Encouraging Family Literacy in Ethnically Diverse and Immigrant Families

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Overview

• Family Literacy: What Matters in Early Childhood?
  – Center for Research on Culture, Development, and Education

• Is Family Literacy Enough? Broader Contextual Influences on Family Literacy and Children’s Learning

• Interventions to Improve Family Support of Learning and its Broader Contexts:
  – Three to Third Family Engagement Intervention
  – Tulsa Children’s Project
Family Support of Learning in the First Years of Life: Processes

• Parental Goals for Children’s Learning
• Responsive Parenting (Tamis-LeMonda & Bornstein, 1994)
• Cognitively Stimulating Activities
  – Reading to and with children
  – Everyday literacy activities (grocery lists, etc.)
  – Telling stories
  – Labeling and conversation about things, states, emotions
• Stimulating Materials and Resources
  – Books, Toys
Aim – How do family, peers, schools, and parental employment influence child and adolescent development in multiple ethnic and immigrant groups in New York City?

2 cohorts: birth (Tamis-LeMonda, Yoshikawa) and adolescent (Hughes and Way)

CRCDE birth cohort: 3 NYC hospitals serving Mexican, Dominican, Chinese, & U.S.-born African American

374 mothers of newborn infants:
- 114 African American (100% 2nd+ generation)
- 113 Dominican (86% 1st generation)
- 93 Mexican (100% 1st generation): (MX births > DR births for first time in NYC, 2000-2005)
- 54 Chinese (100% 1st generation)
CRCDE Birth Cohort Study: Assessment Schedule

• Baseline interviews with mothers in hospitals’ post-partum wards
• Phone interviews at 1 month and 6 months
• 14-, 24-, 36- and 52-mo home visits (2-3 hours): survey, videotaped observation of mothers and children, direct child assessment
Mothers’ Language at 24 months

- Language coded in interactions with children (free play; tasks with beads, books)
- Mexicans: Most use of regulatory language, less use of referential language
- African Americans: Most use of referential language, less use of regulatory language
- Dominicans: In between
- Mexican children: lower levels of expressive language at 24 and 36 months
What might account for differences?  
Is family literacy enough?

• Parental goals for children’s development
• Broader contexts of family literacy and child development:
  – Income poverty
  – Work conditions
  – Parental education
  – Parental citizenship and documentation status
  – Neighborhood and organizational supports
Assessment of Mothers’ Socialization Goals (at 6, 14, 24 months)

• **Undesirable** Qualities
  – What is one quality you would *least like* to see in your child when he/she is three years old?

• **Desirable** Qualities
  – What is one quality you would *most like* to see in your child when he/she is three years old?

• Mothers’ socialization goals were coded by native coders using original language transcripts
Coding of Mothers’ Socialization Goals

• Achievement
  – E.g., Literacy (“Read more”), Intelligence (“Be intelligent”)

• Individuality
  – E.g., Instrumental Independence (“Go to the bathroom by himself”), Leadership (“Be sure of herself”)

• Proper Demeanor
  – E.g., Self-Control (“Be patient”), Respect (“Be respectful”)

• Connectedness
  – E.g., Compassion (“Be considerate”), Sociability (“Be sociable”)

• Miscellaneous
  – E.g., Danger (“Avoid dangerous behaviors”), Health (“Be healthy”)
RQ1: What goals do mothers mention? (Desirable)

- Both Achievement goals and Proper Demeanor goals were frequently mentioned.
RQ1: Were there ethnic variations? (Desirable)

African American

- Achievement: 39%
- Individuality: 14%
- Proper Demeanor: 26%
- Connectedness: 13%
- Miscellaneous: 8%

Dominican

- Achievement: 32%
- Individuality: 11%
- Proper Demeanor: 35%
- Connectedness: 12%
- Miscellaneous: 10%

Mexican

- Achievement: 33%
- Individuality: 12%
- Proper Demeanor: 32%
- Connectedness: 12%
- Miscellaneous: 35%
Other factors: Poverty and Parental Education

• Income poverty affects children’s cognitive development through lower levels of parental cognitively stimulating materials and activities (Bradley & Corwyn, 2003)

• Parental education has a causal effect on child cognitive development (Magnuson 2007)
Broader factors: Work conditions that matter for children

• The structure of work:
  – Wage growth and job stability
  – Work hours – overall amount and non-standard and shifting schedules

• The quality of work:
  – Job complexity
  – Job benefits

• Mechanisms of effects on children
• Mexicans vs. other groups on these factors
Broader factors: Citizenship and documentation status

• Undocumented status as a risk for children’s development:
  – No pathway to citizenship
  – Lower levels of connection with multiple societal institutions (education, health, legal, family support)

• As new immigrant group, less connection with co-ethnic networks, information, and ethnic enclave organizations
Improving Family Literacy

• Two approaches:
  – 4-component approach to family engagement in the context of a PreK-3rd grade initiative: Three to Third
  – Supporting workforce development and economic stability in a comprehensive early childhood education program: The Tulsa Children’s Project
Three to Third Family Engagement Intervention

• GOALS:

• Integrate family support of learning:
  • Across the preschool to third grade years
  • Across the daily routine, reducing TV watching
  • Across the entire year, including the summer months
  • In the teacher-parent relationship through rapport building and provision of materials
  • Address parents’ desire to learn how best to support their children’s learning

• Support schools’ ability to track family engagement with a comprehensive longitudinal database
Components of Three to Third

• Materials and tips across a summer program (START) and academic-year Homework for Success program:
  – Tips for how to read with child (dialogic reading principles)
  – Tips for integrating rich conversation and vocabulary-building into the daily routine

• Accompanied by Sacramento home visiting program (teachers visit all students’ homes):
  – Build rapport, welcome to school
  – Provide learning materials for use at home

• ReadBoston reading logs / contracts as reminders for daily reading

• Develop peer leaders in family literacy and advocacy
Learning and Applying What Happens in School

• Sometimes when I drop my daughter off for the before-school program, I noticed the teachers reading, and I was like, ‘oh, that is not how I sound.’ So I made it a point of staying in before school for a few minutes so I could hear how [the teacher] reads to them, because otherwise I wouldn’t have known. But it would’ve be great if at the beginning of the year if we could get some information, or just listen, like the START program.
• And I know for us, it helps to have the ReadBoston log, because even when I don’t feel like reading—which often I don’t feel like reading at the end of the day—it helps me to make the extra effort, because I’m like, OK, she’s got this reading log. But that is when we read, is at the end of the day, when we are both in bed, and I bring the reading log with us. And she gets to mark it off, checking off what she did, and I fill out
Three to Third
FAMILY ENGAGEMENT COMPONENT

YEAR ONE STRATEGIES
- Home Visiting Program
- Reading Contracts & Logs
- 2 Family Engagement Events
- START Program

YEAR TWO STRATEGIES
- Home Visiting Program
- Reading Contracts & Logs
- Interactive Homework
- 4 Family Engagement Events
- START Program

YEAR THREE STRATEGIES
- Home Visiting Program
- Reading Contracts & Logs
- Interactive Homework
- 6 Family Engagement Events
- START Program

OVERALL OUTCOME
Improvement in Children’s Language, Learning, and Achievement
Addressing the Broader Contexts of Family Literacy

• Because I’m so tired, I’ll be like, I’ll just read the first sentence. And she’ll be like, ‘mommy, you didn’t read the whole thing.’ And so, for me, I am seeing how my own tiredness can be an obstacle, because she.... I don’t know how, but somehow she knows I didn’t read the whole page. So I feel like my own schedule, she’s like... She knows somehow, through school or someway, she knows that mom didn’t read the whole page, so. But that is something I try to do is when I am tired, I’ll just try to read the first line, but that doesn’t quite work.
Tulsa Children’s Project: Theory of Change

Signature Intervention Model

Early Childhood Care and Education

Integrated Mental Health Promotion

Parent Workforce Development & Enhanced Economic Security

Health Care Services

Reduce in the Intergenerational Cycle of Poverty

Healthier and more competent children and families

Low-income families

Children birth-5
• Workforce Development and Economic Security: Career Advance program within the Tulsa Children’s Project
• Workforce development:
  – On-site at early childhood center
  – Not traditional job training
  – Paired with specific high-growth sectors with good entry-level jobs
  – Integrated with city Workforce Improvement Board through funded liaison position
  – Contextualized adult basic education and GED
  – Pathway for recent immigrant families (many undocumented) with greater emphasis on ESL
  – Peer leader component to alter community-level participation in workforce development
• Economic security:
  – Financial incentives of up to $3,000 per year for engagement in job training classes, peer support weekly meetings, peer leadership activities
  – In addition to coverage of child care, transportation costs
  – Enough to make a measurable difference for child development
  – Not lump sum but regular payment
Conclusion

• Directly encouraging family literacy:
  – Integrate into family routine, across summer and school months, and into the teacher-parent relationship

• Addressing broader contexts of family literacy:
  – Address work conditions, income support needs directly, not through referrals

• In both approaches, integrate peer leadership development
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