Cultural Models of Parent–School Involvement: A Study of African American, Caribbean, and Hispanic Parents and Teachers in an Urban U.S. School District

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Abstract

This mixed-methods study explored cultural models of parent–school involvement. African American, Caribbean, and Hispanic parents, along with teachers, were recruited from an urban school district. Participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview protocol based on Joyce Epstein's (1995) framework for parent–school involvement, and their responses were thematically coded. Statistical and qualitative analyses of responses revealed significant group differences in ideas about involvement and education across the domains of parenting, communicating, and learning at home, but not for volunteering. The findings suggest that conventional beliefs and practices of parent–school involvement in the U.S. are not universal among parents of different cultural groups, and discrepancies between parents' and teachers' ideas about involvement may therefore emerge as well. The implications of these findings for schools' efforts to involve parents are discussed.

Key Words: parent involvement, ethnotheories, culture, parents, teachers, cultural models, African American, Caribbean, Hispanic, families, urban district

Introduction

There is widespread agreement in the United States today that parents' involvement in their children's education is beneficial for children's success in school and beyond. Despite apparently general acceptance of this proposition, however, there is a surprising lack of consensus about what parental involvement actually consists of, or how much involvement is helpful. Definitions vary from direct involvement in activities at the child's school (Child Trends, 2013), to a variety of parent–child activities and interactions outside of school that are intended to support the child's successful development (see El Nokali et al., 2010). Feuerstein (2000) concluded, on the basis of his review of the literature, that parent involvement is a multidimensional construct, from which various lists of activities and perceptions can be derived. Similarly, Wilder (2014) comments that "parental involvement is a complex concept that encompasses various components, such as participation in school activities, homework assistance, and academic expectations for children" (p. 379). Regardless of exactly how parental involvement is conceptualized in various studies, however, Wilder's (2014) meta-synthesis of the results of nine previous meta-analyses found a consistently positive relationship between parents' involvement and their children's academic achievement across all grade levels and ethnic groups.

Reflecting this multidimensional conceptualization of parental involvement, Epstein's frequently cited model includes six types of involvement: parenting, communicating with the child's school, volunteering and participating in school activities, engaging with learning at home, being involved in decision-making for the school, and collaborating with the community to coordinate resources and services for families, students, and schools (Epstein, 1995; Epstein & Salinas, 2004; Epstein & Sheldon, 2022). Included in each of these types are practices in which families, schools, and communities can engage. It follows that such practices may not influence students' success directly, but they impact children's connectedness to school and ownership of their own success. It is important to note that scholars have made distinctions between involvement and engagement as they relate to parents' and families' roles in children's education and school experience (see Ishimaru, 2019). We use the terms involvement, engagement, and partnership throughout the manuscript, as all these terms are used in the literature on this general topic and since many of the ideas and behaviors examined in this study relate to all three constructs.

Epstein's model has been used for research in a variety of cultures and places; for example, researchers at Doha University in Qatar used it to explore Doha parents' and school staff members' perceptions of family–school relationships (Ihmeideh et al., 2020). Other research informed by Epstein's model of family–

school partnerships includes a study of parent engagement with their children's transition to high school based on a diverse national sample of schools that were mostly urban, with high percentages of minority and low-income students (Mac Iver et al., 2015). Some scholars have critiqued Epstein's model and similar traditional models and views of parent involvement as biased against nondominant families (e.g., low-income, cultural minority) and ignoring the inequality they can experience in the U.S. educational system; they have also explored and described ways in which such inequalities can be addressed to promote family engagement and equity for nondominant families (e.g., Fennimore, 2017; Ishimaru, 2019, 2022).

Nonetheless, there are wide socioeconomic and cultural differences in how parents from various backgrounds participate (or not) in their children's school. For example, in her 2000 book *Home Advantage*, Annette Lareau describes how parents in two California communities related to their children's schools. In the first, a middle-class town, parents brought a sense of self-confidence and even superiority to interactions with teachers and administrators, and they both promoted and advocated for their children's academic success. In the second, a working-class community, parents were reluctant to object to the judgments of teachers, and they believed that they could have little influence on their child's progress in school. Teachers generally were more satisfied with the middle-class parents (although some complained about overinvolvement); in contrast, they expressed frustration with the working-class parents, whom they perceived as either too busy or not caring about their children. Although Lareau's observations were carried out over 20 years ago, the realities that they portray continue to be recognizable in classrooms and communities today. In addition, continuing racial/ethnic disparities and the rapid increase of immigrant populations add to complexities regarding how to conceptualize parent involvement and how to promote its hoped-for beneficial effects (Curry & Holter, 2019).

In this article, we explore ideas and reported practices of parents in three diverse cultural groups—African American, Caribbean, and Hispanic—which, together, constitute the majority of families whose children attended the early grades of public schools in an urban New England school district; we also report on a sample of teachers of children of the same ages in the district. Our study is based on the premise that parents' ideas are influenced by shared cultural models of appropriate parental involvement, which are then (at least to some extent) expressed in practices. It is important to understand these diverse cultural models which shape how parents construct their role in their child's education, since they may help schools develop more culturally inclusive family–school partnerships and environments (see McWayne et al., 2022).

As defined originally by cognitive anthropologists, cultural models are understandings shared by members of a cultural group or subgroup that "frame experience, supplying interpretations of that experience and inferences about it, and goals for action" (Quinn & Holland, 1987, p. 6). Building from this concept, Harkness and Super (1996) have proposed the concept of parental ethnotheories as a theoretical framework that begins with general "all-purpose" cultural models, from which are successively derived particular ideas about aspects of children's development and parents' roles in supporting it, and finally (as modified by particular parent or child characteristics or circumstances) actual practices and developmental outcomes for both the child and the family.

The present article examines patterns of similarity and difference among parents of three cultural groups within one northeastern American city with regard to their ethnotheories and reported practices concerning parental involvement in their children's education. Additionally, we investigate the extent to which teachers employed in the same school district (although not teachers of the children whose parents participated in the study) may share distinctive ethnotheories concerning parental involvement. Although there is evidence of cross-cultural variability in teachers' ideas (Edwards et al., 2014; Harkness et al., 2007), we expected that teachers' professional training and immediate collegial environment would also influence their ideas about parental involvement, thus creating a common shared set of beliefs and practices in this domain. As Hill (2022) describes in a commentary on parental involvement in the U.S., school-based perspectives on parents' role in education are dominated by a U.S. cultural script, which may not capture the various ways that parents from diverse backgrounds conceptualize their role in their child's education. In addition, early grade public school teachers in the U.S. today are predominantly White, which could also influence their cultural models of family–school relationships (see McWayne et al., 2022).

In the U.S., teachers have the opportunity to build relationships with parents of many different cultural backgrounds, including those whose voices are less often heard. Exploration of the degree of "fit" between teachers' and parents' ethnotheories, thus, may contribute to greater insights into the challenges inherent in cross-cultural communication and to possible avenues for increasing meaningful parental involvement in their children's education.

Parental Involvement and Children's School Success Among Diverse Cultural Groups

Research has documented that parents in diverse cultural groups in the U.S. are involved in their child's school through a variety of different practices. For example, the African American parents in Jackson and Remillard's

2005 study were involved at home by assisting their children with homework and setting up learning activities for their children outside of school. In another study, Archer-Banks and Behar-Horenstein (2008) found that African American parents of middle school children talked about assisting their children with homework, finding tutors for their children, participating in school decision-making organizations, and showing interest in and support for their children's education. Poza et al.'s (2014) study found that Latino immigrant families asked their children's teacher, as well as family and friends, questions about their children's progress and how to support learning; they also asked other community members how to navigate the education system and school. These parents talked about how they attended events at school and outside that helped them learn how to support their children's learning, and they tried to enhance and augment learning by enrolling their children in extra programs and finding ways to improve the quality of their child's education. Smith et al.'s (2008) study found that Hispanic parents believed they should supervise their children while they worked on homework, prepare their children for school, and motivate their children to work hard and behave well. These parents also mentioned several factors that inhibited their involvement, including limited communication from the school in Spanish, inability of the parent to speak and understand English, and a reluctance to challenge the school and advocate for their child. Parents' involvement in their children's elementary school has been linked to lower high school dropout rates and greater high school completion for African American and Latino adolescents (Barnard, 2004), higher GPA and standardized testing scores for African American children (Jeynes, 2016), and fewer social and emotional problems among English language learners (Niehaus & Adelson, 2014).

Several studies have also identified the ways that Caribbean parents are involved in their child's education. For example, teachers described Afro-Caribbean parents of children in their classrooms as engaging in more home-based involvement compared to school-based involvement (Calzada et al., 2015). Roopnarine et al. (2006) found that both Caribbean mothers and fathers (and extended family and non-kin) engaged in academic activities with their children, with mothers spending at least eight hours and fathers spending at least four hours per week in this way. Fathers' school contact, but not mothers', was associated with higher expressive and vocabulary skills. Additional research indicates that Afro-Caribbean parent–child communication about school progress is associated with secondary school achievement (Pinder, 2012).

Asian American parents' patterns of involvement in their children's school show a distinctive profile, including lower levels of contact with their children's schools but a high level of involvement in academic coaching at home, which

has also been found to relate positively to their children's academic success (Sy, 2006). As with the other sociocultural groups, it is important to keep in mind that there are strong subcultural and individual differences within the broad categories described above.

Despite the general findings on the benefits of parental involvement, parents in diverse cultural groups in the U.S. often face barriers to involvement, including limited family resources, contextual barriers such as ethnic biases, and communication barriers due to language differences. For example, Poza et al. (2014) found that time, financial resources, and instances of bias against their children were barriers to Hispanic parents' involvement. In addition, Hispanic families may face language barriers to being involved at school, resulting in needing to have their children translate for them. Similarly, Hispanic parents in Smith et al.'s (2008) study described how their children's school did not provide Spanish-speaking families with important documents such as letters to parents and newsletters translated into Spanish. Language barriers can also affect Asian parents (Cheng & Koblinsky, 2009; Collignon et al., 2001). The low-income immigrant parents in Cheng and Koblinsky's (2009) study reported that their limited English proficiency inhibited their capacity to be involved. Additionally, work schedules made it difficult for these parents to attend meetings at the school. Such socioeconomic factors can also play a part in involvement for other parents. For example, Calzada et al. (2015) found that parent education was positively associated with teacher-rated home-based involvement for both Afro-Caribbean and Latino parents, that income was positively associated with teacher-rated home-based involvement for Latino parents, and that marital status and living with a partner were also positively associated with teacher-rated home-based involvement for Afro-Caribbean parents.

Like parents, teachers have their own ideas about how parents and teachers contribute to the family–school partnership and about child outcomes of parental involvement. A majority of the teachers who participated in a survey study by Ramirez (1999) reported that they believed that it is important for parents and teachers to communicate about problems that teens were facing at home and for parents and teachers to have conferences. Some of the other ideas they agreed with were that it is important for parents to volunteer in school, assist their child with homework, and participate in parent organizations. Taliaferro et al.'s (2009) study showed that school faculty and staff primarily viewed parent involvement as consisting of at-school activities, but about half of the participants also recognized that parents can also be involved outside of the school. Other research has suggested that in some circumstances, low parental involvement may not be detrimental to their children's success in school. For example, Stormont et al. (2013) showed that students whose parents and

teachers had low contact but high comfort with each other (defined as quality of the parent–teacher relationship) were rated as having higher prosocial behaviors, lower disruptive behaviors, and higher emotion regulation compared to both those with high contact and high comfort and those with low contact and low comfort. Context makes a difference too: Bergman (2013) found that preservice teachers completing field experience at an urban school, compared to a suburban school, suggested more strategies for getting parents involved and more forms of communication with parents, such as phone calls, emails, in-person conversations, and home visits. Nevertheless, some teachers worried that their attempts to maintain successful relationships with parents might not succeed. Baum and McMurray-Schwarz's (2004) interviews with preservice student teachers revealed that they were concerned about the relationships they would have with parents and that they expected they would be in conflict with them. More recently, Lasater et al. (2023) interviewed U.S. educators in the context of demographic changes within their school communities. Based on their interviews, some educators expressed a deficit perspective, emphasizing how parents needed to improve and defer to the professional opinions of the school administration. On the other hand, another perspective expressed by other teachers was an understanding of the structural barriers and challenges that their diverse families experienced and an interest in learning from the families and establishing partnerships.

Current Study

As this brief review suggests, there are both sociocultural and role-related variations in ideas about involvement and parent–teacher relationships. This variation has important implications, as it suggests that there may be discrepancies between teachers' and parents' ideas, which can lead to misunderstanding and discord. As noted above, in the U.S., teachers have the opportunity to build relationships with parents of many different cultural backgrounds. Certain cultural groups may find it easier to be involved and build effective parent–school relationships if their ethnotheories of involvement match those of teachers, and the opposite effect may occur when there is discrepancy between the ethnotheories of parents and teachers. A further source of complexity is the presence of students from several different cultural backgrounds within single classrooms. Exploration of these ideas, thus, may contribute to greater insights concerning the challenges inherent in cross-cultural communication between teachers and parents from varied backgrounds (as well as among parents of varying backgrounds) and to possible avenues for increasing meaningful parental involvement in their children's education. The purpose of this study, therefore,

was to examine ethnotheories about involvement and parent–teacher relationships among African American, Caribbean, and Hispanic parents, as well as teachers, from an urban U.S. school district.

Methods

Participants and Setting

Participants in the study were 49 parents (20 African American, 9 Caribbean, 20 Hispanic) of children enrolled in prekindergarten through fifth grade and 20 primary school teachers involved in the public school system of a New England city (see Table 1). At the time of this study, there were around 20,000 students in the school district, 78% of whom were approved for free/reduced lunch; about 51% of the students were Hispanic, 31% were Black, and 12% were White. Although we had planned to sample Asian parents as well, these families made up only about 3% of the school district's student population, and they were not available through our method of recruitment. Thus, inclusion criteria for parent participation in this study were: (1) the participant was the primary caregiver of one or more children in Grades K–4 in the public school district where data were collected; and (2) the participant identified as African American, Caribbean, or Hispanic (or Latino/a). The 20 teachers were all instructors or supervisors for students in Grades K–4 in one of two schools in the same school district. Fifteen of the teachers were female, and five were male. Seven teachers identified as European American, six as Hispanic, and two as African American; the remaining five chose not to identify their racial/ethnic background.

Almost all the parents were recruited at a citywide school center where parents and primary caregivers could register their children for school, submit requests for transfer to other schools, set up bus transportation, and receive other school-related services. Family advocates were at the center to assist with issues of bullying, inform parents of their rights in the education system, and provide resources to families in need. Two parents were recruited during a school breakfast session at a public school. Teacher data were collected at two schools: 13 at a school with primarily African American students, and seven at a mainly Hispanic population school. Although the center was known to some of the co-authors through other previous projects, the first author had no affiliation or previous relationship with the participants, the school center, or the two schools where data were collected; this was also made clear to participants before data were collected.

Table 1. Participant Information by Group

Group	# of Partici-pants	Participant Gender	Immigrant	ESL	Child Grade	Child Gender	Teacher Ethnicity	School Role
African American	20	20 female	0	0	5 prekindergarten, 10 kindergarten, 4 first, 6 second, 1 third, 2 fourth, 3 fifth	12 female 19 male		
Caribbean	9	9 female	7	0	1 prekindergarten, 3 kindergarten, 2 first, 1 second, 1 third, 2 fourth,	7 female 4 male		
Hispanic	20	18 female	4	8	8 kindergarten, 7 first, 3 second, 3 third, 3 fourth	13 female 7 male		
Teacher	20	15 female					6 European American, 2 African American, 1 Jewish, 6 Hispanic, 5 Other/ Did not answer	3 K, 2 1st grade, 2 2nd grade, 1 3rd grade, 3 4th grade, 5 bilingual/ ESL, 1 music, 3 special ed.

Procedures

Participant recruitment and data collection were carried out by the first author of this article, who was an undergraduate student that prospective participants would most likely perceive as a White, young adult male. He visited the center on weekdays from early morning to late afternoon. As parents waited to meet with center staff, the first author approached the parents and informed them that he was an undergraduate student enrolled in a nearby public university, explained details of the study and inclusion/exclusion criteria, obtained participants' verbal consent, and then initiated the interviews, which were audio recorded. For two Spanish-speaking only participants, one interview was translated by an onsite CITI-certified (Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative, required by the UConn Institutional Review Board) translator and for the other interview a family member translated the interview; and these Spanish interviews were transcribed directly into English by a bilingual speaker. In most cases, the interview took place before or after the parents' meeting if time permitted, in a private space to the side of the reception area. The two parents recruited at a school were present at the school's breakfast session, which parents could attend to volunteer or just be there with their children, and they were recruited using the same process as at the school center. The first author approached teachers in a public environment at the two schools or as recommended by school administration or by earlier teacher participants. The teachers were given the details of the study and inclusion criteria, and if they agreed to participate in the study, signed their consent form. The audiorecorded interview was carried out by the first author individually in the teacher's classroom when time was available.

After agreeing to participate, parents and teachers responded to several questions about their cultural background, including country of origin and primary language spoken at home, as well as the age, sex, and grade level of their children. A semistructured interview, based on Epstein's types of involvement (Epstein, 1995) and developed for this study, was used to explore participants' ideas and practices related to involvement and parent–school communication (see Appendix A and B for parent and teacher interview protocols). During the interview, the first author asked a series of questions from the interview protocol and, based on the participant's response, followed up with a request for clarification or elaboration. The interviews lasted approximately 15–20 minutes each, and participants were compensated for their time with a $10 gift card to a local grocery store or online shopping site of their choice. Interview recordings were later transcribed verbatim. All identifying participant information was removed from transcripts to ensure confidentiality. Data management was in accordance with Institutional Review Board procedures of the authors' university.

Analytic Strategy

The transcribed interviews were uploaded to Dedoose©, an online qualitative analysis software package (Dedoose, 2018). Based on Epstein's framework, the interviews were coded for themes and practices related to four domains: parenting, communicating, volunteering, and learning at home. Epstein's other types of parent involvement, community and decision-making, were not included as parents rarely mentioned parent organizations and community involvement was not assessed in the interview protocols. Codes for each type of involvement were identified inductively by the first two authors through reading the interviews and taking notes on which ideas kept recurring. Subsequently, codes were marked in Dedoose and their rate of occurrence in each interview was calculated. Codes that overlapped substantially were then combined into broader codes (e.g., the codes "Sets High Expectations" and "Parents Challenge Children Academically" were combined with the code of "Academic and Grade-Focused"). Codes that were rarely used across all groups were dropped from the coding scheme. The first author then recoded all the interviews using the finalized coding scheme. Codes were included in the final analyses if at least 20% of participants in at least one participant group had that code applied to their interview. Thus, the coding system, while organized by four of Epstein's categories of involvement, reflected parents' own ideas about their perceptions, goals, and experiences with school involvement.

Quantitative analyses of the coded data included examining differences among groups in their frequency of use of the codes in each domain. For each code, we calculated the proportion of participants within each group who had the code applied to a passage at any point in their interview. Higher proportions within a group indicated a more salient theme among the participants within that group. Fisher's Exact Test was calculated for each code, using the fisher.test function in the R statistical software (R Core Team, 2021) in order to identify statistically significant differences in code response rates across the groups.

Qualitative analyses of what parents and teachers actually said were then carried out in order to derive cultural models of school involvement and children's education for each of the parent groups and the teacher group. Given the small size of samples (especially the Caribbean parents), our interpretations of the data are meant to be suggestive rather than conclusive. This approach fits within a tradition of cross-cultural research on parents and children that has often relied on small samples (e.g., Harkness et al., 2007; Miller et al., 2002) to elucidate patterns of ideas and behavior that larger-scale approaches may miss. Our goal was not to highlight whether one group or another was better or cared more about their children's education, but rather to understand how

the participants' ideas may represent distinct cultural patterns in the ways that diverse parents and teachers think about family–school involvement.

Results

Discriminant Analysis

The three groups of parents and the teachers were in general agreement about some of the themes identified in interviews, but, in addition, each group tended to display some particular characteristics. In order to evaluate the distinctiveness of the cultural models evidenced by these four groups and before going on to describe these differences, we present the results of a discriminant function analysis using SAS Proc Discrim (SAS Institute, 2019), as shown in Table 2. We reduced the number of predictor variables (codes) to 19 by selecting codes endorsed by at least 50% of at least one group; these codes can be found in Table 3. Codes with less than 50% response across all groups can be found in Appendix C.

Table 2. Discriminant Analysis by Group

% Classified INTO Group % Classified FROM Group	African American	Caribbean	Hispanic	Teacher	Other – not classified
African American n = 20	**70**	15	10	0	5
Caribbean n = 9	0	**100**	0	0	0
Hispanic n = 20	5	25	**65**	5	0
Teacher n = 20	0	20	5	**75**	0
Other – not classified n = 0	-	-	-	-	-

Values were recomputed for each individual to be the number of mentions of each code divided by the total number of codes mentioned by that individual. Because few of these predictors displayed a normal distribution, we used the nonparametric analytic option with k = 3, and calculated distances with the Mahalanobis method. The procedure was able to successfully assign 77% of the individual participants to their correct group based on the predictor variables, a result highly unlikely by chance (χ^2 (16) = 128.23, p < .0001). As shown in Table 2, however, there was considerable variation in rates of "correct" assignment of individuals to their own cultural group. The Caribbean parent group was most distinctive, with all nine members correctly assigned. In contrast, just under three-fourths of the African American parents were correctly assigned to their own group, with the remainder assigned to the Caribbean group and, less frequently, the Hispanic group (one parent could not be assigned to any

group). The Hispanic parents were assigned to their own group at almost the same rate as the African American parents; interestingly, most of the remainder were assigned to the Caribbean group. Three-fourths of the teachers were correctly assigned; again, most of the others were assigned to the Caribbean group.

Table 3. Percentages of Code Response Rates (For Codes with 50% or Higher Response) by Group

Codes	African American	Caribbean	Hispanic	Teacher	Fisher's Exact Test
Parenting					
Academic and Grade-Focused	**0.85**	**0.67**	**0.60**	**0.85**	0.19
Check Children's Academic Progress	0.40	0.44	**0.55**	0.10	0.02*
Children's Behavior Is Important	0.20	**0.67**	0.35	0.45	0.10
Involvement in Children's Education	**0.50**	0.44	**0.55**	**0.70**	0.52
Parents Should Motivate Children	**0.80**	**0.67**	**0.60**	0.30	0.01*
Rules and Discipline	0.45	**0.89**	0.25	0.30	0.01*
Learning at Home					
Have Children Do Homework in a Distraction Free Place	**0.55**	**0.67**	0.40	**0.70**	0.26
Let Children Attempt Homework on Their Own First	**0.50**	0.22	**0.50**	0.10	0.01*
Parents Help Children w/ Homework	0.30	**0.56**	0.35	**0.70**	0.05+
Review Children's Homework	0.25	**0.56**	0.15	0.30	0.18
Communicating					
Both Parents and Teachers Should Initiate Communication	**0.50**	0.00	**0.55**	0.40	0.03*
Communication is Important	**0.95**	**0.78**	**0.75**	**0.85**	0.30
Cooperation is Important	**0.60**	0.33	0.45	**0.55**	0.54
Frequent Communication	**0.60**	0.33	0.40	0.10	0.01*
Talk about Academics	**0.65**	0.33	**0.50**	**0.65**	0.33
Talk about Behavior	**0.50**	**0.56**	**0.50**	**0.65**	0.76
Volunteering					
Volunteer to Get Info About Children and Education	**0.60**	0.44	0.35	0.35	0.34
Volunteer to Help School w/ Activities	**0.65**	**0.56**	0.40	0.40	0.35
Important to Volunteer in School	**1.00**	**0.78**	**0.95**	**0.90**	0.17

Notes. Proportions of .50 or greater within each group column were bolded. Fisher's Exact Test *p*-values of less than .05 are denoted with a *, and *p*-values of .05 and greater and less than .10 are denoted with a +.

To illustrate how particular codes within each of the four types of involvement contributed to both similarity and differences across the groups of parents and teachers, Table 3 shows their rates of occurrence across the samples. As is evident, some codes were expressed with high frequency in all groups. These include being academically and grade focused, being involved in the child's education, and (for the parents but not the teachers) expressing the idea that parents should motivate their children to succeed in school. Almost all parents and teachers talked about the importance of parent–school communication, including talking about the child's behavior at school. A great majority of parents and teachers talked about the importance of volunteering at their child's school, with many in each group specifying various purposes of volunteering including getting information about children and education and helping with classroom activities.

In contrast to the similarities across groups with regard to some themes (codes), each group's profile of themes was distinctive in some ways. Looking down the column of codes for the African American parents, the high rate of academically related themes is striking, along with talk about all aspects of communication with the school and volunteering, especially in order to get information about their child and to help with activities. The Caribbean parents were notable in their high frequency of talking about the importance of good behavior, and relatedly, rules and discipline. These parents also frequently described themselves as being very present in their children's homework, both by helping their children and reviewing the children's work. The Hispanic parents were less distinctive in their talk about various themes, but they were often most similar to the African American parents' profiles, although with generally lower rates of occurrence of themes across the four types of involvement. One distinctive theme that was expressed by a quarter of the Hispanic parents was the idea of making homework interesting for children, which was mentioned by only one-tenth of the African American parents and not at all by the other groups (therefore not included in Table 3). Finally, the teachers focused most on being academic and grade-focused as well as the importance of parents being generally involved with the child's education; on the practical side, they also talked most about having children do their homework in a distraction-free place at home, and parents helping their children with homework.

Cultural Models of School Involvement

Although the frequencies of particular themes and their patterns of co-occurrence in the parent interviews suggest interesting differences as well as similarities across the four groups, it is essential to look at what parents and teachers actually said in order to derive some sense of the cultural models that

organized their thinking and actions. The following section provides some clues to the possible cultural models that were most prevalent in each group, keeping in mind, of course, that none of the groups were totally different from each other, and that larger samples would undoubtedly add further dimensions. The themes (codes) mentioned in this section can be found in Table 3 or in Appendix C.

African American Parents

The African American parents in this study talked about a parenting style characterized by strong expectations for their child's behavior and academic responsibilities, emphasizing that being strict is important to ensure their child's success. As one mother commented with regard to visiting her child's school to ensure that her child was not behaving badly:

> Like I said, I make it my business to go. I want to know who my son is dealing with, who I got to deal with for the next 180 days, because I tell my kids in a minute, I know they are not angels. That is one thing parents make a mistake at, is making their kids believe that they are angels. Only in God's eyes. Because when my back is turned, I know he ain't an angel.

Similarly, another African American mother stressed the importance of keeping track of children's school attendance and participation by staying in contact with the teacher:

> I think parents just need to know what their kids are doing overall…but a lot of them don't know if their kids are even in school. Some of them have just dropped their kids off, and their kids will not be there.…You are wondering why your kid is not improving in school, but you are not communicating with the teacher….They just leave it completely up to the kids, and I feel that should not be left up to the kids.

Of the African American parents, 40% said that it was important for them to check up on their child's academic progress and behavior with the teacher, and they talked about having their child do homework in a distraction-free place. However, some of these parents said that the materials that their children were currently learning were being taught differently from what they were taught as children, which made it difficult for them to help their children with homework. One mother commented about her struggle to help her child with homework:

> In this age, they are doing it a lot different than when I was in school. A lot different. Like my daughter, who is in third grade last year, she would have to explain to me how they do it, because when I showed her my way, she would be like, "Mom, that is wrong." And I would be like, "I don't understand that." It is complicated. Things have changed.

In addition to being involved with their children's education at home, the African American parents in our study expressed strong support for being in involved at school. More than half of the parents said that they believed volunteering was useful because it allowed them to gain information about what was happening in the school and what their child was learning. One mother described the benefits of her volunteering experiences, which included learning about education resources and networking with school staff and other parents:

> It depends on what type of volunteering opportunity it is. I could learn, like, a lot of different things. Like when he was in daycare, I volunteered a lot of that. When he was in school, I did a lot of educational resources and things like that, I learned a lot from it, so, it is just knowing who [is] in the school, the principal, the teacher, and other parents—just networking being important.

In general, the African American parents highly prioritized academics, and they overwhelmingly supported the idea that parents should motivate their children to succeed in school. Good communication with the teacher was perceived as essential by almost all the parents, and at least half of them also mentioned the importance of frequent communication about students' behavior and academic progress. Communication between the parent and teacher was invoked as a strategy for preventing the child from getting away with bad behavior:

> Just having the communication, and like I said, the child can see that my parent can contact my teacher, and the teacher can contact my parent. So I can't get away with not doing my homework. I can't get away with misbehaving. They are gonna be on me.

Caribbean Parents

The Caribbean parents in this study, overall, displayed a "no-nonsense" focus on behavior and children's social development, a responsibility to contribute to their child's education, and high expectations for their children's performance. As one mother described her expectations for her child's grades:

> No, I want "As" and "Bs," so if she comes home with a "C," then, ok, what happened? You know what I am saying…because you know what the answer is. Either you weren't paying attention, or you were rushing. That is why you got it wrong. It is not because you don't know, so I don't want to hear the excuses.

Consistent with this style, most of the Caribbean parents said that parents should maintain rules and discipline at home. At the same time, they supported active roles for themselves in children's learning, for example, by helping children with homework, providing a distraction-free environment for doing

it, and checking it afterwards. One parent described her role as a watchful monitor of quality; interestingly, she was the only parent in the study who mentioned recruiting an older sibling to share this role:

> I go over it, or I would ask one of their older siblings to go over the homework to make sure it is done correctly, make sure it looks appropriate. I do not like messy work. I don't like a lot of scribble on the paper. If you are erasing a whole bunch of times, I think your homework should be very presentable. Legible so the teacher can understand.

As this same mother explained, however, it was also important to allow the child a break before getting started with homework:

> I mean, she comes home, she gets a snack. She likes to unwind a little bit. Then she gets her homework started. That takes the stress off of it. She is just coming in, maybe a little bit fatigued. Put something in your stomach, and then you are a little bit energized because you had your snack. You can sit down. You can devote more time and energy and effort into actually reading the homework to make sure you understand.

Two-thirds of the Caribbean parents mentioned being concerned about children's behavior in school, and over half mentioned talking with the teacher about their child's behavior, more so than about academics. Although the great majority of these parents said they thought parent–teacher communication was important, fewer of them said it should be frequent, and none of them mentioned the idea of a close personal relationship between the parent and teacher. One mother expressed the necessity of communication between parents and teachers when either has a concern:

> I think with better communication, with like the teacher telling the parent, like, "This is what your child is dealing [with]" or with the parent going to the teacher with, "Why are my child's grades messed up, or what is it they need to work on?" No one is communicating, you know what I mean? I feel that communication would be the key to everything.

Hispanic Parents

Although the Hispanic parents' profile of themes was quite similar to that of the African American parents, one distinctive theme expressed by a quarter of the parents in this group was that it was important to make homework interesting for their children—an idea expressed by only two of the African American parents and none of the Caribbean parents or the teachers. One Hispanic mother described a variety of strategies she used to make homework an interesting and fun activity for her child:

> Well I try to make it fun and creative so they don't get bored, and then I do it. So you know I try to, let's say here like, I put like snacks out. Cut some food up, because my kids love fruits and vegetables, too. So I have all that set up on the table; I will sit there. I will try to play the card games with them first—flash cards, showing them the pictures—the animals—and how to spell it, how to sound it out. We start like that.

Interestingly, *fewer* of the Hispanic parents talked about rules and discipline than did either the African American or (especially) the Caribbean parents; in this regard, the Hispanic parents' views were more similar to those of the teachers. However, like the African American parents, half of the Hispanic parents said that children should be allowed to try doing their homework on their own before being given help. As one mother explained, she did not immediately help her child with homework because she didn't want her child to be dependent on her for success in completing the homework:

> I'm not going to be there giving you the answers. You need to know the answers. You need to figure out a way when I'm not there—when you don't have this there, then you need to figure out a way where you can do it yourself.

Again, like the African American and Caribbean parents, about half the Hispanic parents expressed the idea that they should be involved in their child's education, including checking on their child's academic progress. One mother emphasized this point, including moral as well as academic teaching:

> It is not only the teacher's responsibility to teach, it is the parents' as well. The parent has to teach the child when it comes to work and school. You got to teach them right from wrong. You have to teach them as well.

These Hispanic parents, like all the other groups, talked about the importance of parent–teacher communication and cooperation, including children's behavior as well as academics. One father explained the roles of parents and teachers as a joint effort:

> You know what, there is a saying that says it takes a village to raise a kid, and everybody has to work together. I mean as a parent, the parent has the main authority and the main responsibility to make sure their kid does well. But aside from the parent's power, the parent can't sit in the school with the child all day, so the teacher has to do their part as well to try to instill some educational background into that child. It starts with the parents, it starts at home, but at the same time the teacher has got to help this kid believe in themselves and show that they have a chance. The parent's influence and the teacher's influence together make for what the outcome is going to be, usually.

Teachers

Given the complementary roles of teachers and parents, it is not surprising that the teachers' concerns were quite different in some regards from those of the parents. In particular, a third of the teachers talked about the importance of basic care for children by their parents. Some of the teachers commented that students did not have proper clothing for being able to go outside for recess during the winter season or did not have a chance to have breakfast before school. One teacher recounted struggles she faced when she had students coming to school without having eaten beforehand, not having food for school hours, or enough sleep:

> Giving them support. Getting them here on time. The big one is breakfast. We do give free breakfast, but a lot of the ones that take the bus may not get here on time to get that free breakfast. You can tell which students have not eaten before they come in—they will be sleepy or grouchy, complaining of stomach aches, and there is only so much they can do. The nurse doesn't have food for 500 kids if all of them miss lunch or breakfast.

A related concern expressed almost exclusively by teachers in this study was how many parents in this school district were confrontational with the schools and teachers, which made cooperation and communication difficult. One teacher spoke of the importance of also talking about positive things going on with the child at school instead of only talking about negative things:

> But I always try to start off with a positive, because I have noticed the parents, if you start with a negative—they are always used to hearing so much negative that their defenses go up right away, and they are not hearing anything else you would have to say. But if you say something really good about their kids, I have one in particular that all her kids—it is always negative…and she is much more receptive because she is coming in with her guard up, already thinking I am going to say something negative, so I always try to say something positive.

The great majority of teachers stated that parents should be involved in their children's education and focus on their children's academic success, but fewer teachers mentioned the importance of parents' emotionally supporting or motivating their children. Surprisingly, only two of the 20 teachers said that parents should check their child's academic progress, and only a few mentioned the importance of parents talking with their child about school. In contrast, almost three-quarters of the teachers stated that parents should help their child with homework. As one teacher explained:

Definitely the parent should help, and that shows the child that there is interest in their education. If a parent isn't involved at least in that way, the child doesn't see a connection between the home and school, I think.

Almost all the teachers talked about the importance of parent–teacher communication, and they equally supported the idea of parents volunteering in the classroom. The following quote illustrates both a teacher's ideal form of parent helping and its hoped-for benefits:

I think it would be really nice for parents to go into classrooms to assist teachers and support by doing copies, which is so difficult in inner cities because it takes so much time. Things like that would be so wonderful to help teachers have more time for instruction.…I just think it is really important that parents be part of the educational process, and that is a way to get them in so they understand what is going on in the schools, in an unthreatening manner.…I think that it affords some understanding of what is really happening in the classroom and exposes them to materials that the children are learning or what their expectations are, because a lot of time they don't know.

Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to explore cultural variation in parents' and teachers' ideas about parental involvement and children's education in the context of an urban U.S. school district. Our results offer several new insights into parents' and teachers' ideas about school involvement. Unlike most other studies investigating parent involvement, this study compared three different parental cultural groups, as well as teachers. As a result, we were able to describe a possible cultural model of school involvement for each participant group. By using Epstein's (1995) framework to construct the interview protocol, this study also gathered data on parents' ideas across the four domains of parenting, learning at home, communicating, and volunteering. Our results show significant cultural variation across these types of involvement for this urban school district sample. Relatedly, this study indicated that these four types of involvement were an important concern for not just the parents in this sample, but for the teachers as well.

Despite the variations found here across the African American, Caribbean, and Hispanic parents in this study, there were also many similarities. Both the African American and Caribbean parents talked about using a strict parenting style. However, differences were found in that the African American parents were more academically focused, whereas the Caribbean parents spoke more

about children's social development. The Hispanic parents also indicated that they supported a variety of practices for being involved, especially regarding homework and—uniquely—making homework interesting and fun for the children.

The patterns of themes found in this sample concerning involvement and family–school partnerships are generally in agreement with the existing research literature. The African American parents in the present study, like those described by Howard and Reynolds (2008) and Jackson and Remillard (2005), talked about volunteering to gain information about their children's progress and stated that it is important for parents to be informed about the happenings of the school and their child's progress. Like the African American parents studied by Archer-Banks and Behar-Horenstein (2008), the African American parents in the current study emphasized the importance of having an effective parent–teacher relationship. Many of the Hispanic parents in the current study talked about ways to help their children with homework, as also found by Smith et al. (2008). With regard to the teachers in our sample, like the findings of Ramirez (1999), they expressed that they highly valued parents' involvement in their classroom.

Our study offers additional information on Caribbean immigrant parents' ideas about involvement and children's education. In particular, the Caribbean parents in the current study talked most about rules and discipline, about parent–teacher relationships, and about communicating about their child's behavior with their teacher.

Limitations and Implications for Future Directions

The current study has several limitations, indicating possible next steps and new avenues for future research on parents' and teachers' ideas about involvement. The samples of parents (especially the Caribbean parents) in this study were quite small. Future studies with larger samples, using quantitative self-report assessments based on the findings of the current study, could test the generalizability of the patterns we identified and cross-validate the discriminant findings. Another limitation was that the parents and teachers who participated had already shown support for school involvement by attending the center where they were recruited or being referred by other highly involved teachers; thus, they might not be fully representative of the larger population of parents and teachers in the city. The parents in this study were also mainly mothers; thus, fathers' ideas about involvement were underrepresented. Future studies should attempt to recruit fathers and harder-to-reach parents and teachers to assess their ideas about involvement. Our data show that all the parents and teachers in our study valued involvement and talked about their ideal

involvement strategies, in addition to ones they had already used. However, as some of these parents and teachers mentioned, many of the parents living in these urban environments do not have the resources, time, or knowledge to be involved as much as they would like. Future studies should further assess the impact of culture on parent involvement by identifying interactions that parental ethnotheories may have with socioeconomic status, age, gender, and family structure.

Another important factor to consider, which we could not with the small sample in our study, was the role of teachers' cultural background in the school–family partnership. Purposely sampling teachers within different cultural subgroups would allow for researchers to examine whether teachers' ideas about involvement differ meaningfully across cultural groups and whether a match or mismatch between the cultural background of the family and teacher matters for their communication and cooperation. Finally, this study was not able to take into consideration the history of family–school relations of the participating parents and teachers and how that may have impacted current relations. Future research may benefit from matching parent and teacher participants from the same schools in order to explore the history of those schools' relations with families and their impact on current relationships.

Regardless of these limitations, the current study sheds new light on educational involvement in a diverse community. We found both commonalities and cultural variation among the parents' ideas about children's education and parent involvement. The teachers also had unique ideas about parent involvement. Furthermore, the distinctness of parents' and teachers' ideas about involvement depended on the type of involvement: ideas about parenting were quite different among the four groups, whereas ideas about volunteering were mostly similar. Schools can utilize such findings to promote the cultural competency of staff in interaction with parents of underrepresented groups, potentially leading to more effective parent–teacher relationships in diverse communities.

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Appendix A. Interview Protocol for Parents

- Have you ever volunteered at your child's school? How so?
- Are you involved in any parent organizations at school?
- Do you help your child with their homework?

- Where does your child do their homework? Is there a special time for your child to do their homework?
- How do you find out about your child's progress in school?
- How often do you communicate with your child's teachers? What about? Who is initiating that contact?
- Is there a comfortable fit between people that share the same background as you and what teachers expect?
- How can parents help their children be successful in school? What are the most important aspects of the parent's role?
- How do you think parents and teachers can work together to ensure children's success in school?
- Do you feel that these views are shared among other members of your community?
- Are there any areas of parent–school communication where you think improvement is needed?

Appendix B. Interview Protocol for Teachers:

- Do you have parents volunteering at your school? What are they doing?
- What parent organizations are there at your school? Are they effective?
- Do you think parents should help their child with homework? Why?
- Do you think teachers should help parents organize or make suggestions for setting up a learning environment for children at home?
- How are you reporting your students' progress to their parents?
- How often do you communicate with your students' parents? Who is initiating the contact?
- How can parents help their children be successful in school? What are the most important aspects of the parent's role?
- Besides academic teaching, do you think there are any other things that teachers can do to help children be successful in school?
- How do you think parents and teachers can work together to ensure children's success in school?
- Do you feel that these views are consistent with the views of other teachers?
- Do you feel that your expectations for your students' parents agree with what they feel their role is?
- Are there any areas of parent–school communication where you think improvement is needed?

Appendix C. Additional Tables

Table C1. Percentages of Parenting Codes Response Rates by Group

Codes	African American	Caribbean	Hispanic	Teacher	Fisher's Exact Test
Academic and Grade-Focused	**0.85**	**0.67**	**0.60**	**0.85**	0.19
Being Aware of Child's Needs	0.30	0.11	0.00	0.00	0.00*
Check Children's Academic Progress	0.40	0.44	**0.55**	0.10	0.02*
Children's Behavior is Important	0.20	**0.67**	0.35	0.45	0.10
Concerned About Social/Emotional Development	0.00	0.22	0.05	0.20	0.08+
Education is Parents' Responsibility	0.15	0.00	0.20	0.20	0.59
Emotionally Support Children	0.40	0.33	0.20	0.05	0.04*
Get Resources for Children	0.00	0.22	0.00	0.15	0.03*
Involvement in Children's Education	**0.50**	0.44	**0.55**	**0.70**	0.52
Parents Should Motivate Children	**0.80**	**0.67**	**0.60**	0.30	0.01*
Rules and Discipline	0.45	**0.89**	0.25	0.30	0.01*
Take Basic Essential Care of Children	0.10	0.11	0.00	0.35	0.01*
Talk with Children About School	0.20	0.11	0.20	0.30	0.81

Note. Proportions of .50 or greater within each group column were bolded. Fisher's Exact Test *p*-values of less than .05 are denoted with a *, and *p*-values of .05 and greater and less than .10 are denoted with a +.

Table C2. Percentages of Learning at Home Codes Response Rates by Group

Codes	African American	Caribbean	Hispanic	Teacher	Fisher's Exact Test
Designate a Special Place for Children to Do Homework	0.05	0.22	0.25	0.30	0.20
Give Children a Break Before Starting Homework	0.20	0.44	0.15	0.40	0.19
Have Children Do Homework in a Distraction Free Place	**0.55**	**0.67**	0.40	**0.70**	0.26
Homework is Important	0.30	0.22	0.35	0.15	0.53
Homework is Reinforcement	0.10	0.22	0.00	0.40	0.00*
Let Children Attempt Homework on Their Own First	**0.50**	0.22	**0.50**	0.10	0.01*
Make Children do Homework Right After School	0.40	0.00	0.45	0.10	0.01*

Table C2, continued

Make Homework Interesting for Children	0.10	0.00	0.25	0.00	0.05[+]
Parents and Children Should do Homework Together	0.20	0.11	0.10	0.00	0.24
Parents Explore Children's Ideas While Doing Homework	0.05	0.33	0.25	0.05	0.06[+]
Parents Help Children with Homework	0.30	**0.56**	0.35	**0.70**	0.05[+]
Parents Learned Differently as Children	0.25	0.11	0.00	0.15	0.11
Parents Only Clarify Homework for Children at First	0.20	0.00	0.20	0.10	0.56
Review Children's Homework	0.25	**0.56**	0.15	0.30	0.18

Note. Proportions of .50 or greater within each group column were bolded. Fisher's Exact Test *p*-values of less than .05 are denoted with a *, and *p*-values of .05 and greater and less than .10 are denoted with a +.

Table C3. Percentages of Communicating Codes Response Rates by Group

Codes	African American	Caribbean	Hispanic	Teacher	Fisher's Exact Test
Both Parents and Teachers Should Initiate Communication	**0.50**	0.00	**0.55**	0.40	0.03[*]
Close Relationship	0.15	0.00	0.15	0.25	0.51
Communicate About Good and Bad Things	0.05	0.00	0.05	0.25	0.13
Communication Should be Initiated When Problem Occurs	0.00	0.22	0.00	0.25	0.01[*]
Communication Is Important	**0.95**	**0.78**	**0.75**	**0.85**	0.30
Cooperation Is Important	**0.60**	0.33	0.45	**0.55**	0.54
Frequent Communication	**0.60**	0.33	0.40	0.10	0.01[*]
Parents Can Be Confrontational	0.10	0.00	0.00	0.20	0.18
Parents Should Initiate Communication	0.25	0.44	0.30	0.15	0.41
Talk About Academics	**0.65**	0.33	**0.50**	**0.65**	0.33
Talk About Behavior	**0.50**	**0.56**	**0.50**	**0.65**	0.76
Teachers Should Initiate Communication	0.05	0.11	0.00	0.20	0.13

Note. Proportions of .50 or greater within each group column were bolded. Fisher's Exact Test *p*-values of less than .05 are denoted with a *, and *p*-values of .05 and greater and less than .10 are denoted with a +.

Table C4. Percentages of Volunteering Codes Response Rates by Group

Codes	African American	Caribbean	Hispanic	Teacher	Fisher's Exact Test
Volunteer to Get Info About Children and Education	**0.60**	0.44	0.35	0.35	0.34
Volunteer to Help School w/ Activities	**0.65**	**0.56**	0.40	0.40	0.35
Volunteer to Monitor Children in School	0.25	0.33	0.25	0.00	0.03[*]
Volunteer to Motivate Children to Succeed	0.45	0.44	0.40	0.45	1.00
Important to Volunteer in Children's School	**1.00**	**0.78**	**0.95**	**0.90**	0.17

Note. Proportions of .50 or greater within each group column were bolded. Fisher's Exact Test *p*-values of less than .05 are denoted with a *, and *p*-values of .05 and greater and less than .10 are denoted with a +.