

Beyond the Greatest Hits: A Counterstory of English Learner Parent Involvement

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Abstract

Over the past 20 years there have been significant policy, research, and social emphases placed upon the importance of parent involvement in U.S. schools as a means for improving student achievement. This has resulted in an implicit definition of what constitutes involvement for all parents rather than an inductive understanding of what is occurring in families, particularly for those who are culturally and linguistically diverse. The purpose of this review is to present a counterstory (Yosso, 2006) to widely held notions about parent involvement in U.S. public schools through examining the ways that research has documented English learners' (EL) parent involvement *in situ*. I review 31 research studies that use inductive methods to define and describe parent involvement with EL families. Findings reveal that EL parents' involvement is centered around three key relationships: between families and schools, between parents and children, and among families. These relationships exist along a continuum from school-directed to parent-led. Additionally, they present a counterstory to the standard practices that define parent involvement and instead reveal that EL parents' involvement is characterized by dynamic processes.

Key Words: family engagement, parent involvement, English learners, counterstory, culturally, linguistically diverse families, schools, children

Introduction

In the United States the notion of parents being involved in their children's education is a widely accepted cultural norm rooted in ideals about the importance of education and the parent-child relationship. Numerous federal, state, and local policy initiatives are in place to train and support parents who might be viewed as uninvolved in their children's education. For example, several pieces of federal legislation, including the Goals 2000: Educate America Act (1994) and the last two reauthorizations of the Elementary and Secondary Schools Act—the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA; 1994) and the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB; 2002)—all require that schools develop parent involvement plans. The Goals 2000: Education America Act explicitly states that “every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children.” IASA and NCLB both include provisions—through Title I funds—to support involvement initiatives with the explicit intent of improving student achievement. Specifically, this legislation emphasizes that parent involvement initiatives pay particular attention to “parents who are disadvantaged, are disabled, have limited English proficiency, have limited literacy, or are of any racial or ethnic minority background” (NCLB, 2002, Sec. 1118).

Moreover, much academic research has examined the role of parental involvement in children's education. Google Scholar returns over 22,000 hits when searching for “parent involvement” AND “education” since 1994 (the year IASA and Goals 2000 were passed). Popular media outlets are also filled with articles on parenting, early learning, and parent involvement in education.

These policy, research, and social emphases on parent involvement have resulted in a narrow list of activities that constitute a “greatest hits” of parent involvement practices. Hong (2011) quotes an urban school principal in Chicago explicating this phenomenon:

With the influx of middle-class families at my school, I am realizing that some of the strategies are written for them. If you look at our events, it looks like we have more parent involvement, but really, we just have more middle-class parents who are responding to our use of the “greatest hits” in parent involvement. (p. 19)

The greatest hits that this principal mentions refer to observable practices that often occur within the school. These may include attending school events (parent-teacher conferences, back-to-school nights, PTA/O meetings, ceremonies, celebrations, sporting events, etc.), communication with the school, helping with homework, and reading to children (Jeynes, 2010). Implicit in this principal's statement is the recognition that such practices are insufficient

for engaging all parents. Moreover, Doucet (2011) argues that such ritualized practices in parent involvement lead to a group identity and solidarity among mainstream parents that excludes culturally diverse families—the same families that many of these initiatives intend to target.

Problem Statement

Often discussions of parent involvement do not include a consideration of the ways in which families' cultural and linguistic backgrounds may factor into their involvement. In fact, there is evidence to suggest that families who may speak a home language other than or in addition to English—and whom for the purposes of this review I will refer to as English learners (EL)—are involved in their children's education in ways that differ from those of other social groups (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Yet teachers and schools frequently view linguistic minority parents as uninterested and/or uninvolved in their children's education when they do not attend school events (Hong, 2011; Ngo, 2012; Poza, Brooks, & Valdés, 2014). This is despite substantial research on immigrant and minority families that demonstrates how they are deeply concerned about their children's education (e.g., Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Lim, 2012). In fact, many immigrant families state that their main reason for migration is to provide their children with better opportunities for success. Once in the U.S., immigrant parents come to see education as imperative for their children to access future opportunities and social mobility (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

As the population of immigrant children in public schools continues to grow, while at the same time concerns about their academic achievement rise, a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which EL parents are involved in their children's education has the potential to inform future research, policy, and practice regarding this population. Through a thorough review of the literature, this study provides a comprehensive analysis of the ways in which extant research defines and describes EL parent involvement.

Clarification of Terms

Throughout this article I use the terms “parent” and “family” interchangeably. I am principally concerned with the ways that mothers, fathers, and legal guardians are involved in their children's education because they have been the focus of involvement policy initiatives. NCLB (2002) explicitly mentions this in Section 1118(e): “specifically, these provisions stress shared accountability between schools and *parents* [emphasis added].” This is not to say that siblings and extended family members are not involved in children's education in significant ways. To the contrary, there is a substantial body of research highlighting each of these groups' influence on language minority children's

education. But by and large, parents—in policy, research, and practice—tend to be emphasized most and are thus the focus of this review.

My use of the terms “English learner” and “language minority” also warrants clarification. For the purposes of this review, I use these terms to refer to parents and families who—for reasons of immigration or migration in their histories—speak a language other than or in addition to English in their homes. These are the parents of children who are often deemed to be ELs in U.S. public schools.

Lastly, recent research on parent involvement has shifted to the use of the term “engagement” over “involvement” to reflect a shared responsibility between families and schools (Doucet, 2011; Ferrara, 2011). In this article I choose to use “involvement” in the title to reflect the word’s use in policy initiatives, which I argue have had a strong influence on school practices. Yet in discussing this study’s findings I explicate how the use of this term may have the effect of narrowing educators’ and even parents’ ideas about what constitutes involvement.

Parental Involvement and Children’s Outcomes

There is no lack of evidence to link the connection between family involvement and students’ educational achievement (e.g., Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2003; Sheldon, 2009). Specifically, involvement has been shown to be associated with children’s positive behavioral outcomes, grade advancement (Miedel & Reynolds, 1999; Tinkler, 2002), achievement on standardized tests, improved grades, graduation rate, college entrance, social skill development (Henderson & Mapp, 2002), attendance (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002), and general attitudes towards school (Jeynes, 2003).

Several recent meta-analyses have been conducted to summarize quantitative research findings on effective parent involvement. Overall, these studies find a positive relationship between involvement and academic achievement. In a review of 25 studies, Fan and Chen (2001) found that parent involvement was associated with a 30% increase in academic achievement as measured by test scores and grade point averages. Each of these meta-analyses also highlights that while parent involvement is important, the type of involvement matters. Across these reviews, one aspect of parent involvement—having high expectations—was consistently the strongest predictor of achievement (Fan & Chen, 2001; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2005, 2007). This finding is also echoed by Froiland, Peterson, and Davison (2012), who found that parental expectations for postsecondary attainment while the student was in kindergarten are stronger predictors of achievement than home-based involvement practices such as

reading books and helping with homework. Furthermore, parental expectations during kindergarten are related to both parental expectations in middle school as well as involvement in early grades, which helps children to develop skills that will facilitate their later success (Froiland et al., 2012). Moreover, in a meta-analysis of parent involvement in middle school, Hill and Tyson (2009) note that parents' academic socialization of their children—defined as setting high expectations, valuing education, fostering aspirations, and making plans for the future—conveys “an understanding about the purposes, goals, and meaning of academic performance, communicates expectations about involvement, and provides strategies that students can effectively use” (p. 758).

In addition to having high expectations for academic achievement, supporting children's learning at home was also an important component of children's school success in these meta-analytic reviews. Yet effective home-based support can come in a variety of forms including reading (Jeynes, 2005), engaging children in home learning activities (Hill & Tyson, 2009), providing direct supervision of activities (Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2007), and embodying a parenting style that is both loving and supportive but also maintains an appropriate level of discipline (Jeynes, 2007). Specific findings on homework help are mixed (Fan & Chen, 2001; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes 2005, 2007). School-based involvement—including visiting a child's school, volunteering, and attending events—were only moderately correlated with achievement (Hill & Tyson, 2009).

Parent involvement is important for children regardless of background. Jeynes' (2003, 2005, 2007) work—which examines the association between parental involvement and academic achievement by race and socioeconomic status—consistently reports that correlations between parent involvement (as defined by a variety of measures) and academic achievement hold across minority and income groups. In other words, “one can conclude that parental involvement has a significant positive impact on children across race and across academic outcomes” (Jeynes, 2003, p. 213). Moreover, Jeynes stresses that these findings reveal that parent involvement—both voluntary and that which occurs as the result of parental involvement-focused programs—can be a powerful influence in reducing the achievement gap between White and minority students (Jeynes, 2007).

Joyce Epstein and her colleagues at the National Network for Partnership Schools (NNPS) at Johns Hopkins University are well known for their work in training teachers, principals, and district leaders to plan for and work with families. NNPS operates on a framework of six keys for developing successful partnerships. These keys are: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community (Epstein

et al., 2009). Both independent and internal research on NNPS's model has shown that family involvement is positively related to achievement in reading, math, and science (Epstein, 2005), as well as better attendance (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002).

As mentioned above, parent involvement is touted as a crucial element for student success under NCLB, yet research into parent involvement and adequate yearly progress (AYP) reveals that the relationship between the two may be more tenuous than the law asserts. In a survey of over 7,000 school principals, researchers found that when parent involvement was defined as *participation* in school events—such as back-to-school nights and parent–teacher conferences—there was a strong positive correlation between parent involvement and making AYP (Ma, Shen, & Krenn, 2013). However, when the researchers examined the relationship between school-initiated *provisions* for parents—such as creating drop-in centers or hiring parent coordinators—and AYP (controlling for student demographics), they found that these efforts, particularly in urban and suburban schools, were significantly correlated with not making AYP. The authors speculate that there may be differential effects between parent-initiated (choosing to attend) and school-initiated (providing supports) efforts towards involvement, with the former potentially being more salient and effective and the latter not being rooted in an understanding of parents' preferred means of engagement. In relation to language minority families, the researchers found that urban schools providing translators and translated materials for EL parents were twice as likely to make AYP than schools with similar EL populations that did not include these provisions (Ma et al., 2013). In sum, the findings of this study reveal that student achievement is related to both parent-driven as well as linguistically accessible means of parent involvement.

Theoretical Framework: Counterstorytelling

Individually and collectively, the research analyzed in the present study conveys a counterstory to the hegemonic parent involvement practices that have come to be seen as commonplace greatest hits (Hong, 2011) but may not be definitive of the ways in which EL parents are involved in their children's education. Counterstories are important in this regard because they juxtapose majoritarian stories through documenting the lived realities of groups of people who do not have social privilege (Knight, Norton, Bentley, & Dixon, 2004; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, 2006). Majoritarian stories, like the greatest hits, implicitly assert deficit orientations towards nonmajority populations (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Majoritarian storytelling reinforces inequalities by ascribing deficit-oriented assumptions to members of minority groups who may not enact the same practices or demonstrate the same behaviors. For

example, if an EL parent does not participate in their child's education in the same ways as English-speaking parents, they are viewed as not valuing their child's education (Yosso, 2006).

Rooted in critical race theories, counterstories offer alternative explanations from those put forth through majoritarian stories. For example, in their study of low-income, minority youth, Knight and colleagues (2004) use the teenagers' counterstories about college access to demonstrate the important role that their parents and families played in influencing their future aspirations. The families of these children were instrumental in shaping their desires to attend college, yet were not involved in the youth's education in ways that were apparent to school staff. In fact, many of their teachers assumed that the children's parents were uninvolved in their education. Similarly, the counterstories revealed through this review show that EL parents are involved in their children's education in meaningful ways that go beyond the greatest hits practices.

Researcher Positionality

As the primary instrument for selecting, cataloging, and analyzing these studies, I want to clearly acknowledge and address potential biases that may influence this work. I have had a longstanding professional interest in the role that language minority parents play in their children's education and have dedicated a significant portion of my career towards understanding their counterstories. In my academic work, I have focused my research on the role that Spanish-speaking families play in their children's education in both home and school contexts. My ability to speak Spanish and my experiences living and working in Latin America have greatly aided my ability to relate to the families with whom I work.

I attempt to examine the relationships between schools and families by understanding both sides, and I am well aware of the challenges that both encounter. I approach my work with families under the assumption that all parents—regardless of education level, immigration status, or income—care deeply about their children's future and will work with the knowledge and resources that they have available to them to ensure their children's success. At the same time, in working with schools and teachers, I presume that they too want all of their students to be successful and will work within their means to serve children as best they can. Yet I have observed many instances when these two groups—language minority families and school staff, despite their shared concern for children—struggle to understand one another and work together. Even in these instances I have often observed how both EL parents and teachers are aware of their own limitations and strive to ameliorate these disconnects.

Integrative Review

Research Questions

Given the social, policy, and research emphases in the U.S. on parent involvement over the past 20 years, this review is focused on understanding how these shifts relate to EL parent involvement in American schools. In reviewing research that documents and describes EL parent involvement as it is practiced, this review paints a portrait of the phenomenon in order to critique the notion of greatest hits practices. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) In what ways does research define and describe *in situ* EL parent involvement since 1994 (the first year that major federal legislation was passed emphasizing involvement)? (2) How do these definitions and descriptions present a counterstory to the greatest hits of parent involvement as they have been documented in research during that same time period?

Method

Criteria for Inclusion and Exclusion

In order to answer the questions above, this review only includes research that documents parental involvement with language minority families *in situ*. In other words, I did not include studies that used preestablished definitions or frameworks for defining parent involvement; instead I only included studies that describe parent involvement as it is actually practiced by schools and families. In this way, I was searching for studies that utilized inductive—as opposed to deductive—methods for data collection and analysis.

Only original research studies were included in this review; literature reviews, research summaries, policy briefs, translator pieces, and editorials were excluded from the corpus. I decided to include both book chapters and full-length books, first, because I found that a significant portion of the literature on this topic was found in books (26% of the studies in this review) and, second, because studies that are published in books often provide either longitudinal data collection and/or a level of detail that goes beyond that found in articles, which is particularly suitable for studies of *in situ* parent involvement.

Since I was concerned with the potential impact of federally enacted U.S. policies, I only included studies that were published after 1994 (the year IASA and Goals 2000 were passed) and conducted in an American K–12 context. Lastly, the studies needed to specifically research the involvement of EL families in their children's education as the main phenomenon under study.

Search Strategies

I used the following Boolean search terms to initially identify studies for review: “involvement” OR “participation” OR “engagement;” AND “parent” OR “family” OR “caretaker;” AND “English language learner” OR “English as a Second Language” OR “Limited English Proficient” OR “bilingual” OR “multilingual” OR “language minority” OR “linguistic minority” OR “immigrant” OR “migrant.” I searched the EBSCO databases, PsychINFO, Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts, ERIC, Google Scholar, and Academic Search Complete. I only searched for studies published after 1994 (see criteria above). I did not include theses or dissertations as their quality may vary. In article searches, I only looked for those that were published in peer-reviewed journals as a measure of quality control.

These search strategies resulted in an initial corpus of 72 unique publications. I then read each of these studies to select those that utilized inductive measures for documenting parent involvement within linguistic minority families. Additionally, in order to accurately analyze and summarize the ways in which research defined and described EL parent involvement *in situ*, I needed to assure that the studies included in the review were employing quality research methods. Since all of the studies employed either qualitative or mixed methods designs, I used Brantlinger, Jiménez, Klinger, Pugach, and Richardson’s (2005) quality indicators within qualitative research (p. 202) as standards to assure that studies utilized appropriate and systematic sampling, data collection, and data analysis techniques.¹ This resulted in a final corpus of the 31 articles, chapters, and full-length books that I analyzed for this review.

Cataloging Studies

I cataloged all of the studies in the review using Microsoft Excel. For each study I recorded the authors’ names, the year the study was published, the type of publication (journal article, chapter, book), the name of the publication, the sample size, the sample demographics, the study’s methodology, the research questions, the theoretical framework, and the *in situ* parent involvement observed. Whenever possible I used direct quotations for describing parent involvement in order to maintain the integrity of the original work to document the phenomenon.

Coding and Analysis

Initial cataloging allowed me to discern categories for coding each study. Using the cataloged studies, whenever possible I transposed the information into quantitative data in order to calculate descriptive statistics about the studies included in the review (see Table 1; further description is provided in the

Results section). I took a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to coding the studies' descriptions of *in situ* parent involvement. During several careful read-throughs, I developed an initial list of open codes, which became core categories from which to analyze the studies' descriptions of parent involvement. These core categories then became axial codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) from which other subcategories were surmised, sorted, and rechecked.

Table 1. Descriptive Information on Included Studies

Publication Information	N	Date	Percent	Range
Studies included in review	31			
Time span				1994 to 2014
Median publication year		2008		
Mode publication year		2011		
Study Source				
Journal articles	23		74%	
Book chapters	2		6%	
Books	6		20%	
Study Characteristics				
Qualitative design	27		87%	
Mixed methods design	4		13%	
Sample size range				1 to 182
Average sample size	21			
Elementary school context	26		84%	
Middle school context	20		65%	
High school context	14		45%	
Multi-grade contexts	16		52%	

Final versions of codes can be seen in Figure 1. The initial open codes and eventual axial codes were the three relationships that were at the center of families' involvement: relationships between families and schools, relationships between parents and children, and relationships among families. The subcategories are the bulleted lists that define involvement within each type of relationship.

Reliability Checks

I utilized the assistance of an experienced researcher to provide reliability checks on both the inclusion of studies in the review as well as the coding and categorization of included studies. She independently reviewed 20% of studies that resulted from my initial searches to decide whether or not they met

the inclusion criteria. From this review, we were in agreement on decisions for 87% of the studies she reviewed. We then met to discuss the two studies where our decisions differed and were able to arrive at 100% agreement as well as further refine the criteria for inclusion. Additionally, she categorized 20% of the included studies into the three codes described in Figure 1. Initially, we had an 86% agreement on the categorization of studies, and again, through discussion, we were able to come to agreement on the one study where our coding differed.

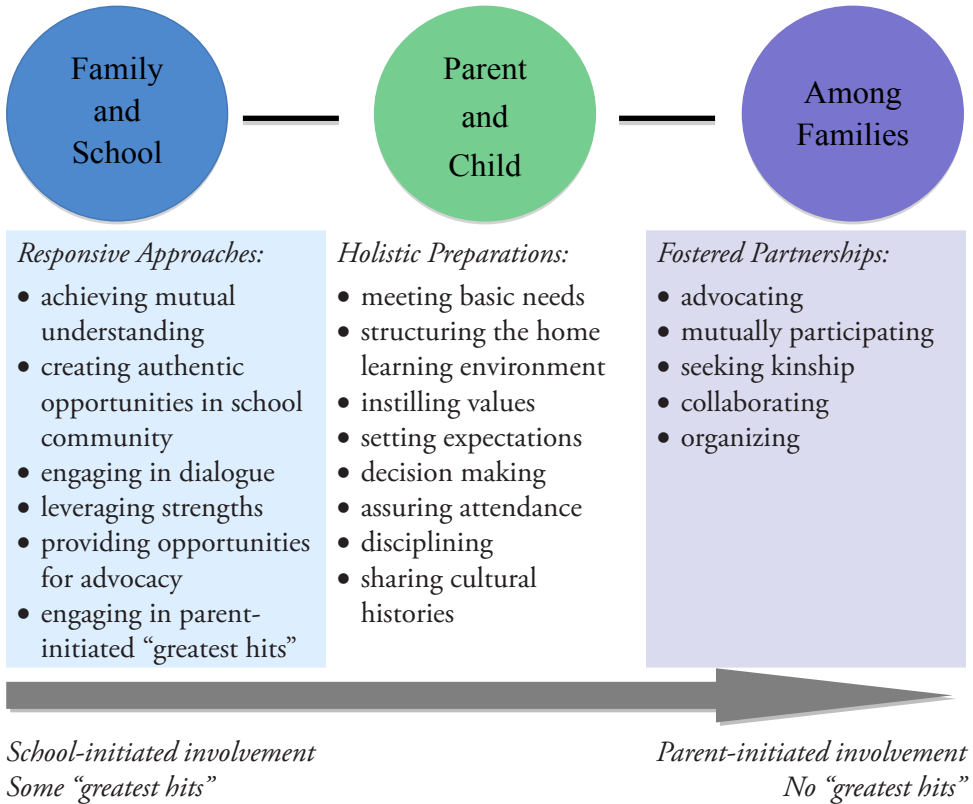


Figure 1. Relationship-Centered Parent Involvement in EL Families

Results

Literature Included in Review

Thirty-one studies met the inclusion criteria for this review. Table 1 displays descriptive information about the publications included. The studies include journal articles (74%), book chapters (6%), and full-length books (20%). The studies were published over a 20-year time span (1994 to 2014), but the bulk of the studies were published on the latter end of that range. The median year was 2008, and the mode was 2011.

The sample sizes of the studies ranged from as small as one—case studies presenting in-depth profiles of the experiences of one parent or one family—to as large as 182. Overall, studies tended to have small sample sizes, with the average sample size being 21 participants. The studies included elementary (84%), middle (65%), and high school (45%) contexts with 52% of studies investigating more than one of those contexts. The majority of the studies (87%) in this review employed a qualitative study design. The remaining studies all used a mixed methods approach.

Relationship-Centered Parent Involvement

After a series of read-throughs and several rounds of coding the studies' *in situ* EL parent involvement, I found that the definitions and descriptions of the ways that schools and EL families enacted parent involvement were all focused on one of three different relationships: (1) relationships that the families have with schools; (2) relationships between parents and children; or (3) relationships among families. Figure 1 provides a summary of each relationship, and Table 2 details the number of studies addressing each of these categories. Collectively, these studies document a counterstory to the greatest hits. Specifically, these studies document how EL families are involved in their children's education through the cultivation of specific relationships. Moreover, the relationships that this review identifies represent a continuum of involvement from school-initiated forms of involvement—some of which may still reflect a reliance on the greatest hits—to more parent-led forms of involvement, which are absent of the greatest hits.

Table 2. Studies Within Each Relationship Category

Relationship Category	Number of Studies in Category	Percentage	Median Publication Year
Family and School	20	65%	2008
Parent and Child	6	19%	2002
Among Families	5	16%	2012

Relationships Between Families and Schools

The first category is the largest in the review, with almost two-thirds of the studies describing EL parent involvement through the relationships that families have with their children's school. The studies in this category explain parent involvement through responsive approaches—or ways that schools and families interact—that strive to understand EL families' existing involvement as well as provide meaningful ways to further involve them in the school community.

Specifically, these studies highlight means of EL parent involvement that are based upon a mutual understanding between families, teachers, and school staff. These studies document how mutual understanding is achieved through engaging in open dialogue and opportunities for relationship building (Chen, Kyle, & McIntyre, 2008; Lawson & Alameda-Lawson, 2012; Quezada, 2004; Waterman, 2008; Wiseman, 2010). Moreover, these studies stress that schools create authentic opportunities for participation in the school community that leverage parents' strengths and resources (Hong, 2011; Iddings & Katz, 2007; Kumar, 2011; Larrota & Yamamura, 2011), are responsive to their needs and goals (Lopez, Scribner, & Mahitivanic, 2011), and provide them with opportunities to advocate for the education they desire for their children (Diaz Soto, 1997; Quiñonez & Kiyama, 2014; Ramirez, 2005). Inherent in these approaches to parent involvement is a directionality of engagement from schools to families. In other words, the onus of developing understanding, fostering dialogue, and providing opportunities for leadership lies upon the school. Furthermore, underlying these approaches to parent involvement is the assumption that, in the end, these efforts will prove mutually beneficial to both schools and families and will also facilitate children's academic success.

Also implicit in these approaches is the idea that schools view parents as advocates for their children. Yet even though schools want parents to be vocal participants in their children's education, being an advocate may not come easily to some EL parents or may be passively enacted. In their portrayal of immigrant families' transitions to the U.S., Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) note that there can be initial tensions between families and the ways that schools might expect them to be involved in their children's education. Moreover, some parents may not see themselves as capable or responsible for micromanaging the work of teachers. Instead, for families that may be escaping violence in their home countries, being able to safely attend school could be seen as an achievement in and of itself. Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco also note that initially many immigrants have a high level of respect for teachers and would not want to critique them or their work, but with time these same parents may also become frustrated with what they perceive to be a lack of discipline in schools and may then be motivated to act in order to improve their child's educational environment. This often results in parents looking for another school or even moving to another area, not necessarily acting to change the current school setting (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

It is also interesting to note that the approaches laid out by the studies in this category are not without reference to the greatest hits—thus reflecting their pervasiveness within American schools and perhaps even some parents' understanding of what their involvement should look like. In fact, several

studies in this category emphasized EL parents' desire to comply with schools' expectations for communication and attendance at school meetings (Lo, 2009; Sutterby, Rubin, & Abrego, 2007) as well as for reading to children at home, even if it was not a part of the family's regular routine (Dudley-Marling, 2009; Sutterby et al., 2007). Additionally, though these approaches are aimed at understanding families and creating opportunities for their involvement, schools may also leverage their relationships with families as a means for encouraging parents' successful participation in the greatest hits (Lopez et al., 2001) as well as structuring interventions whose outcomes may be geared towards participation in the greatest hits (Chen et al., 2008; Larrota & Yamamura, 2011). While not as strong as the latter two categories described below, this first category on the continuum of relationships still contains evidence of a counterstory through the actions that these schools took to engage and understand families rather than solely emphasize predetermined practices.

This category also contained three studies whose *in situ* EL parent involvement included tensions between conflicting approaches to parent involvement. These tensions arose from competing ideas about educator-led programs to incentivize parents' participation in school events that resemble the ways that English-speaking parents participate (i.e., the greatest hits) versus adaptive and responsive practices for relationship-building with families in order to meet their needs (Gates & Smothermon, 2006; Grant & Wong, 2004; Lim, 2012).

For example, in a study of Korean American parents' involvement, Lim (2012) noted that the school expected these parents to participate in the same ways as English-speaking families, and when they did not, schools interpreted them as passive and unconcerned with their children's learning. Yet, the parents reported that they had very high aspirations for their children, respect for the teachers, and frequently engaged in networking with other Korean American parents (Lim, 2012). Two other studies in this category highlight the specific initiatives made by educators to build strong relationships with EL families through responsive approaches, even though they work within systems (schools and districts) that continue to value greatest hits practices above other forms of involvement (Gates & Smothermon, 2006; Grant & Wong, 2004).

Relationships Between Parents and Children

The second most prevalent category of studies (19%) had definitions or descriptions of *in situ* EL parent involvement that focused on the parent-child relationship. These definitions and descriptions highlighted the ways that parents holistically prepared their children for school. These preparation practices included providing for the child's basic needs (Liska Carger, 1996; Walker & Dalhouse, 2008), structuring a home environment that is conducive to learning (Panferov, 2010), instilling values (Liska Carger, 1996), setting

expectations (Panferov, 2010; Walker & Dalhouse, 2008), helping the child make education-related decisions (Liska Carger, 1996), asking questions about school (Poza et al., 2014), ensuring the child attends school, disciplining the child (Walker & Dalhouse, 2008), and teaching the child about the family's cultural history (Walker & Dalhouse, 2008).

The studies in this category focused more on the holistic preparations that parents provide their children in order to be successful at school and less on families' participation in the greatest hits. The only references to the greatest hits included attending school events that parents thought were supportive of their children's learning (Poza et al., 2014) and providing homework help (Panferov, 2010). The absence of homework assistance from the majority of these studies is striking as it is commonly viewed as a key parent involvement practice, even though evidence supporting the connection to children's academic achievement is tenuous (Fan & Chen, 2001; Froiland et al., 2012; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2005, 2007).

A family's culture may also inform the ways that parents holistically prepare their children for school. Two studies in this category provided insight into specific, culturally informed practices of Mexican American families. First, in an ethnographic study of a Mexican American family, Delgado-Gaitan (1994) describes how the parents she studied provide their children with *consejos*, a word in Spanish that is translated as "advice" in English, but connotes both empathy and expectation for success. Moreover, the author documents how these *consejos* effectively counteracted the schools' hegemonic practices through empowering statements about the parents' belief in their children's ability to be successful in school (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994). Similarly, *Con Respeto, Bridging the Differences Between Culturally Diverse Families and Schools: An Ethnographic Portrait* (Valdés, 1996) describes the ways in which 10 Mexican American women support their children's learning at home. These mothers instill in their children an appreciation for education by emphasizing the importance of education and the family's reliance on children's future success. Additionally, they focus on making sure their children are well behaved and respectful to their teachers, but they do not regularly engage in what might be seen as teaching practices—such as learning letters or practicing math facts—at home (Valdés, 1996).

Relationships Among Families

The third category described parent involvement by the ways in which parents participate in their children's education through fostering partnerships with other EL families. This approach to parent involvement allows parents who may share a language, culture, and/or educational aspiration for their children to work together and present a united voice to advocate on behalf of their

children. These studies demonstrate how EL families have organized parent groups (Bratt, Briceño, & Violand-Sanchez, 1998; Dyrness, 2011; Jasis, 2013; Jasis & Ordonez-Jasis, 2012) that not only allow for kinship (Rivera & Lavan, 2012) but also encourage parents to take on leadership roles and collectively advocate to promote social change (Dyrness, 2011). As opposed to the studies included in the relationships between schools and families category, the studies in this group show a directionality of engagement from the families to the school. In other words, involvement starts from the families who work together in order to change the school context. It is notable that there was no mention of the greatest hits practices within this category. Hong (2011) notes that in order to move beyond the greatest hits, schools must show a willingness to embrace these parent-led forms of involvement.

An in-depth portrayal of families fostering partnerships in this category was the book, *Mothers United: An Immigrant Struggle for Socially Just Education*, a powerful account of what EL parents can accomplish when they work together. In this book, Dyrness (2011) describes how a group of low-income Mexican and Central American immigrant mothers came together through a local community organization and collectively—despite many barriers—accomplished reform in their children’s school. Through their shared passion for and commitment to pursuing the best possible educational environment for their children, these women were able to become active participants in planning and reforming their children’s school. The study reveals how their relationships with one another, their “*convivencia*—the relationships built through the sharing of daily struggles and victories” (Dyrness, 2011, p. 25), were essential for fueling their movement and ultimate success.

Discussion and Conclusions: A Counterstory Beyond the Greatest Hits

My analyses of research studies documenting EL parent involvement *in situ* have revealed an emphasis on the relationships that parents have with schools, with their children, and with other families. Viewed collectively, these observations of *in situ* EL parent involvement create a counterstory (Yosso, 2006) to the greatest hits of parent involvement by demonstrating the numerous ways that EL parents are involved in their children’s learning. While the greatest hits emphasize specific, observable practices that parents might be seen engaging in either at home or at school, the studies included in this review reveal that EL parent involvement might be less obvious. Studies within the category of family and school relationships detail responsive approaches that schools make towards understanding EL families and providing meaningful opportunities

for involvement. While not every study in this category contained evidence of the greatest hits, those that did reflect the pervasiveness of these practices. Studies emphasizing relationships between EL parents and children highlight culturally informed, holistic ways that parents prepare their children for school. Studies that detail relationships among EL families show the powerful ways in which families are able to foster change-making partnerships with one another. Moreover, when viewed as a continuum from the between schools and families category to the among families category, relationship-centered EL parent involvement demonstrates an increasingly diminished reliance on the greatest hits practices and moves away from school-initiated approaches towards a greater emphasis on parent-initiated involvement (see Figure 1). Additionally, as demarcated by the median publication years in Table 2, there is evidence that research from the among families category is more recent ($M = 2012$, $SD = 6.3$), perhaps reflecting a trend towards more parent-led involvement.

As noted in the introduction to this study, research in this field is moving away from the term “parent involvement” and into “family engagement” to reflect both the shared responsibility held by schools and families as well as the important role of other family members in supporting a child’s education (Ferrara, 2011). Yet, as evidenced through the wording in NCLB, many policies that influence practice tend toward the narrower term, “parent involvement.” It is possible that this word choice may limit the ways in which schools and families view themselves and one another, therefore influencing the ways in which they engage.

The greatest hits approach to involvement emphasizes activities and practices rather than dynamic processes (Calabrese Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis, & George, 2009; Hong, 2011; Warren, Hong, Rubin, & Uy, 2009). The studies included in this review show that research documenting EL parent involvement *in situ* is less defined by activities or practices and more focused on dynamic processes. A focus on processes over activities can be understood through the Ecologies of Parental Engagement framework (Calabrese Barton et al., 2009), which can be summarized as:

a shift from focusing primarily on what parents do to engage with their children’s school and with other actors within those schools, to also considering how parents understand the hows and whys of their engagement and how this engagement relates more broadly to parents’ experiences and actions in and out of the school community. (p. 3)

While the greatest hits were present within the category of relationships between families and school, they were not a part of every study in that category. Instead, the studies in that category revealed how, in working with EL families, many schools start from trying to understand the ways in which parents are

already involved in their children's lives—a stark contrast to the ways greatest hits are often encouraged.

It is important to note that EL parents are not a uniform group. In fact, they represent a diversity of backgrounds, languages, educational experiences, and (potentially) ways of being involved in their children's education that are not limited to what has been documented in research. Jeynes (2010) points out that many parents may be engaged in subtle means of involvement that are not always visible. He notes that parenting practices and attitudes, while not always easy to observe or measure, are just as (or more) crucial to a child's educational success as the pedagogy that parents employ with their children. Finally, this review reinforces existing research noting that, just as “there is no single effective method to assist ELL families” (Téllez & Waxman, 2010, p. 103), neither is there a single means by which EL parents participate in their children's education.

Limitations

As with any research study, this review is not without limitations. I acknowledge that as the sole researcher, I am influenced by my biases and constrained by my perspectives. Additionally, it is possible that the search terms and databases limited my access to additional studies that could have met the inclusion criteria and been part of the corpus. Lastly, I was striving to understand EL parent involvement as it is documented in research, yet not every context or community has been studied. It is likely that there are many more schools and EL families that are engaged in parent involvement practices that also deviate from the greatest hits but have yet to be documented through research.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should seek to document and describe the unique and innovative EL parent involvement practices in which families, schools, and communities are engaging. In this work, researchers should be clear about what constitutes parent involvement, where their definitions come from, and what limitations exist within their definitions of such a broad phenomenon.

Due to the nature of the research questions, the majority of the studies in this review employed qualitative or mixed methodologies to describe and document *in situ* EL parent involvement. However, it is important that future research go beyond just describing involvement in order to examine how these types of involvement relate to schools' and families' development. It would be interesting for future research to explore how broader conceptions of EL parent involvement—like those detailed in this study's relationship-centered approaches—relates to children's achievement and/or changes in teachers' and

parents' perceptions over time. Many of the studies included in this review do not consider the relationships between *in situ* parent involvement and children's academic outcomes. Beyond just documenting this phenomenon, it is important that future research show how EL parent involvement relates to children's academic growth over time.

Implications for Practice

First and foremost, educators should operate under the notion that all parents care about their child's education, though they will inevitably interact with the school, with their child, and with other families in varying ways. Schools should invest in families by showing a genuine interest in their lives before demanding that they participate within the school community (Jeynes, 2011). Instead of insisting on greatest hits practices that may not fit with EL parents' cultural or linguistic understanding of involvement, schools should strive to understand the successful ways in which parents are already involved in their children's education.

At the same time, I acknowledge that teachers and parents are constrained by the time and resources that they have available to them. In order for schools to support the involvement of all families, they need to be backed by policies that also value forms of parent involvement beyond the greatest hits.

Ideally, approaches to parent involvement should emphasize all three of the relationship categories highlighted above. Schools should express an interest in the relationships between parents and children and strive to understand families' interactions around education and learning outside of school. Finally, schools should facilitate opportunities for EL families to connect with one another as well as opportunities to act together within the school community.

Endnote

¹Brantlinger and colleagues' (2005) quality indicators go beyond established evaluative criteria for qualitative research (cf. Miles & Huberman, 1994) in that they provide researchers with specific indicators based upon study design (e.g., interview, observation, etc.) from participant selection through reporting.

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*Indicates a study included in the review.

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