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Parental Assistance During Homework Interactions:  
The Roles of Scaffolding and Parents' Awareness  
of Their Children's Skill Levels

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## ABSTRACT

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This study examined the relationship between parents' awareness of their children's capabilities and parents' teaching techniques while working with their children. Previous studies have shown that parents who are more accurate predictors of their children's task performance have higher-achieving children (Hunt & Paraskevopoulos, 1980). A separate field of research has documented an association between a parent's "scaffolding" of their child's understanding and the child's actual task performance (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). The current study, set within a Vygotskian (1978, 1981) framework, investigated the intersection of these respective findings to determine whether a relationship exists between parental predictive accuracy and parents' scaffolding behaviors with their children.

Participants were 22 dyads of second-grade students (ages 7 years, 7 months to 8 years, 3 months) and their mothers or fathers. Participants completed a simulated homework task involving math word-problems that required setting up an equation and solving it using addition and subtraction skills. Children completed three parallel problem sets: one, independently as a pretest; another, with their parent as a simulated homework session; and a third, independently as a posttest. During the pretest and posttest, parents' awareness of their children's skill levels was measured by their predictions of which items their children would solve independently. Parents' patterns of verbal and nonverbal assistance to their children were analyzed according to principles of scaffolding, that is, the explicitness and contingency of parental support.

Results documented a moderate correlation between parental predictive accuracy and children's task performance and math achievement. Parental predictive accuracy was also significantly correlated with the particular patterns of scaffolding behavior that parents exhibited while working with their children. Additionally, a modest yet significant correlation was evident between parents' scaffolding and their children's task performance and math achievement. When compared with other parental factors, however, changes in children's performance were better explained by differences in parents' awareness than by the incremental adjustments they made while assisting their children. Ultimately, increased parents' awareness of children's skill levels contributes not only to children's gains in learning but also to the effective sensitivity of parents' teaching techniques.

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