

Parents Acquiring Learning Strategies (PALS): How Empowering Hispanic Parents Increases Parental Involvement and Student Achievement

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Purpose of the Study

Some Hispanic parents in Miami-Dade County show limited involvement in the educational process of their children. Currently, Miami-Dade County Public schools consists of an increasingly high number of language minority students who come from homes where parents are limited in their English proficiency. Consequently, these parents have difficulty assisting their children with schoolwork and often feel they lack adequate skills to involve themselves in school curricula. The lack of parental involvement by this population has a negative impact on students' learning and their academic achievement. The purpose of this study is to impact the level of participation of these families and to study its ultimate effect on students' academic achievement.

Theoretical Framework

Research indicates that there is a positive influence on children when parents support and encourage their children's learning (Olsen & Fuller, 2003). Positive correlations have been found between parental involvement and children's achievement test scores, grades, motivation and attitudes, classroom behavior, self esteem, and school attendance (Finn, 1998). Three types of parental involvement at home are consistently associated with aiding student performance at school: (a) actively organizing and monitoring the student's time, (b) discussing school matters with the child, and (c) helping with homework (Finn, 1998).

In a study of the parental involvement of parents learning English as a second language, it was reported that the involvement of Hispanic parents in their children's education is often limited due to lack of time or perceived ability (Cassity & Harris, 2000; Olsen & Fuller, 2003). However, there is positive research to indicate that when parents are made aware of their expected role in this area, they develop interest in knowing more about effective homework helping strategies and tend to get involved despite their personal limitations or difficulties (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). When school group members (parents, teachers, administrators, and children) communicate frequently and have a shared understanding of role expectations, there is success in maintaining parents' involvement (Lim, 2003).

Method

The intervention will consist of eight two-hour sessions at an urban public K-8 Center school in Miami-Dade County, Florida. The demographic composition of this school is Hispanic (69.7%), Black (25%), White (5%), and Others (less than 1%), with 90% of students on free or reduced lunch. The participants are approximately 15 Hispanic parents, 17 students (grades K-7), and 12 teachers. The instruction will involve teaching strategies to promote parental participation in their children's school-related activities.

The design of this action research study involves using mixed methods in order to determine the impact in the level of participation of these families and its ultimate effect on students' academic achievement as measured by increases in (a) home learning completion, (b) class participation, and (c) academic performance in reading, math, or other content areas. To determine if there is any difference in parents' level of school participation after the intervention,

parents and students will complete pre and post questionnaires assessing participation levels. Classroom teachers will complete pre and post questionnaires to assess student behaviors regarding (a) home learning completion, (b) class participation, and (c) academic performance. All parents will complete a demographic questionnaire. To monitor comprehension and use of learning strategies, focus groups will be conducted during and after the interventions.

References

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