Connecting Social Services to Social Change; Nonprofits and K-5 Parental Involvement

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Latinx families face unique barriers to educational success, one of which might be the U.S. emphasis on parental involvement in schools. Some social theories predict that some Latinx families could already be benefiting from services that promote parental involvement in early education through educational or community service provision. Measured in this study through IRS data on nonprofit community organizations, such civic infrastructure is predicted to especially facilitate parental involvement behaviors from individuals in communities with fewer resources and from families with more recent immigrant histories. Controlling for other community and individual factors, fixed-effects models predict a scale of parental involvement behaviors with the number of nonprofits, community poverty, and family acculturation and provide some evidence for a nonprofit effect on parental involvement.

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 "History will judge us by the difference we make in the everyday lives of children."
-Nelson Mandela, 2002

The everyday lives of children in America are shifting. The lives of Latinx children, in particular, are caught up in the tension created by a dynamic, evolving society, as they represent the fastest growing segment of children in the United States (Fry and Gonzales, 2008). Consequently, the success of these children within the U.S. educational system is increasingly important for structuring a just and equal society. American schools, however, are vastly unprepared for providing the necessary environment for the success of not only all children from Latinx families, but also other minority families, and all children from families with low income (Alexander, Entwisle, and Olson, 2014). Beginning in the 1980's economic and educational policy in the United States has relied heavily on the nonprofit sector to provide the kinds of additional community services that such struggling families require for educational success (Clemens and Guthrie 2010). But do such programs show macro-level promise for the reduction of inequality?

Answering this question poses many unique challenges, as the nonprofit sector is diverse and provides a huge range of services that might influence a child's educational success (Anheier, 2014). This study leverages the unique experiences of Latinx families, in particular, to determine if nonprofits are valuable community resources, or if they are just another social program that is out of reach to those most in need. Leveraging economic and political nonprofit theory with recent insights developed in small-scale qualitative studies, I explore the association between nonprofit services and parental involvement in education among the Latinx population in the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Kindergarten Cohort 2011 (ECLS-K 2011) (Barman, 2016; Hong 2011; Small, 2009).

Knowing if and how community organizations represent an avenue to promote the ability for Latinx families to successfully navigate the educational system is practically important given the large share of the U.S. population that is Latinx. But it is also theoretically important regarding institutional influences on healthy population behavior because nonprofit service provision is rapidly expanding in the United States, as well as globally (Powell and Steinberg 2006). A lot of economic and political justification exists for these types of service providers, but there still lacks a comprehensive understanding of their ability to promote the health and wellbeing at the population level. This study moves in that direction.

The U.S. emphasis on parental involvement, especially in elementary school, represents an ideal metric for isolating potential nonprofit impact in the lives of Latinx families and others (US Department of Education 2001). These families, who have more limited experiences with the U.S. educational system because of cultural differences and immigrant histories, face several barriers to parental involvement that nonprofit theory suggests community organizations may be particularly situated to overcome(Adair and Tobin 2008; Marwell, 2004). With an eye towards inequality, a deeper understanding of how these community organizations might improve the educational chances of children in Latinx families, in turn, can help to illuminate and refine the positive and negative consequences of the American and emerging global reliance on the third sector for fundamental service provision.

Aims and Hypothesis

This study encompasses two major aims. The first is to determine if the nonprofit community

context matters for the parental involvement of Latinx families. The second is to determine if there is variation in how the nonprofit community context matters according to acculturation and community poverty. These two aims result in three specific hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: The number of nonprofits in a child's community will be positively associated with that child's parent's involvement.

Hypothesis 2a: If nonprofits reduce inequality, the impact of nonprofit community organizations on parental involvement will be more pronounced for families with low levels of acculturation and high levels of community poverty.

Hypothesis 2b: If nonprofits do not reduce inequality, the impact of nonprofit community organizations on parental involvement will not be more pronounced for families with low levels of acculturation and high levels of community poverty.

Data and Methods

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) is an ideal source for data to address the aims of this study. The NCES has been collecting data on American students in various forms since the 1860's. Modeled after previous surveys, the ECLS-K 2011 represents a recent effort to better understand children's experiences in elementary school, and how these experiences relate to their later development. Beginning in the fall and spring of 2010-2011, 18,000 children, their families, teachers, schools, and care providers began providing information on the child's educational experiences and continued to do so through the spring of fifth grade (2016). The current study includes all children identified as "Hispanic" through parent report. Restricted-use data files provided the geographic information for children, and the sample contains 2,440 children (note: sample sizes are rounded to the nearest 10 per NCES regulation). Multiple imputation processed missing data in Stata using 10 data sets.

Variables

Dependent Variable: Parental Involvement The kinds of parental involvement behaviors that are appropriate for this age group include both visiting the school and facilitating activities for the child outside of school hours. A series of questions asked respondents to indicate if they were involved in one of 11 such activities within the past school year, from attending a PTA meeting to visiting a museum. I constructed a simple sum of these variables.

Independent Variable: Total nonprofit count With data provided by the IRS through a freedom of information act, I constructed a total count of all registered electronically filing nonprofits within a zip code. Although not a reliable estimate for the total number of community organization an area, including those that might be private or a religious institution, I suggest that variation in the number of nonprofits for which data are available reflects variation in the real and perceived services within a community.

County Level:

Derived from the Current Population Survey (CPS), *Community poverty* is the percentage of households within the county that report 185% or below the federal poverty line.

To isolate the influence of nonprofit organizations, several community level controls were added to the model at the county level. *Charter schools:* data from the Common Core of Data contained every registered charter school which are aggregated to the zipcode level. To account for variation in community characteristics and norms, I include, also from the CPS, *Percent white*, *Percent Hispanic*, and *Percent black*. *Percent that carpool* accounts for any latent social-orientation within a county. *Population, Percent Married, Percent Bachelor's degree, Percent Unemployed,* and the *Gini coefficient* capture other important dimensions of community level variation.

Family Level

The ECLS-K also collects significant information on the family of the children it samples. From this data I include *Parental education* (in years), a dichotomous indicator for *currently married*, the provided categorical *Family income,* a categorical *Region* variable*,* and *Parental Employment*; an indicator that at least one parent was employed.

Acculturation To explore variation within the Latinx community in regards to potential influence of nonprofit organizations on parental involvement, I construct a scaled acculturation measure derived from questions pertaining to English language proficiency, immigrant status, and a scaled indicator for immigrant generation for both parents.

Method

The longitudinal nature of this data is ideal for child-level fixed effects. This approach limits the ability for unmeasured time-invariant confounds to influence results. Each child in the data set is compared to themselves over time, meaning that a significant coefficient indicates that a when a child experiences a change in the value of that variable, there is a significant association with a simultaneous change in their parents reported involvement. To evaluate the first aim, a baseline model predicts parental involvement with all variables. To accomplish the second aim, a subsequent model includes and interactions between nonprofit counts, family acculturation, and community poverty.

Causal Inference although fixed-effects are associational in nature, the ability to compare a child against themselves over time eliminates the influence of time-invariant traits. The addition of a year variable controls many time-variant characteristics and as such this approach greatly reduces omitted variable bias. Future analysis will check the robustness of these results to several specifications, including multi-level modeling and school-level fixed-effects. Ad-hoc robustness tests will also determine the impact threshold for a confounding variable.

Results

Table 1 displays the results for the baseline and interaction models. The significant coefficient for the nonprofit count in the baseline model indicates that when a child experiences the addition of a single nonprofit in their zipcode, the reported involvement of their parent increase by .02 points on the 11 point scale. Few other variables in the model reach significance, with the exception of the indication that as a child experiences increases in surrounding unemployment levels, they also experience increases in parental involvement behaviors. The interaction between nonprofit community organizations and acculturation is also insignificant. Future analysis will incorporate the community level poverty. These results point to support for Hypothesis 1, but do not support Hypothesis 2.

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Table 1. Predicting Involvement for Hispanic Sample with Fixed Effects and Acculturation Interaction

	Involvement Scale (RSE)	
	Baseline	Acculturation Interaction
Total Nonprofit Count	0.026***	0.020
	(0.007)	(0.015)
County Level		
Charter schools	-0.044	-0.043
	(0.057)	(0.057)
White (%)	-0.264	-0.266
	(0.326)	(0.327)
Hispanic (%)	-0.005	-0.005
	(0.011)	(0.011)
Black (%)	-0.006	-0.006
	(0.021)	(0.021)
Carpool (%)	-0.038	-0.038
	(0.110)	(0.110)
Population	-0.000	-0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Married (%)	0.015	0.016
	(0.057)	(0.057)
Baclehors Degree (%)	0.018	0.018
	(0.019)	(0.019)
Unemployment (%)	0.220***	0.220***
	(0.065)	(0.065)
Gini	2.265	2.393
	(9.011)	(8.949)
Family Level		
Parental education	0.005	0.005
	(0.111)	(0.111)
Marital status	0.001	0.000
	(0.035)	(0.035)
Family income	-0.001	-0.001
	(0.014)	(0.014)
Region	-1.051	-1.051
	(1.056)	(1.062)
Parental employment	-0.065	-0.064
	(0.127)	(0.127)
Interaction		
Acculturation x NP		0.009
		(0.023)
Constant	3.371	3.280
	(6.913)	(6.888)

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1, Observations: 4970, *n* = 2440