Connections: Families and Schools Supporting our Youth

Year 3 – Final Report (Addendum)

Report to Children’s Services Council of Broward County

Broward County Public School’s Research Services

Research Proposal # 532

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Connections

Introduction

This project was a continuation of the Connections Project, which was extended in order to gather greater information from school personnel, parents, and community leaders to explore how difficult cultural experiences and individual and family strengths converge to shape the family lives and school experiences of youth from Latin America, Haiti, and the English-speaking Caribbean. We proposed conducting focus groups similar to those conducted prior to the start of this study with parents, school counselors, and teachers. In addition, we were interested in interviewing community leaders (e.g., spiritual and religious leaders) who serve the families attending the participating schools. These conversations were seeking to explore the roles of difficult background experiences (i.e., stressors) and six protective factors (parent and child coping strategies, religion and spirituality, warmth and cohesion, effective parenting practices, biculturalism, and parent involvement in the school) central to this study. Specifically, we were interested in comparing the findings with the information obtained during the qualitative interviews conducted prior to the Connections’ intervention sessions. The goal of this study is to obtain greater information about how protective factors are expressed and how and why they serve as buffers for immigrant families. Results will inform future interventions by providing cultural and contextual information that can be used to better engage immigrant families in schools and mental health services, and will help to strengthen the effectiveness of the interventions implemented through Connections.

Activity Report - Phase I: Start-Up (January – April 2011)

- IRB Documents and Approval - Co-investigators Diana Formoso and Mercedes ter Maat and Student Co-Investigators Michelle Mantilla, Sasha Stok, Alexis Resnick, and Christina Bermudez-Mejia submitted amendment requests for research approval to NSU’s Institutional Review Board and to Broward County Public Schools’ Research Services. Approval was granted on April 15, 2011.

- Documentation Update and Translations (Spanish and Creole) - Student Co-Investigators worked with NSU bi-lingual and bi-cultural students and non-NSU cultural brokers to update and translate (into Spanish and Creole) documents used in Year 2, such as consent forms, flyers, and interview materials.

- Develop Focus Group Questions - Co-investigators Diana Formoso, Mercedes ter Maat, and Student Co-Investigators developed questions and topics of discussion for the focus groups with parents and teachers, and interviews with community leaders. Focus group topics of discussion included stress and coping, religion and spirituality, warmth and cohesion, parenting practices and discipline, biculturalism, and school involvement.

- Participant Recruitment - Co-investigator Mercedes ter Maat and Student Co-investigators
  1. Met with key school personnel from the 2 participating BCPS elementary school to discuss the project and to request their assistance in recruiting families (24) and teachers (6) from each school to participate in the Parent and Teacher Focus Groups (April, 2011).
  2. Coordinated with BCPS staff to begin the process of recruiting teachers and families (face-to-face and phone contacts, dissemination of flyers, etc.) in May, 2011.
  3. Scheduled the Teacher Focus Groups on both schools. Student Co-investigators obtained refreshments and snacks for the participants (May, 2011).
  4. Purchased $18 Publix gift card incentives to be given to teachers who attended the Focus Group. Student Co-investigators were responsible for disbursing these cards and obtaining receipts from participants (May, 2011).
  5. Continued to work closely with school personnel to coordinate the recruitment of the families to participate on the Parent Focus Group; however, we experienced difficulties with the recruitment
of the families as it conflicted with school personnel’s responsibilities and arrangements for the end of the school year (May-June, 2011).

Activity Report - Phase II: Implementation (May-July 2011)

Teacher Focus Group Sessions

✓ Teacher Focus Groups were conducted at Northside and Miramar Elementary in May, 2011. A total of 11 teachers and school counselors attended the Focus Groups at Northside (7) and Miramar (4) Elementary. Each focus group was held immediately after school dismissal and lasted approximately 2 hours. Student Co-investigators were present during both focus groups and each group was co-lead by two of the Student co-investigators. Refreshments and light snacks were provided for the participants. Prior to beginning each focus group, Student co-investigators reviewed the consent forms and were available to answer questions; all the participants agreed to participate and signed the forms. Participants also completed a brief demographic questionnaire.

✓ The topics of the Teacher Focus Groups included parental involvement, stress and coping, warmth and cohesion, discipline, and recommendations for future interventions. All topics were covered as planned.

✓ Participants were enthusiastic about the topics discussed and demonstrated great commitment to the children and families they work with. Teachers at both schools reported being interested in obtaining more information and training about working with immigrant families.

✓ Breakdown of school personnel participants: Eleven teachers (10 teachers and 1 school counselor) participated in our Teacher Focus Groups. The ethnic background of participating teachers was as follows: African American (n=4), Caucasian (n=4), Latino (n=1), Haitian (n=1), and Asian (n=1). Teachers work at Northside Elementary (120 NE 11 Street, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33304) and Miramar Elementary (6831 SW 26th Street, Miramar, FL 33023).

⇒ Unfortunately, we were not able to recruit all the participants we were expecting as the time coincided with the end of the school-year and teachers reported being busy with school-related responsibilities.

Community Leaders Interview Session

✓ Community Leaders Interviews were conducted in June and July, 2011. A total of 1 community leader was interviewed. Interviews with community leaders were held at a convenient location designated by the interviewee and each interview lasted approximately 1.5 hour. One student co-investigators conducted the interview. Refreshments and light snacks were provided for the participants. Prior to beginning the interview, the student co-investigator reviewed the consent form and made sure to answer the participant’s questions; all the participants agreed to participate and signed the forms. Participants also completed a brief demographic questionnaire.

✓ The topics of the Community Leader Interview included the role of religion and spirituality in the life of immigrant families, stress and coping, warmth and cohesion, discipline, and recommendations for future interventions. All topics were covered as planned.

✓ Participants were motivated to provide information about the immigrant families they serve and the role of religion and spirituality in their life. Participants provided great details about the culture of the families they work with and the important role of the church as a source of support. Community leaders
demonstrated great devotion to their communities and expressed interest in continuing to participate with the research team to assist with information that would help to make the training more appropriate for immigrant families.

✓ Breakdown of community leader who participated: One Pastor from Deliverance Reunited Church of God, located at 2800 W. Oakland Park Blvd. Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33311. The ethnic background of participating community leaders was as follows: Haitian (n=1)

Parent Focus Group Sessions

⇒ Despite efforts to coordinate the Parent Focus Groups on the participating school, the timing did not allow to complete the recruitment process prior to the end of the school-year. We deeply apologize for not being able to complete the proposed Parent Focus Groups as expected.
⇒ Recruitment of religious leaders was also constrained by the academic calendar at NSU as several of the student researchers began out-of-state internships. We again apologize for not being able to meet with as many religious leaders as expected.

Activity Report – Phase III: Data Analysis and Future Steps

✓ Focus Group with Teachers and Interviews with Community Leaders were completed. Each participant received an $18 gift card for attending and participating on our Focus Group or Interview. At the time of this report, data analysis is still in progress and no preliminary results are available yet.

✓ Next steps involve the transcription of the Focus Group Sessions and the interviews. Transcription guidelines developed during the prior year will be followed. The qualitative coding scheme will be updated to reflect the changes made. Qualitative data will be coded and memos will be written to organize the information teachers and community leaders provided during the Focus Groups and interviews. Connections research assistants who have been trained in transcription and qualitative data analysis will be recruited.

Thank you!!!

On behalf of NSU and all investigators and student research assistants involved in the Connections Project, Dr. Formoso and Dr. ter Maat would like to extend continuous deep appreciation toward Broward County Public Schools, the principals and school staff of Miramar and Northside Elementary Schools, to all our participating teachers and community leaders, and to the Children Services Council of Broward County for the financial, emotional, and administrative support provided in order to expand this project.