. Socially deprived families usually need more support as they lack the capitals necessary to assist their children.
Though important, there has not been any study to provide a comprehensive review of home-based and school-based parental involvement. A number of research has tried to establish a causal link between various forms of parental involvement and reading performance (e.g., Hannon, 1987; Tizard et al., 1982), however, they fail to account for the reasons why parents participate in children’s reading. Some studies tried to examine the process of parent-child reading (e.g. Stuart et al., 1998) but the dimensions of preparing home environment and parents’ skill acquisition, which are essential for the process, were neglected. Furthermore, it is necessary to understand practices at home and at school since both arenas can affect parents’ decisions in engagement. Therefore this study aims to explore how they teach reading at school and at home, as well as the school measures that can support them.

In order to articulate the influence of various factors on parental involvement process, a theoretical model is adopted (Walker et al., 2005). Parents’ motivational beliefs, their perceived life context and perceived invitations from other parties are the three main constructs. Beliefs, which include role awareness and self-efficacy, are the internal qualities of parents. Role awareness, in particular, is crucial to determine whether parents would nurture reading interests. Life context can be prescribed by the self-perceptions of environmental factors such as time, energy, skills and knowledge. The final construct should be the invitations from the child, teachers and school. The model is also used as a checklist of parameters for designing the research tools.

On the other hand, the complexity of school-based parental involvement in reading demands a new framework to integrate both forms of engagement and the roles that the school can perform. The six ways which school can involve parents are best described by the Joyce Epstein’s typology (1995). The first type is parenting which concerns about the strategies to support families for setting home conditions in learning. Communication between families and school is another type that helps both
parties to understand each other. The third type - volunteering - is to involve parents at schools to support children schooling. In addition, learning at home refers to support parents to read with their children. Decision-making is another area that schools have to engage parents in order to promote shared responsibility and accountability. Parent-child reading committee can be an example. Finally, school should collaborate with the community to create or utilize the childcare resources so that more cultural and social capitals can be available to the families. Any school initiatives to engage parents could fall within the six types.

At the same time, the ORIM framework outlines the roles of parents in children’s reading clearly (Hannon, 1995). Using books for reading, parents can provide opportunities (O) for their children to recognize words, pronounce them and write them down. Parents’ praise for their effort and correction of students’ errors form the components of recognition (R) and interaction (I) respectively. They become role models (M) for their children when they read themselves. In a similar way, school should work according to the expected roles in the teaching of reading (ORIM). By integrating Epstein’s typology and ORIM, types of school-based involvement and how these strategies can raise parents’ awareness can be explored (Table 1).

Table 1: Framework for understanding parental involvement at school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roles of school</th>
<th>Parenting (schedule/materials)</th>
<th>Communicating with parents</th>
<th>Volunteering</th>
<th>Learning at home (process)</th>
<th>Decision-making</th>
<th>Community collaboration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities (O)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition (R)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction (I)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Model (M)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Nevertheless, this framework cannot explain parental involvement at home, which should be more focused on parenting and learning (or more specifically, reading). First, the meaning of parenting should be modified as preparing the conditions necessary for children to read, for instance, setting reading schedule or buying books. Similarly, learning at home can be described as the process of interaction between parent and child. It is integrated with ‘communicating’ of the six types of involvement as interaction itself is communication. Third, parents can make use of community resources like seminars or training to prepare themselves for reading at home (community collaboration). Volunteering and decision-making for school do not exist in family and they have to be removed from the framework. As a result, the framework below is used to examine how parents help at home and the roles they can fulfill in such behaviour (Table 2).

Table 2: Framework for understanding parental involvement at home

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roles of parents</th>
<th>Types of Parental Involvement in Reading at home</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parenting (reading schedule/materials/environment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities (O)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition (R)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction (I)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model (M)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Methods

As there has been much concern about the effect of family background on children’s reading, this study selected four sample schools that served socially deprived regions in Hong Kong. After reviewing the primary school profile, a list of
schools which had placed emphasis on reading and parental involvement was made. The recommendations of the Secretary of the Committee on Home-School Co-operation and an on-site observation of the annual reading carnival were taken into account of creating the list. The preferred schools were first contacted with the help of some key informants, followed by telephone conversation with the principals. Finally invitation letters were sent to three schools. The remaining school was recruited by sending a second batch of invitation to the remaining schools on the list.

Together with the Walker’s model (2005), the two above-mentioned frameworks are used for designing various measurements of this mixed-method study. School documents were reviewed and observations of school activities such as parents’ meetings outline the context of the research. At the same time, semi-structured interviews were carried out for 32 matched pairs of parents and their second-grade children. Parents were asked about the family background, the home-based and/or school-based involvement and their perceived roles; whereas students had to share the ways they read with the family, as well as their perceptions towards parent-child reading at home. The information gathered was used to design two different questionnaires which were administered for all parents and students in the schools later. Once again, parents’ beliefs and behaviour, divided into the types of involvement and parents’ roles, were the focuses of the survey. Their perceptions about school initiatives were explored. Similar to the interviews, students’ voices were listened to understand the materials, methods and opinions of parent-child reading. The frameworks were employed again in data analysis.

Discussion

The analysis of this study is divided into home-based and school-based parental involvement in reading. Since parents involve in less complicated ways at home, the
discussion mainly focuses on the data collected from the two surveys and interviews for parents and children. On the other hand, school-based activities can be classified into six types of involvement, which demand various sources of information and triangulation. Staff interviews, lesson observation and documentary review are necessary to complement the analysis.

*Parental involvement in children’s reading at home*

Parents of the second graders were generally supportive to read with them at home (Table 3). More than 77 per cent of parents claimed they always or sometimes read with their children, giving a relatively high mean value of 3.7. Data from student survey indicated the frequency was relatively high, ranging from everyday in a week (21.6%), four to six days (12.4%) and one to three days (46.4%). The interest of children (83%) was the most important motivator of having home reading. In fact, more than 80 per cent of students liked to read with their families. Time availability of family members (79%) came very close to the first factor, whereas family reinforcement (27%) and teachers’ persuasion (42%) remained less influential.

**Table 3: Parent-child reading behaviour at home (parent survey)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of questions</th>
<th>No. of items in the survey</th>
<th>*Mean (M)</th>
<th>Standard deviation (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parenting</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning at home</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Data are on a 5-point Likert scale (5= always; 4 = sometimes; 3=not sure; 2=seldom; 1=never)

Concerning the mode of reading (O in ORIM), parents reading to students was the most popular method in learning (73%), followed by student reading aloud (72%) and reading together (65%) (student survey). In fact, parent interviewees also reviewed that storytelling, a way to read to students, was very popular. The variety of
content and hidden messages attracts students’ attention. Parents also found it easier to tell stories rather than to read non-fictions such as encyclopedia. There is a space for parents to figure out how to present the story in a lively way. Other than storytelling, parent interviewees mentioned quite a lot about asking students to read aloud for diagnosing the words they did not know.

From the parent survey, it is found that parents had to answer children’s queries about reading frequently ($M = 4.4; SD = .9$). This type of interaction is essential for children to learn (I in ORIM). Asking for the meanings and pronunciation of words were the usual enquiries. Nevertheless, the questioning process was not one-way. Many parents tried to ask students questions to ensure they were attentive and understand the information of the articles.

Concerning the recognition of students’ effort in reading (R in ORIM), there were more than 90 per cent of parents claimed they praised their children for their progress. However, only one parent interviewee could review clearly how she recognized daughter’s effort. The contrasting data may not only due to the research methods used, but also be accounted by the circumstances and the ways of the recognition parents agreed to give. Chinese parents also tended not to praise children explicitly or frequently as they believed this might make the children over-proud of themselves.

Other than being supportive in reading process at home, parents invested much energy in preparing reading environment for the children, that is, parenting in home-based involvement. They tried to read what children read most of the time ($M = 4.1; SD = .9$), bought reading materials for the children ($M = 3.7; SD = 1.2$) or borrowed them from the library ($M = 3.6; SD = 1.3$). All these aspects contribute to ‘opportunities’ in ORIM. Similarly, data from student survey reviewed the parents’ willingness. Sixty-two per cent of students reported that they were given the materials within the month for the survey. More than half of the families tried to buy books upon the request of the students. Parents were especially supportive in the sense that home space was provided to store children’s books (77%). Nevertheless, there was not
any fixed schedule for library visits, book purchase or reading at home. Parent-child interaction about book choice was common (I in ORIM) but recognition did not exist.

Previous research has suggested that parents decide on whether and how they would involve based on their self-confidence and beliefs. Therefore it is necessary to examine the role concepts and self-efficacy beliefs. Statistics of this study shows that the P.2 parents generally held positive beliefs in their capabilities to read with the children (Table 4). In the area of parenting, a positive belief was found. They were confident in spending at least 10 minutes each week ($M = 3.9; SD = .8$) and reading regularly with the children ($M = 3.7; SD = .8$). Moreover, they were willing to give a degree of freedom for students to choose their favourite materials ($M = 4.1; SD = .7$) or they prepared by themselves ($M = 3.8; SD = .8$), indicating that parents would like to let students’ interests guide the reading development. In a similar vein, they claimed they could help children’s learning by interacting ($M = 3.8; SD = .8$) and solving their difficulties ($M = 4.1; SD = .6$).

Table 4: Parents’ belief in reading with children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of questions</th>
<th>No. of items in parent survey</th>
<th>$^*M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parenting (schedule)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting (materials)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning at home</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role modeling</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Data are on a 5-point Likert scale (5 = strongly agree; 4 = agree; 3 = not sure; 2 = disagree; 1 = strongly disagree)

On the other hand, parents were not very certain about their roles in children’s reading. Though they thought they could play a role to cultivate reading habits ($M = 3.7; SD = .8$), parents were especially uncertain about their own capacities to be the role models in reading ($M = 3.4; SD = 1.0$). The possible reasons could be ‘role’ was a more abstract term as if the questionnaire did not provide them a definition.
Respondents could hold different standards of role modeling effects and parents’ roles. Fortunately enough, this did not make all of them leave the responsibilities to the schools. About half of the parents disagreed schools should be the only one to promote reading \((M = 3.0; SD = 1.3)\).

Parents, indeed, acted according to their motivational beliefs, since their self-efficacy and role construction were correlated with their behaviour (Table 5). The only exception was the correlations between their beliefs in the roles of school and parenting and learning at home. Once again, this confirms that parents did understand they had to carry out their duties to teach the children to read.

Table 5: Pearson correlations of parental beliefs and behaviour

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beliefs</th>
<th>Behaviour</th>
<th>Parenting</th>
<th>Learning at home</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parenting – schedule</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td>.42**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting - materials</td>
<td>.45**</td>
<td>.32**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning at home</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td>.46**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role modeling of parents</td>
<td>.30**</td>
<td>.42**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of school</td>
<td>-.18**</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** p < .01

Then what roles did the parents believe in? Rather than pointing them out directly, interviewees usually used examples to illustrate their ideas. For instance, a parent said,

‘I love reading a lot…I ask my younger daughter to sit next to us (mother and elder sister). She loves to be with us. She imitates what we do.’

Many parent interviewees tried to be the role models of their children. They might not read books but read newspapers and/or magazines extensively. Some even made reading one of the few pastimes that children could have. Indeed, the concept of role modeling has been rooted in Chinese parents. In Confucian doctrine, children’s practice is continuously under the influence of environmental factors such as education, culture, family background and parents’ attributes and interests. In order to
shape a child, family has to set up examples easy enough for children to follow and
model themselves. It is better to teach by acts than by words. This is in-echo with a
concept identified as ‘osmosis’ in a comparative study of Japanese and American
learning environment at home. It emphasizes on the ‘nurturance, interdependence, and
close physical proximity’ to prepare a readiness for the child to ‘imitate, accept, and
internalize’ adult values (Hess and Azuma, 1991). Parents are also expected to set
texamples for children and teach them well otherwise they will lose face. This can also
explain why some parents have started to read with their children even when they
were babies.

Children’s preference and informal invitations constitutes another factor for
parents to perform their roles. Multiple regression of an item in student survey
reviewed the frequency of parent-child reading was mainly determined by children’s
interests ($R^2 = .17$, adjusted $R^2 = .15$, $F(3, 52) = 10.37$, $p=.00$), followed by school
differences. Most children interviewees preferred parent-child reading to reading
alone. Reading by themselves might be more tiring as they needed to understand the
texts with their limited literacy. The bonding and individual attention was necessary
for nurturing reading interests. Parents also tried to assist them out of love.

‘He is my son. I try to make it for his benefits…He may not have the same opportunity
when he grows up.’ (Parent)

In echo with the survey data, parent interviewees did not find it hard to read with
their children, in particular, in solving children’s reading difficulties. The possible
reasons can be most of them had received education up to Form 3, or the children
were still young to allow parents assist them in learning. In the eyes of parents, very
specific knowledge or techniques was unnecessary for parent-child reading. Therefore
most parents practised it based on their personal concern about child development and
awareness of their roles. They gained their knowledge and skills based on daily
practice with their children, sharing between peers or getting information from reading or mass media. As a result, it was rare for them to advance their understanding from the activities or trainings organized by external organizations. The area of community collaboration in the framework was nearly blank.

Although the families were socially disadvantaged, they did not feel uneasy to utilize their resources in assisting their children to read. If both parents and child did not understand certain words, they could make use of dictionaries. When it came to more difficult words or book content, something the parents were unable to cope with, the families knew where they could get further assistance. Sources of support came from the relatives, family friends or colleagues, neighbours, as well as from teachers. ‘There must be someone who knows it,’ said a grandmother.

In summary, parents of second graders were supportive in both parenting and learning process, the two dimensions of parental involvement at home. Their behaviour was related to their motivational beliefs. Though some of them might not have strong social background, they understood their importance in children’s reading. Parents practised it based on the love for children and role awareness. As a result, they acquired the necessary skills from personal encounters with children, self-study and/or others’ advice. Even if they could not solve the problems in children’s reading, they tried to utilize the social resources. This implies there are chances for the school to engage parents in parent-child reading by various strategies.

**Parental involvement in children’s reading at school**

There are six ways for parental involvement in reading: parenting, learning at home, communicating with school, decision-making, community collaboration and volunteering. In this study, the four sample schools used various methods to engage the adults. First, school could support parenting by giving information through
newsletters, asking students to borrow books from school library, encouraging parents to buy books from book fairs, as well as organizing seminars on book selection.

Second, parents could be supported for the reading process by carrying out the parent-child reading scheme, organizing seminars teaching the techniques and publishing guidebooks for parents. Third, there could be home-school interaction for the sake of children’s reading development. In the process of organizing activities for parents, the school usually had to collaborate with the community to obtain extra funding or expertise. For the parents who had more contacts with school, they could have more opportunities to influence school in reading policies. Some could even volunteer to help in reading sessions, library work or chaperon visits to other libraries.

When various dimensions of parental involvement are compared, parents were more satisfied with the support for home reading than the other aspects (Table 6). More than 90 per cent of parents agreed that the schools encouraged them to read with the students. The schools also tried to motivate parents to buy reading materials \( (M = 3.8; \ SD = .8) \) or encourage the students themselves to borrow materials from schools \( (M = 4.3; \ SD = .6) \), which could constitute a reading environment at home. On the other hand, home-school communication, volunteering and providing opportunities for parents to express their ideas (decision-making) only gained moderate recognition. Moreover, schools could only moderately promote role awareness of the parents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of questions</th>
<th>No. of items in the survey</th>
<th>*M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parenting</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning at home</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating with school</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-making</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall (to promote role recognition)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Parents’ perspectives towards school strategies
* Data are on a 5-point Likert scale (5 = strongly agree; 4 = agree; 3 = not sure; 2 = disagree; 1 = strongly disagree)

Further analysis indicates weak to moderate correlations between parents’ beliefs and their perceptions towards school strategies (Table 7). This means school strategies could affect the motivational beliefs, or vice versa. Similarly, the school established connections with the parents’ behaviour in children’s reading, in particular, their willingness to participate in school-based activities (Table 8). The initiatives used to promote parents in carrying out parenting and reading were also weakly related to their actual behaviour at home.

Table 7: Correlations between parents’ motivational beliefs and their perceptions towards school strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beliefs</th>
<th>Perceptions of school</th>
<th>Parenting at home</th>
<th>Learning at home</th>
<th>Communicating with school/parents</th>
<th>Decision making</th>
<th>Volunteering</th>
<th>Overall role recognition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parenting – schedule</td>
<td>.29**</td>
<td>.32**</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td>.20**</td>
<td>.34**</td>
<td>.19**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting - materials</td>
<td>.27**</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td>.16*</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.14*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning at home</td>
<td>.29**</td>
<td>.33**</td>
<td>.27**</td>
<td>.14**</td>
<td>.18**</td>
<td>.17**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role modeling of parents</td>
<td>.30**</td>
<td>.39**</td>
<td>.39**</td>
<td>.22**</td>
<td>.34**</td>
<td>.31**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of school</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.22**</td>
<td>.21**</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05; ** p < .01
Nevertheless, school strategies remained marginal to parental involvement at home. By carrying out multiple regression on parents’ questionnaire, the frequency of parent-child reading was found to be predicted mostly by the motivational beliefs in parenting and role modelling (adjusted $R^2 = .21$). Parents’ background could account for another 10 per cent of variations and lastly, the number of children in a family studying at the same school. School strategies and differences among school did not affect the frequency at all. (Table 9)

Table 9: Predicting parent-child reading by incorporating all parameters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Order of blocks entering model</th>
<th>Parameters in questionnaire</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>adjusted $R^2$</th>
<th>F value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>No. (N)</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig. (p)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>7.29</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Home language (others)</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>6.07</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs</td>
<td>Parenting (schedule)</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>13.82</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Role modeling of parents</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>12.54</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associations with school</td>
<td>No. of children studied at the school</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>11.33</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In fact, the smaller mean and larger standard deviation values found in parents’ perceptions about the school can explain something. Parents were less satisfied and more uncertain about strategies that required them to actively participate in schools (Table 6). It was rare for parents to communicate with school for the sake of reading.
and participate in external reading activities recommended by the school ($M = 2.4; SD = 1.3$). Their self-efficacy and role awareness, as described before, can be the reasons for taking parent-child reading as less ‘urgent’ and/or ‘unimportant’ to have school-based involvement. Most of them thought that teaching children to read was not hard at all. Even they came across any difficulty, they could get help conveniently as if they tried to seek. The remaining reasons can be explained by qualitative data.

Other than the six types of involvement, school-based activities can be divided into active and passive forms. Passive forms include unidirectional transmission of information like guidebooks, newsletters and parent-child reading scheme. Active ones can be exemplified by parent training, book fairs for parents to purchase reading materials, home-school contacts, opportunities for volunteering and decision-making, as well as community collaboration. School-based involvement, indeed, requires stronger commitment of parents. However, the interests of parents remained the most important problem for school to engage them actively.

Taking parent training as an example, time mismatch was key reason for the parent interviewees of the poor participation or no-show. Parents had to work on weekdays and it was impossible for them to join. The schools also did not have suitable venue since various classes required a lot of space to hold lessons. At night, parents might spare the time to supervise homework and revision instead. Weekends were not appropriate either. Children had their extra-curricular activities and various training. Parents might prefer to spend the free time with family and friends. Housewives could have more chances to participate, however, this did not guarantee a higher participation rate. Those who had little awareness about parent-child reading would seldom join. On the other hand, the low level of participation remained a headache for the organizers since the school had to invest manpower, money and
space to hold any event.

In a similar vein, home-school contacts, volunteering and decision-making were restricted to certain groups of families. Both teachers and parents did not find urgent need to make contacts specifically about reading for most of the time. In addition, few parents were willing to volunteer even if recruitment was open to all. The workforce usually shrank after the training or within a few months. As a result of more school contacts, volunteers could influence the decisions made on reading policies than general parents. Fortunately, the scenario of domination by certain parents in school activities did not occur (Crozier, 1999), since most volunteers worked for a love for children, a strong belief in the benefits of reading and better understanding of the school. The teachers-in-charge also supported and monitored their service closely.

In summary, parents’ role awareness and self-efficacy were the most important reasons for their engagement. Although they understood their roles, they preferred to involve at home and rarely tried to advance their skills by seeking external support. School initiatives remained as remote entities to influence their beliefs and behaviour.

Socio-economic status and parental involvement in reading

To some extent, family background had a significant impact among the parents. Parents’ marital status and whether the families had newly immigrated members differed significantly in the parental involvement at home. Divorced parents were less actively engaged in reading with the children ($M = 2.78; SD = .91$) than the married couples ($M = 3.24; SD = .55$) in the ANOVA test ($F (2,204) = 3.80, p < .02$). They were also psychologically less ready to prepare reading materials for their children ($M = 2.74; SD = 1.96; F (2,206) = 5.04, p < .01$), therefore they actually had less preparation ($M = 2.08; SD = 1.12$) than the others ($M = 3.05; SD = .58; F (2,202) = 15.46, p = .00$). Moreover, families with newly immigrated members also showed a lower level to read with the children ($M = 3.09; SD = .63$) than their counterparts ($M = 3.29; SD = .54$) in t-test ($t = 2.35, df = 200, p < .02$). The presence of such members also exerted difference in preparing reading materials for the children ($M = 2.85; SD$
Nevertheless, there was no significant difference for both beliefs and behaviour when parents with different educational attainment, with or without social subsidies or the types of housing they lived were compared.

The contrasting results of beliefs and behaviour in parent-child reading might not necessarily come from the use of multiple SES measures itself. Rather, it indicated that parents had different awareness about the ways and levels they involved at home. When the verbatim of parent interviewees were compared, parents who received less education, more social assistance, or who were divorced were less certain about their roles in participation. They might encourage their children in ways such as bringing them to library, however, they were not aware that what they had already nurtured reading interests among the children. These parents usually did not use the terms ‘roles’ or ‘role modelling’ in these answers. They carried out the practices simply based on the love for the students and their development, that is, reading is important for their future.

‘As parents, we have to select books that are appropriate to them. (How about role modeling?) What?…I have never thought about this.’ (Parent who studied to F.1)

‘My husband and I don’t have an important role because we seldom cultivate the interests. We buy the books and her dad brings her to library… We don’t encourage a lot (Parent who received social allowances)

In fact, poorer families were usually more reliant on the school to promote students’ reading interests as they treated schools as authoritative in teaching. One parent said ‘it is better for a teacher to instruct in one sentence than us to teach with a thousand words’. As ‘reading’ and ‘studying’ are quite similar in Chinese wording, parents might take both as the same. Reading and schooling were viewed as mechanisms to improve literacy and eradicate family poverty.
‘I ask her to read by herself. I tell her that mom doesn’t know any words. I have the difficulties to help my daughter at home. Only the school can assist her.’ (Mother educated in Mainland to F.3)

**Implications**

To the contrary of some common thoughts, poor parents do value reading and education in Hong Kong. These parents try to utilize the community resources to read with the children at home. More importantly, they know they should establish partnership with school. On the other hand, families facing multiple life constraints are more reliant on school to support children’s reading, seeming to give school the opportunity to involve them. Nevertheless, data of this research reviews school-based involvement exerts little influence to the beliefs and behaviour in parent-child reading. The low participation rate, to some extent, also discouraged the school to invest further resources in parent training.

The future seems to be dim for school-based involvement, however, it does not mean that school should stop engaging parents at once. Since the concept of home-school partnership is getting root in Hong Kong, reading can be an area parents mostly concern other than supporting children in studies. Under the Chinese culture, they are aware of their roles and wishful to help their children to succeed in schooling. The trust placed on the school still gives a space for it to carry out initiatives targeting at easing parents’ reliance, giving the information necessary for parents to read with children at home, opening the school library after school hours for parents, or inviting them to participate activities by personal networking. Moreover, there are new parents in every academic year. There is always a need for the school to raise their awareness and improve parent-child reading skills. Careful planning and adequate school support can be solutions to the difficulties faced.
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