

Determinants of Parental Involvement in Early Schooling: Evidence from Japan

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Abstract

This study examined how demographic and psychological factors shape the involvement of Japanese mothers in their children's education. The five demographic variables studied were family income, maternal education, family size, mothers' employment status, and sex of the child. Three forms of parental cognition were also studied: mothers' aspirations for their children, parenting self-efficacy, and perceptions of the school. Survey data were obtained from 97 Japanese mothers with a second-grade child. Multiple regression analyses indicated that mothers' aspirations concerning their children's occupational future were associated with monitoring homework and communicating with the teacher, as well as with financial investment in supplementary lessons. Parenting self-efficacy was negatively related to investment in supplementary lessons but positively related to engaging in cognitive stimulation at home. Mothers who perceived the school as supportive and open to communication were more likely to engage in all three forms of parental involvement. More highly educated and wealthier mothers with fewer children reported investing to a greater extent in supplementary lessons. Mothers' work status was not associated with any of the outcomes, nor was sex of the child. Survey findings were further illuminated with excerpts from in-depth interviews.

Introduction

A great deal of research in the United States and other Western countries supports the notion that parental involvement generally has a positive effect on children's achievement. Parents who are more involved with their children's schooling become knowledgeable about school goals and procedures (Hill & Taylor, 2004), communicate the importance of education to children (Lareau, 2000), help children learn strategies to enhance their perceptions of competence and control over achievement outcomes (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994), and structure learning experiences that result in skill development (Keith et al., 1993).

Evidence about parental involvement in non-Western societies is considerably less abundant. In the 1980s, several influential studies concluded that Japanese mothers were highly involved in their children's education and instrumental in promoting student achievement relative to mothers in the United States (e.g., Stevenson & Stigler, 1992). More recently, however, negative portraits of Japanese mothers have emerged. Some observers within Japan characterize mothers as being overly focused on academic achievement and negligent in supporting their children's social and emotional development, while others criticize them for selfishly neglecting their children's schooling and their development while gratifying their own hedonistic desire for leisure or employment (see Holloway, 2000a; Inoue & Ehara, 1995). Indeed, permissive or neglectful parenting has been cited by Japanese government officials and the media as the cause of recent problems in the schools, including bullying, absenteeism, and disruptive behavior in the classroom (Okano & Tsuchiya, 1999).

One explanation for this apparent paradox concerning the role of mothers in supporting their children's schooling is that previous work has relied on theory generated within Western societies, and thus the resulting research did not take into account culturally situated forms of parental involvement. While Japanese mothers may have been performing well according to Western criteria, their efforts may not have appeared sufficient on criteria of importance to those within Japanese society. Additionally, earlier work contrasted average levels of parental involvement in various countries, and few studies focused on variation within Japan in the degree to which mothers support their children's schooling. Indeed, research conducted to date has paid minimal attention to important family demographic elements such as social class, mothers' employment status, and family size. To resolve this apparent paradox, it is necessary to conduct research on forms of involvement that are expected of parents within Japan, as well as to examine variation in the degree to which parents engage in these forms of involvement.

Parental Involvement in Japan

Parental involvement is typically defined as the initiation of home-based behaviors such as monitoring homework as well as school-based activities such as attending school events and communicating with teachers (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). In Japan, teachers make explicit and exacting demands on parents with regard to these types of involvement (Allison, 1991; Benjamin, 1997; Holloway, 2000b; Holloway & Yamamoto, 2003; Lewis, 1995). Communication with parents is conducted through several channels, including a short home visit by the teacher at the beginning of the school year, one or more observation days in which parents are able to witness a typical school day, regularly scheduled parent-teacher conferences, and the use of a notebook that teachers and parents pass back and forth to exchange comments about student progress.

In addition to becoming engaged directly with children's schoolwork, a second type of parental involvement pertains to the general degree of cognitive stimulation provided in the home setting. The role of mother has traditionally been accorded high status in Japan, and mothers are said to feel "privileged, and proud of the position they occupy" (Hendry, 1981, p. 239; see also Iwao, 1993). Many Japanese women believe that children's early development is highly malleable and are certain that the type and quality of the care they provide will conclusively determine whether or not their children will grow into healthy, productive adults (Hirao, 2001). It is likely that many Japanese mothers are actively engaged with their children at home, but it is also important to document variation in their tendency to become engaged and to understand the predictors of engagement within this particular society.

A third component of particular relevance in the context of Japan is parents' propensity to find, pay for, and monitor their children's involvement in supplementary classes (*juku*). In Japan, supplemental schooling in the form of lessons and academic classes has become an increasingly common way of augmenting the public school curriculum and boosting a child's ability to be successful in the examinations that determine entrance into high school and college (Hirao, 2001). Recent national estimates suggest that 15% of Japanese second-graders and 28% of fifth-graders are enrolled in supplementary schooling (Ministry of Education, 2003). Far less scripted than parental involvement in regular schooling, the use of *juku* is particularly likely to vary depending on parents' resources and beliefs about their own role in supporting children's development and education.

Determinants of Parental Involvement

Parents' cognitions about their role have been identified as a major contributor to their willingness to engage in supportive parenting. We focused on three forms of parental cognition: parents' aspirations concerning their children's future occupation, their self-efficacy in rearing and educating their children, and their perceptions of the school (Eccles & Harold, 1996; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Okagaki & Frensch, 1998).

Parental Aspirations. Parental aspirations refer to idealistic hopes or goals that parents may form regarding future attainment. Parents who hold high aspirations for their children's future are likely to be more willing to exert efforts to ensure that those aspirations are realized. Indeed, evidence from research conducted in the United States suggests that educational and occupational aspirations are associated with the ways in which parents shape children's activities, time, and learning environment (Murphey, 1992).

A considerable body of literature emphasizes parental valuation of educational and professional attainment in Asian countries. Various researchers have proposed that members of societies that endorse Confucian beliefs are likely to respect educational attainment (e.g., Li, 2002). However, there may be important differences among Asian countries in this regard. Some evidence suggests that in Japan many parents prefer that their child attain a secure but "average" lifestyle rather than aspiring to the maximum in professional advancement (Brinton & Lee, 2001). Parental aspirations for girls may be particularly low. Because Japanese women tend to have lower educational attainment than men and are significantly disadvantaged with regard to professional opportunities, parental investment in girls' education is less likely to pay off in terms of future earnings (Yu, 2001). It was thus of interest to us to examine whether parental aspirations concerning their children's future occupation would be associated with their propensity to become involved in their children's schooling. We expected that parents who held high aspirations might be particularly likely to "go the extra mile" for their children by enrolling them in after-school activities. It seemed less likely that parents' aspirations would affect the more institutionally scripted forms of involvement required by the regular school system. We also expected that parental aspirations may be a stronger predictor of involvement when the target child was male.

Parenting Self-Efficacy. The construct of self-efficacy refers to "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). Research conducted in a variety of countries finds that individuals with high self-efficacy in a particular area exert effort in that area, persevere in the face of difficulty, and respond resiliently to adversity (Bandura, 2002). They are less prone to self-defeating thought patterns, and they experience less stress and depression than those with lower self-efficacy. The construct of self-efficacy is intended to be domain specific; particular experiences with respect to a given domain affect the individual's sense of confidence about acting efficaciously in that domain.

The domain of parenting self-efficacy has been examined at length, and parenting self-efficacy has shown to be an extraordinarily powerful determinant of effective parenting behavior in Western societies. Parents with high self-efficacy are generally more optimistic, authoritative, and consistent in their interactions with their children than are those with lower parenting self-efficacy (Ardelt & Eccles, 2001; Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996; Oloff & Aboud, 1991; Silver, Bauman, & Ireys, 1995; Williams et al., 1987). Additionally, theoretical formulations have identified parenting self-efficacy as a key determinant of parental involvement in schooling (Eccles & Harold, 1996; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Empirical work suggests that parents with high self-efficacy are more likely to monitor their children's schoolwork and to participate actively at the school site (Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski, & Apostoleris, 1997).

There is strong evidence to suggest that Japanese mothers express less confidence in their parenting abilities than do mothers in other industrialized countries (Bornstein et al., 1998; Kazui, 1997). In one study of Japanese mothers, nearly half described themselves as "not very confident" or "not confident" about childrearing (Shwalb, Kawai, Shoji, & Tsunetsugu, 1995; see also Ujiie, 1997). A review of the literature revealed few empirical studies focusing on the reasons for Japanese mothers' apparent lack of parenting self-efficacy, but some observers have noted a range of possible contributing factors including modesty, lack of support from husbands, a scarcity of parenting classes and counseling opportunities, criticism by professionals, the isolation of living in modern housing complexes, and a growing tendency to live apart from the older generation (Fujita, 1989; Imamura, 1987).

If the theory of self-efficacy functions in Japan as it does in Western countries, and if Japanese mothers are indeed prone to low parenting self-efficacy, then it is difficult to explain how they could be effective in supporting their children's schooling and development. One possibility is that self-reflection and self-criticism are cultural norms in Japan, which, rather than leading to a decrement in performance as they may do in Western countries, actually form the motivational basis of renewed vigor for addressing perceived shortcomings (Heine, Takata, & Lehman, 2000). If true, this inverse relationship between parenting self-efficacy and parental involvement constitutes a significant challenge to the universality of self-efficacy theory. We tended to favor an alternative possibility, which is that while strenuous self-reflection may depress the average level of parenting self-efficacy experienced by Japanese mothers, there is nevertheless a relation between higher self-efficacy and more effective parental involvement. We further expected that parenting self-efficacy would be a more powerful predictor of involvement in activities that were less heavily structured by the school, namely, investment in supplementary schooling and cognitive stimulation. Participation in these activities is likely to hinge more directly on mothers' own initiative and beliefs about their role.

Perceptions of the School. Parents' degree of involvement is likely to be affected by the school itself. If teachers appear to care about the welfare of the child, communicate respect for parents, and develop effective means of communicating with families, parents are more willing and able to become involved in their children's schooling (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

As noted earlier, some evidence suggests that Japanese schools are generally quite explicit and uniform in their techniques for eliciting parental involvement. However, whereas mothers tended to defer to teachers' authority and expertise in the past, contemporary mothers may be more likely to speak out in criticism of the teacher and to seek involvement in shaping classroom practices ("Schools grapple," 2007). As Japanese mothers move out of their scripted role as passive recipient of advice from teachers, the actual characteristics of mothers and teachers may become a more dominant determinant of their actions.

We were interested in parental perceptions about the school, particularly concerning the extent to which teachers appeared to care about individual children and the willingness of teachers to encourage communication and interaction with parents. We expected that perceptions about the school would be a stronger determinant of parental behavior directly related to the school and homework than of actions outside the auspice of the school, including investment in supplementary schooling and general cognitive stimulation.

Family Demographic Variables as Determinants of Parental Involvement

Socioeconomic Status. Socioeconomic status (SES) is clearly an important factor affecting parental involvement in many countries (Hess & Holloway, 1984). Many studies conducted in the United States find that college-educated, relatively affluent parents are more involved in educational activities at the school than are lower SES parents, although some research suggests that lower SES parents engage in certain aspects of parent involvement as frequently as their middle-class counterparts (Lee & Bowen, 2006; Weiss et al., 2003).

During the last decade, in contradiction to the prevailing image of Japan as a "classless" society, researchers have begun to uncover evidence of a growing achievement gap between higher and lower SES children in Japan (Kariya & Rosenbaum, 1999; Kariya, Shimizu, Shimizu, & Morota, 2002; Ono, 2001). There is some evidence that this gap may be attributable to the fact that parental aspirations are somewhat higher among higher SES parents and that they may mobilize their financial resources to pay for enrichment classes (Hamama, 1990; Iwanaga, 1990; LeTendre, 1998). We expected that wealthier mothers in our study would be more likely to invest in supplementary schooling. We also suspected that mothers who were more highly educated might be more involved in children's activities in the school context, although not necessarily at home.

We added a third construct related to resources that may function similarly to income, namely family size. Japanese people consider children to be a major expense, particularly because of the cost of supplementary schooling and of college tuition, which is typically borne entirely by the student's parents (Economic Planning Agency, 1998). We expected that mothers with more children would be less likely to enroll them in supplementary activities than those with fewer children. Additionally, because larger families also require a greater investment of time, we expected that Japanese mothers with more children would have less time to engage in activities at the school site and would be less likely to become involved in day-to-day interactions with the child at home.

Maternal Employment Status. Most Japanese women seek employment after finishing high school or college, leave the workplace upon getting married or having their first child, and return to work when their children enter elementary school (Choe, Bumpass, & Tsuya, 2004). The number of Japanese mothers with school-age children who were employed is only slightly less than that of their peers in the United States (Choe et al., 2004). However, several factors make it particularly difficult for employed mothers in Japan to balance the roles of wife, mother, and employee. One factor is the disinclination of Japanese men to take on much responsibility for childrearing or housework (Ishii-Kuntz, Makino, Kato, & Tsuchiya, 2004). Another obstacle is a lack of affordable child care open during the hours when it is needed (Yu, 2001). The structure of employment—particularly the expectations for putting in long hours—is another obstacle; while most Japanese mothers work part-time, part-time jobs in Japan are more demanding than in other countries and often involve substantial commute time as well (Kawashima, 1995).

These factors point to the possibility that employment may reduce the amount of time and energy Japanese women have for interacting with their children and becoming involved in their schooling. Nevertheless, an alternative view is that employment may boost women's support for children's schooling by making financial resources available for lessons and materials. Additionally, involvement in the workplace may bring opportunities to acquire skills and knowledge as well as increased self-confidence, all of which mothers can bring to bear on their interactions with their children and with school staff (Barnett & Hyde, 2001).

Sex of Child. Because Japanese mothers' aspirations for their children and their willingness to support their schooling may depend on whether the child is male or female (Brinton & Lee, 2001), we included sex of child in the analysis.

Summary

In the 1980s, pioneering work identified mothers as key supporters of Japanese children's educational achievement but tended to identify modal national patterns rather than to examine within-country variation. The goal of the present study was to examine how demographic and psychological factors shape the practices of individual mothers within Japan. In this study, we evaluated the strength of five demographic variables (family income, maternal education, family size, mothers' employment status, and sex of the child) and three forms of parental cognition (mothers' aspirations for their children, parenting self-efficacy, and perceptions of the school) in predicting mothers' involvement in their children's education.

Methods

Participants

The data are part of a longitudinal study that initially focused on families with a preschool-age child and then followed the families through the child's second-grade year. We originally obtained a sample of 116 Japanese women from nine preschools (*yōchien*) in two urban regions. At each school, a member of the preschool staff solicited the participation of mothers with a child in the final year of preschool. All solicited mothers elected to participate, although a few canceled because of scheduling difficulties or unforeseen emergencies.

At the time of the first survey, the age of the 116 mothers ranged from 25 to 46, with a mean of 35.57 ($SD = 3.93$). Mothers' education level varied from junior high school diploma to master's degree ($M = 13.49$ years, $SD = 1.50$). Forty percent indicated an annual household income of 5 to 7 million yen (roughly the equivalent of \$40,000 to \$60,000). Twenty six percent earned less than 5 million yen, and 34% earned more than 7 million yen. The mean educational background and annual household income of the sample were comparable to those of the national population at the time of data collection (Statistics Bureau, 2001).

At the time of the third survey, more than half (55%) of the mothers were working for pay, with the majority of these employed part-time. Three mothers were divorced. The average family size was 2.19 children ($SD = .68$). The target child was the first born in 44% of the families, second born in 40%, third born in 14%, and fourth born in 1% of the families. All children were in second grade and were either 7 or 8 years of age.

Procedure

In June of 2000, participants were interviewed for 60 to 90 minutes. After the interviews, the participants completed a survey. They were mailed a second survey when their children were in the first months of first grade and a third survey near the end of second grade. Ninety eight participants (84% of the original sample) completed the third survey. Measures used in the present analysis were drawn from the third survey, except for mother's education level and family income, which were obtained in the first survey. Attrition analyses revealed that women who responded to the third survey did not differ from the original group in terms of residential location, age, years of education, household income, number of children, or focal child's gender. Women who had older children were somewhat less likely to respond to the third survey, $t(114) = 2.05, p < .05$.

To provide additional in-depth qualitative evidence pertaining to parenting beliefs and educational involvement, 16 of the participating mothers were interviewed on three subsequent occasions over a 3-year period (when their child was in preschool, first grade, and second grade). The subsample was selected based on the mothers' parenting self-efficacy scores on the initial survey; half were above the mean score on the parenting self-efficacy composite, and half were below. The subsample was further stratified on education level; within each of the two groups (high and low self-efficacy), half the mothers had attended a two- or four-year college, and half had received a high school diploma or less. Five or six orienting questions were developed for each interview; interviewers also encouraged the women to discuss themes and issues of personal interest. Interview topics included their views on the role of mothers, perceptions of their children, interactions with school staff members, their own school experiences, and their current activities. Data from these interviews were used to interpret the findings from the statistical analysis of data obtained from the full sample (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989).

Measures

All survey items were originally written in English by the authors (two of whom are native English speakers and two of whom are native Japanese speakers) and then translated into Japanese; a back translation was obtained in English, which was checked by the authors for nuances and accuracy. Items and related descriptive statistics may be found in the appendix.

Parenting Self-Efficacy. Bandura recommends that investigators assess self-efficacy with regard to the specific set of tasks under investigation (Bandura, 1997; Bandura et al., 1996). In order to capture constructs of meaning and importance in Japan, items were derived by examining parent surveys conducted by Japanese government agencies and private educational organizations (Benesse Educational Institute, 2000). The authors also consulted with an advisory panel of Japanese child development experts (teachers, parent education specialists, and university researchers) about childrearing issues of importance to Japanese parents. A draft of the scale was piloted with a different sample of Japanese mothers (see Holloway & Behrens, 2002); measurement work conducted on those data resulted in the scale used in the present study.

Mothers indicated on a 6-point scale, from 1 (not at all confident) to 6 (very confident), how confident they were in performing each of 10 parenting behaviors related to supporting their child's social/emotional and cognitive development. A composite, *parenting self-efficacy*, was created by calculating the mean score of the summed items, $\alpha = .82$.

Parental Occupational Aspirations. Mothers rated on a 5-point scale, from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important), the importance of five goals for their child's future life (contribute to society, financial stability, develop expertise in some endeavor, find a rewarding occupation, become active in international matters). These items were based on the subsample mothers' aspirations for their children expressed in interviews conducted prior to the third survey. A composite was created by calculating the mean score of the summed items, $\alpha = .82$.

Perceptions of the School. Mothers indicated on a 5-point scale, from 1 (disagree) to 5 (agree), how much they believed that their child's teacher understood and cared about their child, as well as how often the teacher facilitated communication with parents (mean score of 8 items, $\alpha = .81$). Items were created to apply to the Japanese cultural context, as reflected in the subsample mothers' descriptions during interviews.

Monitoring Homework and Communicating with the Teacher. A composite was created from four items pertaining to supervising homework and five items pertaining to communication with the teacher and involvement at the school site. To assess homework supervision, mothers indicated how often they checked and monitored their child's homework for completeness and accuracy (1 = less than once a month; 5 = almost always). To capture communication and involvement at the school site, mothers indicated how often in the past year they had spoken to the teacher at a conference, visited the classroom, contacted the teacher about homework, volunteered in the classroom, or exchanged notes with the teacher. A composite reflecting *monitoring homework and communicating with teacher* was created by combining the nine z-scored items, $\alpha = .70$. These items were selected based upon the subsample mothers' descriptions of their own parental involvement practices, as well as items in similar scales developed in the United States (Eccles & Harold, 1996; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

To assess *investment in supplementary lessons*, mothers indicated the amount spent per month on their second-grade child's lessons (no expenditure, less than 5,000 yen; 5,000 to 10,000 yen; 10,000 to 15,000 yen; 15,000 to 20,000 yen; 20,000 to 25,000 yen; over 25,000 yen). Exchange rate at the time of the third survey was roughly 115 Japanese yen per U.S. dollar.

Cognitive stimulation at home was obtained by asking mothers to indicate on a 5-point scale, from 1 (less than once a month) to 5 (almost every day), how often they engaged with their child in reading, using the computer, playing cards or a board game, visiting the library or a bookstore, visiting the museum or zoo, or engaging in a favorite activity, $\alpha = .63$.

Socioeconomic Status. Mother's education background and family income were obtained on the first survey. Education level was coded based upon women's indication of years

of schooling completed (i.e., junior high school = 9 years; GED or high school = 12; professional/vocational training or AA/AS = 14; BA/BS = 16; postgraduate = 18). Participants indicated the family's current income on a 5-point scale (coded 1 = less than 3 million yen, 2 = 3 to 5 million yen, 3 = 5 to 7 million yen, 4 = 7 to 10 million yen, 5 = over 10 million yen).

Family Size, Child Gender, and Mother's Employment Status. We obtained information concerning number of children in the family and mother's work status (coded 0 = not employed; 1 = employed part or full time). Child gender was coded as 0 = female or 1 = male.

Analytic Strategy

We examined bivariate relations among the three parent involvement measures, the family demographic variables, and the parent belief measures. Multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine the independent contribution of each predictor to the three parent involvement indicators. To illuminate the findings from the statistical analyses, we draw from the interviews conducted with the 16 subsample mothers.

Results

Descriptive Findings

The correlation analysis (Table 1) revealed that mothers who reported being more involved in monitoring homework and communicating with the teacher also made a larger financial investment in their children's supplementary lessons. Mothers who were more involved in monitoring and communicating were more likely to report engaging in cognitive stimulation. Financial investment in supplementary lessons was not associated with engagement in cognitively stimulating activities. We also found that mothers with higher aspirations for their children expressed greater parenting self-efficacy. Mothers' perceptions of the school were not related to self-efficacy or aspirations.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations among Major Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Mother's education	--									
2. Family income	.25**	--								
3. Number of children	-.06	.20**	--							
4. Employment status	.17	-.06	-.06	--						
5. Parenting self-efficacy	.21*	.19	.05	-.01	--					
6. Occupational aspirations	.12	.30**	-.03	-.07	.27**	--				
7. Perception of school	.10	.20*	.22*	.01	.10	.12	--			
8. Investment in lessons	.32**	.35***	-.16	-.04	-.01	.38***	.24*	--		
9. Homework/teacher	.11	.17	-.01	.07	.19	.32***	.27**	.32**	--	
10. Cognitive stimulation	.16	.10	-.08	.02	.33***	.16	.23*	.04	.53***	--
Mean	13.49	3.16	2.20	.55	4.31	3.61	.00	2.62	.00	2.31
SD	1.51	.98	.70	.50	.78	.51	.66	1.60	.55	.66

Note: For data collected at Time 3, *n* ranges from 93 to 97, depending on missing data. For mother's education and family income, collected at Time 1, *n* is 116.
* *p* < .05.
** *p* < .01.
*** *p* < .001.

Examination of the relation of the demographic and parent belief measures to the parental involvement measures revealed that mothers who paid more for supplementary activities were more highly educated, had a higher family income, held higher aspirations for their children, and expressed more positive perceptions of the school. Mothers who reported more monitoring of homework and communicating with the teacher had higher aspirations and more positive perceptions of the school. Mothers who engaged in cognitively stimulating activities expressed greater parenting self-efficacy and more positive perceptions of the school.

Multivariate Regression Models

We constructed one regression model for each of the three parent involvement variables: investment in supplementary lessons, monitoring homework and communicating with the teacher, and engagement in cognitive stimulation at home. Predictors included the five contextual variables (mothers' education, income, number of children, child gender, maternal employment status) and the three parent belief predictors (parenting self-efficacy, parental aspirations, and perceptions of the school). Neither child gender nor maternal work status was a significant predictor of any of the outcomes in these regressions, so we removed them and re-ran the analyses with the remaining variables. Results are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2
Simultaneous Regression Analyses Predicting Investment in Lessons, Involvement in Schooling, and Cognitive Stimulation

	Investment in Lessons			Homework Monitoring and Teacher Communication			Cognitive Stimulation		
	B	SE	β	B	SE	B	B	SE	β
Contextual Variables									
Mother's education	.24	.10	.23*	.01	.04	.03	.03	.05	.06
Family income	.41	.16	.25*	.02	.06	.04	.00	.07	.00
Number of children	-.47	.19	-.22*	-.04	.09	-.06	-.11	.09	-.13
Maternal Beliefs									
Self-efficacy	-.38	.19	-.18*	.06	.07	.09	.25	.09	.29**
Aspirations	.92	.30	.29**	.27	.12	.25*	.22	.10	.22*
Perceptions of school	.48	.22	.20*	.20	.09	.24*	.06	.14	.05
Constant	-2.67	1.66		-1.36	.65		.90	.77	
R ²	.36			.17			.17		

Note: *N* ranges from 87 to 91, depending on missing data.
* *p* < .05.
** *p* < .01.
*** *p* < .001.

Investment in Supplementary Lessons. Mothers who paid a higher amount for their children's activities tended to be more educated, *p* < .05, had a higher family income, *p* < .01, and had fewer children, *p* < .01. They expressed higher aspirations for their children, *p* < .01, and were more likely to hold positive perceptions of the school, *p* < .05. They expressed lower parenting self-efficacy, *p* < .05. This model explained 37% of the variance in the outcome.

Monitoring Homework and Communicating with Teacher. Mothers who were more involved in monitoring and communicating expressed higher aspirations, *p* < .05, and more positive perceptions of the school, *p* < .05. None of the contextual variables was a significant predictor of their involvement, nor was parenting self-efficacy. The model explained 17% of the variance in parental involvement.

Engagement in Cognitively Stimulating Activities. Mothers who engaged more often in cognitively stimulating activities expressed higher self-efficacy and more positive perceptions of the school, $p < .001$. None of the contextual variables was a significant predictor of general engagement, nor were parental aspirations or perceptions regarding the teacher. The model explained 21% of the variance in this outcome.

Qualitative Illumination

In this section, we use examples from our interviews to better understand *how* and *why* certain maternal beliefs and family structural variables were associated with the parent involvement constructs.

Investment in Supplementary Lessons. The survey findings indicated that mothers who invested in supplementary lessons were more likely to have greater financial resources. Indeed, during the interviews, most mothers indicated that the cost of these activities constituted a significant portion of the family budget. Several women mentioned that they took on a part-time job in order to pay for their children's lessons. Lower-income mothers tended to evaluate the benefits of the lessons closely and canceled activities if the children did not seem to be enjoying or benefiting from them.

The survey also revealed that more highly educated mothers were more likely to invest in activities. The interview data suggested that mothers with a college degree believed that it was important to "cultivate" a child's skills, whereas less-educated mothers believed in letting children play and develop in a natural manner (Yamamoto, 2006; Lareau, 2003). For example, Yasuko, who had a high school education, praised current school reform efforts aimed at reducing the number of hours spent in school. Although aware that many parents responded to the new policy by enrolling their children in supplementary lessons, she decided not to enroll any of her three children in lessons because she thought it was better for them to have an opportunity to play with their friends. She reported feeling satisfied that her son spent his free time playing with friends in the neighborhood: "He is very happy. He never stays home; he just goes out to play. He is doing something by playing. So I see him and I think, 'Oh, that was a good thing.'"

The survey findings also suggested that mothers who invested in more lessons were more likely to have high occupational aspirations, even after taking income and educational level into account. For example, Yuri, a college-educated mother, wanted her daughter to become a professional musician and envisioned for her a career of international travel and residence abroad. To prepare her daughter for application to private school, Yuri enrolled her in piano, English, swimming, and abacus lessons, and she was planning eventually to pay for a class to prepare her daughter for the private school entrance examination.

The survey findings indicated that—after taking into account SES and family size—mothers who *lacked* parenting self-efficacy were more likely to pay a higher amount for extracurricular activities. Mothers who felt less capable may have tried to compensate by drawing upon the skills of special teachers. This pattern was illustrated by Chihiro, a college-educated mother who repeatedly emphasized her feelings of inadequacy as a parent:

She [daughter] stays inside her shell. And I cannot see her. In that case, I cannot understand her.... I think I do not understand the life of children. It seems like she has many parts that she shows to other people but which she does not show to me.

Chihiro enrolled her daughter in a preschool that provided extensive preparation in math and Japanese. In addition, she enrolled her in gymnastics and piano lessons. In first and second grade, her daughter took English lessons and continued with piano.

Monitoring Homework and Communicating with the Teacher. Family income and mother's education were not predictive of mothers' monitoring and communicating, nor was self-efficacy implicated in this form of involvement. Because it is highly scripted by the schools, parents' participation in homework and at the school site may not depend as much on their own level of resources or their degree of motivation to become involved. Additionally, children at this age received relatively little homework, so mothers' employment status and education background may not have had any bearing on their ability to monitor its completion.

Rather than structural factors, we found that mothers' aspirations for their children predicted their tendency to be involved in monitoring and communicating. The comments of Junko illustrate the connection between lower aspirations and lack of involvement in schooling. Junko aspired for her son to be healthy and to behave well. She believed that "studying was a secondary issue," and she "did not even care whether he was clever or not." At one point, she commented that she would not object if her son did not go to college. Junko made sporadic efforts to monitor his homework but thought that she had "better not say too much about studying" for fear that he would start to dislike it. When her son began first grade, she did not seek specific information about the school curriculum, activities, or policies.

Mothers' participation in children's schoolwork depended on whether they perceived that teachers were open to communication with them. In the interviews, some were uniformly supportive of their child's teachers, but other mothers were more analytical and critical of the teachers. Somewhat contrary to the survey findings, the interviews suggested that high involvement was sometimes prompted by the perception that the teacher did *not* care about a child or was *not* open to communicating with parents. For example, Asako told us that her son's second-grade teacher was a harsh disciplinarian and impatient with students who were slow at grasping their lessons. Asako became an active classroom volunteer in order to monitor the teacher. She and her husband tried to develop a good relationship with him in the hope that he would look favorably upon their son: "It's not that we are trying to flatter him too much, but we are trying to do things the way he likes."

Engagement in Cognitively Stimulating Activities. Mothers who feel more efficacious were more likely to report more frequent interactions with their children at home. This relation is illustrated in the case of Asako, the highly efficacious mother mentioned previously who, in spite of having no college education, routinely provided various kinds of informal learning experiences for her son. Asako emphasized that her primary parenting goal was to understand her child by "seeing into his heart and soul" (*kokoro*). Oriented toward an appreciation of her son's unique qualities, she tried to support his early learning in ways that built on his capabilities and interests. Noting his interest in trains, she read him children's books about trains as well as magazines for adult model train enthusiasts. She indulged his desire to go on long train and subway rides, and she helped him read the names of the stations along the way. In general, her actions flowed from her sense of confidence that she was a good judge of her child and his interests, and she was not worried about whether or not she was doing the right thing, as were some of the other less-educated mothers.

Discussion

Many studies in the United States and Europe indicate that when parents are involved in their children's schooling, the children are more motivated to learn and achieve at higher levels. It is particularly interesting to examine the parental involvement in a country such as Japan, where children consistently achieve at high levels of international comparisons. However, recent findings of a growing achievement gap in Japan associated with socioeconomic background have fueled concerns that some parents may no longer be able to propel their children to the highest level of achievement (Kariya et al., 2002). We designed a study to examine how the involvement of Japanese mothers in their children's school was affected by family resources as well as by maternal perceptions of the school's openness to involvement, their occupational aspirations for their children, and self-efficacy regarding their own parenting skills.

Findings Concerning Family Demographic Variables

Our findings complement those of others who have found that college-educated, wealthy mothers are more likely to enroll their children in supplementary schooling than are lower SES mothers (Hamama, 1990; Iwanaga, 1990; LeTendre, 1998). Japanese students who take extra academic classes tend to perform better on the fact-oriented examinations that determine admission to high school and college (Stevenson & Baker, 1992). Taken in combination with the move of upper-income parents toward enrolling their children in private schools, the use of supplementary schooling by Japanese parents threatens to undermine what has been a basically egalitarian educational system at the elementary school level (Kobari, 2002).

Although we did not find evidence that mothers' monitoring of homework and communicating with the teacher was related to family income or maternal education, we suspect that it may be affected in subtle ways that were not reflected in our statistical findings. As Pomerantz and her colleagues (2007) have argued, it is important to examine the quality of parental involvement, not just the quantity or type of involvement. Our interview data revealed that less-educated mothers set out with similar goals as the college graduates, but they often felt hesitant to follow through on various forms of involvement when they hit an obstacle such as a child's lack of interest. They tended to express doubts about their own intelligence and worried that they were not capable of effectively guiding their children's experience in school (Yamamoto, 2006).

Contrary to concerns about the effects of maternal employment expressed by members of the media, government, and medical profession (see Holloway, 2000a; Jolivet, 1997),

we saw no evidence that employment status was associated with a lack of parental involvement. Part-time work, which was far more common than full-time employment in our sample, may afford women the flexibility they need to remain fully involved in children's schooling. And the confidence and satisfaction women appear to receive from being employed may counterbalance the potentially negative drain of work on their time and energy.

Mothers' Occupational Aspirations and Parenting Self-Efficacy

We found substantial variation in the occupational aspirations of these parents, and contrary to stereotypical images, some mothers appeared to be "aiming for average" rather than aspiring to the highest level of achievement for their children. Those mothers who held higher occupational aspirations were more likely to invest in supplementary lessons and participate in their children's schooling. Surprisingly, we saw no strong gender differences in occupational aspirations or in any of the parental involvement measures. It is possible that the children are still too young for their parents to be focusing on gender-based career trajectories, or these mothers may be expressing slowly changing gender norms (Morley, 1999).

Mothers' parenting self-efficacy was also shown to be more variable than what is typically portrayed in stereotypical images of Japanese women. Our results indicate that personal judgment of efficacy is a strong correlate of mothers' reported tendency to monitor homework and communicate with the teacher. This finding provides important support for the theoretical importance of parenting self-efficacy even in a society characterized as collectivistic (Bandura, 2002; see also Holloway, Suzuki, Yamamoto, & Mindnich, 2006; Yamamoto, Holloway, & Suzuki, 2006). However, our findings suggest that parenting self-efficacy is not positively associated with all forms of parental involvement. In particular, we found that mothers with a low sense of efficacy were *more* likely to send their children to lessons and activities, thus compensating for their own perceived inability to support their education.

Implications for Practice

The findings from this study hold several implications for practitioners in Japan and Western countries. First, by showing *variability* in parental involvement in an Asian society where mothers are typically characterized in the Western literature as highly motivated to support their children's achievement, we hope to help teachers, medical professionals, and mental health professionals understand that in Japan, as in other societies, some parents are more able than others to support their children's academic development. Similarly, teachers and other practitioners should be careful not to assume that parents share similarly high aspirations for their children simply because they have been exposed to Confucian ideals emphasizing the importance of educational attainment. It is crucial to understand the particular views of individuals rather than make assumptions based on stereotypical cultural models. Neither the glowing reports of Japanese mothers often found in Western literature nor the pessimistic assessments featured in Japanese media accurately portray the varying beliefs, efficacy evaluations, and capabilities of Japanese women.

Second, these findings can serve to remind practitioners that the construct of parenting self-efficacy is as powerful a predictor of parental involvement in Japan as it is in Western countries. It would be a mistake for practitioners to discount maternal protestations of low efficacy as simply a matter of culturally constructed modesty; rather, such views should be taken seriously and addressed, regardless of the cultural background of the parent. And finally, these findings can serve as an important reminder that in spite of individual variability, certain forms of parental involvement are culturally bounded to some degree. The features that define an "involved parent" are not necessarily identical in all societies. Teachers and other practitioners in a multicultural society should try to understand the ways in which parents from particular national or ethnic backgrounds define their role and engage with their children.

Study Limitations and Future Directions

While mothers are in some sense the best informants concerning their own involvement with their children (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005), some women in our study may have been tempted by self-presentational concerns to exaggerate the extent to which they engaged in socially desirable parenting practices, or conversely, some may have felt constrained by modesty from reporting fully on their activities. Assessment of maternal involvement by fathers, teachers, or independent observers would have provided important corroboration to mothers' own estimates. In future studies, it would be valuable to ask mothers to record their activities using a time-use diary technique (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1987).

The existence of shared method variance must be acknowledged as a possible factor inflating the association between parent involvement and predictors such as parenting self-efficacy. However, in their review of recent research on parenting self-efficacy, Jones and Prinz (2005) found no evidence that studies using independent observation for assessment of parenting were more likely to find a relation to parenting self-efficacy than were those relying on maternal report.

Finally, we note that our study focused exclusively on mothers and not fathers. Future studies should focus on fathers' role in childrearing to determine the ways in which it complements and extends mothers' activities. In analyses reported elsewhere, we found that the amount of emotional support that Japanese husbands provide to their wives is a crucial determinant of their parenting self-efficacy (Holloway et al., 2005). And while Japanese fathers are typically characterized as uninvolved in daily childrearing, some surveys suggest that fathers of young children hope to engage in more hands-on care than did previous generations (Cabinet Office, 2005).

In summary, our study employed an expanded definition of parental involvement to capture emic forms of involvement in Japan. In addition to assessing mothers' monitoring of schoolwork at home and communicating with the teacher, we examined their investment in supplementary schooling and their engagement in cognitively stimulating activities at home. By modeling the relation of these important constructs to diverse aspects of parental involvement, we provide a rare glimpse into the proximal determinants of parental involvement in Japan.

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Appendix

Descriptive Statistics

Monitoring Homework and Communicating with Teacher		
Monitor homework (1 = less than once a month to 5 = almost every day)		
Practice spelling and math	3.35	(1.27)
Help with homework	2.99	(1.48)
Check that homework is completed	3.96	(1.48)
Check accuracy of homework	3.64	(1.53)
Communicate with teacher (mean number of times this school year)		
Had conference with teacher	2.45	(1.48)
Visited child's classroom	4.55	(1.92)
Contacted teacher about child's homework	.54	(1.34)
Volunteered in child's classroom	1.89	(2.45)
Exchanged note with teacher	3.11	(3.10)
Monthly Activity Fees (percentage of mothers reporting each category)		
No cost		8%
Less than 5,000 yen		11%
5 to 10,000 yen		38%
10 to 15,000 yen		19%
15 to 20,000 yen		12%
Over 20,000 yen		12%
Cognitive Stimulation (1 = <1/month; 5 = almost always)		
Read to child, listen to child read	3.15	(1.44)
Use computer	1.91	(1.16)
Play cards or board game	2.26	(1.08)
Visit library or book store	2.33	(.92)
Visit museum, zoo, aquarium	1.34	(.71)
Engage in child's favorite activity	2.82	(1.19)
Parenting Self-Efficacy How confident do you feel that you can use the following strategies with your child? (1 = not confident; 6 = very confident)		
Listen to my child	4.44	(1.12)
Understand my child's feelings	4.43	(1.02)
Control my emotions in front of my child	2.79	(1.24)
Avoid over-reacting when my child misbehaves	3.02	(1.22)
Create a calm, peaceful home	4.80	(1.07)
Set a good example by being polite and respectful	4.04	(1.31)
Explain things so that my child will understand	4.43	(1.23)
Praise my child when he does well	5.07	(1.02)
Discipline my child firmly when he misbehaves	5.34	(.92)
Let my child know I love him	4.87	(1.20)
Parental Occupational Aspirations How important for child's future? (1 = not at all; 5 = very important)		
Contribute to society	3.61	(.88)
Achieve financial stability	4.27	(.66)
Develop expertise in a sport, hobby, or area of interest	3.21	(.82)

Have a rewarding job	4.21	(.81)
Become active internationally	2.75	(1.06)
Teacher and School Invitations		
Perceived caring attitude by teacher (1 = disagree strongly to 5 = agree strongly)		
Teacher knows how much child is comprehending	4.15	(.93)
Teacher understands my child's personality	4.00	(1.04)
Teacher cares about my child's welfare	3.58	(1.22)
Teacher is willing to communicate with me about my child	3.14	(1.36)
Perceived invitations for involvement (0 = never, 1 = once this year, 2 = more than once)		
Teacher has suggested a meeting other than regular conference	.33	(.66)
Teacher has asked me to help out during a school event	.65	(.83)
Teacher has given me suggestions about how to help my child	.42	(.68)
Number of written communications from the school per month	3.02	(1.17)