Identifying Parental Needs in Supporting Their Child's Schooling

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Study on parental needs in supporting their child's schooling
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Research Context

Project Objectives

Parental involvement in their child's schooling is recognized as a key factor for school success and persistence. **Elementary school students whose parents are more involved tend to perform better in school** (Statistics Canada, 2000; Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2013).

It is important to better understand why some parents struggle to actively engage and to do so in an optimal way.

Our project examines the psychological needs of parents of elementary school students as well as their role as explanatory mechanisms underlying their school involvement and its quality.

Three objectives:

1. To better understand parental psychological needs in the context of their school involvement;

2. To identify the factors that explain the satisfaction and frustration of parents' psychological needs in the context of their school involvement;

3. To assess how psychological need satisfaction is related to the quality of their school involvement.

Methodological Approach

Study 1: Qualitative

A focus group was conducted with mothers of gifted children.

n = 5 mothers

An open-ended questionnaire was also administered to parents of elementary school students.

n = 74 parents
(60 mothers; 14 fathers)

Study 2: Quantitative

A province-wide electronic survey was administered, twice with two distinct samples of elementary school parents.

Cohort 1 : n = 1,017 parents
63% women, M_{age} = 40 years
Cohort 2 : n = 1,448 parents
76% women, M_{age} = 38 years

What Are the Basic Psychological Needs?

This research project is grounded in Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017), which posits that every individual has three fundamental psychological needs whose satisfaction is essential for **optimal functioning**, **adaptation**, **personal development**, and **overall well-being**.

AUTONOMY
The need to act of one's own will and to feel at the origin of one's actions, thoughts, and feelings.

COMPETENCE
The need to feel effective and to perceive that one's actions lead to desired outcomes.

RELATEDNESS
The need to cultivate warm and reciprocal relationships with significant individuals.

In the context of school engagement,

parents who feel

AUTONOMOUS	**COMPETENT**	**WELL-CONNECTED**
choose to be involved in their child's schooling because they value their role.	understand what they need to do to help their child and feel **capable** of doing it.	Create a **quality** relationship with their child and maintain a positive bond with teachers.

Children whose psychological needs are better satisfied adjust more effectively to their school environment, which in turn supports their **perseverance, motivation, school success, and overall well-being**.

What Are the Optimal Practices for Supporting Child's Schooling?

Self-determination theory identifies **three optimal parenting practices** to support the satisfaction of a child's psychological needs:

AUTONOMY SUPPORT

Create an environment where the child feels they can act voluntarily by...

| considering the child's perspective | respecting their natural pace | explaning the reasons behind requests | providing meaningful choices |

STRUCTURE

Create a predictable environment for the child by helping them plan their actions by...

| communicating rules and expecttions | being consistent | offering constructive feedback | demonstrating supportive authority |

INVOLVEMENT

Create a supportive environment where the child feels accepted and understood by...

| being attentive and available | showing genuine interest | showing empathy and acceptance | providing support and resources |

In the context of school engagement,

a parent who...

SUPPORT THE AUTONOMY of their child

listens to and values their child's opinions, respects their ideas, and provides meaningful choices.

ENGAGES with their child

is available and attentive, shows genuine interest, and offers support when needed.

STRUCTURES their child's life

establishes clear rules and expectations, creates a predictable environment, and recognizes their child's efforts and achievements.

Supporting practices are important for a child's motivational and educational development.

① Are parental needs being met when supporting their child's schooling?

Our study reveals that parents have psychological needs that manifest when involving in their child's schooling.

These needs are generally more **fulfilled** than thwarted.

Relatedness is the most satisfied need while autonomy if the most thwarted need.

Need for Relatedness: the most satisfied
Parents feel they establish strong connections with both their child and their child's teacher.

Need for Competence: satisfied
Parents generally feel confident in their ability to support their child's schooling.

Need for Autonomy: the most thwarted
Parents may experience pressure and feel constrained in their role when supporting their child's schooling.

Practical Implications

For school administrators and teachers

- Increase teachers' awareness about their importance in supporting parental autonomy as well as avoiding controlling behaviors.
- Encourage parental involvement in school activities by highlighting how their participation benefits the school's community and their child's development.

For parents

- Stay engaged with and show interest in your child's school experience to build a positive relationship.
- Reflect and recognize the significance of your role in your child's education.

What Are the Main Sources of Parental Need Satisfaction?

Our study identifies factors that contribute to both the satisfaction and frustration of parents' psychological needs in the context of supporting their school involvement.

The main sources of **parental need satisfaction** include:

Environmental factors	• Establishing a strong collaborative relationship and effective communication with teachers. • Perceiving the school climate as positive. • Feeling that the school environment is welcoming to parents. • Having opportunities to be involved in their child's school life.
Child-related factors	• The child is doing well at school. • The child faces minimal academic, behavioral, or emotional challenges.
Parent-related factors	• Having good self-esteem and a high level of vitality • Adopting intrinsic values (e.g., aspiring to contribute to the community).

Practical Implications

For school administrators
- Promote and facilitate parental involvement in the school by offering various opportunities to get involved.
- Allocate resources to support parents of special needs students.

For teachers
- Foster collaborative relationships and maintain clear communication with parents.
- Regularly update parents on their child's progress and provide specific suggestions for how they can help.

For parents
- Participate in school activities or committees.
- Seek advice from school professionals on how to support your child when they experience difficulties or challenges.

How Does the Satisfaction of Parental Needs Support Their School Involvement?

The results indicate that **satisfying parents' psychological needs** in the context of supporting their child's schooling **predicts** the **quality of their involvement and support practices.**

| AUTONOMY | ⇢ | AUTONOMY SUPPORT |
| COMPETENCE | ⇢ | STRUCTURE |
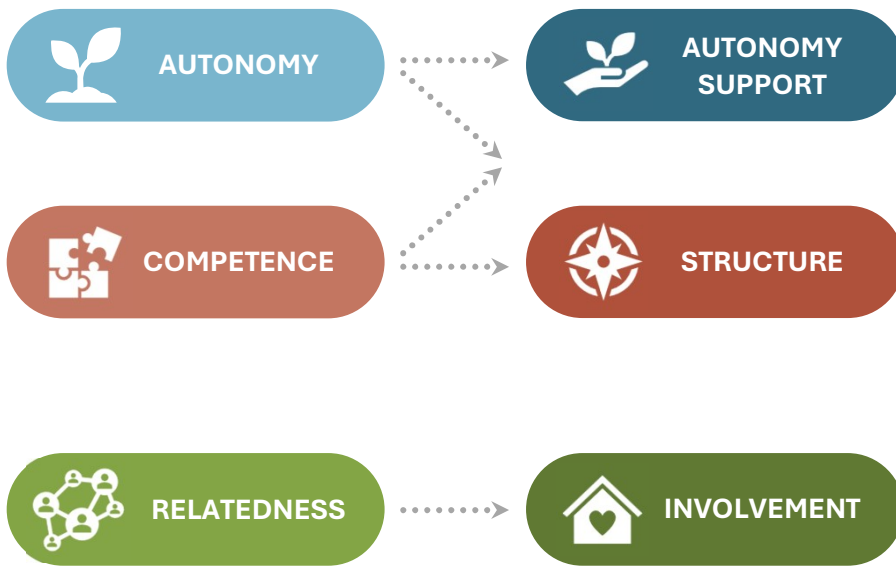
The more parents' needs for **autonomy** and **competence** are satisfied, the more they support their child's **autonomy** and **provide structure.**

| RELATEDNESS | ⇢ | INVOLVEMENT |

The more parents' need for **relatedness** is satisfied, the stronger their **involvement** with their child.

Practical Implications

For school professionals

- Support parents' autonomy by showing empathy, trusting their expertise regarding their child, and providing meaningful rationales for your asks.
- Enhance parents' competence by clearly communicating expectations and offering practical resources to help them support their child effectively.

For parents

- Identify factors that hinder the satisfaction of your psychological needs when supporting your child's education and develop strategies to address these challenges.
- Foster the satisfaction of your psychological needs in the context of your school involvement by collaborating with your family (e.g., partner) and school professionals.

Intervention strategies for the school environment to meet parental psychological needs when supporting their child's schooling

To improve the quality of parents' involvement in their child's schooling, **it is important to consider the satisfaction of their psychological needs**.

When parents feel **autonomous, competent** and **positively connected**, ➡ they are more **involved, structuring**, and **supportive of their child's autonomy**.

Four intervention strategies for the school environment:

1 Encourage parents to maintain a positive relationship with their child during school support.

2 Raise teachers' awareness regarding the importance of supporting parents' autonomy and avoiding controlling approaches.

3 Encourage teachers to build strong and positive relationship with their students' parents.

4 Inform school staff about the importance of fostering a welcoming school environment, especially in promoting an open and inclusive atmosphere that encourages parental involvement.

Parents are key allies in helping students reach their **full potential**. It is important to implement strategies to support parental psychological needs in the context of their school support, while also promoting strong, collaborative relationships between parents and school staff.

Community Partners

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