

Links between parenting styles, parent–child academic interaction, parent–school interaction, and early academic skills and social behaviors in young children of English-speaking Caribbean immigrants

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of parenting styles, parent–child academic involvement at home, and parent–school contact on academic skills and social behaviors among kindergarten-age children of Caribbean immigrants. Seventy immigrant mothers and fathers participated in the study. Hierarchical regression analyses revealed that fathers' authoritarian parenting style was negatively associated with and father–school contact was positively associated with receptive skills, vocabulary, and composite scores over and above that of mothers' contributions in these areas. Fathers' authoritative parenting style and father–child academic interaction at home were positively related to children's social behaviors. Mothers' authoritarian parenting style was negatively and mother–school contact was positively associated with children's social behaviors. Analyses indicated that fathers' parenting carried the weight of influence over mothers' parenting for facilitating both child academic skills and social behaviors. The roles of parenting styles, parent–academic activities, and parent–school contacts in early schooling are discussed.

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It is estimated that there are close to 4 million immigrants from the Caribbean in the United States (*Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, U.S. Department of Justice, 2000*). The increase in the number of Caribbean immigrants over the last two decades has been dramatic. For example, between 1981 and 2002, 387,300 Jamaicans, 187,600 Guyanese, 592,700 Dominicans, 322,000 Haitians, and 102,800 Trinidadians migrated to the United States. In some cases the number of immigrants constituted about one-quarter of the sending country's population (e.g., Guyana's; United States Department of Homeland Security, 2002, Immigrant Statistics).

Despite the increasing number of recent immigrants from the Caribbean to the United States, there is limited understanding of the nature of their family life and child socialization practices. Of particular interest to educational researchers are the factors that contribute to the development of academic and behavioral skills of children in immigrant families (Hill, 2001; Roopnarine, Bynoe, & Singh, 2004). Researchers who investigate adjustment and developmental

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patterns in immigrant families point to a multitude of factors that play a crucial role in determining childhood intellectual and social skills (see Berry, 1998; Fuligni, 2001; Suarez-Orozco, 2001). They involve, among others, parental belief systems about educational training (see Roopnarine, Shin, Jung, & Hossain, 2003; Sigel & McGillicuddy-DeLisi, 2002), parenting styles, and academic socialization practices. Academic socialization practices include parent–child learning activities at home (e.g., interactive activities at home such as reading books with children, telling stories, and building things together) and parent–school contact (e.g., talking to the child’s teacher about academic progress and attending school functions) (see Irish, 1995; Lopez, 2001; Suarez-Orozco, 2001, entire issue). In this investigation, we examined the relationships between parenting styles, parent–school contact, and parental involvement in academic activities with children at home and children’s early academic skills and social behaviors among English-speaking Caribbean immigrant families from Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, Barbados, St. Vincent, Antigua, and Grenada residing in the New York City area.

1. Parenting styles and academic skills and social behaviors

Parental socialization practices have been identified as critical in determining children’s cognitive and social development in diverse ethnic and cultural groups (Aunola & Nurmi, 2005; Chao, 2001; Lansford et al., 2005; Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992). Effective socialization behaviors such as the display of warmth and acceptance and appropriate control have repeatedly been shown to be associated with behavioral and cognitive competence in children (Baumrind, 1996; Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Hill, 2001). However, there are disagreements about how different parenting styles influence cognitive and behavioral development of children in different cultural/ethnic groups (see Aunola & Nurmi, 2005; Nelson, Nelson, Hart, Yang, & Jin, *in press*). For instance, the authoritative parenting style seems to benefit the school performance of Hispanic and European Americans than African American or Asian American children (Steinberg, Dornbusch et al., 1992; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992). Likewise, findings on the relationships between different parenting styles and children’s social behaviors across cultures have been equivocal (see Barber, 1996; Brody & Flor, 1998; Chang, Dodge, Schwartz, & McBride-Chang, 2003; Porter et al., 2005; Supple, Peterson, & Bush, 2004).

2. Academic activities at home, school contacts, and children’s academic skills

Following the work of Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994), parental involvement in academic activities was conceptualized as a multidimensional construct composed of parents’ interactions in children’s learning activities at home (e.g., supervision of homework, practicing what was learned in school, etc.) and school contact initiated by parents (e.g., volunteering at school, attending parent–teacher meetings, and monitoring school activities). Both of these constructs have been linked to school readiness (Epstein, 1996; Hill, 2001) and higher levels of school achievement (see Epstein, 1996; Kohl, Lengua, & McMahon, 2000; Synder, 2000). But what constitutes parental involvement in academic activities and levels of school involvement varies by ethnicity and socio-economic background, parental education, family structure, school characteristics and practices, teacher practices, and age of child (Feuerstein, 2000; Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski, & Apostoleris, 1997; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 1999).

3. Caribbean immigrants

The pre-kindergarten and kindergarten years is an appropriate time to assess school readiness, schooling, and interpersonal adjustment (Hill, 2001) among children of color who have been identified as being “at risk” for disparity in school outcomes (Entwisle & Alexander, 1989; Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Data on the educational achievement of children of English-speaking Caribbean immigrant parents in the New York City area are rather sparse. Generally, research on children of immigrants and immigrant children indicates that they are more likely to experience social hardship, especially poverty and overcrowding, compared to non-immigrants (Pawliuk et al., 1996), and to attend poorer and lower quality schools that do not encourage and support parent–school interaction or parental academic activities at home (see Irish, 1995; Suarez-Orozco, 2001). No doubt, these conditions have the potential of undermining children’s developmental progress. Other work shows that children of Caribbean immigrants in London exhibited more disturbed behaviors at school than at home (e.g., Rutter, Yule, Berger, Morton, & Bagley, 1974). Nevertheless, immigrant status in and of itself may not be a good predictor of psychiatric disorder or poor school performance, and most studies

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