Title: Engaged Parents: Academic Engagement Among Mexican Heritage Families with Autism

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Introduction: Parental engagement has become an increasingly important component when discussing children’s educational outcomes (Antony-Newman, 2018; Boshoff, Gibbs, Phillips, Wiles, & Porter, 2016; Fan & Chen, 2001; Goldman & Burke, 2017; Jeynes, 2003, 2012; Ma, Shen, Krenn, Hu, & Yuan, 2016; Wilder, 2014). While parental engagement has been shown to increase children’s academic achievement, its relationship to parent participation can vary. Among diverse families (e.g. race, ethnicity, income, urban) whose children are enrolled in general education, parental engagement has been associated with increases in pre-literacy skills, reading comprehension, standardized testing, GPA, and student’s academic confidence (Arnold, Zeljo, Doctoroff, & Ortiz, 2008; Banerjee, Harrell, & Johnson, 2011; Farkas & Grolnick, 2010; Jeynes, 2012). McKay et al.’s (2003) research suggests that studies examining parental engagement in schools from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds can yield differences among parents school engagement practices. Significant research exists among diverse families of children in general education, both on child’s academic outcomes and parent participation, but limited research exists on parental engagement among parents of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) (Burke, 2013; Burke & Hodapp, 2016). If examining the academic engagement practices among Latino parents and their children with autism one would also expect to find different barriers towards involvement in schools. However, few studies exist that examine the relationship between race and ethnicity and parental engagement among Latino families whose children have ASD. Therefore, the current study will examine how Mexican Heritage parents describe their children’s experiences (e.g. parent-teacher relationships, intervention meetings) in school via frequency counts and inductive coding.

Method: The current study will utilize and expand the focus of the Improving Odds (IO) project. The IO project was developed and overseen by Dr. Shana R. Cohen in a border region of Southern California. Thirty-nine parents enrolled in one or more phases of the study. The IO project consisted of four phases; Aim 1 - Focus Group Interviews, Aim 2 – Individual Interviews, Aim 3 – Experienced Sampling Methods (ESM; Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1992), and Aim 4: Video Data. This study will utilize Aim 2 data which focused on parent’s description of services obtained for their child with autism. This data was selected as it often features services provided by teachers, schools, and districts. The 39 individual interviews collected during Aim 2 were conducted in Spanish and analyzed using five key words (e.g. school, teacher, involved, education, learning). This process developed frequency counts that denote the number of times each word was uttered during the interview by the participant. In addition, these excerpts were coded inductively for thematic understanding of parents existing experiences with education.

Results: Frequency counts based on five key words developed over 1,215 original code excerpts based on 39 individual interviews. For the term Escuela, or school, 757 excerpts (62%) were found. Excerpts from parents based on the word school described examples of parent-child conversations about school, transitions related to schooling (e.g. new teachers, routines), parent and child satisfaction or dissatisfaction with school, or descriptions of meetings based on the child’s Individualized Education Program. The term Maestros, or teacher, found 274 excerpts (22%). This code featured parents describing teacher’s classroom practices, parent-teacher relationships, and parent-child conversations regarding teachers. The term Educacion, or education, found 117 excerpts (10%). This term is typically utilized by parents to describe placement in special education or can include a definition of the term. For the term Involucrados, or involved, 57 excerpts (5%) were found. The term can be used to describe examples of practices undertaken in intervention or school. Lastly, the term Aprendizaje, or learning, found 10 excerpts at 1% of the results. This term is often used to describe a child’s intellectual development or processing by teachers or parents. Frequency counts and thematic examples will be presented on the final poster.

Discussion: Research on the impact of involvement from parents of varying minoritized communities (e.g. urban, immigrant) indicates that children receive academic benefits when parents engage in their child’s education (Antony-Newman, 2018; Jeynes, 2003, 2012; Turney & Kao, 2009). However, limited research has focused on the intersecting identities of Mexican heritage families whose children are diagnosed with Autism. The results from this study provide insight into how parents from Mexican
Heritage backgrounds experience and discuss their engagement within schools. Given a growing population of Latinx students, and an increasing number of students being diagnosed on the autism spectrum, this research can serve to understand the particular realities that these families might face due to income, language, and perception of autism. These findings serve as an entry point for additional research among minoritized communities whose children are diagnosed with Autism.

References:


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