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Parent Engagement at a Cristo Rey School: Building Home-School Partnerships in a Multicultural Immigrant Community

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Catholic social teaching affirms the primary role of parents in their children's education, as well as the importance of a home-school partnership. The purposes of this article are to review the results of a mixed methods study of parent engagement at Cristo Rey Boston High School, and how the results of this study led to specific efforts to include parents more closely in the life of the school. Results suggest that parents in multicultural communities perceive their engagement to be an important part of their children's education. Yet, this engagement may take different forms that may go unrecognized by school staff. Based on study findings, school administrators began integrating parent engagement efforts through a coordinated system of student advising. From the perspective of Catholic social teaching, recognizing and responding to these multicultural differences are a means of praxis that affirms human dignity and reduces barriers to education for the marginalized.

Keywords

Cristo Rey model, parent engagement, parent involvement, secondary education, multicultural perspectives

Catholic social teaching affirms the primary role of parents in their children's education, as well as the importance of a home-school partnership (Frabutt, Holter, Nuzzi, Rocha, & Cassel, 2010). Yet, little research has empirically examined parent perspectives of this partnership in the context of urban Catholic high schools serving multicultural immigrant communities. More generally, a wide body of research shows the importance of parental involvement in promoting better academic outcomes (Phillipson & Phillipson, 2010), especially in urban and poor communities and among diverse populations (Jeynes, 2007). However, involving parents can be challenging for school personnel, particularly involving parents for whom English is a second language (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008). Best practice literature suggests

that efforts to garner parental support should move beyond merely providing opportunities for parents to get involved—using a deficit model of parental behavior (Carreon, Drake, & Barton, 2005)—towards school personnel proactively developing relationships with parents and soliciting their input. Distinct from parent involvement, *parent engagement* is an empowering strategy to develop trust and to engage in shared decision-making with parents around their children's education (Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009).

The purposes of this article are (a) to review how an innovative partnership between Cristo Rey Boston (CRB) and the Boston College School of Social Work allowed for systematic data collection of parent perspectives about their engagement with CRB, and (b) to discuss how the results of this study led to specific efforts to include parents more intentionally within the life of the school. In the sections that follow, we first present background information on parent engagement in schools, including common barriers to engagement and strategies for increasing engagement. We then describe Cristo Rey Boston (CRB) and outline the parameters of the partnership between CRB and the Boston College School of Social work before presenting and discussing the results of our study on parent engagement.

The Importance of Parent Engagement in Children's Education

A growing body of research suggests that parental engagement is positively correlated with a range of educational outcomes, particularly academic achievement (Fan & Chen, 2001; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2007). The concepts of parent engagement and parent involvement tend to be loosely defined (Jeynes, 2007), such that comparisons across studies become difficult. Nevertheless, existing research shows that greater parent involvement in children's education is associated with higher student grade point averages (Anderson & Minke, 2007), higher math and reading scores (Izzo et al., 1999; Larocque et al., 2011), and better behavioral outcomes, such as improved attendance and fewer discipline problems (Larocque et al., 2011).

Parent engagement in children's education is important for a number of reasons. First, parental aspirations for their children's academic success and high expectations for performance tend to lead parents to become more involved in their children's education (Fan & Chen, 2001). As parents become more engaged, they help build a bridge between their children's lives at school and at home and help provide a positive environment for their children's development (El Nokali et al., 2010). Increased communication be-

tween parents and teachers also allows parents to address problematic behaviors more effectively, and enables them to provide support in academic areas requiring extra guidance (El Nokali et al., 2010).

Nevertheless, significant barriers to parent engagement exist, especially for marginalized, low-income, and ethnically diverse populations (Hanafin & Lynch 2002; Hill & Tyson 2009; Hill & Torres 2010; Williams, et al. 2011; Yamamoto & Holloway 2010). These barriers are explored in the following section of the report.

Common Barriers to Parent Engagement

A common theme in the literature on US K-12 education is the problem of students of color experiencing poorer academic outcomes than White students. Latino and African American adolescents are more likely than White adolescents to struggle academically, to be suspended from school, to drop out of school, and to demonstrate high rates of absenteeism. These patterns result in significant negative and long term effects for individuals, communities, and society (Murray, 2009). Supportive relationships with adults, both teachers and parents, promote positive adjustment among adolescents—especially adolescents in high risk contexts such as low SES communities and environments plagued by community violence (Murray, 2009). Despite evidence of the importance of positive relationships with adults, school staff often find it challenging to engage parents within the school community.

Dealing with difference. Differences in language and culture present significant challenges for school staff working to engage parents in diverse communities (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008). One unintended consequence of a lack of cultural understanding is that families may feel judged, and become less involved in their children's education over time (Ryan, Kelly-Vance, & Ryalls, 2010). Research, however, shows that many parents of minority or immigrant backgrounds simply have different expectations for their roles in children's education. These parents often believe in a professionalized model of education, in which teachers are solely responsible for education. Yamamoto & Holloway (2010) conducted a meta-analysis of parental expectations as related to student academic performance. Their research suggests that: (a) Parental expectations for academic performance vary by racial/ethnic group; (b) Parental expectations are higher among Asian American families in comparison to other groups, while studies including European American, African American and Latino groups yielded mixed results; and (c) Prior academic

performance is a strong predictor for European American parental expectations, though it is not a strong predictor for groups of color. These broad patterns are further complicated when parents themselves have low levels of education, are single parents, or suffer from mental health problems such as depression (Kohl, Lengua, & McMahon, 2000).

Communication. Multiple studies demonstrate that the content and quality of communication between parents and school staff is a stronger predictor of increased parental engagement than is the amount of contact (Anderson & Minke, 2010; Fan & Williams, 2010; Kohl, Lengua & McMahon, 2000). Low quality communication between parents and school staff leads to poor perceptions of teachers, discouraged and irritated parents, and low endorsements of the school in general, adversely impacting potential for effective and sustained parental engagement (Kohl et al., 2011).

Teacher perceptions of parental involvement. Teachers' perceptions of parental involvement are also critical facets in the parent engagement efforts of schools. Epstein and Dauber (1991) found that teachers who demonstrated a strong belief and a more positive attitude toward parent involvement were more likely to reach out to parents. These researchers also found that when teachers differed culturally from their students, or if there was a large class size, teachers were less likely to know their students' parents. These situations led teachers to believe that parents were disinterested or uninvolved. The less teachers and administration believed the parents cared about their involvement, the fewer opportunities existed for parents to become involved. Teachers' beliefs and assumptions often circumscribed the level and likelihood of parents' involvement (Epstein & Dauber, 1991).

Strategies to Improve Parent Engagement

Cultural responsiveness. Culture may be used as a point of leverage for promoting parental engagement in schools. In one study (De Gaetano, 2007), a small group of educators worked with two schools with majority Latino populations, to determine whether focusing on Latino parents' cultures, background, and language would be an effective vehicle to increase parental engagement at these schools. Implicit in this study was the idea that parents, as primary transmitters of culture to their children, served as a valuable vehicle to understanding children's backgrounds. Through a series of workshops (focusing on parents' backgrounds, experiences and communities), and parent-teacher collaborations, parents reported increased awareness of their

cultures and of their role as educators for their children, at home and within the school. (De Gaetano, 2007).

De Gaetano's study (2007) highlights the need to provide a welcoming environment for parents, wherein parents are understood as equals and advocates in their children's education. Yet, to achieve increased success in school, the school's mission and values should also be reinforced at home to create a consistent environment (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Research has shown that parental reinforcement and support for academics at home improves child motivation and academic engagement (Farkas & Grolnick, 2010; Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow & Fendrich, 1999). It is important that teachers and other school personnel find ways to assist parents in developing expectations for their children's academic achievement, as parent-child relationships are strongly associated with children's school performance (Murray, 2009).

Teacher-parent collaboration. Teacher-parent collaborations have been shown to result in teachers placing increased value on parent participation, as well as a better understanding and knowledge of the classroom and teachers' roles (DeGaetano, 2007). Perhaps most importantly, stronger collaborations between parents and teachers may result in higher parent self-efficacy, an important prerequisite for greater parent involvement in their children's education (Minke & Anderson, 2010). Good parent-teacher relationships are often considered the base of parental engagement at schools, allowing for positive collaboration where shared objectives and expectations help promote positive student development (De Gaetano, 2007; Larocque, Kleinman & Darling, 2011). Other studies have demonstrated the importance of positive teacher outreach and communication as significant predictors of increased parental engagement (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Fan & Williams, 2010). Positive contact and outreach from teachers and other school staff allows parents to feel valued, welcomed and motivated to participate in their child's learning in meaningful ways (Anderson & Minke, 2007). One example is for school staff to help parents navigate school-related activities and students' assignments, which can often be overwhelming. This step has proven to be helpful in building a connection and establishing trust between parents and the teachers (Murray, 2009).

Age-appropriate involvement. The strategies parents pursue to support their child's education differ depending on the age of the child. According to the results of meta-analyses of the relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement for urban children, elementary school children benefitted most from overt activities such as communicating expectations,

reading to the child, and setting a general atmosphere of valuing education in the home (Jeynes, 2005). For urban secondary school children, parental involvement still was significantly associated with academic achievement, but parents' expressions could be less overt or focused on rules and more subtle and supportive in nature (Jeynes, 2007). These findings have been corroborated by more recent meta-analyses that indicated parental expectations (Wilder, 2014) and general parental supervision (Castro, Exposito-Casas, Lopez-Martin, et al., 2015) were the variables most closely linked to student achievement. Importantly, parental involvement in adolescent children's education also has been linked with improved behavioral functioning and reduced depressive symptomatology over time (Wang, Hill, & Hofkens, 2014), a dynamic which suggests that parents' support of education for children also translates to socio-emotional support.

As a college preparatory school for low-income students and families, Cristo Rey Boston High School (CRB) is faced with many of the challenges discussed in the literature above when working to engage parents effectively. Yet, parent engagement and empowerment are at the core of the Cristo Rey mission of education. In the next section of this article, we describe Cristo Rey Boston and its efforts to increase parent engagement.

Engaging Parents at Cristo Rey Boston

CRB is located in an urban neighborhood in Dorchester, Massachusetts. Previously called North Cambridge Catholic High School, CRB joined the Cristo Rey network in 2004 and moved to its current location in Dorchester in 2010. CRB's mission is "educating young people to become men and women of faith, purpose and service" (Cristo Rey Boston, 2010, n.p.). Students at CRB attend school four days a week and spend one day in a corporate work study program that largely offsets the costs of tuition. CRB serves an ethnically diverse, economically disadvantaged, and majority immigrant community. While the school boasts college acceptance and admission rates near 100%, CRB administrators have voiced concerns over their ability to engage and partner with parents effectively.

Effectively engaging parents is one of the core elements of the larger mission and innovative approach to education of Cristo Rey schools. Indeed, one of the 10 Mission Effectiveness Standards of a Cristo Rey School dictates that the school "is family centered and plays an active role in the local community" (Cristo Rey Network, n. d., No. 3). Parent engagement, at least

implicitly, has been central to the vision for CRB since the inception of the school. In 1994, Jim Gartland, S. J., conducted a feasibility study for what was to become the first Cristo Rey school in Chicago. Fr. Gartland outlined 11 presuppositions for this unique vision of education. Of these presuppositions, four were directly related to close involvement of parents and families in children's education (numbering from original document, italics added):

5. The hope is to educate families. *Parental involvement will be necessary for the school's success.*
6. *Community involvement in the planning and functioning of this project will be crucial.*
7. The curriculum and atmosphere of the (school) will be *culturally sensitive to the ...community it serves.*
10. The principles and objectives will be formulated by an *advisory committee that will include parents*, educators, community leaders, church leaders, business leaders, and Jesuit personnel. (Kearney, 2008, pp. 56-57)

The efforts of Cristo Rey Boston to improve its parent engagement strategies are consistent with the larger mission of the school: "ministry with the poor" (Kearney, 2008, p. 55).

Cristo Rey Boston and Boston College Partnership

In late 2011, CRB and the Boston College School of Social Work formalized a relationship in which faculty and students could conduct community-based research at the CRB campus, with the intent of facilitating evidence-informed practices at the school. CRB administrators asked for a better understanding of the barriers to parent engagement. A faculty member created a "group independent study" course for graduate students at Boston College, focused on building parent engagement in the context of CRB. Students engaged in university-based coursework related to parent engagement in schools, and were also trained in basic research methods, including data collection, analysis, and reporting.

The faculty member and CRB administrators then planned a series of data collection efforts in tandem with school activities such as report card nights and financial aid preparation seminars. Members of the research team

attended these activities to oversee quantitative and qualitative data collection. With oversight from the faculty member, students worked in groups of three or four and focused on either quantitative or qualitative analysis. Students presented the findings to CRB administrators at the end of the semester. The following sections explain the study methods and results, and how the findings were later used to build new programming at CRB focusing on parent engagement.

Methods

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to conduct an assessment of the current state of parent engagement strategies at CRB, with the goal of identifying strengths and barriers that may help inform future programming for CRB. In this study, we focused on two primary research questions:

1. What are the profiles of parental engagement at Cristo Rey Boston?
2. What differences (if any) exist between immigrant and US-born parents with respect to involvement activities?

In order to answer these research questions, we gathered both survey data for quantitative analysis and focus group data for qualitative analysis.

Sample

Participants in this study were parents of students enrolled at CRB. All families enrolled at CRB had the opportunity to participate; participation was voluntary. Parent surveys, linked by school-assigned numeric identifiers, were administered during school events already taking place during the study, such as parent nights, college preparation meetings, grade meetings, and informal parent gatherings. Of the 311 families enrolled at CRB, we received surveys from 119 parents, resulting in a response rate of 38.3%.

Nearly half (48%) of the parent respondents self-identified as Latino, which was reflective of the demographics of the school as whole. Two-thirds (66%) of parents who took the survey identified themselves as foreign-born. Our study had fewer African-American respondents compared to the school population (19.8% and 44.0%, respectively). The study also had significant numbers of Haitian (15.3%) and Cape Verdean (6.3%) respondents.

Survey

The survey instrument used in this study was the Parent-Teacher Involvement Questionnaire-Parent (PTIQ-P). Originally developed for the Fast

Track Project, a national, longitudinal study investigating the efficacy of academic and behavioral interventions conducted throughout early/middle childhood and adolescence (Fast Track Project, 2010). The PTIQ-P includes four subscales:

1. Quality of parent–teacher relationship
2. Parent involvement and volunteering at school
3. Parent endorsement of school
4. Frequency of parent–teacher contact.

The instrument contained 26 Likert-scale items and is normed for parents of children in grade 4 and above. In addition, we included survey questions pertaining to perceived respect from school staff, parental trust of school staff, participation in shared decision-making in child’s education, desire to create stronger linkages with school staff, and educational and career aspirations. We also collected demographic information with the survey instrument, including age, length of time living in the community, place of birth, racial and ethnic identification, number of people living in the home, and marital and educational status.

Indicators from the PTIQ-P measure were used to develop composite measures of motivators and activities for involvement. The first two measures were 4-question indexes of parent reports of involvement activities and parent reports of teacher/school invitations to involvement. Questions for these measures asked parents to respond to statements such as “In the past year, you have called your child’s teachers: never, once or twice a year, almost every month, almost every week, more than once per week” and “In the past year, your child’s teachers have called you: never...more than once per week”. The next three measures each focused on aspects of parental motivators for involvement, including trust (4 indicators), connection (7 indicators), and confidence (4 indicators) in the school. Some example questions for each of these measures (measured from “not at all” to “a great deal” include: “you trust your children’s teachers” (trust), “you feel welcome at the school” (connection), and “you have confidence in the people at your school” (confidence).

Survey instruments and consent forms were disseminated in paper-and-pencil format. All measures and consent forms were available in English, and also translated into Spanish, Cape Verdean, and Haitian Creole for the purposes of this study. Bilingual research assistants and students were available to assist parents who had trouble reading the surveys and consent forms.

Focus Groups

The research team also conducted four focus groups. Two focus groups were conducted on a Wednesday evening and two were conducted on a Saturday morning. The number of participants in each focus group ranged from 6 to 12, with an approximate overall number of 30 parents. On each day, one of the focus groups was conducted in English and the other was conducted in Spanish. For each section, there was a facilitator and one or more note takers. The facilitators were given semi-structured questionnaires, of 15 questions, to be used as guides for discussions in the focus groups. Each focus group lasted between 75 and 105 minutes.

Analysis

The research team analyzed the survey data using univariate and bivariate statistical methodologies. We then used multiple imputation techniques to account for missing data and to establish a working sample ($n=104$), removing 13 cases that were missing on key demographic (race, ethnicity, immigration status) variables or who were missing entire sections of the questionnaire. Next, we conducted a k-means cluster analysis to examine latent group membership based on parents' perceptions of school outreach, parent outreach, parent connection to the school, parent trust in the school, and parent confidence in the school. We later conducted a follow-up latent class analysis to compare latent group membership profiles on the same characteristics.

Research team members transcribed and translated the focus group data. In two groups of three researchers, we analyzed all data using a process of open and axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to create a grounded theory of parental engagement.

Results

Quantitative Findings

Bivariate comparisons using student t-tests of study variables are presented in Table 1 ($N=104$). Reports indicate slight differences between US-born and immigrant parents on school outreach ($t(102)=1.81, p<.10$), parent outreach ($t(102)=1.85, p<.10$), and parent trust ($t(102)=-1.79, p<.10$)¹, with immigrant families reporting greater trust in the school but reporting fewer involvement activities.

1 We include results based on a relaxed p value ($p<.10$) given the the small size of the study sample.

Table 1

Comparison of Study Variables between Parents born in the US and Foreign-Born Parents

Variable	Born in US		Foreign Born	
	M	SD	M	SD
School Outreach	.21 ⁺	.14	-.15 ⁺	.12
Parent Outreach	.28 ⁺	.15	-.13 ⁺	.13
Parent Connection	-.16	.17	.15	.10
Parent Trust	-.24 ⁺	.19	.13 ⁺	.11
Parent Confidence	-.09	.18	.10	.12

⁺ $p < .10$ df(102)

Results of k-means cluster analyses (Euclidean distances) to identify profiles of parental engagement and examine differences in involvement practices and attitudes toward the home-school relationship across immigrant and multicultural subgroups are reported in Table 2 and presented visually in Figure 1. Parent responses ($N=104$) were partitioned into four categories based on reports of parent connection, trust, and confidence (i.e., motivators) and school and parent outreach (i.e., activities). The first cluster (14% of sample) represents those parents who reported lower than the mean on all five indicators, which we identified as “disaffected”. The second cluster, “good fit,” (19% of sample) represents those parents who reported higher than the mean on all five indicators, representing strong involvement motivation and activities. The third cluster (43%) indicates the “trusting” parents, who report fewer activities but greater connection, trust, and confidence in the school. This cluster represents the majority of Cristo Rey Parents in our sample. The final cluster represents “agent” parents (23%) who reported higher activities with the school but expressed lower levels of connection, trust, and confidence.

Table 2

Parents' Perceptions of Their Relationship with CRB (N=104)

		Involvement Activities			
		High (N; %)		Low (N; %)	
Motivators for Involvement	High	Good fit	(20; 19%)	Trusting	(45; 43%)
	Low	Agents	(24; 23%)	Disaffected	(15; 14%)



Figure 1. Parent profiles of relationship to school and involvement activities (K-means)

To test the robustness of these findings, we conducted a second cluster analysis using the latent class analysis (poLCA) package in R (Linzer & Lewis, 2011). The advantage of using this strategy, in addition to k-means clustering, is the ability to examine goodness-of-fit statistics and the ability to handle missing data². However, the poLCA package in R requires the use of polytomous outcome variables. To meet this condition, the five continuous (standardized) measures were split into low, middle, and high terciles

² We were able to increase the sample size to n=117 for these analyses because of this advantage. For the previous sample (n=104), we were unable to impute on some cases because they were missing data on variables included in the imputation model.

such that each variable was measured on a scale of 1 (low) to 3 (high). We tested models to see if 2, 3, 4, or 5 clusters best fit the observed data. Goodness-of-fit indices for each models were then compared. Indices were best for both the 3-cluster ($AIC = 1070$, $BIC = 1159$, $X^2(68) = 144.56$) and 4-cluster ($AIC = 1065$, $BIC = 1183$, $X^2(68) = 117.0$) solutions, and we present the 4-cluster solution for theoretical consistency. We find that this second analysis also supports the existence of “disaffected,” “good fit,” “trusting,” and “agent” clusters. We also tested gender, race, and immigration status as model covariates to see if these demographic factors were correlated with any of the four clusters, but there were no significant findings.

Qualitative Findings

Qualitative analyses of parent focus groups highlighted the following: (a) parent perceptions of the home-school partnership; and (b) parent suggestions for improvement. Parent reports of involvement activities were somewhat mixed. Some parents reported being very involved with CRB. For example, one parent noted that she stays up until her child finishes homework: “Me quedo despierta hasta que ella termine las materias.” Yet other parents may be less involved. For example, one parent noted that while she supervises her child’s homework, language barriers prevented her from being more involved.

Parents expressed that they are more active in the home environment, such as helping with homework and taking kids to school. If they have concerns about their child’s performance at school, parents generally felt free to reach out to teachers. Several parents noted that CRB teachers care deeply about their kids, and said that teachers reach out to parents. Still others noted that they wished teachers would communicate more. In particular, parents wanted to receive word from teachers before their child was in trouble or was making a poor grade in class. Parents stated that they like when the administration calls when their children are late or absent. When parents approach the teachers they almost always receive a response. Some parents mentioned the importance of faith in their families, and that they therefore were drawn to the Catholic mission of the school. One parent noted that she wanted her child to have faith be a part of her life (“que pueda tenerla [fe] en su vida”) and another mentioned praying the rosary, receiving first communion, and having an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe in her house as a way of expressing the importance of faith in the life of her child. Some mentioned explic-

itly the benefits of a faith-based education and would like even more integration of faith in their child's education, while others said it was not important to them.

Parents also noted a number of needed improvements in the home-school partnership. Some parents felt disconnected from the school and were not part of the school community outside of parent-teacher conferences. As one parent noted, "I feel as parents we're not valued as equal partners in our children's education." Language barriers emerged as a common theme. Some parents also lack access to computers and email, a common form of home-school communication at CRB. Parents also indicated that they would like more preventative measures from teachers and administrators to keep a student from failing.

Discussion

Schools face unique challenges and opportunities in building parent engagement (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). This is particularly true for schools serving ethnic minority and immigrant communities (Murray, 2009; Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010). Importantly, the families in this study reported high levels of involvement not necessarily visible in the school community, such as taking an active role in supporting homework for their children. Yet, language barriers often prevented families from taking more active roles within the school community, consistent with existing research on barriers to parent involvement (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

An important question of this study relates to how parents born outside of the US perceive their levels of school involvement. Our study found that, with respect to profiles of parent engagement, foreign-born parents were no different than native-born parents in terms of motivation and activities, a finding that challenges existing research (Turney & Kao, 2009). This finding suggests that, for parents of Cristo Rey Boston students, immigrant status plays less of a role than parents' motivations and activities to support their children's education. Similarly, we found that there were no significant differences in involvement profiles across parent race, ethnicity, and gender. This finding is consistent with research from Yamamoto and Holloway (2010), which found mixed results when looking at racial differences among White, Black, and Hispanic families, and highlights the importance of individual school context when examining these differences. This finding is also consistent with other research on parent engagement at CRB, which found that ethnicity, education, family size, and immigration status were not significant predictors of involvement (Reynolds, Crea, Medina, Degnan, & McRoy, 2014).

The results of this study also suggest that parent engagement activities occur on a continuum. Nearly half of the sample (the “Trusting” subgroup) score high on motivation for engagement, but comparatively low on measurable parent engagement activities such as volunteering at the school or engaging teachers in communication. This dynamic is reinforced by parents’ perspectives emerging from the qualitative data, which suggest that parents are engaged in supporting their children’s school work, although these efforts may not be as visible to school staff, and hampered by language barriers. Conversely, nearly a quarter of the sample reported opposite patterns of engagement (the “Agents” subgroup), with relatively low levels of parental connection, trust and confidence in the school, but higher levels of active involvement. Importantly, 42% of all parents reported high levels of involvement *activities*, and 62% reported high levels of *motivation*, such that only 14% fell into the “Disaffected” subgroup with low motivation and low activities. These findings paint a picture of parents who are actively supportive of their children’s education, and more frequently behind the scenes rather than engaging directly with school staff. Calling to mind Catholic teaching which emphasizes the primacy of the parent in the child’s education (Frabutt et al., 2010), these findings indicate that parents are, in fact, living up to the call for involvement, though involvement activities may be less visible to school faculty and staff when occurring within the home.

A corollary to these findings is the importance in developing strategies for reaching out to the “disaffected” subgroup of parents at Cristo Rey Boston—and, for that matter, to parents who are “disaffected” in all Catholic schools. Conceptualizing the efforts of school-parent and school-community partnerships as grounded within a commitment to a preferential option for those on the margins of Catholic school communities, parental involvement policies and strategies in school environments should make a concerted commitment to reach out to those parents who are least involved or may otherwise experience exclusion in any form. This study showed that some families felt marginalized and not valued as equal partners in their children’s education, and that language barriers also played a role in these feelings of being disconnected. One strategy to address this issue is changing the school’s power structure to provide a greater voice to parents, by explicitly including families’ culture in the school curriculum (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001). This approach draws from the cultural wealth of the community and moves away from a deficit model of engaging with communities of color (Yasso, 2005) that risks eroding students’ and families’ social capital (Valenzuela, 1999). Such a re-

sponse from Catholic school faculty and staff would make intentional Pope Francis's (2013) imagination of a Church which "goes forth" and extends beyond "comfort zone[s]", so as "to reach all the 'peripheries' in need of the light of the Gospel" (No. 20).

Practice Implications

When the research team presented findings to CRB administrators, it became clear that efforts were needed to increase the quality of communication with parents—a pattern commonly observed in the literature (Hill & Tyson, 2010) especially in multicultural communities (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008). One strategy that emerged in these discussions was the identification of parent advocates who already were active in the school community (see Capella et al., 2008). Reaching out to these parent leaders might begin a process of building bridges between home and school, and across cultural and linguistic barriers.

One of the recommendations that the research team shared with CRB administrators was to develop a parent coordinator role for the school. The primary purpose of this role would be to invite parents to become more involved in the life of the school, not simply by increasing the frequency of contact, but by focusing on quality, constructive interactions (Izzo et al., 1999). The parent coordinator would help facilitate an open communication policy between school staff and parents (Williams et al., 2010) and would collaborate with teachers and staff to integrate parental engagement activities during the academic year.

Following this research study, CRB administrators began building towards such a structure. First, the school began organizing students and teachers into advisory groups, in which one teacher was assigned to the same group of students throughout their time at the school. As relationships were built and strengthened among teachers and advisees, outreach to engage the advisees' parents increased. As each advisory group's lead teacher became tasked with communicating with the parents of their advisory group, it became easier for the school to identify potential parent advocates looking to become more involved in the school community. Next steps include recruiting parent leaders to be more formally linked to each advisory group's lead teacher so that parent leaders share in the responsibility of communicating with the parents of other students in the advisory group. In this way, the parent community mirrors the student community at CRB, facilitating consistent communication, and opening a mediated pathway for parents to

communicate to the school. Future plans involve selecting a parent coordinator from among the most active parent leaders who could assist in coordinating more effective communication between staff and students.

Conclusion

This study highlights how the efforts of Cristo Rey Boston have led to tangible improvements in strengthening home-school partnerships. The Cristo Rey Boston model for building these partnerships speaks to the core praxis of Catholic social teaching (Scanlan, 2010), and illustrates how one Cristo Rey school has incorporated Pope Francis' call to serve those on the margins and make central the option for the poor in the context of preparing students for college. While often messy, and rarely a straightforward process (Scanlan, 2010), striving for children's educational success depends largely on the ability to form meaningful partnerships with parents around their children's education (Frabutt et al., 2010). As this study suggests, parents in multicultural communities perceive their engagement to be an important part of their children's education. Yet, this engagement may take different forms that may go unrecognized by school staff. Recognizing and responding to these multicultural differences are thus a means of praxis that affirms human dignity and reduces barriers to education for the marginalized.

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