Culture Counts:

Engaging Black and Latino Parents of Young Children in Family Support Programs

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Overview

This brief provides an overview of family support programs and aims to identify the features and strategies that may be most effective for reaching and engaging black and Latino families, with the ultimate goal of supporting young children's development. We present a synthesis of available research on parent engagement—as well as potential barriers to their engagement—in family support services and programs, and recommendations, for both policymakers and practitioners, for designing, adapting, and evaluating culturally-relevant family support programs and services.

Introduction

For decades, programs and policies for young children have been guided by theories of child development that suggest that those people and institutions closest to children—their families, schools, religious institutions, neighborhoods, and peers—have the most immediate and direct influence on their growth and development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Sameroff & Chandler, 1975). As children's primary caregivers, parents[1] play perhaps the most important role in their lives, by providing food, clothing, a safe place to live, medical attention, and a secure, nurturing relationship that is critical to their well-being (Langford, 2009; Cox & Harter, 2003). Often, however, factors such as poverty, limited education, substance abuse, domestic violence, and other family stressors prohibit parents from being able to meet all of their children's physical, social-emotional, or cognitive needs (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Coie, 1996; Loeber & Farrington 1998; Zaslow, Dion, Hair, Sargent, & Ahluwalia, 2001). In addition to supports such as steady employment, strong social networks, and community resources, many parents need access to programs and services designed to help them overcome these stressors and promote the healthy development of their young children.

Family support[2] programs are broadly defined as programs that provide resources to enable parents to successfully support themselves so they can provide a stable, enriching environment for their children (Langford, 2009). While the specific goals of family support programs may vary, they typically include improving parenting skills (Roggman, Boyce, & Cook, 2009); increasing parents' knowledge of child development (Marcynyszyn, Maher, & Corwin, 2011); providing work supports (Bromer & Henly, 2004); helping parents access health and nutrition services, job training, or treatment for substance abuse (Love, Kisker, Ross, Raikes Constantine, & Boller, 2005); and reducing parental stress (Sanders, Turner, & Markie-Dadds, 2002). These goals are met through a variety of strategies and activities, such as parent education classes and support groups, parent-child groups and family activities, drop-in time, child care, information and referral services, crisis intervention and/or family counseling, and auxiliary support services (such as emergency food) (Langford, 2009).

Family support, in its various forms, began as part of the larger social-services movement in the 1960s, with grassroots efforts advocating for the development of community-based programs to strengthen family functioning (Dunst, Johanson, Trivette, & Hamby, 1991; Weissbourd & Kagan, 1989). At the time, emerging research demonstrated the importance of understanding child development within an ecological framework,[3] as well as the benefits of early intervention for children at risk for poor outcomes (Kagan & Weissbourd, 1994; Kagan, Powell, Weissbourd, & Zigler, 1987). Programs were developed independently at the local level to provide vulnerable parents—those experiencing poverty, joblessness, poor health, or other risk factors—with education, social support, and connections to other community services (Langford, 2009). Family support became the foundation of "two-generation" programs (see text box) such as Head Start, which was launched in 1965 under the premise that early care and education programs that help parents achieve self-sufficiency and function more effectively will enable parents to foster healthy development and school readiness in their young children.

Today, family support is continually emphasized as a critical component of integrated early care and education systems that are developed to promote

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[1] The term "parent" will be used throughout this paper to denote those responsible for the daily care and well-being of children, though we recognize that children's primary caregiver(s) are sometimes not their biological parent(s).

[2] The term "family support" is used instead of "parent support," as this is a term with historical significance and one that is widely used in reference to the types of programs and policies discussed here.

[3] Ecological frameworks of child development are based on the theory that development is shaped by the interaction between an individual and his or her environment; see Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

positive child outcomes. National and state early care and education policy organizations and initiatives, such as the Alliance for Early Success and Ascend at the Aspen Institute, include family support and two-generation approaches as central to their work, and family support remains a tenet of the mental health, social work, and child welfare fields (Dunst, 2002; Allen & Petr, 1996; Shelton, Jeppson, & Johnson, 1987; Forry, Bromer, Chrisler, Rothenberg, Simkin, & Daneri, 2012; Chase-Lansdale & Brooks-Gunn, 2014).

The Two-Generation Approach

Two-generation approaches to development focus on meeting the needs of children and their parents together, moving the whole family toward educational success and economic stability (Lombardi, Mosle, Patel, Schumacher, & Stedron, 2014). These approaches are based on research indicating that when parents have access to educational opportunities (for themselves and their children), economic supports, and social networks, they will be more able to support the healthy development of their young children (Center on the Developing Child, 2007). Programs that use a two-generation approach include opportunities to develop the education and workforce skills of the parent (e.g., job trainings, GED classes, and career coaching), and provide early care and education opportunities for the child (Gruendel, 2014). For more information see: *Gateway to Two Generations: The Potential for Early Childhood Programs and Partnerships to Support Children and Parents Together* (Lombardi et al., 2014) and *Two (or More) Generation Frameworks: A Look Across and Within* (Gruendel, 2014).

Ultimately, for family support programs to be successful, they must actively engage their participants—namely, parents—and must be sensitive to the cultural and ethnic diversity of the target populations they serve. These issues are growing in importance, as ethnic minority populations including blacks and Latinos[4] (both native- and foreign-born) are projected to grow considerably by the mid-21st century. By 2050, Latinos are expected to make up 30 percent of the total U.S population, whereas now they comprise 16 percent of the population (Ennis, Rios-Vargas, & Albert, 2011; U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Similarly, blacks are expected to make up 18.4 percent of the U.S. population by 2060, compared to 13 percent today (Rastogi, Johnson,

Hoeffel, & Drewery, 2011; U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). As black and Latino children are more likely than white children to live in areas of concentrated poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), have parents with lower education levels (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005), and have parents who do not have secure employment (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2012), the need to engage parents effectively in family support services targeted to these populations is especially acute.

Engaging black and Latino parents in family support programs and services

Engaging ethnic minority parents in family support programs and services is often a challenge. Research suggests that parenting programs are less likely to provide benefits to families from ethnically-diverse backgrounds (Breitenstein, 2012), that ethnically-diverse families are less likely to access and utilize mental health services (Vega, Kolody, Aguilar-Gaxiola, Catalano, 1999), and that ethnic minority parents are less likely to be engaged than white parents in their child's schooling (Geenen, Powers, & Lopez-Vasquez, 2001; Hughes, Gleason, & Zhang, 2005). While the specific factors causing this apparent lack of engagement are varied and often complex, there is evidence in the health/mental health, education, and social work research literature suggesting that factors may include language barriers (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2006; Mendez, 2010; Smith, Stern, & Shatrova, 2008), socioeconomic constraints (Coatsworth, Duncan, Pantin, & Szapocznik, 2006), and a "mismatch" between a program's goals and approach and the cultural values and beliefs of the target population(s) (Meyer & Bailey, 1993; Weiss, Bouffard, Bridgall, & Gordon, 2009). Regarding this latter point, many family support programs, including parent skills training programs, were originally developed for and implemented with middle-income, white parents and children (Coard, Wallace, Stevenson, & Brotman, 2004; Forehand & Kotchick, 1996).

Research indicates that culturally-relevant program practices produce stronger results (Griner & Smith, 2006), and research shows that cultural beliefs influence parents' engagement in services such as

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[4]The term "Latino" is used to identify persons of Central and South American, Dominican, Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Spanish descents, regardless of race.

parent trainings (Barrera & Castro, 2006; Lau, 2006). Therefore, a central aim of this literature review is to provide a better understanding of the cultural and contextual factors that affect the engagement of black and Latino parents (both native- and foreign-born) in a variety of programs and services designed to support healthy family functioning and positive child outcomes. This review examines literature on parent education and training, health and mental health services, and early care and education programs, to identify effective strategies for engaging black and Latino parents with young children. The review will also explore how cultural adaptation of existing programs and practices may be a necessary, albeit nuanced, process when considering how best to engage parents of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds. The synthesis of the available research is presented to enable both practitioners and policymakers to make thoughtful decisions about how to design or enable family support programs and services that are meaningful and culturally-attuned.

We conducted an extensive search of peer-reviewed journal articles, policy reports, and other literature reviews, using Internet web searches, library collections, and the following search engines: *Psychology & Behavioral Sciences Collection, Social Sciences Abstracts, PsycINFO from the American Psychological Association (APA)* and *SocINDEX* via the *EBSCO* Host Database. With the exception of foundational articles, the search was limited to work published in the last ten years (2004-2014). We began with a broad search using the terms *parent engagement, parent engagement in early childhood programs, parent education, family support programs, early childhood interventions, parenting interventions, culture, cultural sensitivity, cultural match, cultural competence, and ethnic diversity.* Literature from the fields of early care and education, K-12 education, health, mental health, and social work that focused on black and Latino families was selected for this review, to help us gain a comprehensive understanding of the existing literature on parent engagement among these populations. We found over 100 articles during the search process. For this review, we prioritized literature on cultural adaptation of programs and culturally-sensitive services provided to black and Latino parents. We also prioritized articles that provided detail about specific strategies to engage black and Latino parents in programs and services to support their children's learning and development (ages birth to eight). A

synthesis of the findings is presented below—first, the evidence supporting parental engagement of ethnic minority parents, and then, potential barriers to their engagement in family support programs.

Research evidence to support the importance of parent engagement

Programs designed for families and children must effectively engage their targeted participants. The concept of *engaging* parents has become a cornerstone of programs and policies designed to support the healthy growth and development of young children (from birth through age eight) (National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement, 2011; United States Department of Education, 2014). Emphasis on the critical role that parents play in their children's development and learning has grown over the last several decades, in part due to research examining the influence parents have on children's academic success (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Epstein, 2001; Jeynes, 2005; Henderson & Mapp, 2002), readiness for school (Henrich & Gadaire, 2008; Weiss, Caspe, & Lopez, 2006), and social-emotional health (McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen, & Sekino, 2004). The terms used to describe parents' efforts to support their children's development have varied over time and across fields of study (e.g., *parent involvement, family involvement, family engagement, parent engagement*), but parents are consistently considered vitally important to a child's overall well-being (Halgunseth, Peterson, Stark, & Moodie, 2009; Forry, Moodie, Simkin, & Rothenberg, 2011; Cox & Harter, 2003).

Benefits of parent engagement

In the early care and education literature, there is considerable recent research on the effects of parents' participation in home-based or school-based activities on children's academic outcomes. Here, parental engagement is often seen as a method used by educators in child care, preschool, and school settings to encourage parents' efforts to support their child's learning. For instance, several studies of parent engagement in early care and education have shown that the frequency of parents reading to young children at home is related to children's language and literacy development, including vocabulary knowledge, letter knowledge, and comprehension (Dunst, Valentine, Raab, & Hamby, 2013; Trivette, Dunst, & Gorman, 2010; Landry, Smith, Swank, Zucker, Crawford, & Solari, 2012).

A recent review of 95 studies (including descriptive, quasi-experimental, and experimental studies) on the effects of family involvement on reading and math outcomes for children ages three to eight found that when parents and their children are engaged in math-related activities such as counting, playing with shapes and puzzles, or money math, children's math knowledge and skills increased (Van Voorhis, Maier, Epstein, & Lloyd, 2013). Other studies have shown that parents' involvement in activities at school (e.g., attending parent-teacher conferences and parent meetings, visiting and volunteering in the classroom, and participating in social events in the school) predicts literacy and math skills as well as teachers' report of children's academic progress (Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006; Fan & Chen, 2001; Nord & West, 2001; Galindo & Sheldon, 2012). There is also increasing evidence that efforts to increase parent-initiated school involvement at key developmental transitions, such as the transition into kindergarten, will have a positive effect on kindergartners' academic outcomes (Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000; Schulting, Malone, & Dodge, 2005).

Research in other fields often describes parents' "engagement" as their level of participation or involvement in programs and services and the effect this participation has on specific outcomes. For example, some research has found that parents who participate in carefully-implemented home visiting programs experience improved parenting practices (such as increased sensitivity and reduced detachment), and the creation of more stable and nurturing home environments for children (Daro, 2006). Studies have also found that children within the child welfare system experience fewer incidences of maltreatment when their parents actively participate in parent education programs (Maher, Marcynyszyn, Corwin, & Hodnett, 2011). Children's behavior problems, including externalizing (i.e., aggression, hyperactivity, inattention) and internalizing (i.e., anxiety, depression) behaviors have also been reduced due to parent engagement in training/education programs (Breitenstein, Gross, Fogg, Ridge, Garvey, Julion, & Tucker, 2012). Further, parental involvement is cited as a critical aspect of the short- and long-term success of children's health initiatives, including obesity interventions (Institute of Medicine, 2005).

In this discussion, we take the approach others have taken by focusing on engagement and not just on

involvement. Carréon, Drake, & Barton (2005) state that "involvement" is used to describe the specific things parents do, while "engagement" also includes parents' orientations to the world and how those orientations frame the things they do (p. 469). Here, parent engagement is also viewed as Korfmacher et al. (2008) propose: as an understanding of the emotional quality of parents' interactions with programs, or how parents feel about or consider the services they receive, such as the strength of the relationship between parent and program staff, or the barriers parents experience with regard to the components of the program.

Barriers to parent engagement for blacks and Latinos

Despite the benefits of parental engagement in a variety of program types (e.g., Jeynes, 2003), not all parents are equally engaged. Research shows that educational, community, and mental health programs are less likely to successfully engage black and Latino parents (Geenen, Powers, & Lopez-Vasquez, 2001; Hughes, Gleason, & Zhang, 2005;Frazier et al., 2007;Kazdin Holland, & Crowley, 1997). Kazdin, Holland, and Crowley (1997) suggest that barriers to engagement for black and Latino parents in family-based services can be conceptualized as being "structural" (e.g., lack of time, needing transportation), "attitudinal" (e.g., perceptions of the value of services, beliefs about practitioners), or "cultural" (e.g., mismatch in cultural beliefs between practitioners and parents). Research suggests that black and Latino parents encounter each type of barrier more frequently than other families. For example, using a nationally-representative sample, Turney and Kao (2009) found that black and Latino immigrant parents perceived a greater number of barriers (e.g., inconvenient meeting times, lack of transportation, not feeling welcome at their child's school, problems with safety in getting to school) compared to white and native-born parents, even after controlling for other demographic and socioeconomic variables. Not surprisingly, then, Latino and black families (both native- and foreign-born) were also less involved in schools (Turney & Kao, 2009).

Research on barriers to parental engagement is often conducted on a small scale, is qualitative in nature, and tends to focus on structural barriers. The most commonly cited structural barriers are related to scheduling conflicts or child-care needs (Lamb-Parker, Piotrkowski, Baker, Kessler-Sklar, Clark, & Peay, 2001).

Time constraints or the length of meetings were also commonly reported reasons for parents' nonparticipation in parenting programs (Spoth, Redmond, Hockaday, & Shin, 1996). The solutions to structural barriers are easily identified; however, some solutions may require resources that might not be available. For example, a solution that requires minimal resources is changing meeting times to better fit families' schedules, and shortening meeting times to relieve time constraints. In contrast, providing child care for participating parents can be costly and may require additional considerations (e.g., background checks or licenses for providers, or employing enough adults to maintain adequate adult-to-child ratios). Although structural barriers may be easily addressed, it is important to note that no single barrier has been identified as primarily responsible for lack of engagement (Coatsworth, Duncan, Pantin, & Szapocznik, 2006). Indeed, parents tend to report multiple barriers to their engagement (Turney & Kao, 2009).

Attitudinal and cultural barriers are more difficult to address, as the solutions require an understanding of families' values, beliefs, and culture, and possibly changes in program or staff approach and practices. Attitudinal barriers may arise when parents feel they have limited power to define their roles or actions within family support programs (Carréon et. al, 2005). If families are not included in the program planning and design phases, they are forced to accept or reject the program as it is offered. An evaluation of a parenting program examining recruitment, retention, and attrition among the black, urban families it served found that parents were more likely to attend and complete the program when their motivation for participation matched the program's goals (Gross, Julion, Fogg, 2001). In contrast, parents who did not agree with the program's philosophy were more likely to drop out. Parent participation and attrition in programs may depend, in part, on their perception of the program being valuable to them and aligned with their beliefs and ideals.

Cultural barriers tend to involve a lack of understanding of cultural norms and beliefs, on the part of either the practitioner or the parent. For example, a cultural barrier to engagement in children's schooling reported by Latino immigrant families is their unfamiliarity with the structure and system of school cultures (Delpit, 1988), as well as the curriculum and organization of U.S. schools (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990), and limited English proficiency which makes communicating with teachers

about their children's progress difficult (Quiocho & Daoud, 2006; Ramirez, 2003; Worthy, 2006). Parents also report a lack of cultural awareness on the part of the practitioner as a cultural barrier to engagement in schools (e.g., Fuller, Eggers-Pierola, Holloway, Liang, & Rambaud, 1996), community-based parenting groups (e.g., Dumas, et al., 2008), or health-care settings (e.g., Betancourt, Green, Carrillo, Firempong, 2003). Despite the challenges inherent in addressing cultural barriers, it is imperative for family support programs to incorporate the cultural values and beliefs of the families they serve, lest the programs and services offered remain inaccessible to the populations they are intended to support (Kumpfer, Alvarado, Smith, & Bellamy, 2002). We turn now to considering the cultural aspects of engaging parents.

Cultural considerations and parental engagement

Research evidence suggests that engagement is influenced by the extent to which a program is sensitive to the cultural characteristics of the target population (Kumpfer et al., 2002). Research also shows that parenting beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviors vary by culture and that not all conceptualizations about the roles of the family, the determinants of a child's development, or the aspects of a child's development that are most important (e.g., discipline or intelligence) are similar across cultural groups (Garcia-Coll, Meyers, & Brillon, 1995). Therefore, programs designed to support positive parenting practices benefit from an understanding of the cultural capital (i.e., material resources, social networks, cultural beliefs, and personal life orientation) that parents draw on to direct their actions and make decisions (Coleman, 1988).

The literature on culture and parenting reveals several important findings, particularly with regard to the cultural values and beliefs present among black and Latino populations. For instance, in their conceptual model for the study of child development in minority populations, García Coll and colleagues (1996) propose that "in families of color, there is a tendency for a more integral use of persons other than birth parents to perform some of the tasks of parenting, through the support of extended family members, familism, and fictive kin (friends who become as close as kin)" (García Coll et al., 1996, p. 1906). Other research has also indicated that black parents may rely on extended

family networks to assist with childrearing (Kane, 2000; McAdoo, 2002; Billingsley, 1992), and therefore it may be beneficial to engage multiple family members (both biological and non-biological) in parenting program content (Mendez, 2010). In addition, Boyd-Franklin (2003) states that another critical aspect of family life to consider when working with black parents is the role of religion or spiritual beliefs in many black families. According to Boyd-Franklin and Lockwood (2009), black churches serve many functions in family life, and church members (e.g., ministers, deacons, deaconesses, and other congregation members) are often seen as extended family, providing support and help in times of trouble (Billingsley, 1999; Boyd-Franklin & Lockwood, 2009).

Calzada, Fernandez, and Cortes (2010) examined the cultural values most salient to Dominican and Mexican mothers of preschoolers (ages three to six), and found that *respeto* (respect) plays a significant role in child rearing and informs many of the practices of Dominican and Mexican mothers during the preschool years. *Respeto*, as summarized by the study authors, manifests in four key behaviors: obedience (the expectation that children do as they are told without question), deference (courtesy given to elders and people of high social status), decorum (appropriate behaviors for social interactions), and *public behavior* (set of boundaries imposed on the behaviors expressed by children in public situations). According to the Latino mothers interviewed, mainstream American socialization, that emphasizes independence, open communication, and exploration, is inconsistent with Latino culture and its focus on *respeto* (Calzada, Fernandez, & Cortes, 2010). Another value cited in the literature on Latino parenting is *personalismo*, which refers to the mindset that human relationships are more important than formal rules and regulations, and that "warmth and familiarity in a relationship are central to the establishment and maintaining of it" (Smith & Montilla, 2006, p. 240). *Educación*, which refers to educational achievement as well as training in responsibility, morality, and interpersonal relationships (as opposed to the word "education" in English, which refers more exclusively to the learning of subject matter in schools), is also described in the literature as a value among Latino populations (Valenzuela, 1999; Okagaki & Sternberg, 1993; Halgunseth, Ispa, & Rudy, 2006).

For programs aimed at supporting positive parenting behaviors to be culturally relevant for both black and Latino parents, the values described above should be considered, as this may increase the program's social validity for blacks and Latinos (i.e., the extent to which parents agree with the social significance of the program's goals, the appropriateness of its procedures, and the importance of its outcomes) and may increase their desire to be engaged (Bernal, 2006; Castro, Barrera, & Martinez, 2004; Parra Cardona, Domenech-Rodriguez, Forgatch, Sullivan, Holtrop, Escobar-Chew, & Bernal, 2012).

Efforts to engage and support diverse families also require an understanding of parenting behaviors that differ across ethnic groups. For instance, Julian, McKenry, and McKelvey (1994) found that white and Latino parents differ with respect to the amount of praise and harsh discipline strategies they use with their children. There is also evidence that the same parenting behaviors could have different effects on children of different ethnicities. For example, physical discipline used by black parents was found to decrease child aggression, though it increased aggressive behaviors among white children (Deater-Deckard, Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 1996). Similarly, Bradley et al. (2001) found that in contrast to white parents, an authoritarian parenting style[5] is associated with low levels of child misbehavior among black parents. As Ortiz and Del Vecchio (2013) argue, if "optimal" parenting behaviors vary by ethnicity, then a single model of parent training/education may not be relevant for everyone (p. 446), and a prescriptive approach for or against certain parenting practices may be perceived by parents as naïve, judgmental, or disempowering (Ortiz & Del Vecchio, 2013; Dawson-McClure, Calzada, Huang, Kamboukos, Rhule, Kolawole, Petkova, & Brotman, 2014; Calzada, Basil, & Fernandez, 2012).

In several instances, researchers have emphasized the importance of ensuring that programs and services for diverse populations remain responsive to the realities faced by that particular group. For example, interventions targeted to a particular Latino subgroup (e.g., Mexicans) should be based on the cultural experiences that are most relevant to their lives, rather than on cultural generalizations or preconceptions associated with Latinos (Castro et al., 2006). So, while several cultural values have been associated with Latinos in the research literature (e.g., respeto), it is important not to assume that such values are equally

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[5] Authoritarian parenting is described as "attempts to shape, control, and evaluate the behavior and attitudes of the child in accordance with a set standard of conduct" (Baumrind, 1966, p. 890).

Acculturation and Engagement

Some research studies cite acculturation, or the process of adaptation that occurs through continued contact with a culture distinct from one's culture of origin (Berry, 2006), as another factor that may contribute to a parent's decision to engage in programs and services. Studies investigating psychotherapy treatment patterns have found that less-acculturated Latino families are less likely to enroll and more likely to terminate services prematurely compared with more-acculturated or U.S.-born families. Lara, Gamboa, Kahramanian, Morales, and Bautista (2005) found that families with low levels of acculturation to the U.S. are least likely to access quality health services, and Moreno and Lopez (1999) found that lower acculturation to the U.S. was associated with less knowledge about school activities and greater barriers to parental involvement at school. In addition, Mexican-American mothers reported that acculturation differences between parents and children, separation from extended family, discrimination against immigrants, and concerns about legal status negatively influenced their parental involvement (Leidy, Guerra, & Toro, 2010).

Research examining the effects of varying levels of acculturation on engagement has produced some interesting findings. For example, Mendez and Westerberg (2012) adapted The Companion Curriculum (TCC), which promotes parent involvement at home and in school through lessons targeting parent-child interactions, for Latino families enrolled in Head Start programs. Their planned accommodations for parents with limited English and low levels of knowledge about the U.S. included providing ESL classes, offering materials in both Spanish and English, and training and providing bilingual facilitators to deliver the intervention. They found that parents reporting high levels of native (Latino) cultural competence reported more perceived benefits of the intervention. Higher levels of native cultural competence were also associated with fewer barriers to treatment, perhaps because these parents are more inclined to participate in a program that could help them adjust to life in the U.S. and learn new information about U.S. culture.

Parents who have other methods to learn English and who perceive themselves as aware of U.S. cultural practices may see less need for this type of service (Mendez & Westerberg, 2012). A study of Mexican-origin parent engagement in an intervention designed to reduce risk factors associated with poor academic achievement and mental health found that English-speaking families with the most-acculturated children (in this case, adolescents) were the least likely to stay engaged with the program following initial recruitment. The authors hypothesize that efforts to appeal to the traditional values and cultural identities of Mexican-origin families may have been less appealing to more-acculturated families that identified less with their Mexican heritage. They also state the possibility that less-acculturated, Spanish-dominant families were more motivated to take advantage of this school-based program because the families have fewer resources available to them (Carpentier, Mauricio, Gonzales, Millsap, Meza, Dumka, German, & Genalo, 2007).

relevant across various Latino subgroups. There is a need to identify which specific cultural values have the greatest influence on the parenting practices of each unique target population (Griner & Smith, 2006).

Emerging strategies to address cultural barriers to parent engagement

We identified several strategies used by program developers (including both practitioners and researchers) to address cultural barriers to engagement. These include adopting a culturally-informed approach to program design, culturally adapting existing programs, and framing programs and services to align with culturally-specific goals and issues.

Cultural considerations in program design

Some programs have incorporated cultural considerations into the design of the program at the outset. For example, *ParentCorps*, a parenting intervention for parents of pre-kindergarten (pre-k) and kindergarten children, was designed to serve culturally-diverse communities in low-income neighborhoods. *ParentCorps* uses a core set of behavioral strategies (e.g., positive reinforcement, consequences) that are present in many other parenting interventions (e.g., Sanders, Markie-Dadds, Tully, & Bor, 2000; Webster-Stratton, 2007), but it also includes components of a culturally-informed approach, such as collaborating with cultural "informants," including black and Latino

U.S.-born and immigrant parents, educators, and mental health professionals, in the initial planning phases to gather input on both the content of the program and the implementation process (Brotman, Kingston, Bat-Chava, Calzada, & Caldwell, 2008; Brotman, Calzada, Huang, Kingston, Dawson-McClure, Kamboukos, & Petkova, 2011). Initial sessions of the 13-week program include activities in which parents are invited to share information about their culture and discuss how culture influences parenting and child development. Program sessions follow a consistent structure and approach to behavior change, including introduction of topics through a *ParentCorps* video, questions about the influence of culture (e.g., What might your grandmother say about praising children for good behavior?), experiential activities (e.g., role play) and discussion about parents' readiness to try a new skill (Dawson-McClure, Calzada, Huang, Kamboukos, Rhule, Kolawole, Petkova, & Brotman, 2014). Facilitators use a collaborative approach aimed at empowering parents to select the strategies most relevant to their goals and consistent with their values. For instance, rather than taking a prescriptive approach toward spanking, leaders guide participating parents through an exploration of their goals for discipline (e.g., "to teach good behavior," "to stop misbehavior," "to teach respect for elders") and the alignment between the strategies and their values. A recent study examining the effects of *ParentCorps* found that the program had high rates of participation and had a positive effect on three parenting areas: positive behavior support (e.g., positive reinforcement or praise, clear behavior expectations), behavior management (e.g., the use of harsh or inconsistent discipline), and involvement in early learning activities (e.g., reading to children, communicating with teachers). The study authors suggested that the level of participation may be attributed to engaging families at a key developmental transition (from pre-k to kindergarten) and to the culturally-informed approach to behavior change (Dawson-McClure et al., 2014).

A recent Child Trends evaluation of the Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors program, a parenting education program designed for Latino parents of children zero to five, found that participants made important behavioral changes to foster their children's learning and development (e.g., reading to their child more frequently, taking trips to the library, developing plans to reach family goals, taking time to respond to

children's behavior, and being more mindful of how parents' behavior sets an example for their children). When asked about their perceptions of the program, parents identified several components they particularly appreciated: the fact that the program was created in Spanish rather than being a translation from English, the incorporation of culturally-relevant activities such as children's music from Latin America, familiar games (e.g., *Loteria*), and *dichos* (sayings in the Latino culture that express strong values or beliefs), the interactive activities that engage parents, and the culturally sensitive and accessible nature of the classes that encourage social connections (Moore, Caal, Rojas & Lawner, 2014).

Cultural adaptation of existing family support programs

Cultural adaptation, or the process of revising programs to reflect the reality of the participants' experiences (Bernal, 2006), is another strategy used to increase the cultural relevance of programs and services for black and Latino parents and children. For example, McCabe, Yeh, Garland, Lau, and Chavez (2005) developed an adaptation of Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT; Eyberg & Robinson, 1982) for Mexican-Americans called Guiando a Niños Activos (GANA). The GANA approach is tailored for each family through a comprehensive assessment process. Questions are administered to parents at intake and during treatment that assess culturally relevant constructs, such as the causes of externalizing behaviors in children (e.g., what do parents believe to be the cause of children's behavior problems?), acceptability of outside help (do parents feel they should be able to solve their problems without help from outside the family?), family support (are family members supportive of treatment?), and parents' ideas about discipline. GANA therapy includes other cultural adaptations, such as framing the experience as an educational/skill-building experience and not a mental health treatment, spending more time and effort engaging parents, increasing attention to building rapport and trust, and eliciting complaints from parents who might find it difficult to question the expertise of group leaders (Ortiz & Del Vecchio, 2013). In a 2009 study of the program, McCabe and Yeh found that GANA produced significantly greater improvements in parenting practices and child problem behaviors than treatment as usual. The study also found that

there were no significant differences between GANA and standard PCIT on any measure of parent or child behavior (McCabe & Yeh, 2009).

Matos, Torres, Santiago, Jurado, and Rodriguez (2006) and Matos, Bauermeister, and Bernal (2009) adapted PCIT for Puerto Rican parents of four- to six-year-old children diagnosed with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and who had experienced significant behavior problems. In addition to translating manuals and handouts into Spanish, examples used to highlight parenting concepts were modified to reflect the daily experiences and idiomatic expressions of Puerto Rican families. In addition, time was added at the beginning of each treatment session to discuss issues that could affect the treatment process and to engage in social interactions with parents (Matos, Bauermeister, & Bernal, 2009). In a study that examined the effects of the adapted PCIT for 32 Puerto Rican families, participating mothers reported reductions in children's hyperactivity-impulsivity, inattention, and oppositional defiant and aggressive behavior problems, as well as reduced levels of parent-child related stress and improved parenting practices (Matos, Bauermeister, & Bernal, 2009).

Coard, Foy-Watson, Zimmer, and Wallace (2007) developed the black parenting strength and strategies program, a cultural adaptation of a program entitled *Parenting the Strong-Willed Child* (Forehand & Long, 2002). The adapted program included traditional behavior management strategies as well as racial socialization strategies, such as how to positively discuss racial issues and how to increase children's positive self-image. The delivery of the content was modified using culturally-influenced strategies, such as the use of African-American proverbs and extended family participation (Coard, Foy-Watson, Zimmer, & Wallace, 2007).

It is important to note that while there is much agreement in the literature about the need to pay attention to culture and ethnicity when developing interventions (Forehand & Kotchick, 1996; Griner & Smith, 2006), there is disagreement about whether modifying evidence-based parenting interventions increases their efficacy for any particular group (Ortiz & Del Vecchio, 2013). Researchers warn of the risks of cultural adaptation without adherence to the core components of evidence-based programs and services that have been found to be effective. McKleroy et al

The Cultural Adaptation Process

Domenech-Rodriguez, Baumann, and Schwartz (2011) outline a three-phase process to culturally adapt existing programs:

1 **Phase one, setting the stage:** In collaboration with a cultural adaptation specialist (i.e., professional with knowledge of the cultural adaptation process and families being served), members of the community, and program staff, a rigorous review of the fit of the concepts/techniques of the program and a community needs assessment should be performed to identify key areas in which to improve cultural relevance.

2 **Phase two, initial adaptation:** Materials and strategies should be tailored to enhance cultural appropriateness.

After adjustments are made, program staff and adaptation specialists should examine whether adaptations work as intended and revise, as needed.

3 **Phase three, adaptation iteration:** Changes made to measures should be finalized and field tested; these revisions should be made in consultation with the cultural adaptation specialist to ensure measures and materials were not altered to the extent that they are made conceptually different than originally intended.

(2006) define adaptation as: "the process of modifying an intervention without competing with or contradicting its core elements or internal logic. An intervention is modified to fit the cultural context in which the intervention will take place … and the unique characteristics of the agency and other stakeholders, but the core elements and internal logic are not changed" (p.62). Scholars argue that modifying the core components of effective interventions could reduce their capacity to produce positive effects, and therefore, there is a growing need to promote cultural adaptations that maintain fidelity to an established model while promoting cultural relevance (Chaffin, Silovsky, Funderburk, Valle, Brestan, Balachova, Jackson, Lensgraf, Bonner, 2004; Barker, Cook, & Borrego, 2010).

Frame services to align with culturally-specific goals and issues

Calzada et al. (2012) suggest that careful attention to the ways parent training programs are named and

advertised could increase their use by ethnic minority parents. For instance, in the GANA study mentioned previously, Mexican-American mothers reported that they preferred the program to be presented as educational rather than therapeutic in order to avoid stigma associated with mental health treatments (McCabe et al., 2005). In their study of Latina mothers' views on the causes of young children's misbehavior, Calzada et al. (2009) found that peer influences (i.e., imitating aggressive classmates), difficult child temperament, and fighting in the home were often cited as causes for the development of behavior problems. Therefore, according to the study authors, Latino parents may not be drawn to mental health services that treat child behavior problems by targeting parenting practices, and clinicians may need to emphasize different aspects of the program to successfully engage them. For example, clinicians may help parents see how parent training programs address the needs of children with difficult temperaments or those exposed to stress (e.g., fighting in the home). Calzada and colleagues also suggest that it may be useful to frame a parent training program in terms of biculturalism, or supporting parents in finding strategies that are both consistent with their cultural approach to parenting and that are acceptable within mainstream U.S. society.

Parra Cardona et al. (2009) suggest that Latino parents will be most receptive to the core components of a parenting intervention if their cultural experiences and values are acknowledged and respected. In their qualitative study of Latino immigrant parents' views of the relevance of a culturally-adapted parenting program, Parra Cardona and colleagues found that to foster an environment where Latino parents feel comfortable learning and improving their parenting skills, new discipline strategies (e.g., limit-setting skills) should be presented to parents by acknowledging the value that parents attribute to their current discipline strategies, as well as by describing how effective discipline can reinforce values such as respeto or personalismo by strengthening family harmony (Parra Cardona et al., 2009).

Additional strategies and considerations

While language preference is not in and of itself a cultural consideration, there is some evidence that providing programs and services in the primary language of the target group may be beneficial to engagement (Griner & Smith, 2006; Matos et al., 2006; Tang, Dearing, & Weiss, 2012), in that a shared language may allow for more-effective collaboration between parent and practitioner. There is also evidence that ethnic similarities between parents and program staff may matter to retention in parent training programs, but this evidence is limited (Dumas, Moreland, Gitter, Pearl, & Nordstrom, 2008). Overall, there is a need for more rigorous research examining cultural influences on parent engagement, as many of the studies in this review report small sample sizes (e.g., Matos et al., 2009; Calzada, Basil, & Fernandez, 2012) and constraints on making generalizations of the findings to other populations (particularly other Latino subgroups). While much of the literature described here used qualitative data collection methods, it may be useful for more studies to employ mixed-method approaches in order to gather both quantitative indicators of engagement and qualitative descriptions of the cultural relevance of programs and services for black and Latino parents and their young children.

Recommendations

The research summarized here presents a growing need to consider culture when developing strategies to engage Latino and black parents in family support programs/services, particularly as these populations continue to expand over the next several decades. The recommendations offered below are just a few of the many considerations that both policymakers and programs should reflect on in their parent engagement efforts.

Recommendations for policymakers

Promote a shared understanding of what is meant by parent engagement. Increasingly, parents' engagement is seen as more than their involvement or participation in activities (either at home or at school) to support their children. However, disparate fields of study lack a common definition that encompasses the emotional and relational aspects of engagement, which makes drawing conclusions about effective engagement strategies across varying types of programs and services a challenge. Policymakers and other funders of family support programs can play a role by encouraging program developers/practitioners to use a common, comprehensive definition of parent engagement, with the understanding that the targets of these programs may include primary caregivers beyond the biological parents of the child. Developing this shared definition is a large task to be carried out collaboratively by researchers, practitioners, and parents, so policymakers can work to support all of these stakeholders in this effort.

Support partnerships with community-based organizations to engage parents. Community-based organizations (CBOs) may have an established reputation for work within a particular racial or ethnic community. A service delivery system that relies on trusted representatives from CBOs to serve as liaisons may strengthen outreach efforts to parents. Policymakers can work to facilitate collaborative initiatives between community-based non-profit organizations that may already be engaged with the target population(s), and family-support-program funders and administrators.

Foster a culturally and linguistically diverse workforce. A lack of culturally diverse teachers, counselors, or parent trainers may make it difficult to leverage the expertise of these practitioners to better serve diverse parents and children. Career pathways and professional development programs that attract and retain diverse program staff should be created and given sufficient resources to grow and expand.

Call for rigorous research. As U.S. demographics continue to shift, there is a need for additional experimental research examining, for instance, how well culturally-informed and culturally-adapted programs and services engage parents and produce the desirable outcomes. There is also a need to further examine the interplay of socioeconomic status, immigration status, and acculturation in parent engagement research.

Recommendations for programs

Consider a collaborative approach to program design and evaluation. Gathering input from representatives of the target group about the parenting values, beliefs, and practices considered most relevant may help create a more informed program approach and may increase overall engagement. Program developers can work side-by-side with members of the target communities to obtain feedback on program materials and content, and can work together to determine the logistics of program delivery (e.g., where and when to deliver the program). Researchers should also team with members of the community to define program evaluation research questions and methods, implement the research, and disseminate the findings.

Develop culturally-informed parenting programs. It is important to recognize the role of culture in parenting and to develop new, culturally-informed parenting

program models. For example, there may be differences between Westernized frameworks of parenting that foster individualism and those that emphasize the needs and goals of the group as a whole (i.e., collectivistic values). Programs should also consider the intersection of socioeconomic status, immigration status, and acculturation in their strategies to engage parents. There is no one strategy that will work for all parents; thus, programs that employ multiple strategies increase the chance of engaging parents.

Offer multiple opportunities for engagement. As many programs compete with work schedules, religious commitments, and other aspects of parents' lives, there should be multiple ways parents can engage with program staff (or materials). For example, programs can conduct home visits to work with parents, use phone calls or text messages to relay information, combine community events with parent engagement opportunities, or hold meetings/program sessions in places where parents already feel comfortable, such as a church. Programs can also use technology to increase accessibility; for example, video recordings can be used to reduce the need to meet in person.

Address both structural and cultural barriers to engagement. Programs should work to address practical barriers such as time constraints, transportation issues, or child care needs, as well as culturally-specific barriers such as lack of ethnic-minority practitioners, mistrust of program staff, stigmas associated with program participation, or language incompatibilities.

Perform thoughtful adaptations to programs. When adapting an existing program or intervention for a specific cultural group, it is important to be mindful of the extent to which the adaptations are culturally relevant. It is useful to consult with members of the target group throughout the adaptation process. When attempting to adapt a program or service that is evidence-based, it is also important to determine whether the proposed adaptations deviate from the program model.

Revisit cultural considerations often. Culture is not a static concept, but one that changes and evolves over time. In addition, the racial/ethnic mix of a target population may change over time; so, programs seeking to engage diverse populations should revisit their approaches often, and work to make any necessary

adjustments or improvements. This can be done by reviewing program content with members of the target community and collecting feedback directly from program participants.

Conclusion

While we know that parents are integral to the lives of all young children, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to effectively engaging them in programs and services designed to support positive development of children and healthy family functioning. As research continues to examine how best to engage black and Latino parents in particular, the influence of cultural beliefs about parenting and issues of cultural relevance should remain at the forefront. There is still much to learn, but we do know that parents across cultures want the best for their children. The task at hand is to help parents meet their parenting goals in ways that are respectful and supportive, and that reflect the growing diversity of U.S. families.

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