Exploring the Educational Involvement of Parents of English Learners

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Abstract

The purpose of the current investigation was to examine the relationships among a range of specific barriers and facilitators of parent involvement and a variety of types of school involvement within a diverse group of immigrant parents of English Learners (ELs) in four elementary school districts. In-home types of educational involvement such as monitoring homework and asking children about their school day were the most commonly reported behaviors, and utilizing community resources was found to be the least common type of parental involvement. Involvement type was predicted by parental demographic factors such as comfort with English language, educational background, and ethnicity, as well as perceptions of barriers and overall school climate. The findings of this study have implications for the design and implementation of interventions (e.g., parent programs, school policy changes) aimed at increasing the parental involvement of EL children.

Key Words: parental involvement, ethnic minorities, immigrants, English learners, second language, ELs, ELLs, ESL, family, parents, elementary schools, homework, communication, community resources, ethnicity, climate, barriers, policy, programs

Introduction

The population of children from immigrant families is growing faster than any other group of children in the United States (Hernandez, Denton, & Macartney, 2008). U.S. Department of Education statistics reveal that over 5 million school-age children are categorized as English Learners (ELs; NCELA, 2006). EL students have traditionally been defined as children whose English has not yet developed to the point where they can take full advantage of instruction in English (Coleman & Goldenberg, 2009). While not all EL children are from immigrant families (i.e., their parents were born outside the U.S.), there tends to be high overlap between these populations. ELs are more likely to have parents with lower formal education levels than their non-EL counterparts (Capps et al., 2005) and to come from low-income families (Garcia & Cuellar, 2006). These factors, in combination, often lead to lower levels of academic achievement in ELs (Jensen, 2008).

Parental educational involvement has been widely studied as one of the most important predictors of school success, not just in the United States, but in other countries as well (Davies, 1993; Smit & Driessen, 2007), suggesting that this is not a phenomenon restricted to the U.S. While some research suggests that parental involvement has the greatest impact on the academic success of younger children, the majority of the literature supports the contention that children of all ages with involved parents tend to have higher attendance, achievement levels, and more positive attitudes toward school (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hill & Tyson, 2009) than those whose parents are less involved. However, several recent meta-analytic studies have found that different types of parent involvement (e.g., homework involvement) have different relationships to achievement (Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008) and, furthermore, that parents' involvement changes as their children move through the school system. Thus, it is important to study specific types of parental involvement, since its impact on achievement tends to be variable (Hill & Tyson, 2009).

With regard to EL students specifically, Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) noted that programs which engage the family in the educational process, among other interventions, will effectively improve academic achievement. However, this population of parents often faces unique barriers to being more actively involved in their children's academic lives and, therefore, to being a more active part of the school community. There are school-based barriers, which may include a negative climate toward immigrant parents, individual barriers, such as a lack of dominant language proficiency (Quezada, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2003), and logistical barriers, such as work responsibilities and lack of childcare, which often make it difficult for parents to attend school functions (Valdes, 1996).

Despite the existence of such barriers, there are a multitude of ways that parents can be involved in and supportive of the educational experiences of their children (Ingram, Wolfe, & Lieberman, 2007). Epstein (1995; Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders, & Simon, 1997) is one of the most influential scholars in this arena; her conceptualization of parental involvement has had an impact on the majority of research in this area. Epstein's multidimensional framework of parental involvement includes the following types: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. Parenting refers to providing a home environment that is conducive with learning (e.g., having a reasonable bedtime, monitoring media consumption). Communicating refers to establishing regular, two-way avenues of dialogue with teachers and other relevant school staff. Volunteering refers to helping out at and supporting school functions or classroom activities. Learning at home refers to providing opportunities to enhance learning outside of school (e.g., monitoring homework, providing books or computers, talking to one's child about school). Decision making and collaborating with the community refer to participating in the development of school policy (e.g., joining the Parent Teacher Association) or community support for schools (e.g., running for school boards).

Based on this framework, it is possible to argue that despite one's level of formal education or linguistic proficiency, a parent can be significantly involved in supporting a child's educational success in a variety of ways. For example, parents can monitor their children's bedtimes, access to television and video games, or structure their child's homework schedule. They can also provide opportunities for visiting the library or accessing homework assistance in the community.

For other types of involvement, however, participating in one's child's educational success can be quite limited by a parent's linguistic proficiency or formal education. For example, being available to attend school functions, volunteering for school trips, or initiating communication with a teacher may be a challenge for the EL child's parent who does not have adequate English language skills or who works multiple jobs. Thus, rather than attempting to make generalizations about the quantity of parental involvement of EL children, it is important to define parental involvement as a multifaceted endeavor which may or may not be related to parental demographic characteristics (Borrero & Yeh, 2010; Dorner, Orellana, & Li-Grining, 2007).

While the aforementioned framework of parental involvement generally assumes that parents can initiate a variety of types of involvement, it is important to note that there are school barriers that may bias the type of involvement observed in particular groups of parents. Parents' experiences with the teachers,

counselors, and administrators at their children's school can set the stage for whether home–school communication and volunteering will be initiated or continued (Ariza, 2010). For example, if a parent of an EL child feels that his or her presence at the school is unwelcome or isolating (e.g., no bilingual staff or translators are available at the school), it may decrease the likelihood of a parent continuing to attend school events.

Similarly, parents' cultural values or beliefs about their role in the education of their children can also be a factor in limiting their involvement. For example, in some cultures, asking a teacher questions about his or her methods or assessment of a child would be considered disrespectful (De Gaetano, 2007). In many other countries, teachers are highly respected, and parents aim to not interfere with the way teachers do their jobs (Sosa, 1997). Thus, the mainstream cultural expectation in the United States—that parents are highly active advocates for their children within the school—can be a cultural incongruity for many parents of ELs.

What appears to be a consistent finding in the literature on immigrant parents, however, is that, as a group, there is a great importance placed on education. Among studies that have examined parental values toward education, there is growing consensus that immigrant parents often have even greater aspirations for their children's educational success than do U.S.-born parents (Kao & Tienda, 1995; Ramirez, 2008). In fact, Schaller, Rocha, and Barshinger (2006) found that regardless of parents' own level of formal education, 100% of immigrant parents in their sample expressed expectations that their children would graduate from high school and endorsed statements about the value of education in the lives of their children. Thus, the myth that parents of EL children simply do not value education (i.e., as much as U.S.-born parents) seems to be without merit.

While there has been some research that has examined factors that both facilitate and limit the educational involvement of parents of ELs, fewer studies have examined the relationships among a range of specific barriers or facilitators of parent involvement and a variety of types of involvement in a diverse group of EL parents. Without such specific information, it is challenging for schools to identify effective strategies for decreasing barriers and increasing the involvement of these parents. The purpose of the current investigation was to examine these variables collectively for an ethnically and socioeconomically diverse group of immigrant parents of EL students in elementary school districts. The findings of this study have implications for the design and implementation of interventions (e.g., parent programs, school policy changes) aimed at increasing the involvement of EL children's parents.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the current investigation:

1. What types of school involvement are the most and least commonly reported by parents of EL children?
2. What are the most common barriers to involvement in schools as reported by parents of EL children?
3. Are there significant relationships between educational aspirations, reported barriers, and specific types of involvement, as reported by parents of EL children?
4. Do demographic factors such as gender, ethnic background, highest level of formal education, or occupational status significantly impact aspirations, barriers, and specific types of involvement in schools as reported by parents of EL children?
5. What are the most significant predictors of specific types of parental involvement in schools as reported by parents of EL children?

Methods

Participants

Participants included 239 parents of EL children representing four elementary school districts in a large Midwestern metropolitan area. The districts volunteered for participation in the research based on their involvement in a large-scale project aimed at understanding and enhancing the academic experiences of EL children. All parents of EL-designated children were contacted for participation in this study. The response rates varied by district, ranging from 9% to 20%. Table 1 contains a summary of the response rates, sample sizes, and demographic characteristics of each school district's sample.

The parents who participated in the research represented 28 different cultural backgrounds, and 74% were mothers (26% fathers). In terms of cultural background, 53% were born in Mexico, 10% were born in the United States, 6% were Ukrainian, 4% were Japanese, 3% were Russian, and 3% were Korean. The remaining 20% represented 22 other countries (approximately 1-3 participants per country). In terms of the languages used in responding to the survey, 56% responded in Spanish, 34% responded in English, 4% responded in Korean, 4% in Japanese, and 2% in Russian. On average, participants reported living in the United States for 12.6 years with a range of 1 to 28 years.

Eighty-three percent of the participants were married and living with their spouses; 6% percent were single, 6% separated, 2% married and living away from their spouses, and 2% were divorced. On average, participants reported

having a mean of 2 children, with a range of 1 to 7. In terms of education, 32% indicated that they had finished elementary school or its equivalent in their countries of origin. Seventeen percent indicated that they had finished high school or its equivalent in their countries of origin. Twenty-eight percent indicated that they attended some college or received a college degree. The remaining 22% had post-graduate education experience or degrees. In terms of occupational status, 50% of the sample indicated that they worked full-time, 20% worked part-time jobs, 25% were unemployed, and 5% worked temporary jobs.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

District	Surveys	% Returned	Ethnicity	M time in U.S.
A	99	17%	88% Mexican	11.08 years
			12% Other	
B	59	14%	68% Mexican	11.89 years
			32% Other	
C	51	20%	11% Korean	12.04 years
			17% Ukrainian	
			13% Japanese	
			11% Russian	
			48% Other	
D	26	9%	42% U.S.	18.64 years
			10% Ukrainian	
			10% Philippines	
			38% Other	

Procedure

School administrators from the four districts participating in this project contacted their respective individual schools to identify all students who were categorized as ELs. The parents of each eligible child were sent a survey along with a self-addressed stamped envelope which was addressed to the researchers, not the school administration. A cover letter explained the purpose of the survey, the anonymity of the process, and other pertinent consent information. The surveys and accompanying letters were all translated into the primary languages of the parents and had English translations on the back pages so that parents could choose the language in which they would respond. The survey was described as a needs assessment created to understand the opinions, experiences, and interests of parents of EL students. Participants were informed that the data would be used both for exploratory research purposes and to identify topics on which parent workshops would be created and delivered by the university partners.

Instrument

A survey was created by adapting relevant items from the Family Involvement Questionnaire (Fantuzzo, Tighe, & Childs, 2000) while adding new items designed to measure potential barriers affecting parental involvement in schools and to tap into parents' attitudes and aspirations about the education of their children. Each of the 31 items was accompanied by a 5-point Likert scale in which parents indicated their level of agreement with the items. Higher scores indicated stronger agreement with an item. The subscales included: educational aspirations, school climate toward parental participation, six barriers (language barriers, not wanting to interfere with how teachers do their job, lack of knowledge about the educational system, stress from other responsibilities, logistical barriers, and negative experiences with school personnel), and six types of involvement (reading at home with child, having routines, monitoring child's homework, utilizing community resources, communicating with teachers/school staff, and communicating with child about school experiences). The types of involvement included within the survey follow the typology of Epstein (1995) with the exception of *decision making involvement* and *collaboration with the community,* since each of these types of involvement is very atypical for the EL population sampled for this study.

Results

Research Question 1

With regard to the first research question, descriptive statistics were calculated on each of the subscales assessing type of parent involvement, and the means were analyzed to determine which types were most likely and least likely to be endorsed by sample participants. Table 2 contains a summary of these data. The most common types of parent involvement were monitoring children's homework activities and talking with children about their experiences at school. The least common type of parental involvement was utilizing community resources (e.g., going to the library with children).

Research Question 2

With regard to the second research question, means of the responses to questions measuring potential barriers were analyzed. An examination of these means revealed that the most highly reported barriers to parental involvement were language barriers, lack of knowledge about the U.S. educational system, not wanting to interfere with how teachers do their jobs, and stress from other responsibilities. Table 2 also contains a summary of these findings.

Table 2. Mean, Standard Deviation, and Observed Range of Scores on Aspirations, Barriers, and Parent Involvement

Variable	Mean	SD	Range
Aspirations	14.84	.90	3-15
School climate around involvement	31.08	5.14	9-35
Barriers:			
Language barrier	2.78	1.45	1-5
Don't want to interfere with teachers	2.47	1.48	1-5
Negative school experiences	1.42	.82	1-5
Overwhelmed by other responsibilities	2.41	1.21	1-5
Logistics	1.99	.91	1-5
Lack of familiarity with U.S. schools	2.39	1.12	1-5
Involvement:			
Read with my child	8.18	1.84	2-10
Utilize community resources	6.97	1.87	2-10
Communicate with teachers	8.08	1.54	3-10
Communicate with child about school	9.18	1.19	6-10
Monitoring	9.41	1.04	4-10
Routines	8.05	1.54	2-10

Research Question 3

With regard to the third research question, whether aspirations, barriers, and types of parent involvement were significantly related to one another, correlation coefficients were calculated between the main predictors and the dependent variables, types of parental involvement. These data, summarized in Table 3, reveal an interesting pattern. Perceptions of school climate toward parental involvement were significantly related to utilization of community resources ($r = -.169$, $p < .05$), communication with teachers ($r = .267$, $p < .01$), communicating with their children about school ($r = .209$, $p < .01$), and negative experiences with the school ($r = -.196$, $p < .05$). In other words, perceiving the school climate to be more inviting of parental involvement was related to greater communication with both teachers and children about school, less use of community resources, and having fewer negative experiences in school. Aspirations were not significantly related to any of the types of parental involvement.

In terms of how perceived barriers to participation related to types of parental involvement, only the following relationships were significant. Parental language barriers were significantly related to use of community resources ($r = -.216$, $p < .01$), use of routines at home ($r = -.17$, $p < .01$), reading with one's child ($r = -.191$, $p < .01$), and talking with one's child about school ($r = -.22$, $p < .01$). In other words, parents who felt more uncomfortable or less proficient with their English language skills were less likely to utilize community

resources, provide routines for their children in the home, read with their children, and talk with their children about their school experiences. Not understanding the U.S. school system significantly correlated with less reading with one's children (r = -.193, $p < .01$). No other barriers emerged as being significantly related to any type of parental involvement (e.g., being stressed from other responsibilities, desire to not interfere with how teachers did their job, logistical problems, negative experiences at the school).

Table 3. Correlations of Parent Involvement Types, School Climate Toward Parental Involvement, and Barriers to Involvement

	Read	Resources	Teacher	Talk	Monitor	Routines
Climate	.09	-.17*	.27**	.21**	.10	.00
Aspirations	.09	.03	.08	.06	.06	.02
Language	-.19**	-.22**	-.11	-.22**	-.09	-.17**
Interfere	-.07	-.10	-.10	-.03	.05	.04
Familiar	-.19**	-.12	.06	-.08	.00	-.04
Stress	-.05	-.01	-.06	-.04	-.10	-.04
Neg. Exp.	-.11	.00	.07	-.06	.00	.04
Logistics	-.01	-.06	-.07	-.08	-.06	.05

Note: *indicates a significance of $p < .05$ and **indicates a significance of $p < .01$

Research Question 4

In order to determine whether demographic variables would be related to scores on the measures of aspirations, school climate regarding parental involvement, barriers, and types of school involvement, a series of analyses of variance were conducted. Because these data were not equally distributed across all levels of certain demographic variables, data were regrouped using dummy coding into the following categories: ethnicity was grouped by Latino or non-Latino; work status was grouped by full-time vs. less than full-time (or not employed). With regard to gender, no differences emerged between parental gender and types of involvement with the exception of reading with one's child. Mothers were found to read significantly more than fathers ($F(1, 231) = 4.6$, $p < .01$). Educational status was significantly related to reading with one's child ($F(6, 221) = 3.23$, $p < .05$), utilizing community resources ($F(6, 216) = 7.38$, $p < .001$), and talking with children about school experiences ($F(6, 216) = 2.08$, $p < .05$). An examination of the means revealed that parents with more education were more involved with their children in these particular areas. With regard to work status, significant differences were found only on talking with one's child about school ($F(1, 205) = 4.18$, $p < .01$), with parents who worked full-time talking more with their children than those who were not working

or working less. Finally, with regard to ethnicity, we examined whether Latino vs. non-Latino parents exhibited different types of involvement. Non-Latino parents were more likely than Latino parents to utilize community resources ($F(1,222) = 14.3$, $p < .01$) and to have routines such as bedtimes and limits on television ($F(1, 227) = 11.88$, $p < .01$).

With regard to aspirations, no demographic differences were found based on gender, educational status, work status, or ethnicity of participant. However, with regard to school climate, differences emerged based on educational status ($F(6, 201) = 5.60$, $p < .01$), with less educated parents perceiving the climate more positively than more educated parents. Differences also emerged with regard to ethnicity ($F(1, 200) = 55.41$, $p < .01$), with Latino parents having more positive perceptions of school climate than did non-Latino parents.

With regard to barriers, ethnic differences emerged on language barriers ($F(1,222) = 33.8$, $p < .01$), stress from other responsibilities ($F(1, 215) = 5.17$, $p < .01$), and lack of knowledge about the U.S. school system ($F(1, 201) = 21.78$, $p < .01$). Latino parents had higher scores on language barriers and lack of knowledge, while non-Latino parents had higher stress scores. Work status was also significantly related to language barriers ($F(1, 212) = 12.4$, $p < .01$), with parents who worked full time having lower scores than those who were unemployed or employed less. Finally, educational status was significantly related to both language barriers ($F(1, 226) = 11.8$, $p < .01$) and lack of knowledge of the U.S. school system ($F(1, 201) = 7.07$, $p < .01$), with more educated parents having fewer language barriers and greater knowledge of the system.

Research Question 5

In terms of the final research question, what are the most significant predictors of specific types of parental involvement, a series of six multiple regression analyses were run (one analysis per each type of parental involvement). Based on the aforementioned analyses, we controlled for the demographic variables that were found to be significant predictors of each of the types of parental involvement. Thus, in response to the final research question, data concerning aspirations, school climate perceptions, and each of the barriers were regressed onto each of the six dependent variables (i.e., types of parental involvement). We also first controlled for demographic variables such as gender, educational status, work status, and ethnicity where they had been shown to be significantly impacting the types of parental involvement. The statistical results of these analyses are depicted in six tables available from the authors upon request.

The first equation, predicting reading with one's child, utilized hierarchical multiple regression to first control for gender and educational level (entered on the first step). The predictors of aspirations, school climate, and barriers were

entered on the second step. This analysis was statistically significant (F = 2.03, $p < .05$), and the total model accounted for 12% of the variance. The only statistically significant predictor was parental education level.

The second equation, predicting use of routines, utilized hierarchical multiple regression to first control for ethnicity (entered on the first step). The same set of predictors used in the previous analysis was entered on the second step. This analysis was statistically significant (F = 2.3, $p < .05$), and the total model accounted for 12% of the variance. The only two significant predictors were aspirations and ethnicity (not being Latino).

The third equation, predicting use of monitoring, utilized hierarchical multiple regression to first control for ethnicity (entered on the first step). The same set of predictors used in the previous analysis was entered on the second step. This model was not statistically significant (F = 1.2, $p < .05$), and the total model accounted for 6% of the variance. The only two significant predictors were logistics and ethnicity (not being Latino).

The fourth equation, predicting communicating with one's child about school, utilized hierarchical multiple regression to first control for parental education level and work status (entered on the first step). The same set of predictors used in the previous analysis was entered on the second step. This analysis was statistically significant (F = 3.45, $p < .05$), and the total model accounted for 19% of the variance. The only three significant predictors were aspirations, negative experiences with the school, and school climate.

The fifth equation, predicting utilization of community resources, utilized hierarchical multiple regression to first control for parental education and ethnicity (entered on the first step). The same set of predictors used in the previous analysis was entered on the second step. This analysis was statistically significant (F = 4.3, $p < .05$), and the total model accounted for 23% of the variance. The only significant predictors were parental education level, school climate, and not wanting to interfere with how teachers do their job.

The final equation, predicting communicating with teachers, entered the same set of predictors used in the previous analysis simultaneously. This analysis was statistically significant (F = 3.1, $p < .05$), and the total model accounted for 14% of the variance. The only two significant predictors were school climate and language barriers.

While there were several factors that were uniquely related to specific types of parent involvement, parental education, ethnicity, aspirations, and school climate appear to be significant predictors of multiple types of parental involvement. These findings suggest that it may often be both parental characteristics (e.g., parental education, ethnicity, aspirations) and school characteristics (i.e., climate) that are most closely related to the types of involvement that parents of EL students exhibit in efforts to support their children's educational success.

Discussion

This study contributes to the scholarship on understanding patterns of ELs' parents' educational involvement. The findings on what types of involvement exhibited by parents of EL children are most common and least common mirror what has been suggested by other scholars (Ingram, Wolfe, & Lieberman, 2007), in that in-home types of educational involvement such as monitoring homework and asking children about their school day were most common. Utilizing community resources was found to be the least common type of parental involvement of those responding in this study. This could be related to either the availability of such resources or the ease with which such resources could be accessed by families of EL students. Anecdotally, it is unlikely that the resources were not readily available, but rather, it may be more likely that such resources were either viewed as too costly (e.g., museums) or lacking in translators or bilingual materials, making access more difficult for parents with language barriers or financial pressures. Clearly identifying what the reasons are that parents may underutilize resources and whether or not they are problems that can be solved is critical to developing successful programs.

In terms of barriers, the findings from the current study echo what has been discussed by other scholars (Brilliant, 2001; DeGaetano, 2007; Sosa, 1997) in that the most common barriers were linguistic, a lack of familiarity with the U.S. educational system, and a desire to not interfere with how teachers do their jobs. Providing education for parents about how schools work in the U.S. and expectations about the involvement of parents in the U.S. may be useful interventions in response to this information (Brilliant, 2001; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). Conversely, it is critical for teachers to be educated about the reasons that some parents of EL students may be less involved in their children's schools, such as the cultural differences previously discussed, as opposed to the parents not valuing education.

In terms of whether demographic differences existed in how parents responded to scales on the survey, several interesting findings emerged. First, parental educational level and parental ethnicity seemed to be the most relevant demographic differences. Parental education level predicted barriers such as experiencing language barriers and lack of knowledge of the U.S. school system. Ethnicity was significantly related to the same barriers, as well as stress related to other responsibilities. Interestingly, while Latino parents reported higher tendencies to experience language barriers and a lack of knowledge of the U.S. educational system, it was non-Latino parents who reported higher stress levels. These findings are mirrored by those discussed in the literature (Capps et al., 2005; Garcia & Cuellar, 2006; Jensen, 2008; Sosa, 1997) and

suggest that it is less educated, Latino parents who may be at higher risk for not participating in certain types of parental involvement, findings which were supported by the regression equations conducted in this study.

Predicting Parent Involvement

With respect to the prediction of types of parental involvement, some interesting patterns emerged. For reading, none of the predicted barriers were related to the frequency with which parents read with and to their children, but parents' educational level was a significant predictor. This suggests that parents who are more literate, in their native language and/or English, are more likely to engage in family literacy experiences than those who lack literacy skills. This finding supports the efforts of scholars who have designed family literacy activities as an intervention to increase parent involvement (Freeman & Freeman, 2007; Olsen, 1997)

Utilizing routines that support educational achievement—such as enforcing a bedtime, restricting access to media, or other types of time management—was found to be most significantly predicted by parental aspirations and ethnicity, with Latinos in this study being less likely to use such routines. This suggests that parents with the most investment in their child's educational achievement may also be parents who are highly involved in structuring their child's home life and have high expectations in general of their children, a finding that has been supported by a plethora of research on parenting styles (Baumrind, 1967, 1991). From an interventionist standpoint, it also may be important to recommend the use of routines as one way for parents to support the educational successes of their children.

Monitoring homework progress and completion was only predicted by ethnicity (Latino parents were less likely to monitor) and logistical barriers such as work schedules and availability. This is a logical finding, in that if parents are not around the home when their children are most likely to be doing their homework, it would be difficult to monitor their progress. One might expect this to be a function of social class and/or the types of jobs that parents have (e.g., shift work vs. 9-to-5 careers). However, it is possible to work with those parents to find other ways to provide such monitoring (e.g., by enlisting older siblings, relatives, or neighbors to monitor progress). For children who have no such readily available supervision, schools may want to reach out to their parents to inform them of afterschool tutoring opportunities either sponsored by the school or available in the community.

Communication with one's child about school and its importance was best predicted by parental aspirations, negative experiences with school personnel, and perceptions of school climate. Thus, parents who perceived positive

messages from the school about involvement, who had fewer (if any) negative experiences with school personnel, and those who had higher aspirations were more likely to communicate with their child about the importance of school and their child's experiences in school. This suggests that schools can send an important message to parents about the necessity of communicating with one's children by engaging in school–parent relationships that transmit a high value for such a prime type of involvement (Nieto, 2002; Valdes, 1996).

Utilizing community resources were best predicted by parental educational level, school climate, and not wanting to interfere with how teachers do their jobs. Parents who were more educated, had positive perceptions of school climate, and did not have concerns about interfering with how teachers did their jobs were more likely to utilize community resources that support education for their children. These parents were also more likely to participate in events that increased their awareness of such resources or were in more frequent communication with teachers who alerted them to the importance of using such resources. Schools working with community services and partners may lead to better communication with parents about the availability of bilingual resources (e.g., public libraries), because parents are not likely to assume such availability, since an "English only" mentality still pervades many parts of the country.

Finally, communicating with teachers was best predicted by language barriers and perceptions of school climate around parental involvement. The most obvious implication of this finding is for schools to make sure that they have bilingual professionals or translation services readily available to parents who are not comfortable communicating in English and that they advertise the availability of these services to parents who may not know they exist. In addition, the perceived climate of the school environment and, in particular, whether or not parents feel welcome in the school community is another important area for schools to assess in efforts to increase parent participation.

Interestingly, some of the barriers suggested in the literature did not emerge as significant predictors of any of the types of parental involvement. While a lack of familiarity with the U.S. school system was found to vary depending on parental education level and ethnicity, past research would suggest that it should have emerged as a stronger predictor of actual types of involvement (Brilliant, 2001). It could be that there were other factors that trumped this particular barrier in terms of predicting involvement types, but it is also possible that it was not a large problem for participants in this study. This is suggested by the relatively low mean score and the fact that familiarity was only significantly correlated with reading in the correlational analyses. Similarly, for as much as language barriers emerged as significant correlates of a variety of types of involvement, it did not emerge as a significant predictor when factored

in with the other possible predictors in the equation. There is probably a large overlap between language facility and parental educational level, so it is likely that multicolinearity was a factor in interpreting this finding. It is perhaps a positive finding that stress related to other responsibilities was not a significant predictor of any of the types of involvement, suggesting that parents can and do participate in the educational experiences of their children regardless of other responsibilities in their lives.

It is somewhat surprising how often parental aspirations about the education of their children emerged as a significant predictor, given the range restriction observed on this variable. This is not an uncommon finding in past research (Schaller, Rocha, & Barshinger, 2006), and in fact, recent research by Jeynes (2011) suggests that parental expectations and communication about the value of school are more powerful influences than are more overt types of parental involvement (e.g., checking homework). Hence, the finding in the current study is predictable, but having a wider range of variance on this variable would have, in all likelihood, increased the potency of this variable as a predictor.

Implications for Future Research and Practice

The findings from this study have important implications for future research and practice on this topic. First, given the disparate patterns of findings that emerged in predicting types of parental involvement, it seems important to measure different types of parental involvement instead of using additive models of involvement to make generalizations about "being involved." Second, it seems important to tailor interventions aimed at increasing parental involvement to parents based on factors such as educational background and linguistic fluency, as opposed to targeting interventions for parents of EL children in general. Given the extent to which such demographics were predictive of barriers and types of involvement, it is important for schools to understand the life experiences of the parents of their EL children as they make attempts to increase their involvement. Third, given the importance of school climate as a significant predictor of three types of parental involvement (i.e., communicating with one's child, utilizing community resources, and communicating with teachers), efforts should be made to articulate positive messages about the importance of parental involvement as it relates to educational success. While parents who themselves were educated in U.S. schools may be aware of this finding, it may be that parents of EL children, many of whom may have been educated outside the U.S., would benefit from psychoeducational workshops on this topic and from efforts by school administrators and teachers to reinforce this message. There is some international evidence that actual parent involvement, not just the expectation around participation found in U.S.

mainstream culture, is positively related to academic achievement (Davies, 1993; Smit & Driessen, 2007). However, there have not been rigorous studies done in all the countries of origin represented by the participants in this study that would support such a finding as universal in nature.

On a positive note, while these data may be useful in contributing to the conversation about why some parents of EL children less frequently participate in school activities compared to their non-EL counterparts, there are many examples of successful strategies that have been used to increase participation in this population. A unifying thread of such success stories appears to be the philosophy of working *in collaboration* with parents as opposed to a more paternalistic approach where parents are told what to do. Wink (2005) discusses this as the "We-are-going-to-do-this-with-you" model as opposed to the "We-are-going-to-do-this-to-you" model. The goals of a do-it-to-them approach are to *change the parents* by having programs where "teachers talk, families listen, and everyone leaves immediately afterward" (Wink, 2005, p. 154). In contrast, the goals and characteristics of the former, much more optimal model that she discusses include *changing the schools* through programs where teachers listen, families tell stories and interact, and community building is the outcome. Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, and Hernandez (2003) discussed an approach with such a sentiment in the Bridging Cultures Project in which teachers were trained to become actively involved in learning about and integrating the cultural worldview and values of their EL students' parents and approached increasing parental involvement from a more mutual, collaborative direction. Another school's successful effort was characterized by parents working with the schools to select ways that they would like to be involved in their children's education and then signing contracts that reflected their commitment to do so (see http://www.cottay.com/brochure.htm). Thus, schools that struggle with increasing parent involvement may be able to learn from examples such as these.

Limitations

While this study suffers from a number of limitations, it represents one effort to contribute to the literature in this important area. For example, the overall response rate suggests that there were many parents whose perspectives were not captured in these findings. One might speculate that only parents who were already more involved in their children's education would take the time to respond to a survey, which implies that parents who were much less involved were not well represented in this sample. One can only speculate how the findings would change with better representation, but it is possible that additional factors would have been identified that relate to different types of involvement

by increasing the range of variance on the scales. To increase parent participation in studies like this one, researchers may wish to use email, send reminder postcards, or resend the surveys to parents who may have forgotten or lost the original mailing. Additionally, having surveys given to parents at parent–teacher conferences or other events may increase participation. These ideas, of course, are all dependent on the resources available to researchers conducting the study. It is also possible that some parents were illiterate, so future studies may also utilize methods that can accommodate such needs (e.g., reading surveys to parents over the phone or in person, in their preferred language).

Second, while the respondents represented a diverse sample of participants, most of the schools from which parents were sampled were in relatively well-resourced communities, generally speaking, as opposed to communities that are homogenously impoverished, where many parents of EL children may be raising their families. The researchers also know that the majority of families are ethnic minorities as opposed to ethnic majorities, which may also be less common in parts of the country where there is more concentrated ethnic segregation. Future research should examine the extent to which cultural homogeneity, the socioeconomic diversity of the larger community, and other systemic factors may impact the experiences of parents of EL children. Ethnic differences beyond those captured in this study (i.e., Latinos) should be the focus of future research as well, including an examination of the extent to which parent participation is related to academic success in international settings such as those countries of origin represented by participants in this study. Such information is critical to schools around the U.S., given the increasing numbers of EL children in today's schools.

Summary

The current investigation examined relationships among a range of specific barriers and facilitators of parent involvement and a variety of types of educational involvement within a diverse group of immigrant parents of English Learner students (ELs) in four elementary school districts. Given the importance of the growing EL population to schools around the country, gathering information about the experiences of diverse groups of parents of EL children is critical to increasing their participation. In our sample, in-home types of educational involvement such as monitoring homework and asking children about their school day were the most commonly reported behaviors, suggesting that parents of EL children are already involved in their children's educational experiences. However, helping their children to utilize community resources was found to be the least common type of parental involvement. In addition, involvement type was predicted by parental demographic factors such as com-

fort with the English language, educational background, and ethnicity, as well as perceptions of barriers and overall school climate. The findings of this study have implications for the design and implementation of interventions (e.g., parent programs, school policy changes, P–12 faculty professional development on cultural differences) aimed at increasing the involvement of parents of EL children, adding to the ongoing conversation that many school districts around the country are having or will need to have in the very near future.

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