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K-12 Teachers and Parents: How Do Length and Frequency of Serial Arguments Affect Perceived Resolvability in the Parent-Teacher Relationship?

Jimena Galvan
Chapman University, galva107@mail.chapman.edu

Selena Pang
Chapman University, pang112@mail.chapman.edu

Paula Pearl
Chapman University, pearl109@mail.chapman.edu

Justin Villasenor
Chapman University, villa170@mail.chapman.edu

Miranda Wall
Chapman University, wall108@mail.chapman.edu

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K-12 Teachers and Parents: How Do Length and Frequency of Serial Arguments Affect Perceived Resolvability in the Parent-Teacher Relationship?

J. Galvan, S. Pang, P. Pearl, J. Villasenor, M. Wall

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Chapman University, Orange, CA

CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY WILKINSON
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Introduction

In recent years, many studies have supported the claims that parent involvement in their child's education has a positive effect on their child's education (Child Trends, 2013); thus, there has been a spike in the amount of parents who have become involved in their child's learning.

Findings from Epstein (1986) indicated that teachers who collaborate with parents in the learning process of students have better cooperation and less antagonism with parents in general; however, as parents become more involved in their students' education, more parent-teacher interaction occurs, which results in an augmented likelihood of a conflict or ongoing conflicts developing. Despite the plethora of research conducted regarding parent-teacher-student relationships, there is a serious lack of research findings regarding solely parent-teacher relationships, specifically findings regarding serial arguments and perceived conflict resolution.

Using role theory as a guide, we argue that role theory, with its idea of predictive patterns of behavior according to social positions and identities can contribute to understanding of the serial arguments between parents and teachers of K-12 students.

Hypotheses

The hypotheses tested in this study are as follows:
H1) The length of serial arguments is negatively associated with perceived resolvability in the K-12 education context.
H2) K-12 teachers who engage in serial arguments more frequently have lower perceived resolvability.

Methods

Participants

- 100 participants who have had serial arguments
- 65 females, 12 males, 23 declined to answer
- 49 were parents, 51 were teachers
*See Figure 1 for breakdown of parents and teachers
- 10 enrolled in college, 66 not enrolled, 24 declined to answer
- Age
  - Age Range: 23 to 65
  - Mean Age: 43.57
  - Std. Deviation: 9.17
- Race ethnic background breakdown:
  - Asian, 7
  - Hispanic, 8
  - Native American/Hawaiian/Alaskan Native, 1
  - White, 58
  - Bi/Multiracial/Mixed, 4
  - Declined to answer, 22
See Figure 2 for breakdown of participants by race/ethnicity

Procedure

For this study, our participants took a voluntary online survey, in which they had to be at least 18 years of age and are either: 1. A current or recent (i.e., within the last two years) parent of a K-12 student, and/or 2. A current or recent (i.e., within the last two years) K-12 teacher.

Measures

Perceived Resolvability. To access parent and/or teacher beliefs on perceived resolvability, the study measured perceived resolvability on a 5-item scale with a deleted item. The scale is designed to access the idea of resolvability between a parent or teacher. Sample items include: "I believe that the argument will never be resolved," "I believe that the argument will be resolved in the future," and "I don't think that the other adult and I will ever agree on this issue". Alpha reliability for perceived resolvability was .72, $M = 3.33$, $SD = 1.49$.

Serial Argument Frequency. The frequency of serial arguments was measured by asking the number of times parents and teachers engaged in a serial arguments: "2-5 times"(59 responses), "6-10 times" (31 responses), "11-20 times" (5 responses).

Serial Argument Length. To measure the lengths of serial arguments between parents and teachers, we had participants indicate how long the argument had been going on: "less than 1 month"(21 responses), "1-3 months"(31 responses), "4-6 months"(20 responses).
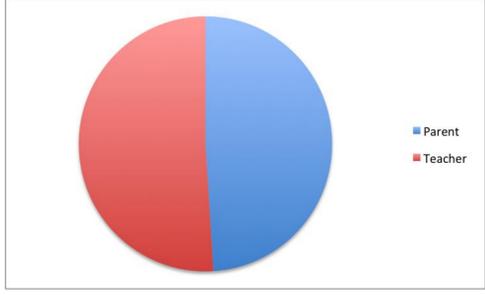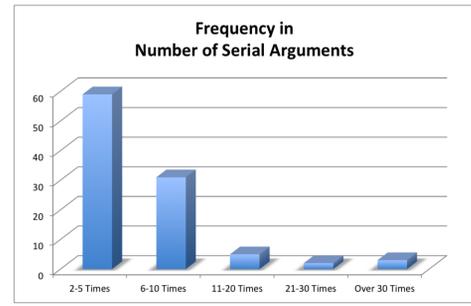

Figure 1. Depicts the breakdown of participants who reported their race/ethnic background
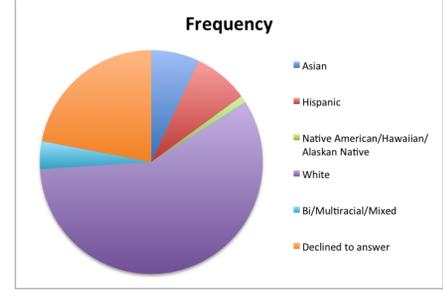
Figure 2. Depicting the breakdown of parents and teachers in participants
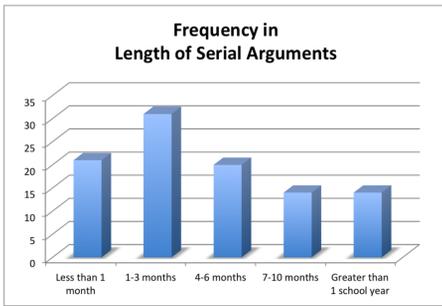
***Figure 3 Depicting the frequency in number of serial arguments in participants

****Figure 4. Depicting the frequency in number of serial arguments in participants

Conclusions

Our study supported both of our hypotheses, which posited that the length of serial arguments is negatively associated with perceived resolvability in the K-12 education context and that K-12 teachers who engage in serial arguments more frequently have lower perceived resolvability.

Our hypotheses were supported because parents and teachers reported with considerable reliability (based on Cronbach's Alpha) that they believe a) the serial argument will never be resolved, b) that there will never be agreement about the issue, and c) that the argument will always be a problem until the student is no longer enrolled in the teacher's class or until the student is no longer enrolled in the school they are attending.

With the knowledge attained from this study, it is important to note that roles play crucial parts in the fabrication of serial arguments. Katz (1984) notes that the distinction between teacher and parent is that a teacher represents the professional side of knowing children while the parent represents all the other aspects of their child's life. The ambiguity of the teacher-parent role can cause challenges within the parent-teacher relationship and should be considered more thoroughly to avoid serial arguments in the future (Keyes, 2002).

Results

H1 predicted a negative association between length of serial arguments and perceived resolvability. Based on the results of a correlation test, we found that H1 is supported. ***See Table 1

H2 predicted a negative relationship between number of serial arguments and perceived resolvability. Based on the results of a correlation test, we found H2 is supported. ****See Table 1

		Perceived Resolvability composite variable without item 5 (alpha = .72)
Approximately how many times have you and the other adult been in contact about the topic of this serial argument?	Pearson Correlation Sig. (1-tailed) N	-.332** .000 99
Approximately how long have you and the other adult been interacting about the topic of this serial argument?	Pearson Correlation Sig. (1-tailed) N	-.221* .014 99
Perceived Resolvability composite variable without item 5 (alpha = .72)	Pearson Correlation Sig. (1-tailed) N	1 99

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed)
*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed)

Table 1: Correlations

Future Research

This was an exploratory study, meaning that the research conducted was the first of its kind. Serial arguments at the K-12 level between teachers and parents have not been studied before and are in need of more attention. It is important for further research to continue so we can have an in-depth look at the serial arguments between parents and teachers; what causes them and how long they are perceived to last. Ideas for this kind of research could include the following:
• Looking at a broader range of people to take the survey (i.e., more male teachers); collect from more participants.
• Make the survey available in other languages, such as Spanish, since many parents do not speak English as their first language.
• Looking at student involvement in the argument.

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