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# Congruence within the Parent-Teacher Relationship: Associations with Children's Functioning

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CYFS Working Paper 2012-2

## **Congruence within the Parent-Teacher Relationship: Associations with Children's Functioning<sup>1</sup>**

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## Introduction

- Meaningful interactions between families and schools benefit multiple facets of children's functioning including their academic, social, and behavioral adjustment (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001).
- Positive relationships between parents and teachers predict children's enhanced social-emotional functioning and academic adjustment across time (Izzo, Weissberg, Kaspro, & Fendrich, 1999).
- Studies of parent-teacher relationships often focus on the association of child outcomes with separate parent or teacher reports of their relationship quality. Little attention has focused on the congruence of perceptions within parent-teacher dyads.
- It may be the case that when parents and teachers view their relationship in a similar positive light, better connections or partnerships across the home and school environments result, thereby enhancing children's functioning.
- Conversely, when parents and teachers hold discrepant views about their relationship, or both view it negatively, they may be less likely to communicate and share goals for children; this disconnect may impede children's functioning.
- This study examined the degree to which congruity and incongruity in parent and teacher views of their relationship are related to children's academic, social, and behavioral functioning.
- Congruity was examined using a categorical approach:
  - *Positive congruence*: parents and teachers share positive views about their relationship
  - *Non-positive congruence*: parents and teachers share non-positive views about their relationship
  - *Incongruence*: parents and teachers hold differing views about the quality of their relationship

## Research Question and Hypothesis

- Is congruence/incongruence between parents and teachers in their views of their relationship related to children's academic, social, and behavioral functioning?
- It was hypothesized that congruent, positive views of the parent-teacher relationship would be associated with children's enhanced academic, social, and behavioral functioning to a greater extent than non-positive congruent or incongruent views.

## Methods

### Participants

- Participants were recruited from 22 Midwestern elementary schools. Two hundred and six kindergarten through third grade children identified with behavioral problems and their parents and teachers participated.
- Data were derived from baseline measures administered as part of a randomized trial assessing the efficacy of a family-school intervention program (Conjoint Behavioral Consultation; Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2008), resulting in 175 valid cases.

### Constructs and Measures

- Congruence of Parent-Teacher Perceptions of Relationship Quality
  - *Parent-Teacher Relationship Scale* (PTRS; Vickers & Minke, 1995) total score, parent and teacher reports ( $\alpha$ s = .93 and .95, respectively)
    - 5-point Likert scale (1 = *Almost never*; 5 = *Almost always*)
    - Assesses interpersonal connection and quality of communication between parents and teachers
    - Parent  $M(SD)$  = 4.39(.61); Teacher  $M(SD)$  = 4.18(.65)
    - Congruency variable created by classifying parent-teacher dyads according to PTRS score:
      - Positive congruent (PTRS mean item scores  $\geq$  4.00 for both partners); 62.3% of dyads
      - Non-positive congruent (PTRS mean item scores  $<$  4.00 for both partners); 9.7% of dyads
      - Incongruent (PTRS mean item scores fall in different categories); 28% of dyads
- Children's Academic Functioning
  - *Woodcock-Johnson III Tests of Achievement* (WJ-III; Woodcock, McGrew, & Mather, 2001) direct child assessment
    - Standard score ( $M = 100$ ,  $SD = 15$ )

- Broad Reading and Math Calculation Skills cluster scores
- Children's Social Functioning
  - *Social Skills Rating System* (SSRS; Gresham & Elliott, 1990), parent and teacher reports
    - Standard score ( $M = 100, SD = 15$ )
    - Total score assesses children's prosocial behaviors such as sharing and exhibiting appropriate responses
- Children's Behavioral Functioning
  - *Behavior Assessment System for Children – Second Edition* (BASC-2; Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004), parent and teacher reports
    - T-score ( $M = 50, SD = 10$ )
    - Adaptive Skills, Behavioral Symptoms Index, and Externalizing Problems subscales

### **Analysis Plan**

- *Mplus* Version 6.1 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2010) with robust ML estimator and adjustment for complex sampling (2-3 children nested within each classroom)
- Series of ANOVAs and MANOVAs evaluated separately for parent and teacher ratings of child functioning
- Likelihood ratio test (LRT) used for determining significance of omnibus effect; Bonferroni-Holm correction applied to univariate tests of MANOVAs and planned comparisons evaluated for significant omnibus effects (positive congruent vs. non-positive congruent and incongruent)

### **Results**

#### *Child Academic Functioning and Parent-Teacher Relationship Congruency*

- There was no significant omnibus mean difference in child broad reading and math calculation skills across parent-teacher congruency groups (LRT [ $df = 4$ ] = 5.73,  $p > .05$ ).

#### *Child Social Functioning and Parent-Teacher Relationship Congruency*

- There was no significant omnibus mean difference in parent reports of children's social skills across congruency groups (LRT [ $df = 2$ ] = 3.27,  $p > .05$ ).

- There was a significant omnibus mean difference in teacher reports of children's social skills across congruency groups (LRT [df = 2] = 19.61,  $p < .001$ ).
  - Children of parent-teacher dyads in the positive congruent group had significantly greater mean social skills compared to children of parent-teacher dyads in the non-positive congruent ( $p < .001$ ) and incongruent ( $p < .001$ ) groups.

#### *Child Behavioral Functioning and Parent-Teacher Relationship Congruency*

- There was no significant omnibus mean difference in parent reports of children's adaptive skills, behavioral symptoms, and externalizing problems across congruency groups (LRT [df = 6] = 6.75,  $p > .05$ ).
- There was a significant omnibus mean difference in teacher reports of children's adaptive skills, behavioral symptoms, and externalizing problems across congruency groups (LRT [df = 6] = 15.19,  $p < .05$ ).
  - Univariate tests showed significant differences in mean child behavioral symptoms (adjusted  $p < .01$ ) and externalizing problems (adjusted  $p < .05$ ) across congruency groups, but not in mean adaptive skills (adjusted  $p > .05$ ).
    - Children of parent-teacher dyads in the positive congruent group had significantly lower mean behavioral symptoms compared to children of parent-teacher dyads in the non-positive congruent ( $p < .001$ ) and incongruent ( $p < .05$ ) groups.
    - Children of parent-teacher dyads in the positive congruent group had significantly lower mean externalizing problems compared to children of parent-teacher dyads in the non-positive congruent ( $p < .01$ ) and incongruent ( $p < .05$ ) groups.

#### **Discussion**

- This study is one of the few to examine the quality of parent-teacher relationships by analyzing parents' and teachers' views from a dyadic perspective.
- Teachers' ratings of children's social-emotional functioning, including social skills and behavior, are associated with congruence in parent and teacher views of their relationship.
  - When parents and teachers together view their relationship positively, teachers indicate that children demonstrate greater social competence and fewer behavioral problems in the school setting.



- It is possible that teachers' versus parents' perspectives on children's skills are more heavily influenced by the way they regard parent-teacher relationships.
- Congruence in parents' and teachers' views of their relationship was not related to academic functioning in children.
  - Academic functioning may be less susceptible to influence from parents' and teachers' views of their relationship.
  - Differences may be due to the nature of the sample; children were referred for inclusion in the study due to behavioral, rather than academic, concerns.
  - Differences may be due to measurement artifact. Academic skills were rated using standardized direct assessment; social and behavioral skills were rated based on informant report and may have been susceptible to bias.

### **Limitations**

- The study utilized a select sample:
  - Only included children who were referred due to concerns regarding behavior; generalizability to other samples is not possible.
- Definitions and methods used to identify congruity and incongruity in parent-teacher relationship were based on pragmatic decisions and are in need of empirical support.

### **Implications and Future Directions**

- It is not simply whether parents and teachers rate their relationship as positive or negative, but the congruence in their perspectives, that affects teachers' ratings of children's social-emotional functioning in the school setting.
- Findings underscore the importance of healthy relationships and meaningful partnerships between parents and teachers (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001).
- Research is needed to explore whether the unique sample characteristics (i.e., children referred by teachers with behavioral concerns) may have influenced teachers' views of relationships with parents or congruence between parents and teachers.
- More research is needed to better understand the nature of differences in parents' and teachers' ratings of their relationship with one another, including parents and teachers who hold negative and/or incongruent views of their relationship.
- More research is needed that examines patterns in parent and teacher ratings of behavior while taking into account views of the parent-teacher relationship.

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**Table 1***Demographic Information*

	Children ( <i>N</i> = 206)	Parents ( <i>N</i> = 206)	Teachers ( <i>N</i> = 90)
<i>Gender</i>	Female: 25% Male: 75%	Female: 90% Male: 10%	Female: 96% Male: 4%
<i>Grade/Education</i>	Kindergarten: 25% Grade 1: 33% Grade 2: 27% Grade 3: 15%	Less than high school: 4% High school/some college: 51% College: 32% Advanced graduate coursework/degree: 13%	<i>Years in current position</i> <i>M</i> = 9.89 ( <i>SD</i> = 9.85)
<i>Ethnicity</i>	White: 73% African-American: 8% Other: 19%	White: 86% African American: 5% Other: 9%	White: 99% Other: 1%
<i>Primary Language at Home</i>	English: 96% Other: 4%		
<i>Special Education Services or Clinical Diagnosis of Disability:</i>	43%		

**Table 2***Child Outcomes Across Parent-Teacher Congruency Groups*

Child outcomes	Positive congruent			Incongruent			Non-positive congruent		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
Woodcock-Johnson									
Reading	104.50	13.99	66	105.28	10.50	36	98.14	20.66	14
Math	106.42	13.95	66	103.08	16.05	36	97.21	13.68	14
SSRS									
Parent-report	92.03	17.18	109	97.65	18.95	49	92.47	18.86	17
Teacher-report	87.21	10.04	109	81.67***	10.18	49	77.59***	10.42	17
BASC									
Parent-report									
Adaptive Skills	42.39	8.63	92	45.44	9.71	45	42.94	9.18	16
Behavioral Symptoms	59.85	11.34	92	56.53	10.47	45	60.94	11.38	16
Externalizing Problems	62.24	13.29	92	57.89	11.36	45	62.25	12.52	16
Teacher-report									
Adaptive Skills	42.50	6.12	92	41.16	7.26	44	38.69	5.64	16
Behavioral Symptoms	65.68	10.63	92	69.77***	10.26	44	76.50*	10.91	16
Externalizing Problems	65.82	11.24	92	69.43**	10.81	44	73.19*	6.60	16

*Note.* Asterisks indicate mean is significantly different from mean of positive congruent group. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .