Increasing Parent Involvement for Low-Income, Multilingual Parents

Sally Loeza
Liberal Studies Program, California State University, Chico
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Dr. Maris Thompson
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Abstract

This study draws on research and examination of the effect that schools have on parent participation and involvement in their children's education, with a particular emphasis on non-English dominant speaking families. The purpose of this study is to examine the barriers that these families face in the school setting, as well as potential solutions for creating a more welcoming environment. This research revealed that parents felt uncomfortable or discouraged when attempting to participate and that linguistic discrimination in schools affects parent involvement. A significant finding of this study was that schools, educators, and administration could all take steps to ensure that parents feel respected and understood, thereby fostering a positive and mutually beneficial relationship that will benefit the students, parents, and teachers equally.

Keywords: Non-English speaking families, parent participation, parent-school relationships
Introduction

This research focuses on the barriers low-income, specifically non-English dominant speaking parents, face in the education system and how that negatively impacts their children. The benefits of parent involvement and the ways schools can make parent involvement for low-income, non-English speaking parents more possible will be highlighted. As educators, the goal should be to provide every student with the best possible education and the necessary tools to succeed. To do this, schools need the participation of parents. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) stated that parent involvement in school is one of the most important factors impacting a student's academic success. Schools that focus on parent engagement often see a profound change in their classrooms. Students' attitudes and behaviors improve, students' competence, grades, test scores, and attendance increase, and they develop better social skills and self-confidence. Parent involvement does not only rely on the parents to do their part but also on the school. The most effective way to help students academically is for schools to create positive relationships with all parents regardless of socioeconomic status, education, religion, or race to give them the confidence, desire, and tools to become involved. The earlier educators build the foundations for parent-teacher communication and establish parent engagement, the more effective they will be in raising student performance (Van Velsor and Orozco, 2007).

Statement of Problem

My problem of practice draws on a historical lack of inclusion for low-income parents, especially for non-English dominant speaking parents. Cullaj (2015) noted that studies have shown that student achievement increases once parent-teacher communication is successful. Academic success, attitudes and behavior, attendance, school adjustment and participation, and
graduation rates are linked to parental involvement in schools. However, a lack of involvement affects partnerships and causes problems in a student's education. Although the focus of the discussion is on parents, they are not the root of the issue. The issue is caused by a lack of resources and communication from the school system. Van Velsor and Orozco (2007) added that these parents face barriers in attempting to become involved, including demographic and psychological obstacles and barriers generated by the schools themselves. Parents' involvement at school is of central importance, and existing inequalities in this type of involvement are likely to contribute to the achievement gap. Therefore, schools must find ways to identify and reduce barriers among minority and low-income families and emphasize strategies to engage them in their children's education.

**Justification of Study**

The purpose of my project is to bring light to the inequities students and parents face in schools due to their socioeconomic status and linguistic background. This problem needs to be urgently considered to create equal opportunities for everyone regardless of the person's background. Through this project, I hope educators take the initiative to serve all families equally. When it comes to hidden inequities and how the differences in parents' incomes play out in schools, educators cannot control a family's income. However, they can control the way they approach a family's situation. Nzinga-Johnson et al. (2009) explained that educators must be cognizant of the racial and social class dynamics between educators and parents to optimize schooling outcomes for all children. As noted by Brown and Beckett (2007), it is far too often that low-income and ethnic and linguistic minority parents feel that the schools are not theirs, limiting their involvement in school programs, groups, and meetings and activities directly concerning their children. Only the affluent, white parents appear to feel that the school is theirs.
The voices of these minority parents are not heard or important enough for schools to change their practices, so this paper will highlight their perspectives and needs in the hopes of changing the education practices put in place by staff members who favor the affluent, predominantly white parents.

**REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

**Defining Parent Involvement**

According to Bower and Griffin (2011), the traditional definition of parent involvement includes activities in the school and at home. They explained that parental involvement takes many forms, such as volunteering at the school, communicating with teachers, assisting with homework, and attending school events such as performances or parent-teacher conferences. When it comes to volunteering in school, parents are sometimes responsible for providing supplies requested by the school, including traditional classroom supplies such as pencils, paper, and folders and also items for fundraisers or school events. These traditional definitions of parental involvement require parents to spend their time and money on school-related supplies and events. Those who may not be able to provide these resources are deemed uninvolved.

Bowen and Lee (2006) state that this overlooks different perceptions of parents from low SES and minority populations regarding parental involvement and educational responsibilities. Many immigrant families are unaware of the needed involvement, and because they are not fluent in English, they go unnoticed, and their participation is nonexistent. These low-income, non-English speaking, minority parents are judged for not participating, yet they are not given guidance to become involved. These issues showed that schools need to urgently redefine parental involvement and develop broader frameworks that can make involvement more
inclusive for all families. This is where the intersectionality of race, language, and social status, is seen as well as the highest levels of discrimination.

**Benefits of Parent Involvement for Students**

Whether constructed by home-based behaviors, school-based activities, or parent-teacher communication, parental involvement has been positively linked to indicators of student achievement, including teacher ratings of student competence, student grades, and achievement test scores (Hoover-Dempsey et al. 2005). Parent involvement has also been associated with other indicators of school success, such as lower dropout rates, higher on-time high school graduation rates, and higher rates of participation in advanced courses. In addition, Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) mentioned that parental engagement had been related to psychological mechanisms and characteristics that promote student success in addition to these outcomes. Since they are vulnerable to direct parental and instructor influence, the student's motivational, cognitive, social, and behavioral characteristics are especially significant.

Similarly, parent involvement also increases social capital, which are networks that are designed to leverage resources. When social networks are increased, students have the chance to access additional resources, such as tutoring, enrichment opportunities, or access to curriculum extensions, in order to achieve academic success (Bower and Griffin, 2011). These opportunities can open up to students simply because of their parent's involvement in their school. This sense of community and working together can make the child feel comforted as they see their parents working together with their school to help them succeed. This can then help students change their outlook on school from negative to positive (Cullaj, 2015).

Lee and Bowen (2006) discussed how parent involvement is positively linked to children's educational success and how it can mediate poverty. They also addressed how
increasing parent involvement has been described as a potential strategy for closing the achievement gap. Bower and Griffin (2011) highlighted that although there are numerous positive benefits of parental involvement, researchers have studied and discussed parental involvement extensively in the literature, and schools have used models to implement parental involvement strategies, schools continue to struggle with increasing parental involvement with students of low socioeconomic statuses and students of color.

**Benefits of Parent Involvement for Teachers**

Teachers benefit greatly from parental involvement. Teachers who maintained open communication with parents talked about how much these relationships helped them. Cullaj (2015) explained this by saying that teachers who are aware of students' current struggles and successes at home will be able to modify the students' learning environment to benefit students and increase learning. If a teacher is aware of the student's circumstances at home, they can anticipate how they will feel or act at school and plan accordingly. Cullaj (2015) also mentioned that parents are experts on their children and can save teachers time by helping them eliminate strategies they have used that have not worked out in the past. Parents can steer them towards the strategies that have the potential to succeed. Overall, involving parents in their child's education and reaching out to them for advice can help towards fostering a positive relationship between parents and teachers.

**Racism Towards Minority Parents**

When it comes to parent involvement, there is a huge distinction between minorities and White people. Lee and Bowen (2006) explained that the types of parent involvement exhibited by White parents, parents not living in poverty, and more educated parents would be more strongly associated with children's academic achievement. With this in mind, poverty, low levels
of parental educational attainment in African-American and Hispanic/Latino race/ethnicity are usually associated with lower academic achievement. Brown and Beckett (2007) added to this by saying that these differences in involvement are also seen in relation to the school's parent-teacher association. The White parents run the association in this research, and one mother even said, "If we…didn't participate, there would be no PTA" (p.62). Due to this type of attitude and White parents keeping power to themselves, Latino parents formed their own group, and African American parents became completely uninvolved. These parents consistently feel uncomfortable because of the failure of school staff and dominant parents to include them in conversation. Brown and Beckett (2007) made it clear that low-income and ethnic and linguistic minority parents do not feel like they belong to the school and ultimately choose to limit their involvement to school programs, groups, meetings, and activities. Unfortunately, only the affluent White parents in the example above appeared to feel that the school was theirs and that they had a responsibility to provide general support for all of the school's programs. The theme that emerged from these studies of parent involvement in schools is the schools being "owned" by middle-class White families and mainly serving their interests (Brown and Beckett, 2007).

Another barrier low-income, minority families face is cultural capital which is "the advantage gained by middle-class, educated European American parents from knowing, preferring, and experiencing a lifestyle congruent with the culture that is dominant in most American schools" (Lee and Bowen, 2006, p.198). The advantage comes from performing the types of involvement most valued by the school or that are most strongly associated with achievement. Lee and Bowen (2006) then mentioned that the disadvantage that may accrue to parents whose culture or lifestyle differs from that of the dominant culture takes many forms. For example, they say that parents who cannot visit the school more often are less likely to gain the
social, information, and material rewards gained by parents who enact the school involvement roles valued and delineated by school staff.

**Linguistic and Cultural Barriers**

A huge and common barrier between parents and their involvement in school is the differences in culture and language. For example, Hispanic parents have difficulty communicating with the schools due to English not being their primary language. Furthermore, Bower and Griffin (2011) explained that translation becomes an issue with Hispanic families. As a result, parents who speak languages other than English may experience fewer opportunities to volunteer in the schools, which in turn makes non-English speaking parents feel alienated and not wanting to participate (Van Velsor and Orozco, 2007). Cattanach (2013) explained that many parents from different cultures are unaware that they have to be involved in their child’s school. Because schools are not making an effort to communicate with parents effectively, parents are uninformed of these differences. It is clear that parental involvement strategies are primarily based on school cultures formed from middle-class, European American cultural norms (Bower and Griffin 2011).

**Other Barriers Affecting Parent Involvement**

Poverty presents unique barriers to traditional forms of parent involvement. Van Velsor and Orozco (2007) stated that work often prevents low-income parents from devoting time to their children's schooling; for example, parents may have inflexible work schedules, work long, unpredictable hours, and are just tired from work. Besides work schedules, Bower and Griffin (2011) mentioned that lack of transportation and lack of child care might also prevent families from attending school events or volunteering in schools. As a result, middle- and upper-class
families see a lack of traditional participation as a lack of care or consideration for their children, further alienating low-income families.

In addition to these demographic barriers, low-income parents experience psychological barriers to involvement. Van Velsor and Orozco (2007) stated that parent confidence, parent's perception of racism, and their own negative school experiences serve to distance them from the schools. Also, some teachers may contribute to the level of school involvement of low-income parents in many ways. Some teachers do not value parents' participation or opinions in the schools and perceive parents as impeding the schools' work and judge low-income parents' lack of involvement. Drummond and Stipek (2004) mentioned that schools interpret lack of school involvement as lack of interest; however, parents do want their children to succeed and are interested in helping them, but barriers make it extremely difficult. Brown and Beckett (2007) added to this by saying that some parents feel threatened by the authority of teachers and have anxiety and defensiveness resulting from being contacted by schools only when their children get into trouble. As a result, disadvantaged parents perceive teachers and school officials as racist that have lower expectations for their children.

Besides teachers' attitudes, Halsey (2005) said that school climate might be a barrier to low-income parent involvement. Schools in low-income communities are less likely than those in higher-income communities to encourage parental participation in the classroom. Teachers and parents can have unequal relationships as a result of educational power differentials. Schools also marginalize parents and ignore the status differences and recreate the dominant power relationships of race and social class reflective of the largest society. Many times, schools develop activities based on specific majority culturally-based knowledge. For example, school personnel may speak to parents using professional terminology with which parents are not
familiar or send out notices and memos written in English to parents who speak little or no English.

Although studies have shown that lower-income parents value education as a route to economic and social mobility, their actual involvement falls short of school expectations (Drummond and Stipek, 2004). Unfortunately, involving parents in their children's school-related activities is a challenge for school districts with "increasing numbers of disadvantaged minority parents and increasing numbers of middle-class white families" (Brown and Beckett, 2007).

**Importance of Parent-Teacher Relationships**

The relationship between parents and teachers is essential for parents to see beyond the test scores and report cards and work together with teachers to understand their children’s unique strengths, talents, and interests as their learning patterns emerge. Brown and Beckett (2007) stated that in schools where teachers and students see themselves as members of the same community working toward a common goal, student discipline, and academic achievement tend to be more positive.

Although there are some excellent parent/teacher relationships in schools, there are few, and those who are low-income or minorities are not typically involved in these relationships. Research has shown that schools could create opportunities for extended, meaningful, and positive communications between all parents and teachers. The only opportunities that are usually available now are short parent-teacher conferences and special meetings set up when a child is having academic or disciplinary problems. The difficulties faced by urban schools in improving contact between middle-class white teachers and disadvantaged and ethnic minority parents have proven insurmountable and long-standing, prompting scholars in the field to
advocate for substantive improvements in parent-teacher relationships (Brown and Beckett, 2007).

**How to Create Relationships with Parents**

Parent-teacher relationships do not just happen. These relationships are built over time through consistent communication, problem-solving, collaboration, a common goal, and trust. Cullaj (2015) discussed the different steps teachers should take to create positive relationships with parents. The first step is to reach out to the parents early in the year and let them know their input is essential. Teachers need to contact parents before there are any problems because it will leave a wrong first impression if the initial communication between the parent and teacher is about negative student behavior. Cullaj (2015) explained that parent communication could take many forms, including in-person information sessions, emails, class newsletters, or websites. Teachers can send out a short survey at the beginning of the year to determine how parents prefer to communicate. It is important to keep in mind that one communication strategy will probably not work for all families, so teachers will have to spend time determining how to effectively communicate with parents who prefer to communicate differently. Another way to connect with parents is to be understanding and flexible and find ways to change a class celebration or meeting time or date. Further, parents who have another language other than English may be hesitant to reach out to teachers who do not speak their language. Teachers can ease communication by sending home notes in the parent’s native language as much as possible and requesting a translator or using a translation app for any communication done between the parents and teacher. If teachers take the initiative and arrange for the services before parents need to ask, it can help parents feel more comfortable (Cullaj, 2015).

**What Schools Can do to Increase Parent Involvement**
Van Velsor and Orozco (2007) suggested that school counselors can play a leadership role in strengthening the relationship between schools and low-income, minority families by implementing community-centered strategies for parent involvement. As school counselors design these strategies, they must take into account the uniqueness of these families. This means counselors should consider the barriers to involvement, help parents learn about the school culture, and address the community's needs in which the students live. Doing this will help school staff know about the families' situation to provide optimal education for each child.

The needs of low-income families extend beyond the educational success of their children. Often, low-income parents struggle to provide basic necessities for their families, such as food, clothing, and healthcare. When these basic family needs are met, it is easier for low-income parents to be involved and be more consistent with that of parents who have fewer financial concerns. Schools can help by providing families appropriate referrals to agencies that offer medical care, dental care, counseling, and assistance with food and clothing. Van Velsor and Orozco (2007) made a good point and mentioned that providing on-site activities consistent with the needs and interests of parents attracts parents to the school. It is essential to include many activities that support student goals and address topics of interest to parents. Cattanach (2013) suggested having dual language programs for students, campus-based parent liaisons, and having social workers on staff to help with immigration issues.

In addition to services for parents, Van Velsor and Orozco (2007) stated that a community-centric program must include training for school personnel. Training can be conducted by a counselor, community experts, or outside experts. Topics would vary depending on the needs and the schools. Teachers believe they require additional education regarding
communication with parents, integrating community culture into children's learning, and general issues of multiculturalism.

Bower and Griffin (2011) believed that new practices are needed that incorporate culturally relevant strategies. Practices should include relationship building, advocacy, and parental efficacy, as these are effective in working with African American, Latino, and low-income populations. They suggest redefining parent involvement from academic roles toward more collaborative roles with other parents, such as parents' support groups, parent teams for school events, or presenters in classroom cultural or enrichment activities. These networks can impact academic achievement by helping parents engage directly with the school and empowering parents to serve as supporters for each other. Bower and Griffin (2011) consistently mentioned the importance of relationship building and making it the first strategy schools implement. These relationships also include relationships among parents, increasing participation, and the impact of existing strategies within the school by increasing ownership, accountability, and social networks. Schools can boost and facilitate cultural awareness workshops for parents, focusing on cultural norms and working with translators.

Halsey (2005) mentioned that in order to improve communication between parents and teachers, teachers should increase communication among themselves. Teachers can help each other out, especially since many teachers work with or have worked with the same families as other teachers in the school. Using familiar practices and activities can serve as a bridge for transitions and increase parents' comfort level and encourage sustained parent involvement. Halsey (2005) also stated that in order to increase parent involvement, there should be more individual and casual contact between parents and teachers. Schools should plan meaningful and frequent opportunities for individual conversations. Teachers can provide a portion of their
school day every six weeks to contact parents through letters, phone calls, or email. In addition, teachers can balance negative contacts about problems with the student with positive contacts by sharing the student's successes. A great example Halsey provided to increase communication with parents was to have teams of teachers to greet parents before or after school for one week every six weeks.

According to Hoover-Dempsey (2005), involvement from significant individuals is often key motivators of parents' division to become involved. These invitations from members of the school community serve as an essential motivator of involvement because they suggest to the parent that participation in the child's learning is welcome, valuable, and expected by the school and its members. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2003) stated that the most critical invitations to involvement come from three sources: the school in general, teachers, and students. Another important role is that of the school principal. Principals have the responsibility of developing, supporting, and maintaining a fully welcoming school climate. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) findings emphasized that school administrators set the tone for parental involvement and program implementation. "Overall, the more committed, visible, and active principles are in supporting parent-teacher relationships, the more likely schools are to develop strong programs of parent and community involvement" (p.110).

**METHODOLOGY**

This section of my research will include my positionality, an overview of the theoretical framework that aligned the most with my topic, and data gathered from a community partner interview. The research theory will show a belief system that is consistent, systematic, and theoretically driven. The data collected from the community partner will demonstrate the insights gained from the interview and provide a nuanced perspective on my research question.
Positionality

As a child, I was personally affected by the issue of practice I researched, which is why I am committed to finding a solution to how it impacts education. My parents immigrated to the United States from Mexico two years before I was born in order to provide a better life for my brother and me. From the beginning, people looked down on them because of their socioeconomic status and inability to speak standard English. As my brother and I started school, I had no idea that my parents were different from the rest until we had a back-to-school night. I vividly remember my mom and me sitting down at a table waiting to be acknowledged by either the parents or the teacher. Unfortunately, this did not happen. The affluent, white parents sat together and only spoke to one another while the rest of us awkwardly sat separately. When the teacher came around to speak to the families, it was obvious that the white parents were given preferential treatment because the teacher spoke with them for a long time, laughed with them, and had a good attitude toward them. As she approached me and my mother, she had a completely different demeanor. She didn't strike up a conversation with us; instead, she simply introduced herself. I felt like an outsider for the rest of the day. As a six-year-old, I knew the teacher didn't care about us. I started comparing myself and my mom to the other families and finally realized we were different. I started crying on the way back to the car. When my mom asked me why I was crying, I told her, "I don't want to go to school anymore. You don't have money, and you don't speak English, and I am embarrassed because they don't care about us." My mom felt my pain. This was something she had dealt with for years.

I never forgot this situation as I grew older, mostly because similar events continued to occur. My mother was a single mother working three jobs at the time, and she didn't see the point in attending these events anymore because no one from the school ever reached out to her, and
she was constantly ignored and judged. She also didn't attend these activities because she needed to work in order to support my brother and me. For a long time, I assumed that the wealthy parents did not work because they always seemed to have time to attend any event. However, I quickly realized that many of them owned their own businesses or had jobs that allowed them to take time off. Since these parents were able to volunteer, it seemed that their children were generally treated better and were much more successful than those whose parents did not volunteer. I wish I could say things improved as I grew older, but they just got worse. Nothing has improved at the elementary/middle school where I used to work. I now work at the same elementary/middle school I attended, and nothing has changed. Low-income, minority, and/or non-English speaking parents are still not included in these important events and meetings. Since school diversity is only going to grow, schools must find ways to make parent participation possible for all families as soon as possible.

**Theoretical Framework**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is the theoretical framework that seemed the most relevant to my problem of practice. Solorzano (1998) mentioned that Mari Mastuda (1991) defined Critical Race Theory as "...the work of progressive legal scholars of color who are attempting to develop a jurisprudence that accounts for the role of racism in American law and that works toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination" (p. 1331). In short, CRT in education examines how educational theory, policy, and practice are used to oppress some racial and ethnic groups, challenging the dominant discourse on race and prejudice in education (Solorzano, 1998). While race and racism are at the heart of the critical race analysis, they are often examined with other aspects of oppression, such as gender and class discrimination. Solorzano explained that CRT challenges the conventional arguments of
objectivity, meritocracy, color and gender blindness, race and gender neutrality, and equal opportunity made by the educational system and its institutions. According to critical race theorists, these traditional claims are a cover for the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups in American society. As stated before, the abolition of racism or racial subordination is part of the larger aim of ending other types of subordination, such as gender, class, and sexual orientation, in the critical race theorist's fight for social justice in education.

Stovall (2005) stated that many researchers of color in education have concluded that students of color's histories, cultures, and languages have been devalued, misinterpreted, or excluded from formal educational settings. Therefore, educators must acknowledge that prejudice is a part of many families' everyday lives and work on creating systems to solve these issues.

**Community Partner Interview**

Working for the local school district has allowed me to meet many people who have experience working with students, parents, and staff members with different backgrounds and experiences. An individual who has had a significant impact on the lives of many students and their families due to her ongoing support, acceptance, and genuine interest in watching others succeed is Mrs. Roberts. From the beginning, I knew Roberts would be the perfect person for my research because she had personally spoken to multiple students and parents who had experienced injustices at the school. Another reason she was the ideal community partner for my problem of practice was that she had experienced both sides of the problem I was researching. Roberts also had a lot of experience working with students of various races, cultures, religions, abilities, and socioeconomic status. She worked in suburban and rural schools, public schools, private education centers, and with students two to 14 years old. Roberts has been the after-school program director for the past six years but has worked for the school district for a
total of 12 years holding various positions. Before working for the school district, Roberts obtained her certification in Early Childhood Education and Behavior Modification and worked at a daycare for four years. Through these jobs, she stated that she gained a lot of experience working with multiple ages and backgrounds. Working with kids has always been her passion, and helping them grow, mature, learn, and succeed has always been something that has brought her happiness.

Roberts mentioned that a significant turning point in her career occurred during her last year working for the special education department. She observed that the communication between families and teachers was absent and that there was a lack of connection between many parents and staff. A combination of watching her students overcome obstacles and observing problems between families and staff made her want to pursue different avenues; therefore, she became the after-school program director. Mrs. Roberts was aware that there was a huge need for quality after-school program care and wanted to create a positive environment for all students and their families. She knew she couldn't change the entire school environment and their approaches, but she would now be able to implement her practices and begin to make a difference in the lives of many families and be the change that was needed.

After learning about Mrs. Roberts' experience and background in education, I asked her about the school's effort in making parent involvement for low-income families, primarily non-English speaking families, possible. She said that certain teachers and administrators strived to make it possible for all families to be involved, but as a whole, she did not see the effort being put into place. Although people talked about it, it never actually happened. She mentioned that it was always the same parents who were reached out to, attended every meeting or event, and were involved in everything. Usually, these parents were white, upper class or English
monolingual speaking; very rarely were they minorities or lower/working class. It was clear which population was favored and she stated that it was frustrating to witness it. Some of the low-income, non-English speaking families had even confided in Mrs. Robert's and shared that they did not feel comfortable participating in the school. Other parents often judged the parents, and the school did not even consider their opinions and feelings.

When asked what barriers Roberts believed parents faced, she said there were numerous. She stated that the most prominent barrier was language. Getting a translator was often difficult, so there was always a lot of miscommunication between the school and the families. She explained that this issue made the parents feel uncomfortable and caused a lack of connection with families who were non-English speakers. When inviting parents to an event or a meeting, parents would receive a pre-recorded phone call in English or unintelligible Spanish or a letter through the mail that was typically in English. The school did not make an effort to make personal connections or contact the parents so that the parents could understand. Roberts explained that this form of communication was never enough to convince parents who didn't feel welcomed to participate in activities.

Another barrier she noticed was the scheduling of meetings or activities. Roberts explained that the town had a large migrant community, so many parents worked from sunrise to sunset. Unfortunately, because the parents were always working, they never had the time or the resources to make it to these school-related events. In Robert's eyes, the events were not at reasonable hours nor flexible. They would be in the late afternoon during parents' work hours. If parents did have the time, Roberts mentioned that sometimes they did not have the transportation or childcare needed to attend the meetings or events.
With a tone of disappointment, Roberts said that it seemed like the school would rather continue to communicate with the parents who could volunteer and speak English even though half the population was minorities whose parents were non-English speakers or who were low income. She believed that all students and their families should be treated equally, especially in communication. She informed me that teachers could humanize the individuals by creating positive relationships and not have them be just a number on a page. Having communication amongst each other would also help teachers identify the children's strengths and weaknesses and better serve them.

To finalize the interview, I asked Roberts what she thought the school could do to get more non-English speaking and low-income parents involved. She said the first thing schools should do is receive training on how to appropriately communicate with families and give them the confidence to become involved. She stated that they must find more than one way to communicate with families and that they need to work hard on making personal connections with each parent and student. A suggestion she had that she has done in the past herself is to send out a questionnaire to parents and ask them what hours and days of the week work best. She also mentioned that doing a weekly or monthly check-in with parents would be beneficial. The last suggestion she made was to move the days or hours of when events occur. She stated that the events should be more than one day, done at different times and done in different ways so that more parents could become involved.

Mrs. Roberts' experience working alongside school staff who had favored high income, English speaking families and disregarded low-income and non-English speaking families was evident. She gave me a different perspective on what struggles non-English speaking, and low-income families face in the school setting. She gave me a lot of valuable information on how
families are affected and how the school can improve to serve the families better. It was fascinating to see that she had witnessed a lot of the same issues I had found throughout my research. Luckily, Mrs. Roberts appeared to understand what these students and their families were going through and had taken it upon herself to do her part and give them the best experience and opportunities possible. With the information provided by her, it is evident what issues are present and what can help these students and their families.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

This section of my project will demonstrate everything I have learned about my problem of practice and how it all relates to my research. I will discuss the connections made between the literature review and the interview with my community partner.

**Finding One: White Parents Favored in Parent Involvement Efforts**

Throughout the literature I reviewed and through my community partner, it is evident that white, affluent parents are favored, making low-income, multilingual parents uncomfortable and discouraged. I found this to be true when my community partner mentioned that many parents had confided in her and expressed their dissatisfaction with their treatment. These parents were frequently judged, their voices were dismissed and not taken into account, and their thoughts and opinions were ignored. These low-income, non-English-speaking minority parents were judged for not being middle class or English dominant. However, they were not given guidance about how to become involved in their children's education. Even though half of the population are minorities, my community partner believed that schools would rather take the easier path and choose to interact with the White parents who could volunteer and speak English. According to Brown and Beckett (2007), white parents' attitudes caused Latino and African American parents to form their own communities or remain entirely uninvolved. They felt isolated and unwelcome
in the school community because school staff or dominant parents failed to notice them. On top of that, parents of color already have a suspicion that schools don't care about them because of the long standing histories of racial segregation in schools. Instead of helping all parents succeed in helping with their child's education, white parents wield all power with the assistance of school personnel.

**Finding Two: Linguistic Discrimination Impacts Parent Involvement**

Another significant finding from my research was that schools significantly impact whether non-English speaking, low-income parents participate and often add to the existing barriers. Many times, schools develop activities based on specific majority culturally-based knowledge. An example Hoover-Demosey (2005) gave was that school officials talk to parents in technical terms that the parents are unfamiliar with. They also send out notices and memos written in English to parents who speak little to no English. When I spoke with my community partner, she expressed a similar viewpoint. She noted that language was one of the most significant obstacles, and that while schools are aware of this, they do not always use the most effective methods when speaking with multilingual parents. Parents receive an unintelligible pre-recorded phone call in English or Spanish when they are invited to an event or meeting. Parents receive newsletters and updates in the mail as well, although they are all written in English. The school makes no attempt to build personal relationships or communicate with parents in a way that they can understand. Despite the fact that schools have the ability to translate letters into Spanish or hire translators, they neglect to do so. When done correctly, invites from members of the school community act as an important motivator of engagement, according to Hoover-Dempsey (2005), because they suggest to the parent that participation in the child's learning is welcomed, valuable, and anticipated by the school and its members. There
would be a greater level of involvement if schools made the basic effort to acknowledge the parent's first language. When looking at the literature I chose to study and the data collected from my community partner, it seems to be a common trend, with no means readily available for these parents to effectively connect and engage with their children's schools.

Finding Three: Schools Can Make all Parent Involvement Possible to Benefit all Students

The final major finding of my research is that schools have the resources to concentrate on culturally and linguistically sustainable efforts to be more inclusive of multilingual parent voices, which would greatly benefit students. According to Van Velsor and Orozco (2007), the first step is for schools to require school staff to complete training in areas such as communication with parents, incorporating community culture, and multiculturalism. My community partner agreed, saying that school staff should receive training in interacting effectively with families and instilling trust in them to participate. School staff will become aware of the various measures that can be taken to be inclusive of all families as a result of this. Cullaj (2015) mentioned that teachers could facilitate contact by sending home school papers in the parent's native language as much as possible and requesting a translator or using a translation app for communication between parents and teachers. If teachers take the initiative to plan for resources before parents need to ask, it can make parents feel included (Cullaj, 2015). My community partner also mentioned the importance of being mindful of a family's language in order to make them feel included. When school staff begin to display an interest in other cultures, they will be able to develop deeper bonds with families. According to Bower and Griffin (2011), these relationships are developed over time through regular communication, understanding, a common goal, and trust. These connections increase parental engagement, which has a positive correlation with student achievement. This was a similar viewpoint to that
of my group partner. In order to optimize student, teacher, and parent performance, she stressed the importance of educators developing personal relationships with parents and students. It is important to note that Cultural and linguistic barriers are undoubtedly challenging, but they are not impossible to overcome.

CONCLUSION

This section of my research will include a summary of my problem of practice as well as all of the data collected to support it and better understand it. I will also mention the recommendations I have regarding my problem of practice, unanswered questions, and the implications this study has for the profession.

Conclusion

My problem of practice evolved from pre-existing feelings toward an issue that I had personally encountered and witnessed and believed could serve as a springboard for improvement. According to my research, the root cause of this issue is that schools fail to provide these families with effective communication and opportunities for inclusion. While it is frequently assumed that low-income, non-English speaking parents are to blame for their lack of involvement, numerous opportunities exist to create the welcoming and inclusive environment that these families deserve.

Throughout much of this research, themes related to critical race theory emerged. CRT in education examines how educational theory, policy, and practice oppress certain racial and ethnic groups. CRT rebuts conventional arguments about objectivity, meritocracy, color blindness, race and gender neutrality, and equal opportunity. We can see that these traditional claims serve as a cover for dominant groups in American society's self-interest, power, and privilege.
It is clear from my research that the problem persists and that resolving it will require extensive collaboration. It is critical for educators and researchers to expand their understanding of the numerous ways parent involvement can be encouraged across learning environments to ensure that all children, regardless of their background, have equal access to academic success. There is much that a school can do to encourage parental involvement; however, this can only be accomplished if the school is willing to make an effort. To foster and strengthen positive relationships between parents and schools, schools must demonstrate an interest in these families and a commitment to each student's success.

**Implications and Recommendations**

Throughout the country, low-income, non-English speaking families face significant barriers to school participation. Despite this knowledge, schools have failed to implement effective programs or allocate adequate resources to ensure that all families are involved in their children's education. As a future educator, I will work to ensure the inclusion of all students and families. My goal is to make each guest feel welcomed, included, and appreciated when they enter my room. I want all students to understand the critical role their families play in their lives and that no family is superior to another. I want parents to understand that they can reach out and get involved in their child's education to demonstrate that collaboration results in the best education and future for these children. Without resolving this conundrum, long-term negative consequences for the education of low-income, non-English speaking students will continue to exist. It is critical to recognize that as our world becomes more connected and diverse, teachers' communication styles will need to adapt in order to stay in touch with today's student body — and their families. The results of this study have several implications for non-English speaking parents and for school policy. Given the findings for Parent–School Involvement variables, it is
essential that school administrators and teachers understand the importance of working with parents.
References


APPENDICES

Interview Questions

1. Can you describe yourself? What is your role in the school? How many years of experience do you have? What is your purpose for work?

2. I know why you are a good community partner for me, but why do you think you would be beneficial for my research?

3. Do you think teachers or schools make the effort to make parent involvement for low-income parents, especially for non-English speaking parents more possible?

4. Why does this affect the school? Can you give some examples?

5. How does this make parents and other students feel?

6. What have you noticed between low-income students and high-income students? Such as treatment, opportunities etc.

7. What barriers have you noticed between parents and teachers?

8. Why do you think it is important to address these issues?

9. Why do you think some parents aren't able to become involved in their children's lives? How do you think they feel about this and do you think they are aware of the inequities?

10. Why do you think parent/teacher relationships are important?

11. Do you think parents being involved impacts their children?

12. What is the first step you think teachers or schools should take to get more parents involved?

13. How have you made parents more involved as an ASES director?

14. Have you or someone you personally know faced this issue? Explain.