Initial Evaluation of a Latina/o Parent College Planning Program: "It Changed My Life and My Child's Life"

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Abstract

Parents have long served a crucial role in their children's postsecondary success through guidance and support. In an effort to help Latina/o parents in emerging immigrant communities overcome any limits to their knowledge around college-going practices, this study evaluates the feasibility and beginning efficacy of a parent-focused, Spanish-language psychoeducational program (*Padres Promoviendo Preparación*). The program is novel in that it centers on increasing parent college-going knowledge and self-efficacy for guiding their children forward; it was delivered in both school and congregational settings; and the content was delivered in Spanish by community advocates working in collaboration with university-based personnel. The quantitative pre/post measures indicate that the program was successful at increasing parents' knowledge and self-efficacy, and the qualitative data help to expand upon the ways that parents perceived the impact or benefit of the program for their families. Implications for educators, advocates, and policymakers center on the impact of parent-focused programs on knowledge gains and how that knowledge transforms the parent–child relationship. As schools and communities seek to engage with families to increase Latina/o student post-high school options, this program and these findings can provide both context and content for doing so.

Key Words: Latina/o immigrant families, outreach program, college planning

Introduction

Parent expectations and aspirations for their children's postsecondary pathways can have an important influence on the thoughts and behaviors of the students (National Postsecondary Education Cooperative, 2007). In general, parents can communicate their educational aspirations for their children in two ways: through encouragement and emotional support, and through actions and instrumental support (e.g., taking students on campus visits, helping to organize college application materials, starting a college savings account; Gonzalez, Villalba, & Borders, 2015). However, not all parents are equally positioned in terms of providing emotional and instrumental support for postsecondary access (Auerbach, 2004; Bernhardt, 2013; Walker, Ice, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2011). The current study addresses a situation commonly encountered by immigrant parents: they exert a powerful influence in terms of emotional support but may not have the tools needed to provide instrumental support related to education in the unfamiliar host country.

It is well documented that immigrant parents hold a strong value for educational opportunity and are passionate in encouraging their children to strive and achieve in school (Ceja, 2004; Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese, & Garnier, 2001). Often, one of the core reasons for families to immigrate to the U.S. is to provide greater educational and occupational opportunities for their children (Suárez-Orozco, Onaga, & Lardemelle, 2010). Thus, immigrant parents are optimistic about the potential for success in the U.S. and try to motivate their children through their encouragement and the example of their hard work and persistence (Gonzalez et al., 2015).

However, for parents who did not attend college themselves, emotional support is easier to enact than instrumental support. In the case of immigrant parents, there may be additional barriers that make postsecondary planning behaviors more challenging (Auerbach, 2004; Gonzalez, 2015). Even immigrant parents with a formal educational history in their home country may not be as familiar with educational systems in the U.S. and thus unsure of how to advise and guide their children on a postsecondary pathway (Gándara, 2002; Tornatzky, Cutler, & Lee, 2002). In addition, immigrant parents may encounter language or cultural barriers to school engagement or technological barriers to gathering online information for college planning (Walker et al., 2011). Depending on their socioeconomic status, parents may be concerned about supporting their child's college aspirations financially (Auerbach, 2004; Bernhardt, 2013).

Thus, immigrant parents do have strengths and funds of knowledge regarding college aspirations (Kiyama, 2010), but they also have needs in terms of

information, orientation to the task, and models of how to move forward. Typically, formal and informal outreach from educators and schools regarding postsecondary options is directed toward the students themselves. However, the students already have some advantages over their parents in that they are immersed in the school environment and are typically acculturating to language and societal norms more quickly. Outreach to all students needs to continue, and at the same time, inclusion of immigrant parents as members of the extended school community is essential.

One option is to provide educational outreach for immigrant parents, building upon the cultural strengths they already have and providing them with the tools they need (e.g., information about educational systems, confidence in guiding their children along this path, supportive community to work through concerns). The *Padres Promoviendo Preparación* (Parents Promoting [Educational] Preparation; *PPP*) outreach program was created with input from stakeholders and Latino immigrant parents in our region; further details are available in Gonzalez (2017). The Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) model of parental engagement suggests that parents' capacity to be involved can be enhanced by communicating the important role parents play, giving parents specific information about what they can do, creating parent networks, and offering positive feedback on involvement attempts. The scholarly literature has a few examples of outreach to immigrant parents regarding postsecondary planning, but not many (Auerbach, 2004; Downs et al., 2008; Fann, Jarsky, & McDonough, 2009).

Auerbach (2004) published a case study based on field notes and interviews from participants in a three-year program aimed at improving college access tools in Latina/o families with high school-aged children. The program included bilingual monthly meetings with the goal to provide a safe space for marginalized parents to learn about college and expand their social capital by interacting with educators, counselors, and advocates. Auerbach (2004) found that parents did leave the program with increased knowledge and awareness about college planning, a sense of confidence in their ability to engage with the topic, and an expanded network of people and resources. The current study seeks to build upon Auerbach's study by sharing both qualitative and quantitative program evaluation data and including data from an emerging immigrant community. Auerbach's study was based in Los Angeles, a traditional immigrant destination, and our study was based in an emerging community in the rural southeast, where a rapid increase in immigration was seen between 1990–2000 (Wainer, 2004).

Downs et al. (2008) provided a participant–observer perspective on the initial stages of setting up and implementing a career and college knowledge

program with Latina/o parent peers as leaders in rural Washington state. Some of the critical issues raised by the parents who were trained to be leaders of the sessions included informational needs of Latina/o immigrant families regarding college preparation and most effective program delivery and participant recruitment strategies. The authors also reflected on some of the challenges of partnering with schools or finding college planning information in Spanish that was relevant to both documented and undocumented participants but did not offer any formal program evaluation data.

Finally, Fann, Jarsky, and McDonough (2009) offered a set of four weekly workshops at several Los Angeles middle schools on topics such as understanding the educational system, researching financial aid, and preparing a family action plan related to college planning. Parents completed a session evaluation form after each topic, and some participated in a phone interview at the conclusion of the workshop series; however, the article focused on the qualitative data. The authors noted the importance of cultural adaptations of traditional college planning information, such as noting where to find resources in Spanish or how opportunities would apply to an undocumented family member. One important difference between the workshops offered by Fann et al. and *PPP* is that the former was more informational in structure (i.e., a series of stand-alone topics delivered in a lecture format), and the latter was based on the psychoeducational group format found in the counseling field (i.e., a group limited to the same participants for eight weeks in order to generate trusting relationships, support, and connection in addition to information sharing).

Our study of *PPP* contributes to the literature by (a) including formal program evaluation data (qualitative interviews on program effectiveness and participant gains in addition to quantitative pre/post intervention measures), (b) including a variety of settings and program facilitators (e.g., Latina/o leaders in the faith-based community in addition to bilingual school-based personnel), and (c) engaging with an emerging immigrant community on the east coast. The *PPP* program should be applicable to Latina/o families in school communities in general, and to newer Latina/o immigrant communities in particular. Emerging immigrant communities differ from traditional immigrant communities in that there are often fewer role models and resources for newcomers to access, and support systems may be nonexistent or still under construction (Gonzalez et al., 2015). Families who are recent immigrants may still be acculturating to language and cultural customs as well, and the receiving community members may be mixed in their attitudes toward the newcomers.

Thus, the purpose of the current study is to share qualitative and quantitative findings from a mixed methods program evaluation regarding the initial efficacy of an eight-week Spanish-language college planning outreach program

(*PPP)*. The program's purpose was to help Latina/o immigrant parents better equip themselves with the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to effectively guide their children through postsecondary planning. Specifically, the research questions were: (1) how do scores on a college knowledge inventory change before and after an eight-week outreach program; (2) how do scores on a college going self-efficacy scale change before and after an eight-week outreach program; and (3) how do parents describe their experiences in the group and changes in their ability to assist their children after the program? The mixed-methods approach was a convergent parallel design, with pre/post surveys and interviews planned from the beginning and collected concurrently so that we could have the fullest possible description of the effectiveness of the program (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Methods

Procedures

Through years one and two of the project, program implementation sites included four churches, a high school, and a social service agency. After receiving IRB approval for the study, we collaborated with our partners at the implementation sites on the recruitment phase. For example, the pastors at the churches announced the groups and at times asked *PPP* organizers to come after Sunday services to answer questions and meet members of the congregation. In the high school, a bilingual parent outreach coordinator promoted the groups and gathered a list of interested parents for us. Eligible participants (i.e., Latina/o immigrant adults living in a specified county with high school-aged children) came to the first group meeting and received informed consent materials from one of the researchers. Regardless of whether or not they consented to be included in the research study, all interested adults were eligible to stay and participate in the eight-week psychoeducational group. Typical groups had 10–20 participants.

During year one, all groups were facilitated in Spanish by a bilingual counselor trained by the principal investigators (PIs) and funded to fulfill this role. During year two, designated leaders at the partnering sites received training, began to observe the bilingual counselor conduct the groups, and eventually co-led the groups with her or assumed leadership and facilitated the groups themselves. Groups met for eight sessions, with the last session typically including a graduation party and informal question and answer period. Topics for the sessions are described more fully in a previous publication (Villalba, Gonzalez, Borders, & Hines, 2014), but they were (a) goals/aspirations, (b) your child's interests and needs, (c) getting the most out of high school, (d) understanding

types of universities, (e) the admissions process, (f) financial aid (two parts), and (g) review and graduation. Postsecondary options discussed in the group ranged from 4-year and 2-year degrees to military service, opening a business, and apprenticeship in trades; however, more time was spent on university/college. There was no cost and no payment offered for attending the groups, but childcare was provided, along with a light snack.

The quantitative pretests were collected during the first meeting session, and the posttests were collected either during session seven or eight. Participants also were contacted by phone after the group to inquire if they would be willing to respond to a qualitative phone interview regarding their experiences in the group. Qualitative phone interviews were conducted by two bilingual graduate research assistants who had received training on implementation of the structured interview protocol. After completing a practice interview with a PI, the assistants called group participants one to three weeks after they had completed the outreach program and asked if they were willing to participate in the interview. Interviews were scheduled at a convenient time and audiorecorded with the participant's knowledge. The participants received a gift card in the mail for their extra time in completing the interview. Interviews were then transcribed and coded in Spanish by the bilingual PIs (authors).

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was utilized to identify theory-based themes organized around the interview questions. That is to say, coding was at the semantic level, not seeking a deeper interpretation but simply organizing the words of the participants to look for key themes and implications. The investigators/authors reviewed one transcript together to come to agreement about the size, prevalence, and weight of data extracts to be coded and to identify analytic interest in coding for (a) general experiences in the group, (b) changes in parent–child engagement after the group, and (c) knowledge acquired as a result of participation.

Participants

In the quantitative study, there were 60 matched pairs of pre/post data from participants who completed an entire eight-week group sometime during years one and two, and also 23 pretests and 10 posttests from participants who had missed a portion of the program but completed some sessions. Although we were unable to follow up with those who did not complete a group, their informal feedback typically related to situations in their home lives (e.g., medical problems, change in job). The Latina/o parents who attended the group, like the Latina/o immigrants in the region, were predominantly Mexican in origin. However, we continue to use the word Latina/o for inclusiveness, even while acknowledging that most families in the groups (92%) were from Mexico.

Participants were 39.8 years old on average, female (90%), and had been living in the U.S. for an average of 17.3 years. The types of occupations reported were manual labor (factory work, housekeeping, construction, etc.), and almost all families reported eligibility for free/reduced lunch at school. The level of educational attainment for the sample was difficult to establish, as responses to the "highest educational level completed" item yielded a variety of descriptors, varying by country of origin (*prepa, secundaria, colegio*, *sexto grado,* etc.). Of importance for the program evaluation, the sample was found to have relatively low literacy in Spanish, which led to some challenges with the pre/post survey forms (D'Alonzo, 2011).

A subsample of 27 female participants from the quantitative study also agreed to complete the qualitative phone interview, out of 42 eligible parents who had completed a group during two particular semesters (end of year one and beginning of year two, in terms of the total project). The qualitative data was only collected during this time because of the limited availability of bilingual research assistants and participant incentive funds.

Quantitative Measures

College-Going Self-Efficacy Scale (CGSES; Adapted)

Gibbons and Borders (2010) created the CGSES in order to assess a student's level of confidence in his/her ability to complete tasks necessary for gaining entrance to college and persisting once admitted. The CGSES has 30 items and good internal consistency with a diverse sample of middle school students as its norm group (total scale alpha = .94). With the scale authors' permission, we adapted the items in the college entrance subscale to portray the parents' point of view rather than the student's. For example, instead of "I can choose a college that is good for me," our item read, "I can help my child choose a college that is good for him/her." Of the 15 college entrance items on the CGSES, 12 were selected. The PIs removed items that did not make sense for adaptation to a parent version, such as "I can make my family proud with my choices after high school." As part of our adaptation process, the two bilingual investigators used the back-translation procedure (Breslin, 1970) to go from English to Spanish and back to help ensure the intended meaning was conveyed.

Due to the relatively low levels of reading/writing literacy in Spanish as well as English, we adapted the instructions to indicate that the group leader would read the items out loud, the participants could ask questions if anything was unclear, and then they would circle the best response on their paper copy of the measure (D'Alonzo, 2011). Due to the oral administration, we also simplified the responses from a 4-point Likert scale to a visual analog scale with three images (thumb pointing up = yes, I can; thumb pointing down = no, I can't;

thumb pointing to the left = I'm not sure if I can or not; Williams & Swanson, 2001). The scoring was then coded as three points for confidence in ability to engage in the task, two points for uncertainty about engaging in the task, and one point for lack of confidence or efficacy for task completion.

In year one of the study, participants completed all 12 self-efficacy items, but the authors noticed that the process was somewhat stressful, difficult, and time-consuming for them. Therefore, in year two, we reduced the number of items to six, using the year one data to identify and keep the items with more variability. Internal reliability coefficients in the current study were not calculated due to the use of the visual analog scale (thumbs up and down).

North Carolina College Knowledge Inventory (NCCKI; Adapted)

The NCCKI (GEAR UP North Carolina, 2008) was created for use with the North Carolina GEAR UP program, which is a college access program for middle and high school students. The original NCCKI has 29 items which are both general in nature (e.g., "What is a Pell Grant?" and "The best definition of a bachelor's degree is?") and specific to knowledge of postsecondary options and resources in North Carolina (e.g., "What does CFNC stand for?"—the College Foundation of North Carolina). Although the NCCKI was used by GEAR UP in many schools across the state, we have not been able to access data to verify its psychometric properties. In terms of face validity, it includes many topics that are common to college access curricula, including types of colleges and degrees, financial aid, entrance exams, and steps in college admissions process.

As with the CGSES, the NCCKI items were back-translated into Spanish and oral administration was offered during the outreach program. We selected 13 multiple choice items for use in year one, based on material that was planned to be covered in the outreach program. After year one, we also opted to shorten and simplify the NCCKI, changing it to a true/false format due to the difficulty experienced by program participants with the multiple-choice format (D'Alonzo, 2011). Thus, in year two, we included six items and the visual analog scale, including a thumb pointing up for true, and thumb pointing down for false, and a thumb pointing to the left for "I don't know." In scoring, a correct answer was given a "1" and an incorrect answer (including "I don't know") was given a "0". As with the CGSES, internal reliability was not calculated due to the use of the visual analog scale.

Qualitative Instrument

The qualitative phone interview protocol was prepared by the first author. The interviews consisted of five main questions (i.e., how was your experience

in the group; did you notice any changes in yourself; [or] changes in the way you interacted with your child after the group; was the group effective in helping you learn needed information; was there anything you felt was lacking in the group) with follow-ups as needed. Procedures and participants were described above.

Results

Quantitative Findings

As seen in Table 1, the paired (both pre- and posttest scores, n = 60) and independent (only one or the other, but not both scores, n = 33) t-tests showed similar trends in terms of gains in knowledge and self-efficacy (Weimer, 1999). Parents who completed both the pre- and posttests (paired data) reported higher levels of college knowledge after program participation, $t(59) = -10.470$, $p < .000$, as well as higher levels of self-efficacy for college planning, $t(55) = -9.697$, $p < .000$. Pre to post gains in knowledge $t(31) = -4.21$, $p = .000$ and self-efficacy beliefs $t(30) = -2.93$, $p = .006$ also were observed in the unpaired (independent) data.

Table 1. *T*-test Comparison of Pretest and Posttest Scores

Matched Pair Sample	***N***	**Pretest means (*SD*)**	**Posttest means (*SD*)**
College Knowledge	60	.353 (.24)	.725** (.22)
Self-Efficacy	56	2.18 (.48)	2.75** (.29)
Independent Sample	***N***	**Means (*SD*)**	**Means *(SD)***
College Knowledge pretest only	23	.383 (.217)	
College Knowledge posttest only	10		.716** (.187)
Self-Efficacy pretest only	23	2.18 (.417)	
Self-Efficacy posttest only	9		2.64* (.317)

*$p < .05$, **$p < .001$

Qualitative Findings

As seen in Table 2, the thematic analysis described the qualitative data in terms of three major areas: general experiences in the program, knowledge acquired by the participants, and changes in parent–child engagement noticed by the participants after the group.

Table 2. Results of Thematic Coding of Qualitative Interviews (n = 27)

Main Themes	Subthemes	Key Ideas Within Theme
General experience in group	Fellowship with other parents, comfortable	Shared common experiences with other parents, was welcomed by facilitator, able to ask all my questions
	New feelings and awareness/perspectives	Opened my eyes, gained helpful new information, feel more hopeful, never knew these things, see more opportunities now
Knowledge acquired	Examples of content	New information about financial aid, transferring from 2-year to 4-year, high school course selection, etc.
	Examples of process	New web resources so they can investigate on their own, open a way forward, find answers, feel more hopeful and confident in abilities
	Additional needs	Wanted more info about DACA or undocumented status, about how to complete an application on line, where to go when they encounter a problem, etc.
Parent–child engagement	New communication patterns	Listen to children more openly now, and see children being more open to their guidance, can have a dialogue between two informed parties
	New sense of confidence	Not afraid to go into school and advocate for child, can start to enact plans when worries and barriers are lessened, feeling secure and oriented to the topic

General Experiences

Overall, parent participants were very positive about their experiences in the outreach program and comfortable in the setting. One parent phrased this as "The fellowship with the classmates, with the leader, one feels very comfortable with them. The leader did not get disturbed by requests for help; she always tried to help." Parents also described how the experience was eye-opening to them. Many participants would use phrases such as "*no tenia ni idea…*" (I didn't have any idea…) to describe their starting point and were able to point out how the new information had given them hope, shifted their perspectives

on education, and opened up new possibilities. As one participant commented, "It helped me a lot because now I have a way to motivate my child to keep moving forward, keep studying. Now I know where to start, more or less—where to speak." Another mentioned, "For me, more than anything, it opened my eyes, because the truth is, I didn't have the information. Now I have the information and [the presenters] opened my eyes that my children have a possibility."

Changes in Knowledge

The theme of new knowledge acquired in the group includes three component parts. First, parents listed examples of new content they had learned, such as high school course selection, transferring from a 2-year to a 4-year college, and financial aid applications and resources. One parent said very specifically,

> I didn't know anything about how to get college credits or transfer them or anything, and with these classes now I know how—also how to apply for scholarships; first you need to have a review with the FAFSA, to see what the economic level of the family is.

Another more general quote that represents knowledge gains was "I didn't have any idea how the system here was so that [my children] could study. And now, with the support [of the class], now I know exactly what I have to do." Another parent addressed the unique situation of her family, saying, "I have a daughter who has DACA [Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals] and, above all, to know that there are a lot of opportunities for her."

Other parents mentioned some of the barriers that had kept them from acquiring this college knowledge, including limited English proficiency, lack of experience using a computer, and no prior personal experience with university education. "Without information, we don't know what to do," stated one participant. Another said, "It made me a little scared to approach the school and ask things because I don't speak the language; it's very difficult. Now, we ask for interpreters so we can approach the school and ask for a little bit more help." Sadly, although the class tried to highlight school counselors as a key resource for parents to acquire college knowledge, the participants had mixed experiences with that source. One parent simply acknowledged, "I don't have much confidence in the school counselor because sometimes they put too many kids with one counselor, truly. But it's really important, since the counselor will be like a guide in high school." Another parent lamented that they couldn't hear the same things their child was hearing from the school counselor, and thus were not informed in the same way.

The second part of the knowledge theme included examples of the process of learning. Parents noted the importance of finding websites with college access information in Spanish, so that they could investigate independently and

find their own answers when questions came up. Having these tools made parents feel more hopeful about the educational possibilities and more confident about their role as knowledgeable guides. Even after the group ended, parents indicated they could continue to make their way forward with the resources they had learned to use. A parent stated, "It was enough information that now we know how to open a path forward; we know how to investigate more." Another parent commented, "We can look at certain websites so we can understand the options that are out there for her." Importantly, the existence of Spanish-language resources on the web empowered parents to take leadership roles in finding information themselves and sharing it with their children. A participant said,

> Even though one doesn't know English, one can still knock on doors to be able to help our children. And something that helped me a lot was these [web] pages, I have them marked there, so I can go into the Internet and be able to apply and be able to help my child—between the two of us, we can do it.

Finally, parents identified additional topics that they would have liked to hear more about during the group. The most frequently identified topic was to know more about how to advise a young person who was undocumented or had received temporary DACA status. While the group did offer financial aid resources that could be used regardless of legal status, the situations of undocumented students are often challenging, complicated, and unique. One parent noted,

> For me it's a bit frustrating because my son doesn't have good grades. Then I'm told that he has to have good grades to apply for a scholarship at a private university. With government scholarships there is no chance because he doesn't have papers. So, it's a little complicated…and we'd like to be certain how to help him.

Additional consultation may have been necessary to help these families make a plan for moving forward, which leads to the next subtheme. Parents asked if there was an advisor or resource they could access if they encountered a problem and needed help. One participant noted,

> They gave us a lot of information and the steps and the websites and everything, but maybe it would be better to ask for help from a person—that would be the only thing that maybe in this moment we are missing. A place to go to and they will help you, review your documents, and say, "you need this or that."

Finally, parents were interested in having more demonstrations of the steps of submitting a college application online, especially those parents who felt less

competent with technology overall. This was beyond the scope of the group but is useful for future recommendations.

Changes in Engagement

The other major theme in the qualitative interviews was parent–child engagement. This theme had two component parts, which were new communication patterns and a new sense of confidence. In terms of new patterns of communication, parents noticed that they were more likely after the group to set aside their agendas and assumptions and listen with an open mind to their children's future goals and concerns. One parent said, "They gave me the techniques to speak with my son and not get ahead of myself, to be calm and ask how things were going." Another parent said, "Before I would just say, 'Go study!' But now I know that if I am more involved with her and her studies, she puts more effort into it. I am more alert to her studies." Parents also noticed their children were more open to receiving their advice and guidance when they knew their parents were attending a class to learn about college going:

> Yes [children listen more] when they see that you know more. So, now when I come home and have more information, I feel they take what I say into consideration. They listen more because they know that the things you are saying are really true.

When parents could demonstrate that they knew what the SAT was or understood the steps in the financial aid process, then the children felt reassured that their parents could indeed help them. One example provided was of a child who went from a hopeless to a hopeful attitude:

> Perhaps before he was depressed because he did not know about these opportunities. But after listening, we learned it, and it lit a flame in him. He was more enthusiastic, saying "Let's go to the website, Mom! It's early, but let's go read it." When I came home after meetings he was always asking me, "What did they tell you, Mom? OK, tomorrow we are going to look for information—let's go!" I shared the power, the desire with him, and he returned it to me. It's a beautiful thing—it changed my life and my child's life.

Another parent told a similar story about her daughter suppressing her hopes because of the constraints of her family:

> I noticed a lot of changes in her when we would talk. She thought that she couldn't continue studying because she saw that, economically, we would not be able to get her to the career that she wanted. And now I see that she is much more animated because she sees that we can do it. If I look for aid, we can do it.

Finally, parents could see a partnership developing with their children on this common college access project. One parent said, "We made an alliance with each other, between the children and what I learned. We do a little bit together each night to work on college applications." Another parent said, "My child used to talk to me about college, but I had no idea how to respond, so it would just end there. Now we have a plan about entering community college and taking courses to transfer to the university." In addition to working with their eldest children on specific college readiness tasks, parents described engaging more with younger children about their future plans because "college was possible for them as well."

This sense of greater confidence from the parents also grew in unexpected ways. Several parents shared what they had learned with friends and neighbors, becoming community hubs for college knowledge. One parent described previously feeling fearful to enter the school building, but after participating in the group, feeling that it was her duty to go into the school together with her child to fight for his rights or to speak together to the school counselor. Parents used the words "more secure" repeatedly as they described how they felt now that they had received a basic orientation to the U.S. educational system and were no longer lost or anxious.

> Now with more information I feel like those fears are less weighty. I now know where I am going to go so that my daughter goes to school, [where] to start looking for information with my daughter. Now, I know what to ask. I have fewer fears now. I was worried about money because it costs a lot of money, but now I know more about where to go; now I know more information.

In addition, parents described being more hopeful and feeling relieved that the educational options they had wished for their children could be realized. These affective changes in the parents were often tied to behavioral changes as they felt capable to lead their children or interact with them in a more knowledgeable way. One parent said,

> I feel that there is help out there that before I did not think existed. For that reason, I feel that yes, things have changed. Because when we, as mothers, don't have information, we get frustrated, and we do not know how to help our children. And now, with the information that I have, I can know how to help them. That's why I feel like things have changed.

We have listed the knowledge and engagement themes separately in Table 2, but after finalizing the coding, we realized they are conceptually connected. Most of the parents described a relationship between the knowledge and engagement themes, such that "we inform ourselves about these opportunities,

then we pass this information along to our children—we work together and help each other achieve whatever they want."

Discussion

In summary, the quantitative pre/post data for *PPP* participants showed consistent increases in college knowledge and self-efficacy beliefs, and the qualitative findings further illuminated what kind of knowledge gains were meaningful to the participants and how that changed their manner of engaging with their children on college planning tasks. In broad strokes, parents noticed that having new knowledge regarding college planning had led to greater confidence on their part in speaking with their children about their futures, advocating for their children in the schools, and finding answers when college-related questions would come up. Similarly, better parent–child engagement was characterized by parents being more willing to listen to their children's aspirations and concerns (as was emphasized in the groups), children trusting their parents to be knowledgeable guides, and dialogues moving forward as cooperative efforts among informed parties. Taken together, the two types of program evaluation data (1) provide preliminary evidence for the effectiveness of *Padres Promoviendo Preparación*, and (2) suggest an important mechanism for empowering immigrant parents to provide both emotional and instrumental support for their children's educational planning processes.

Although it is a positive sign to see posttest knowledge scores go up, the goal of the outreach was for parents to be able to use this knowledge to help their children with educational planning, so it was important to see confidence or self-efficacy increase as well. The immigrant parents needed information about their new context in the U.S., but also needed to feel more comfortable and confident advocating for their children and more secure as capable leaders in the domain of educational planning. Prior literature has demonstrated the key role Latina/o immigrant parents have in home-based involvement with their children, focusing on good manners and cultural values (Mena, 2011). However, an additional insight offered by the current study is that parents can expand their involvement to other domains, including education and school, when equipped with knowledge and confidence. After some of their self-doubts and worries had been diminished, the barriers to engagement were reduced, and parents described acting with confidence and moving forward as advocates for their children.

This finding is consistent with the Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) model of parent involvement which posits that parents will take steps toward involvement when they feel motivation (e.g., self-efficacy and role construction for

involvement), when life context permits them to engage (e.g., when they have time, when they are equipped with knowledge, when the family culture supports involvement), and when they perceive invitations to involvement from the school and their child. Thus, if self-efficacy and knowledge can be enhanced by an outreach program, then it potentially paves the way for invitations to engage from the school/student to be well-received or acted upon. This represents a key shift for parents with less formal education, less confidence in their English fluency, and varying levels of trust in U.S. institutions. Parents previously could only be encouraging to their children, but with new information, they could model behaviors and engage in a way they could not before.

This is one key argument for the use of the psychoeducational group format; it provided a peer network to support participants as they learned and translated the new knowledge into behavior. The psychoeducational group allows more time and space for group cohesion, processing of emotional content, and behavioral modeling than a traditional educational format (Brown, 1998). In part, the parent responses to *PPP* were influenced by the fact that they were in a setting where they were comfortable and able to interact with other similar Latina/o parents, thus building connection, reducing isolation, and being allowed to ask questions without feeling shame or embarrassment. In an emerging immigrant community, peer role models can be hard to find. Thus, educators and others in new gateway states may consider both the challenges and the benefits of implementing a psychoeducational group outreach program in the wider school community. From the current and previous studies (e.g., Auerbach, 2004), it is apparent that guided vicarious learning among immigrant adult peers has the potential to promote both increased knowledge and confidence. Parent peer groups can also be a sustained resource to each other during implementation attempts as informal encouragers and advisors.

The qualitative findings emphasize that one key area in which parents experienced a change after participating in the group was in quality and quantity of interaction with their children on educational planning topics. The new information and attitudes not only helped with the child closest to high school graduation, but changed multiple relationships within the family, generating hope for younger students as well. Although Auerbach (2004) and Fann et al. (2009) both mentioned improved parent–child collaboration on college planning after program attendance, the interaction seemed to be emphasized to a greater degree in the current study. Participants in this study described several ways in which they became more attuned in communication with their children and more comfortable engaging in educational planning conversations. Educators and community advocates can model for Latina/o parents the importance of communication and enhance the typical cultural tendency

for parents to connect with their children (Jeynes, 2010). Our contribution to the literature complements that of Auerbach (2004) and Fann et al. (2009) by demonstrating effectiveness of a different outreach format conducted in a new area of immigrant reception in the southeastern U.S., as opposed to traditional receiving communities in California.

Implications for Researchers and Practitioners

Researchers

The *PPP* program showed beginning efficacy as it related to immigrant parents' improved knowledge of college-going and self-efficacy for college planning behaviors with their children. The next step for the research supporting the program would be to focus on sustainability for participants, community partners, and the local school community over time. We took a few initial steps, such as sponsoring a picnic/college fair and inviting our past parent participants in order to give them an opportunity to follow up with us and each other. At one of the sites, *PPP* facilitators created a "study hall" approach where parents could gather and work on doing some of the activities together (e.g., filling out calendars with key application dates, reading the FAFSA together). We also created a bilingual newsletter to mail and a website with updated information for the parents. We have some anecdotal evidence that *PPP* families are reaching out to local college admissions offices, enrolling in college-related summer camps, and participating in college open houses, which is encouraging but very preliminary. In our last year of the project, we focused on interviewing community partners to learn more about how we could support them in sustaining the initiative. We are also distributing materials to school counselors to embed the program resources into the educational system in our region.

The program evaluation also provides ideas for implementation of educational outreach in general. Having the funding to develop and deliver this program in community-based settings with willing and able bilingual partners who had space, interest, community connections, and content/process skills was critical to the success of this program. The larger question for researchers is how successful a similar program would be if any of those factors were absent. For instance, school counselors have access to space, have interest in promoting college readiness among students and families, and have content/process skills, but the authors found very few bilingual school counselors who had time or could facilitate the program alone. Partnering with ESL teachers or bilingual cultural brokers could be one solution.

Regardless of the level to which community-based providers remain engaged with this type of program after the formal connection with a university-based research team ends, the importance of community-based providers in the day-

to-day lives of underrepresented populations should not be lost. Community advocates uniquely serve as brokers and bridges for many underrepresented families. Schools that are effective at creating strong partnerships with community entities will have a head start in working with immigrant families. The effects of school–community collaborations are in need of further exploration, particularly in emerging immigrant communities where bilingual allies may be more difficult to find.

Practitioners

There are many examples of school and community partnerships with other purposes and goals in the literature, but the focus typically is on students, either as individuals or a demographic group. However, the needs, experiences, strengths, and even fears of parents deserve attention from the school-based community, particularly parents from underrepresented groups. The increased interest in school-based involvement stated by the participants in *PPP* represents an important opportunity for schools to consider generating an invitation, opening the doors to communication between the school and family.

The focus of the current program always was the parents and the empirically supported notion that better prepared and more motivated parents would engage with their children in a more intentional and nuanced fashion. Therefore, the question for educators, school-based community advocates, and community-based allies of these parents is: how can I/we help parents (in this case, Latina/o immigrant parents) become a more pivotal part of their children's postsecondary planning and success? The Hoover-Dempsey model is one source of structure and illumination, and the programmatic examples shared here are another (*PPP*, the work of Auerbach, 2004 and Fann et al., 2009). Although it seems obvious, delivering outreach in Spanish and having access to Spanish-language websites and materials made an enormous difference, especially in an area where schools still do not have access to full-time interpreters to help incorporate parents into the school community. This need may be especially acute in an emerging immigrant community where supportive infrastructure is still developing.

Readers based in schools and community settings should see the themes shared here as "guide posts" for where and how to engage with and on behalf of underrepresented parents. The *PPP* program serves as one method for school- and community-based service providers to interact with immigrant parents with the purpose of empowering them to help their children get the most out of high school, plan and pay for college, or find a fulfilling career. But perhaps more importantly, the findings can provide factors to "prepare for" or "inquire about" when working with Latina/o parents. Many of the concerns and

frustrations shared by parents (e.g., immigration policies, paying for college, lack of Spanish informational resources, the emotional weight of poverty or of lack of documentation, language barriers in communication) are beyond the purview of school- and community-based providers. But knowing that under-represented parents in general struggle with these realities can add perspective and assist in goal-setting as schools and communities strive to provide all children with a broad range of post-high school options.

In spite of these efforts and recommendations, it is clear that sustaining a program such as this in congregational, community, or school settings is not simple. Even with free materials and university consultation, there are challenges related to staff turnover in community settings or busy schedules that prohibit adding time for new programs. One of the strengths of *PPP* was its community-engaged approach; the program connected the authors and the community partners in the mutual endeavor of delivering the program to parents in their communities. By the end of the grant, everyone on the team was invested, having seen the responses of the families and the hope generated. Consequently, it becomes paramount for researchers and practitioners alike to consider methods to facilitate sustainability of the program after community advocates have been trained to deliver the contents. Researchers and practitioners might consider local foundations or nonprofits interested in funding these kinds of initiatives, even if on a short-term/pilot basis.

Limitations and Future Research

The study had limitations related to the voluntary nature of participation in the groups and the small, regional sample. The quantitative pre/post data was weakened due to irregular attendance patterns of some parents and the learning curve the investigators went through in doing program evaluation in a low-literacy adult learning context (D'Alonzo, 2011; Weimer, 1999; Williams & Swanson, 2001). Although it did show the desired trends and was supported by the qualitative findings, more robust quantitative data could be collected to verify program effectiveness. Ideally, future research could also collect data from students in the households where a parent attended. Future research or intervention could also try to provide more continuous follow-up with the participants to help solve problems they encountered along the lengthy college planning timeline. Particularly for parents who have learned a new skill and are living in a community where there are few role models or supports, follow up would be essential. Finally, research studies that link parent participation in outreach programs with positive child educational outcomes (e.g., O'Donnell & Kirkner, 2014) are greatly needed.

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