

Latino Parental Engagement: What Matters for Students' Academic Success

Erika Venzor, Anna Park, Veronica Angyal, and Karen Thierry

Abstract

Parents from an urban elementary school completed measures about engagement in their child's learning at home (i.e., within-family engagement) and their sense of community with other families (i.e., between-family engagement). In addition, students' reading and math scores on standardized assessments were obtained. Results from a mediational analysis indicated that within-family engagement mediated the relationship of between-family engagement and academic achievement. In other words, those parents who reported actively participating in school activities and interacting with other parents were more likely to engage in educational activities at home with their child (e.g., reading with the child). As a result, their children had higher math and reading scores.

Introduction

For years, researchers suggested that one of the key factors in academic achievement was parent engagement in the school community (Alameda-Lawson, 2014) especially for Latina/o students (O'Donnell & Kirkner, 2014). However, Robinson and Harris (2014) provided evidence that engagement in the school community (e.g., through volunteering) did not always predict students' academic outcomes. Rather, they found that parents' engagement in specific behaviors at home (e.g., reading with child) was a stronger predictor of students' academic performance. The present study examined whether there was an indirect path between parents' engagement with other families and students' academic outcomes. Specifically, we expected that between-family engagement would predict more family engagement in learning at home (e.g., reading with the child), which would, in turn, be related to improvement in academic performance.

Methods

Participants: 247 students and parents from an urban elementary school (94% Latina/o).

Procedures: Parents completed measures of between-and within-family engagement toward the end of the school year. The students' reading and math scores on standardized assessments were recorded for the 2011-2012 school year and the 2012-2013 school year.

Measures:

Parental Engagement Survey (Gehlbach & Brinkworth, 2011)

- Between-Family Engagement was measured in 2 ways:
 - 3 items assessed how frequently parents volunteered at school and attended school-sponsored events (e.g., "In the past year, how often have you helped out at school?").
 - 4 items assessed parents' sense of school community (e.g., "How connected do you feel with other parents in this school?").
- Within-Family Engagement was measured using:
 - 5 items that assessed their involvement in their children's learning at home (e.g., "How often do you help your child understand the content he or she is learning in school?"; "How often do you read to your child at home?").

Academic Achievement

- Academic achievement was measured using standardized math and reading assessments.

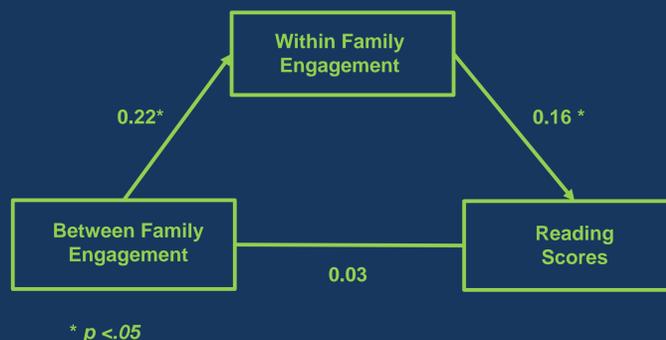
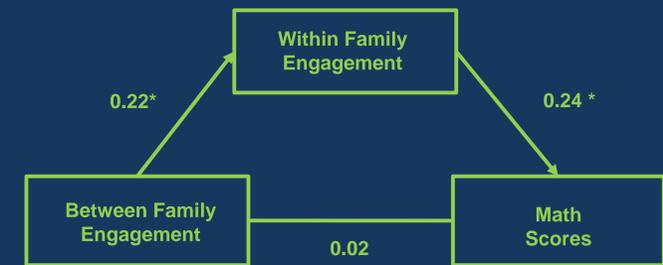


Figure 1. Within-family engagement mediating the between-family engagement link to reading.

Results

Using the PROCESS Macro for SPSS Model #4 (Hayes, 2012), a mediation analysis was conducted to examine whether within-family engagement mediated the relationship between academic achievement and between-family engagement. Process analysis results revealed that within-family engagement sometimes mediated the relationship of between-family engagement and academic performance. In other words, when between-family engagement was measured with volunteered at school and attending school-sponsored events, the mediation was not statistical significant. Once between-family engagement was measured with parents' sense of school community, the mediation was significant (see Figure 1 and 2).

Using the bootstrapping procedures for 1000 samples, the findings revealed a significant indirect effect for both reading and math ($b = 0.05$, bootstrap $SEb = 0.02$, bootstrap 95% CI [0.004, 0.10]; $b = 0.05$, bootstrap $SEb = 0.02$, bootstrap 95% CI [0.02, 0.11] respectively).



* $p < .05$

Figure 2. Within-family engagement mediating the between-family engagement link to math.

Discussion

- The results of the current study replicate previous findings showing that within-family engagement is positively associated with academic achievement.
- Importantly, the results indicated that between-family engagement is an indirect predictor of academic performance. However, the measure of between-family engagement with significant association to academic performance involved parents' ratings of their sense of connectedness with other families. Their ratings of volunteering frequency and school-sponsored event attendance were not associated with academic performance, similar to that found by Robinson and Harris (2014).
- This study suggests that schools should focus parent engagement efforts not only on within-family engagement programs but also on authentic ways to help develop parents' sense of connectedness with other parents.

References

- Alameda-Lawson, T. (2014). A pilot study of collective parent engagement and children's academic achievement. *Children & Schools, 36*(4), 199-209. doi:10.1093/cs/cdu019.
- Hayes, A. F. (2012). PROCESS: A versatile computational tool for observed variable mediation, moderation, and conditional process modeling [White paper]. Retrieved from <http://www.afhayes.com/public/process2012.pdf>
- O'Donnell, J., & Kirkner, S. L. (2014). The impact of a collaborative family involvement program on Latino families and children's educational performance. *School Community Journal, 24*(1), 211.
- Robinson, K., & Harris, A. L. (2014). *The broken compass: Parental involvement with children's education*.
- Schueler, B. (2013, February 7). A New Tool for Understanding Family-School Relationships: The Harvard Graduate School of Education PreK-12 Parent Survey. Retrieved August 22, 2016, from <http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/a-new-tool-for-understanding-family-school-relationships-the-harvard-graduate-school-of-education-prek-12-parent-survey>