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Can the Epstein Model of Parental Involvement Work in a High-Minority, High-Poverty Elementary School? A Case Study

The literature has lauded parental involvement as an effective strategy to increase student achievement, but schools still struggle with how to effectively involve parents of color and low-income families. In an effort to assess the effectiveness of the Epstein Model of Parental Involvement in high-poverty, high-minority schools, the authors conducted a case study of an urban elementary school that uses parental involvement practices stipulated in the model. This article provides implications for school counselors and suggestions for future research.

In faculty workrooms and school improvement plans across the country, parental involvement is both heralded and lamented. Often, a lack of parental involvement is blamed for low student achievement or engagement (Barnard, 2004; Desimone, 1999; Hill & Craft, 2003; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Jeynes, 2011; Zellman & Waterman, 1998); therefore, teachers are asked to communicate with parents to help motivate students and encourage parents to become more involved in the school and their students' educations (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Epstein et al., 2009; Glasgow & Whitney, 2009; Griffith, 1998; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Lee & Bowen, 2006). However, schools often struggle with low attendance at parent nights and a lack of strategies to more effectively promote parental involvement (Glasgow & Whitney). The gap between the desired and actual levels of parent involvement has led to a wealth of literature and strategies developed for schools. These include charging school counselors with including parental involvement strategies in comprehensive school counseling programs (American School Counselor Association, 2010). Although researchers have studied and discussed parental involvement extensively in the literature and schools use models to implement parental involvement strategies, schools continue to struggle with increasing parental involvement with students of color and students of low socioeconomic statuses. This article discusses the outcomes of a case study that specifically explored parental involvement strategies in a high-poverty,

high-minority elementary school that included parental involvement as an approach to increasing the academic achievement of its students. The authors first briefly discuss parental involvement. The school utilized the Epstein Model of Parental Involvement as its guiding framework; therefore, the article considers the strengths and limitations of the Epstein Model and includes a discussion of considerations for race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. The article concludes with a description of the methodology and results, discussion, implications for school counselor practice, and suggestions for future research.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Parental involvement is seen as an effective strategy to ensure student success, as evidenced by several correlational studies, with the overarching benefit of parental involvement being increased academic performance (Barnard, 2004; Desimone, 1999; Hill & Craft, 2003; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Zellman & Waterman, 1998). The current literature also emphasizes other positive effects. For example, increased parent involvement leads to early social competence, which ultimately leads to academic success (Hill & Craft). Similarly, parent involvement also increases social capital, or networks designed to leverage resources (Hill & Taylor; Lee & Bowen, 2006). As social networks are increased, students are able to access additional support or resources, such as tutoring, enrichment opportunities, or access to curriculum extensions beyond the school, in order to achieve academic success (Bryan, Holcomb-McCoy, Day-Vines, & Moore-Thomas, 2011; Hill & Taylor; Lee & Bowen). Furthermore, because of the increased academic success as parents become more involved, parental involvement has been identified as a strategy to decrease the achievement gap (Jeynes, 2011; Lee & Bowen; Zellman & Waterman). In the era of accountability, the promise of increased academic achievement, especially with regards to the achievement gap, places the need to increase and improve parent involvement in chil-

dren's education in a powerful position. However, focusing on parent involvement as a strategy to increase achievement shifts some of the responsibility for students' success from schools to families (Graue & Benson, 2001). This seems to be at the root of the gap between espoused parental involvement strategies and the lack of parental involvement that persists. In an effort to explore why this gap exists, this article first looks at how parental involvement is defined.

Defining Parental involvement

Discourse on parental involvement demonstrates disagreement on how to define the topic (Baker & Soden, 1997; Jeynes, 2005; Lewis & Forman, 2002; Lopez & Stoelting, 2010). The traditional definition of parental involvement includes activities in the school and at home. Parental involvement can take many forms, such as volunteering at the school, communicating with teachers, assisting with homework, and attending school events such as performances or parent-teacher conferences (Epstein et al., 2009; Hill & Taylor, 2004). However, viewed through this lens, African American and Latino families demonstrate low rates of parental involvement (Simoni & Adelman, 1993). Further, parents' volunteering in school only has shown a significant academic effect for white students (Desimone, 1999); yet schools often focus on volunteering as a key measure of parent involvement (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Epstein et al., 2009). Volunteering in the schools often calls for parents to shoulder the additional responsibility of providing supplies requested by the school, which include not only traditional classroom supplies such as pencils, paper, and folders, but also items for fundraisers or school events (Zellman & Waterman, 1998). Traditional definitions of parental involvement require investments of time and money from parents, and those who may not be able to provide these resources are deemed uninvolved.

In addition, the literature typically defines parental involvement as either supporting student academic achievement or participating in school-initiated functions (Lopez et al., 2001). This overlooks differing perceptions on the part of parents from low-SES and minority populations regarding parental involvement and educational responsibilities (Nieto, 1987). Indeed, in a study using random stratified sampling procedures with 30 low-income African American (48%), Hispanic (25%), and Pacific Islander (17%) parents, researchers found that parents believed the school should provide the academic education and parents should provide the moral education for their children (Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001). Further, parents can exhibit parental involvement through activities such as providing

nurturance to their children, instilling cultural values, and talking with their children, which do not align with traditional forms of parental involvement as defined by schools (Scribner, Young, & Pedoza, 1999).

In essence, traditional definitions of parental involvement make demands of parents to help facilitate the success of the school, while reciprocal demands are not made of the school to ensure the success of their families. New research and discourse on parental involvement state that schools may need to redefine parental involvement and develop broader frameworks that can make involvement more inclusive for families of color (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006; Griffin, 2011; Jackson & Remillard, 2005; Mattingly, Prislin, McKenzie, Rodrigues, & Kayzar, 2002).

Even though the current definition of parental involvement has some limitations, the Epstein Model (2009) continues to be one of the most widely referenced frameworks for parental involvement and the model that the urban school in this study chose to use. The Epstein Model outlines six concrete types of family involvement behaviors: positive home conditions, communication, involvement at school, home learning activities, shared decision making within the school, and community partnerships (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Epstein et al., 2009). The positive aspects of Epstein's Model are that it encompasses the traditional definitions of parental involvement and recognizes the role of parents in the home, including supporting educational efforts and providing an environment where educational activities are supported and encouraged (Epstein & Dauber; Epstein et al.). Furthermore, Epstein shifts some of the onus from the parents to the school by acknowledging communication as a bidirectional endeavor and encouraging schools to create a place for parent ownership within the school through shared decision making. Studies have found connections between the use of this model and increased student achievement (Barnard, 2004; Ingram, Wolfe, & Lieberman, 2007; Lopez & Donovan, 2009).

However, limitations do exist with this model. Although the model works to empower parents to have a voice within the school and recognizes the work of parents in the home, the school is still expected to inform parents of effective strategies within the home (Epstein et al., 2009). Further, the role of parents in the decision-making process is defined by and created within the existing framework of the school, ensuring that parental involvement is defined and evaluated in the school's terms rather than the families' terms (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Epstein et al.). This model also fails to address the forms of advocacy demonstrated by African

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American families and their church involvement (Fields-Smith, 2009), which is a primary form of community collaboration among African Americans (Bradley, Johnson, Rawls, & Dodson-Sims, 2005; Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2005). Other forms of advocacy that tend to be overlooked as parental involvement are found in studies specifically with African American parents. These include setting clear and consistent behavioral rules for their children, engaging in frequent and meaningful conversations with their children, encouraging independence, providing assistance with homework, and expressing graduation expectations (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006; Jackson & Remillard, 2005). In addition, many of the studies using Epstein's Model do not take into account differences in race and ethnicity; rather, they provide a general approach to parental involvement, regardless of race, class, or sociocultural factors (Abdul-Adil & Farmer; Garcia-Coll et al., 1996; Tillman, 2009). Parental involvement strategies are largely based on school cultures that are formed from middle-class, European-American cultural norms (Fields-Smith, 2007; Freeman, 2010; Kroeger, 2007; Hill & Craft, 2003; Lee & Bowen, 2006); therefore, schools need to consider differences in cultural norms by race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status in order to use parent involvement effectively as a strategy for student success.

Considerations for Race and Ethnicity
Parental involvement strategies should consider race and ethnicity because research has demonstrated differences in parental involvement among African American, Latino, and White families. African American families tend to spend more time in home-based activities with their children than their white counterparts (Barbarin, McCandies, Coleman, & Hill, 2005); however, home-based involvement is difficult for schools to measure and is often overlooked, and families are not recognized for their efforts. Parent groups are a strategy that has proven particularly successful with African American families, allowing parents to obtain information about the school, advocate for the children as a collective group, and form support networks with other families (Martinez-Cosio, 2010).

As with African American families, Latino parental involvement may not align with the white, middle-class norms of the school. Latino families tend to respect the role of the school and teacher and are therefore less likely to contact the school regarding potential problems, especially when English is not their first language (Gaetano, 2007). However, schools often view a lack of family-initiated communication as a lack of involvement rather than an act of deference. Furthermore, translation becomes an issue with Latino families. Although most schools translate written communication, translation should not end with written language if schools truly desire parents' involvement and collaboration. In one study, for example, a Latina mothers' group that facilitated the cultural translation of the school's philosophy demonstrated a deeper understanding of the philosophy of the school and became empowered to educate other families. This indicated a need for schools to embrace families as translators, trust them to make the most culturally relevant translations, and allow them to become the school's ambassadors to their communities (Galindo & Medina, 2009).

Considerations for Socioeconomic Status
Poverty also presents unique barriers to traditional forms of parental involvement. Work schedules, lack of transportation, and lack of child care may prevent families from attending school events or volunteering in the school (Hill & Taylor, 2004), although research has demonstrated that, for families in poverty, parents' volunteering in the school does not have a significant effect on students' academic achievement (Desimone, 1999). Families from lower socioeconomic backgrounds expend considerable effort, including more informal conversations and unscheduled visits, to demonstrate their involvement to teachers and the school at large (Freeman, 2010); however, these less structured approaches are often viewed as obtrusive by schools and teachers (Fields-Smith, 2007). Furthermore, schools are cautioned against defining specific behaviors as parental involvement because the schools' definition often results in families feeling disenfranchised and their efforts being unrecognized (Freeman). Families in poverty are further alienated by middle-class families who see the lack of traditional involvement as a lack of caring or concern about their children (Kroeger, 2007). For families in poverty, the school's control of time and "appropriate" communications retains its power in parental involvement practices (Freeman).

Given the evidence regarding the limitations of current parental involvement practices, new practices are needed that incorporate culturally relevant strategies. Based on the literature, such practices should include components of relationship building, advocacy, and parental efficacy, as these have been shown to be effective in working with African American, Latino, and low-income populations (Desimone, 1999; Martinez-Cosio, 2010). The authors assert that these culturally relevant strategies should also occur in high-minority, high-poverty schools. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to assess the effectiveness of the Epstein Model in a high-minority, high-poverty school by exploring

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parental involvement strategies in an urban elementary school that has identified parent involvement as one strategy to increase student achievement.

CASE STUDY

Hawk Elementary (a pseudonym) has a majority African American, Latino, and high poverty population and struggles with low student achievement. Because of the various family configurations at this school, parental involvement at Hawk includes working not only with parents, but also with grandparents, aunts, uncles, and community mentors who serve as "parents" within the school. Hawk Elementary embraced parental involvement as a strategy for raising achievement and utilized the Epstein Model. Although school staff employed many parental involvement strategies, including meaningful homework, family workshops, meeting the collective needs of the family, and creating and implementing a comprehensive parental involvement plan, they have been disappointed with the results both in terms of low parent attendance and student achievement. The resulting research question guiding this study was: Even when using an evidence-based model of parent involvement, why does parent involvement continue to remain a struggle at Hawk Elementary?

Method

The Epstein Model, because of its prevalence in the field and use by the school as the model of parental involvement, informed the methodology of this study. In this study, the researchers defined parental involvement both in terms of traditional strategies (such as attending conferences and school events and responding to requests and communications from the school) and less-traditional strategies (such as participating in home learning activities and parental ownership of some aspects of the school). Research questions and field notes were informed by the definitions of parental involvement in the literature, although data were closely examined for counter-evidence that spoke against emerging patterns and themes (Creswell, 2008) and definitions unique to Hawk Elementary. A microethnography framework, which allows for a single researcher to focus explicitly on one aspect of a larger belief system of a culture (Creswell), was used for this case study to examine the definition and operationalization of parental involvement in Hawk Elementary. Microethnography relies heavily on a researcher becoming integrated into the community to form a reciprocal relationship among participants and the researcher. This methodology was appropriate because of the lead author's established relationship with the site and participants of the study.

In the 2006-2007 school year, the lead author began work with Hawk Elementary. She served as the College Access Programs Coordinator for the district and worked with Hawk Elementary to implement programs that increased students' and parents' awareness of and planning for post-secondary opportunities. In the spring of 2008, she left the district to serve as a research project coordinator for a study conducted by a local university and continued to work with Hawk as their University Liaison. As she spent more time at Hawk, she began to explore aspects of the school's culture with the faculty and administration to better understand the culture and develop strategies to improve student achievement. Since parental involvement was identified as a key strategy by the school, it became the focus of exploration for this study, which occurred in the spring semester of the 2009-2010 school year.

Every attempt was made to minimize bias and increase validity because of the well-established relationship the lead author had with the school. Prolonged engagement at the site, triangulation of data, negative case analysis, clarification of bias, thick description, and member checking were all utilized throughout the study (Glesne, 2006). Although this study took place over the span of one semester, it was part of a larger study that occurred over three years, providing the researcher with in-depth knowledge of the school and participants. Observations, interviews, and document analysis provided for triangulation of data, and every attempt was made to find and analyze negative cases in the coding process. Additionally, field notes were kept in rich detail, and reflexive notes were inserted to identify and analyze researcher assumptions or areas that needed additional analysis or data collection. Finally, initial themes and drafts were shared with participants as a form of member checking.

Reciprocity (Glesne, 2006) was also very important to the lead author as a researcher. Participants gave their time and energy to this project, and she sought to ensure that relationships remained reciprocal. Therefore, she would often assist with tasks within the school or on activities such as assembling fundraiser packets, assisting with grant applications and interventions, and researching resources that may be available to the school. Assisting in these ways provided further opportunities for informal conversations and observations. The information gathered during informal conversations greatly informed her knowledge of the general school culture and practices. For example, through this work she learned more about the school's Saturday Academy, which is an opportunity for students who are below grade level to receive additional instruction. As she worked beside teachers, she learned that they often pick up students and bring them to the

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Saturday Academy. This provides teachers an opportunity to speak with parents weekly, build relationships with parents, and offer strategies for parents to utilize throughout the week to help accelerate their children academically.

Sample. Hawk Elementary is one of the smallest schools in a large urban district in the southeastern United States. The 347-student population is 60.5% African American, 33.1% Hispanic, and 6.4% Multi-Racial and Caucasian. Hawk Elementary is considered a high-poverty school, with 92.5% of its students receiving free or reduced-price lunches. On the 2009 state end-of-year tests, 37.6% of the third- through fifth-graders were at or above grade level in reading, and 61.8% were at or above grade level in math.

Two members of the administrative team and five teachers participated in this study. The participants were chosen because of their involvement with the standardized testing that drives many school accountability and reform decisions. Further, the school does not have a full-time school counselor, so teachers and administrators are the sole links to parents. To preserve confidentiality and anonymity, participants are not identified by position within the school. All of the participants are well established within the school, have a minimum of three years of service, and know the school's culture and practices well. All participants are minority females.

Data Collection. Each teacher participant took part in a 45-minute, semi-structured interview scheduled at her convenience. Interviews with teachers took place in their classrooms during their planning periods. The administrator interviews were 60 minutes long, due to their more flexible schedules, and interviews took place in their offices. The guiding question was: How do you communicate with parents and encourage involvement in the school? After the guiding question, probing questions were asked based on participants' responses. The interviewer used a digital voice recorder to record the interviews and transcribed them verbatim within 24 hours of each interview. She inserted reflective notes into the transcripts regarding nonverbal communication and researcher responses, as appropriate (Glesne, 2006).

For this study, the lead author also conducted observations of two formal parental involvement opportunities within the school. The first event was a Parent Teacher Organization meeting, and the second was an open house in which parents were able to view projects the students completed during a six-week unit and also interact with the students and teachers. The author also took field notes while in the school assisting with other projects such as assembling bulletin boards, organizing school bazaar materials, and compiling fundraiser items. All notes were transcribed within 24 hours and annotated with observer notes and reflexive comments (Glesne, 2006).

Throughout the data collection process, the lead author maintained an observer's role as much as possible, but many times was not able to remain totally in that role. Because so few parents attended the events, she was often asked to directly participate or share her opinions or observations about the meeting topic or event. For instance, during a PTA meeting, she was asked to help develop a list of possible resources and sponsors for the school bazaar.

Data Analysis. Throughout the data collection process, the lead author analyzed transcripts for emerging themes and areas for further examination through inductive analysis, which allows for concepts and relationships among ideas to emerge throughout the research process (Glesne, 2006). Inductive coding was most appropriate because it enables emerging concepts and themes to inform the foci of observations and conversations and further minimize researcher bias or over-reliance on the Epstein Model.

Once all the data were collected and transcribed, the lead author began the formal coding process. All transcripts were read line by line for general themes in the form of recurring words. Three themes emerged: Strategies Employed, Frustration, and Engagement. Once initial themes emerged, all of the transcripts were reread to find supporting excerpts, which were placed into Microsoft Word files for each theme (Glesne, 2006). Excerpts were categorized into subthemes for more detailed analysis. Communication and Home Learning Activities emerged as sub-themes of Strategies Employed, and Lack of Reciprocity and Low Attendance emerged as subthemes for Frustration. Finally, all transcripts were reread in their entirety to look for counter-evidence. Once the coding was complete, each Word file was reread for significance and authenticity to ensure that the themes reflected the participants' views rather than the researchers'. No counter-evidence was found.

Member checking was utilized to ascertain the validity of emerging themes. Participants readily agreed with the analysis of the data, identifying most with the strategies employed and frustration themes. Although they agreed with the findings, participants were hesitant to identify cultural differences as a barrier, primarily because they were unsure the school had the resources to address this need.

RESULTS

Three key themes and four subthemes emerged as components of parental involvement at Hawk Elementary School: Strategies Employed (subthemes include Communication and Home Learning

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Activities), Frustration (subthemes include Lack of Reciprocity and Low Attendance), and Engagement. Strategies Employed describes the practices implemented at Hawk Elementary. Frustration describes the lack of impact of those strategies, and Engagement describes the multiple levels of engagement among teachers and parents. By examining the correlations among these three themes, a clearer picture of the current parental involvement practices emerges. Further, the results indicate that strategies of parental involvement (relationship building, advocacy, and efficacy), which could characterize effective parental involvement for people of color and low-SES families, were missing. The next section describes the themes in more detail.

Strategies Employed

The strategies used by Hawk Elementary align with more traditional types of parental involvement strategies. For example, school staff embraced frequent and specific communication as the primary parental involvement strategy. Weekly reports were one tool used by many teachers:

> It's a weekly report that I give to parents just to, kind of, let you know how your child did this week, any missing assignments they have, and failing grades I staple it to it.

These reports, along with all other communication, are translated for any Latino parents that would prefer receiving communication in Spanish, a key best practice in parental involvement (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Epstein 2009; Galindo & Medina, 2009). In addition to written communication, teachers called or visited parents in their homes on a regular basis:

> My parents have my cell phone number, and I'm really open with my parents... I go to their houses on Saturday to pick [students] up [for Saturday Academy] and try to tell [the parents] how important it is for [students] to come to Saturday Academy.

The administration and teachers also personally called all parents to remind and invite them to school events, such as Parent Teacher Organization meetings and conferences. Furthermore, the communication was bidirectional, with parents often calling teachers: "Quite a few of them will call. 'Just want to know how so and so is doing. I saw this report—wasn't happy with this.'" By establishing regular routines for communication and providing multiple methods for parents to obtain information, Hawk Elementary invited parents to become involved in the school.

In addition to providing information, Hawk Elementary developed multiple home learning activities to help parents meaningfully participate in their child's academic development (Barbarin et al., 2005; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Wong & Hughes, 2006). Many of these strategies required very few resources:

> I try to tell the parents, you know, what we do in school, try to reinforce it at home. Like when we're doing measurement and capacity, have the kids look in the refrigerator. What can you find that's two ounces or two liters? What does your mom use to measure a teaspoon? Does she use a regular teaspoon or does she use a teaspoon measurement? Pounds and ounces. Do you have a pound of butter or does she have a cup? So, it's trying to make everything we do in school at home—how can you reinforce it at home. We put it in our newsletter.

The measurement activity served as an example of a math home learning activity that teachers believed parents could easily incorporate into their evening routine. Some activities were more explicitly connected to school work:

> We have packets, you know, helping your child to read. We've done a couple of workshops where we've had the parents come in and here are the types of questions we're asking your child, here's what we're asking them to do. Even if they just ask the five Ws [who, what, when, where, why].

By providing the activity and the training, teachers provided parents with the skills to effectively implement these home-learning activities. Parents also received home learning activities in a more personal setting:

> There are questions that they can ask their kids before, during, and after reading... We had parent conference open night here, and we gave all the parents the questions stems. Please, you know, just always talk to your kids about what they're reading. And then every time on my update I'll say ask your kid about the books that they read. Whether they do it or not, it's presented to them. I'll even give them a specific question to ask [in our weekly newsletter].

These individual conferences enabled teachers to better customize and clarify information for specific students and parents.

By implementing these strategies, Hawk Elementary worked to not only invite parents into their student's learning but also provided them with

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the tools to be successful. Furthermore, focusing efforts on empowering parents to be educational partners within the home shifted the school's efforts away from traditional forms of parental involvement and towards practices that may have a more significant effect on academic achievement such as meaningful homework, home learning activities, and bidirectional communication. However, overall, parents still demonstrated low involvement, especially in returning forms, attending conferences, or participating in school events, causing frustration for the school staff.

Frustrations
In spite of the efforts of the school, the level of parental involvement still remained low, which served as a constant frustration for Hawk Elementary. Teachers were especially frustrated by weekly reports that were unreturned or requests for assistance that went unanswered:

> The [students whose weekly reports] I really want to see don't bring them back. Those are the ones where I write your child really needs help; I'm sending home an extra sheet please make sure it comes back. It never comes back. They're not reading at home, and this is so I can ensure that they are reading. And so it's getting better and that's because I will call them and say look, you're not signing this sheet just saying that your child read. I don't think they realize that just the repetition of reading will help the child so much, but that's what I have.

Equally frustrating for teachers were parents who questioned methodology:

> I know that when I send things home the parents write back and say what is this? Why are they doing this? Why aren't they doing it the way I was taught? And I try to explain that's not how we teach them anymore; they have to learn it this way.

This disconnect between parents' own experiences in school and their children's experiences created a space for contention between teachers and families.

Although communication difficulties served as a source of frustration, parents' lack of attendance at school events garnered the greatest frustration. Parents regularly attended school performances or evening lectures on academic topics such as end of grade testing, reading strategies, or homework assistance, but attendance at Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) meetings and more informal open houses was nearly non-existent. A member of the PTO explained that the group had just three active members, not

including the English as a Second Language teacher who served as the school liaison. However, the presence of this liaison did enable Latina mothers to become involved in the organization.

No parents attended the informal open house organized for students to share their unit projects with their families. After the first two informal open houses, teachers instead decided to plan a typical afternoon of lessons and activities as they did not want to see the children disappointed or have two hours of unstructured time. Although the projects were on display, students and teachers did not receive recognition for their efforts or an opportunity to engage with parents.

Frustrations did not prevent Hawk Elementary from attempting to engage parents, but they impacted the school's attitude towards parental involvement. Although teachers were certain to provide home learning activities, they did not expend the same amount of energy attempting to invite parents into the building because they believed that, no matter what efforts they made, families would not come into the classroom. In essence, previous experiences began directing future efforts.

Engagement
Although teachers engaged with parents on some level, and parents engaged with students, parents did not engage with other parents. The most poignant example of this phenomenon occurred at the PTO meeting, which was comprised of three mothers (two African Americans and one Latina), the ESL teacher, and the lead author. This particular meeting was called to organize the school's bazaar, which was a new fundraising event initiated by the Latino families. A bazaar was more closely aligned to their philosophy of fundraising and community building than traditional sales campaigns. After the details of the bazaar had been arranged, the PTO president stated that a nomination form was in the mailbox from the district for recognizing an outstanding parent volunteer. She then stated that there was no one to nominate. The school liaison did not translate this part of the conversation and proposed that they nominate the Latina parent at the meeting, who had attended every meeting, had given the idea of the bazaar, and was working to get donations and booths. The president conceded without looking at the other parent, and gave the form to the school staff member to complete. The Latina parent accepted without ever acknowledging the president. This exchange was emblematic of the communication throughout the meeting: parents communicating with the liaison, who was also translating, without ever looking at the other parents.

The lack of communication among parents in this scene was transparent. However, no malice was

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apparent. The meeting was very quiet and uncomfortable, even though the group had been meeting all year. The lack of communication demonstrated that, although the school was sensitive and responsive to the two cultures and languages within the building, the two groups did not have the tools necessary to communicate with each other. The resulting discomfort may be one reason parents are reluctant to attend informal events at the school.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL COUNSELOR PRACTICE

The results of this study indirectly answer the research question, "Why does parent involvement continue to remain a struggle at Hawk Elementary?" The authors hypothesize that schools and teachers are not building effective relationships with parents and continue to define parental involvement through more traditional methods as described by Lopez et al. (2001): using strategies geared towards inviting parents to school-based activities, or helping parents become more involved with academics. As already demonstrated in the literature, these types of involvement activities fail to adequately cover parental involvement of low-SES families and families of color.

The results of the study also indicate that Hawk Elementary may need to develop new strategies of parental involvement that work better with the population of the school. Hawk needs to take into account the myriad cultural differences that can impact how parents demonstrate parental involvement. Although teachers at Hawk may have employed different types of strategies, once the strategies failed, the teachers became frustrated and seemed to just consider the parents uninvolved.

The authors also assert that the Epstein Model may not fully capture how parents are or want to be involved in their children's education, indicating that new ways of working with parents in high-minority, high-poverty schools are warranted. Hawk Elementary may need to explore parental involvement in conjunction with the families to find out their needs and what works for them. Parental involvement is not an easy practice, and it takes time and a lot of investment on behalf of schools and school staff in order to build effective, collaborative relationships with their families. Although African American, Latino, and parents in poverty may be more difficult for schools to engage in traditional methods of parent involvement, the evidence both in the literature and at Hawk Elementary suggests that these parents are involved in their children's education (Barbarin et al., 2005; Fields-Smith, 2007; Freeman, 2010; Gaetano, 2007; Kroeger, 2007), and shows that teachers are trying to engage

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parents. Teachers and administrators should realize that cultural differences and practices, individual differences, and misunderstandings that can occur between teachers and parents and among parents themselves can impede parental involvement practices (Lopez & Stoelting, 2010). Schools must reconsider their beliefs about parental involvement to focus on individual families' strengths and design a more effective parental involvement plan (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Griffin, 2011; Lee & Bowen, 2006). For some schools, this may mean redefining parent involvement from purely academic roles toward more collaborative roles with other parents, such as parent support groups, parent teams for school events, or presenters in classroom cultural or enrichment activities. These networks could impact academic achievement not only by helping parents engage more directly with the school but also by empowering parents to serve as supports for each other. Implementing some of these activities at Hawk Elementary may also help address the frustrations that exist for teachers.

Although Hawk Elementary did revise its definition of parental involvement to include home-based learning activities and created a more inclusive version of a parental involvement plan, as suggested by the Epstein Model, the school was unable to reach their desired goals of parents attending informal open houses and working together to improve the school. Even with concrete strategies to involve individual parents, as is the case at Hawk Elementary, schools must bridge the cultural gap among families in order to foster these relationships—a strategy not included in existing family involvement models (Griffin, 2011). Perhaps these strategies—fostering relationships among families, increasing parental involvement efficacy, and empowering parents for advocacy—are the keys to increasing parent involvement in high-minority, high-poverty schools. Relationship building, efficacy, and advocacy utilize non-traditional strategies to empower parents to develop personal social networks and engage in reciprocal relationships with schools. School counselors can facilitate this model to ensure that parental involvement efforts increase not only parental engagement in the school but also parental ownership.

Relationship building should be the first strategy implemented by school counselors. Relationships among parents may increase the participation and the impact of existing strategies within the school by increasing ownership, accountability, and social networks. School counselors might consider hosting and facilitating cultural awareness workshops for parents. These workshops would focus on cultural norms as well as working with translators. Courses in English and Spanish might also help improve com-

munication and collaboration among parents from diverse cultures. Finally, these workshops could establish social networks and strategies to empower parents to support not only their children but also the school community at large.

Further, parent work groups could be established to create ownership within the school. Each work group would begin with natural parent leaders in the school, who may emerge in the cultural workshops. Parent leaders from each subgroup of the school could work together to form work groups that would perform specific tasks within the school, such as providing cultural translations of school materials, creating home learning activities, or organizing events within the school. School counselors could serve as the liaison between these groups and the school administration. Parent leaders would recruit other parents to join, thus widening the social networks.

Once relationships are established through these work groups, parent efficacy should increase. As parents experience success not only with their tasks but also with working with additional families, they may feel as though their efforts are rewarded. Furthermore, social networks could allow for the leveraging of resources to assist families and students in meeting their individual and group goals.

Finally, parent groups should be empowered for advocacy. School counselors could encourage parents to share concerns and needs, and then assist in their efforts to advocate for change or additional resources. For example, if a parent work group tasked with creating math activities to reinforce concepts for standardized tests found they did not have adequate resources in the school's curriculum library, the school counselor could help the group locate potential sources and then advocate to the administration to obtain these resources. To increase empowerment and parental efficacy, school counselors could also charge parents with locating indigenous resources. Indigenous resources are those that include parent-oriented supports, strengths, and skills within the family and community that may be useful in schools (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006).

As stated earlier, Hawk Elementary did not have a school counselor during the course of this study, which could also be a factor in low attendance in the parental involvement activities. Due to the nature of their profession, school counselors are charged with collaborating with stakeholders to optimize the academic, career, and personal development of their students. Furthermore, the importance of networking and collaborating with the community is written into the framework of school counselors' training. According to the 2009 Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs (CACREP) standards, school counseling programs must train students to understand how school-family-community collaboration can enhance student learning and understand how to work with families, staff, communities, and students to promote academic, career, and personal/social achievement. The implications listed above are specifically for school counselors. The lack of a school counselor could be a detriment for Hawk Elementary, because school counselors are trained not only to work with families and build strong relationships but also to be multiculturally competent, which is essential for working in high-minority, high-poverty schools, such as Hawk.

LIMITATIONS

This study was conducted in one elementary school; therefore, as with any case study, the suggestions about parent involvement cannot be generalized to other urban schools with high-minority and high-poverty populations or to different school levels (e.g., middle and high schools). Similar studies conducted at other schools could certainly support or contradict these findings. Furthermore, the lead author conducted all of the data collection and analyses. Although every attempt was made to improve validity, additional studies conducted by multiple researchers would increase the validity of these results.

Another limitation is the lack of parent voices. Because parent involvement is fragile at Hawk Elementary, administrators asked the lead author not to conduct formal interviews. Although parents' views were obtained during informal conversations and observations, future research should seek the voices of parents more formally and explicitly.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The parental involvement strategies and struggles presented in this analysis are unique to Hawk Elementary School. However, the themes presented here could be utilized as a framework for further study in other schools. Do other schools experience similar successes with home learning activities? Do other schools struggle to create parental engagement and networks?

Furthermore, additional research regarding the types of workshops and work groups suggested above is critical. Are schools able to build parent networks across cultures? What would workshops and work groups designed to facilitate parental engagement look like? What would the curriculum entail? Furthermore, do these parental cross-cultural networks increase student achievement, parental advocacy, and parental efficacy?

Although significant research exists that outlines the benefits of parental involvement for students'

The Epstein Model may not fully capture how parents are or want to be involved in their children's education, indicating that new ways of working with parents in high-minority, high-poverty schools are warranted.

academic success, garnering what schools consider ideal parental involvement strategies remains a significant challenge, especially for high-poverty, high-minority schools. More studies need to be conducted to explore the best strategies to work in these populations. The best practice research for parental involvement for African American and Latino families is certainly a beginning, but more work needs to be done to explore exactly how to best facilitate relationships among parents to foster greater informal involvement within the school and with each other. ∎

> **Cultural differences and practices, individual differences, and misunderstandings that can occur between teachers and parents and among parents themselves can impede parental involvement practices.**

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