

# The Effect of Parenting Education on Parent and Child Behaviors: The Moderating Roles of Income and Ethnicity

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## Abstract

- We investigated the effect of participating in an evidence-based parenting education series on parent's and children's skills and behaviors, and whether income and ethnicity moderated this relation.
- Results indicated that all parents reported significant improvements in their parenting skills and their children's behaviors after completing a parenting education series.
- Latino parents reported significantly greater improvements compared to Caucasian parents.
- Parenting education had a weaker effect on low-income parents' ratings of their children's behaviors.

## Introduction

- Parenting education is a promising resource for supporting parents and promoting the well-being of children (e.g., Serketich & Dumas, 1996; Winter et al., 2012).
- Although there has been an accumulation of evidence supporting parenting interventions that target ethnically diverse populations (Dumas et al., 2011; Webster-Stratton & Taylor, 2001), it is unclear whether evidence-based programs designed for use with Caucasian parents are effective in ethnically diverse families.
  - Most parenting education programs that were designed to target Caucasian families do not generalize to minority populations without the appropriate cultural adaptations (Gross et al., 2007; O' Connor, et al., 2007)
- Understanding the impact of parenting education on Latino families is especially important because:
  - The Latino subpopulation is the fastest growing ethnic minority group in the United States (U.S. Census, 2012)
  - Ethnic minority groups are disproportionately represented among those living in poverty and experiencing co-morbidities associated with being low-income (Corcoran & Adams, 1997; Duncan et al., 1994).
  - Evidence suggests that low-income parents benefit less from parenting interventions (Dumas & Wahler, 1983; Lundahl et al., 2006; Reyno & McGrath, 2006; Wahler, 1980; Webster-Stratton & Hammond, 1990).
- The present study therefore explored two objectives:
  - to replicate the finding that parenting education has a positive impact on all families, and
  - to explore whether parenting education has greater or weaker effects among low-income and minority families.

## Hypotheses

- Participation in a parenting education series will lead to positive changes in parenting skills and child behaviors.
- Low-income and ethnic minority families will experience the greatest benefits from completing parenting education.

## Methods

- Sample consisted of 2,389 Latino and Caucasian parents who participated in evidence-based parent education series in the Pacific Northwest between 2010 and 2012 (Table 1).
- All data came from the Parenting Skills Ladder (PSL), a self-report inventory that asks parents to rate their behaviors and skills, as well as their children's behaviors and skills, before and after completing a parenting education series (Dolenc-Nott et al., 2015).
- A retrospective pre/post design was chosen to maximize the measure's validity (Pratt et al., 2010).
- Parenting skills were measured using 12 items rated on a seven-point Likert-type scale from 0 = Low to 6 = High.
- Child behaviors were measured using three items rated on a seven-point Likert-type scale from 0 = Low to 6 = High.

## Analysis

- A multilevel regression model (parent self-report scores nested within parents, parents nested in parenting education series) was run in Mplus
- ICC's > .10 at individual and class levels
- Non-significant predictors were trimmed in the final model

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Variables of Interest (n = 2,389 parents, n = 235 parenting education classes)**

	M	SD	Range
Parent Age	32.70	9.70	15 – 99
Child Age	5.02	3.48	<1 – 18
Latino	27%	–	0 – 1
Low-Income	72%	–	0 – 1
Parent PSL Score Before	3.78	1.01	0 – 6
Parent PSL Score After	5.21	0.62	1 – 6
Child PSL Score Before	3.56	1.32	0 – 6
Child PSL Score After	4.70	1.12	0 – 6

Note. PSL = Parenting Skills Ladder Sum Score

**Table 2. Multi-Level Model Predicting Perceived Change in Child Behaviors after Participating in Parenting Education**

	b (SE)
<b>Within Parent-Level Main Effects</b>	
Time	1.31*** (0.15)
<b>Between Parent-Level Effects</b>	
Time X Ethnicity	0.21** (0.07)
Time X Income	NS
<b>Between Class-Level Effects</b>	
Time X Ethnicity	0.34*** (0.07)
Time X Income	-0.45* (0.23)

Note. \*p < .05; \*\*p < .01; \*\*\*p < .001  
Outcomes controlled for mandated status

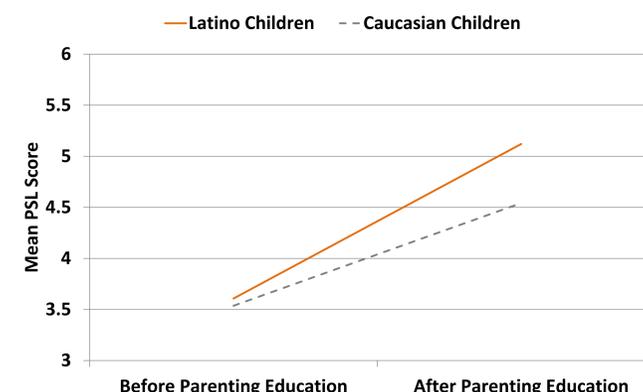
## Results

- The main effect of parenting education was significant for parent skills ( $b = 1.38$ ;  $SE = 0.51$ ;  $p < .001$ ).
- The effect of parenting education on child behaviors was moderated by ethnicity (Figure 1).
  - Caucasian parents reported an average gain of 1.31 points.
  - Latino parents reported a significantly greater average gain of 1.52 points.
- The effect of parenting education on child behaviors was also moderated by ethnicity at the between-class level.
  - For every 10% of a class's enrollees that were Latino, parents in that class reported an added increase in their child's skills of .034 (see Table 2).
- The average effect of time on children's behaviors was not moderated by low-income status at the between-parent level.
- At the between-class level, parents who attended classes with more low-income enrollees reported weaker gains in their child's skills.

## Discussion

- Parenting education can provide parents with tools to improve their parenting skills and may serve as a positive mechanism to address the needs of vulnerable families.
- These results suggest that universal parenting skills and behaviors are important within diverse family contexts, including ethnic minority families (Hill et al., 2003; Mistry et al., 2002; Steinberg et al., 1994).
- From this perspective, it is possible that parenting education provides a social resource that promotes resiliency in children
- Low-income families may have better outcomes if they receive targeted support, such as enhancements to parent training that address the chronic stresses that accompany low-SES (Jackson, Brookes-Gunn, Huang, & Glassman, 2000; Reyno & McGrath, 2006).

**Figure 1. Parent-Level Child Behaviors Before and After Participation in a Parenting Education Program by Ethnicity**



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