

Parents as Teachers: Partnering With Latinx Families

Introduction

Parents as Teachers (PAT) provides evidence-based prevention and early intervention support to expectant parents and families of young children from before birth through kindergarten. A key characteristic of the PAT approach is that it is designed to meet the needs of individual families and, as a result, can address specific maternal, family and child outcomes in culturally responsive ways.

Research shows that PAT is an effective intervention for families in culturally diverse communities. In addition, specific cultural enhancements designed to further support families result in new parenting skills, more confidence in parenting, and stronger relationships with children. Evidence underscores that Parents as Teachers programs should intentionally engage families in culturally relevant ways to optimize positive child and family outcomes. As an organization, PAT is dedicated to seeking out diverse experiences and perspectives that continue to enrich our products, services, and supports. In 2021¹, more than 298,000 families in the US and its territories received evidence-based home visiting services during more than 3.2 million home visits. Approximately 25 percent of the families were Black, 29 percent were Hispanic, and 3 percent were American Indian/Alaskan Native; 19 percent spoke a language other than English. In 2021², Parents as Teachers reached almost 88,000 families across 48 states, territories and tribal areas during more than 967,000 home visits. Approximately 17 percent of families served by PAT were Black, 30 percent were Hispanic, and 5 percent were American Indian/Alaskan Native; 27 percent spoke a language other than English.

Statement of Purpose

This brief summarizes the existing Parents as Teachers model, curriculum, implementation, and research to address four questions:

1. What is PAT's approach to cultural considerations, specifically with Latinx families?
2. How does research validate PAT's work with Latinx families?
3. What experiences have families shared?
4. What future steps must Parents as Teachers take to ensure that Latinx families are served in a respectful, meaningful and authentic way?

What is PAT's approach to cultural considerations, specifically with Latinx families?

Parents as Teachers has made a strong commitment to honor human diversity as a central part of our mission. It is the policy of PAT to work and provide services in a culturally competent manner.

As such, the PAT core curricula are regularly revised and enhanced to reflect this commitment, and to support parent educators in their work to provide all parents with the most current research-based information and strategies. For example, Parents as Teachers National Center relies on a diverse set of curriculum writers and reviewers to prioritize reducing disparities and driving equitable change.

This process has increased our understanding, fluency, and practice related to addressing inequities in service delivery.

We continue to work towards improved communication and feedback loops in our curriculum development process. There is more to learn and continued changes ahead to challenge inherent biases. Parents as Teachers has provided information and practical approaches in human diversity that will fortify our responsive and respectful work with families of different races, ethnicities, diverse family configurations, and different economic backgrounds from a wide range of cultures both inside and outside of the United States.^{3,4}

Parents as Teachers trains parent educators that culture sets the scaffolding for parenting and raising children.

According to the PAT implementation framework, the key for parent educators to understand the values, customs and beliefs that are common to a group is to understand that they are often instilled when we are young and reinforced so often that they are not consciously recognized as a reflection of our own culture.^{5,6}

Research further describes the ways in which culture and child development are interrelated across several concepts important to supporting families. However, while research is a source of credibility, we acknowledge that research findings often communicate information—either directly or indirectly—about community conditions and can have policy, programmatic, and funding implications for communities. Even the most thoughtfully conducted research can be harmful if communicated poorly and subsequently misinterpreted. In that respect, PAT is committed to utilizing and conducting research with an equity lens.^{7,8}

- Child development outcomes are based both on individual experiences and group experiences in the child's family, community, culture, and society.^{9,10}
- The cultural rules children learn at home may be very different from the ones they are expected to know when they enter a childcare center or school.^{11,12}
- If adults (parent educators, teachers, and caregivers) don't understand the cultural rules and norms of a child's family, we may misread a child's developmental progress.¹³
- The clash between home culture and the cultures of childcare, schools, and parent education can result in children being regarded as having deficits.¹⁴
- When disagreements arise, rather than seeking to 'educate' the parents, parent educators should facilitate a mutual sharing of information.¹⁵
- It is important for adults to learn to recognize cultural information without stereotyping in order to accurately screen, evaluate, and understand a child's development.¹⁶

Cultural competence is grounded in the belief that PAT's work with children and families should acknowledge, respect, and support the integrity and strengths of their cultures.¹⁷ While cultural competence is a process that is ongoing and developmental, the goal of individual and organizational cultural competence is outcome-based. The ultimate outcome is for personal and professional behavior of PAT parent educators to be respectful of and compatible with the cultures of families so that parents can be the best possible first teachers of their children.¹⁸

The PAT core curricula support racial equity by outlining the best information and strategies to assist parents in understanding and closing the opportunity gap between children from different racial and

ethnic groups and socioeconomic backgrounds.¹⁹ Relying on data with a racial equity lens offers a structural analysis of how disparities are produced.²⁰ The parent educator resource *Racial Equity and School Readiness* describes these strategies and the research supporting them.

- Opportunity differences in “life chances” for many Latinx families and children.²¹
- Differences between the norms and rules of the home culture and the culture of childcare settings and schools.²²
- Systemic racial prejudice and discrimination that can erode the strong identity of the family and child.²³
- Different standards, expectations and treatment of Latinx students in achievement, behavior, placement, and discipline in many childcare settings and schools.^{24,25,26}

PAT encourages parent educators to remain conscious of these structural factors to refrain from “blaming” the parent or child. The PAT curriculum is also prepared to help parents decrease the effects of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) on their children.²⁷ The importance of a stable home environment and a secure, attentive caretaker as moderators of ACE outcomes is widely acknowledged and much of the success of PAT is attributed to the abilities of PAT to impact the home environment and parental relationships with young children.²⁸

Parent-child interaction frameworks may not capture all the culturally specific ways in which Latinx parents engage with their children. To partner successfully with Latinx families according to research, parent educators must consider the cultural values of *familisimo*, or creating strong, reciprocal bonds with immediate and extended family members, and *respeto*, or an emphasis on children being obedient, polite, and respectful particularly to elders.²⁹ Moreover, the contexts of parents’ lives, including documentation status, institutional supports and networks, shape their abilities to effectively parent their children.³⁰ Latinx families tend to experience higher rates of unemployment, lower wages, and greater levels of poverty, which are linked to negative developmental outcomes.³¹ It is important for parenting education programs working with Latinx families to recognize the strength and importance of these cultural values and contexts and utilize them to address some of the challenges faced by Latinx families.³² PAT National Center is currently working to offer more ways to support Latinx parents during visits and as part of parent educators’ professional and personal development.

How does research validate PAT’s work with Latinx families?

Parents as Teachers Research

An increasing body of studies examining PAT specifically also documents the efficacy of PAT with Latinx families.

PAT’s demonstrated impact with Latinx families, bilingual and Spanish-speaking, native and immigrant, has accumulated over decades of research. Positive outcomes are documented for both parents and children.

Research on PAT suggests that targeting parents’ knowledge about child development and increasing positive parenting behaviors is an effective means of positively impacting child outcomes, especially as related to school readiness and academic achievement. PAT participation effects specific forms of academic achievement such as reading and math abilities, as well as long term outcomes such as school absenteeism or suspensions. These results suggest that PAT can help shape the life course of both parents and children in Latinx families.

A recent study by Lahti et al. (2019) used a matched comparison quasi-experimental design to test improvements in child academic outcomes (e.g., ELA/reading achievement, math, ELL English proficiency), absenteeism and suspensions, and parenting skills among Latinx families. PAT's approach is to change parent behavior as a key mechanism to changing child behavior and the PAT program capitalizes on this by informing parents and supporting them in improving their parenting skills. The findings of the current study suggest that this approach is effective not only in terms of increasing parenting skills, confidence, and knowledge about child development and improving overall family functioning (e.g., social support, attachment), but also in terms of improving childhood academic outcomes and school behavior.³³

In another recent study, Hans and colleagues examined maternal and child health outcomes during the prenatal and newborn period and the impacts of PAT. The goal of this randomized control trial was to examine whether young, low-income families receiving doula-home-visiting services, compared to families receiving lower-intensity case-management services, had improved maternal and child health outcomes during the period between birth and 3 months of age. The doula-home-visiting intervention was associated with positive health and infant-care behaviors. Intervention-group mothers were more likely to attend childbirth-preparation classes, less likely to use epidural/pain medication during labor, and more likely to initiate breastfeeding. Intervention-group mothers were more likely to put infants on their backs to sleep and utilize car-seats at three weeks. Since few evidence-based home-visiting programs have shown health impacts in the postpartum months after birth, incorporating doula services into PAT may confer additional health benefits to families, especially Latinx families.³⁴

In a follow-up study, Hans and colleagues examined the impact of the PAT doula home visiting intervention on maternal stimulation and support for learning during infancy. Results showed that mothers assigned to the intervention were more likely to read to their infants and engage them in activities that foster cognitive development during early infancy. Additionally, moderation analyses revealed that mothers of boys and mothers with high levels of social support experienced additional benefits of the program.³⁵

In a foundational set of studies, Wagner and colleagues used a randomized clinical trial to assess the effectiveness of PAT among Latinx immigrant families. The evaluation was driven by a concern about the high school retention and dropout rates of area students, and the commitment to increasing resources allocated toward quality parenting. Results indicated that children in primarily Spanish speaking Latinx families benefitted more than either non-Latinx or English-speaking Latinx families, with significant gains in cognitive, communication, social, and self-help development.^{36,37,38,39,40,41}

The compilation of research evidence supports Parents as Teachers as a home visiting model with positive outcomes for Latinx families and children. PATNC has made it a priority to continue to explore the evidence-based outcomes for Latinx families.

What experiences have parent educators shared?

As PAT parent educators tell their own stories, we see patterns emerge and problems uncovered, and that helps PAT assess community needs and evaluate the success of our intervention. Stories also help us provide a meaningful exchange for identifying new strategies and possibilities for improvement.

We've had parents who returned to school after their child was born...they have gone on to get their associate degree in Early Childhood Education and have really been influenced by their own parent educator...to do similar work....and to give back what they have received.

Rocio Parra is the Director of Birth to Five Programs at The Whole Child, in California. The Whole Child is also a Parents as Teachers Affiliate and provides home visiting services to families in her community. Rocio said, "We serve primarily the East and Southeast Los Angeles area. That's a community of primarily Latino recent immigrants...or immigrants. The families want something better for their children. They realize that they don't want to necessarily parent how they were parented, but they don't know what to do. They are eager for information, and they are very grateful that programs exist and that they are willing to come to their homes."

Recently her agency was awarded new funding from the CalWORKS Home Visiting Program, The L.A. Departments of Health and Mental Health. With the additional funding, we've been able to hire 12 more parent educators. Our staff live in the communities that we serve." said Rocio.

Rocio said, "We've provided training to all of our staff, including our male parent educators...so that they are all certified lactation educator/counselors...so they can support families who would like to breastfeed. All of our parent educators are also certified child passenger safety technicians, so they can help parents identify the right kind of car seat for their child, and make sure that baby is riding safely. We actually provide car seats to our families in the program, when we identify that's a need. Our parent educators are also certified infant massage instructors and we use that as another tool to help parents bond with their baby. The additional training for our staff really helps them support the families that they work with."⁴²

Explicitly soliciting and responding to family and parent educator experiences, feedback, and needs has allowed PAT to keep pace with families' emerging needs and the changing home visiting field.

What future steps must Parents as Teachers take to ensure that Latinx families are served in a respectful, meaningful, and authentic way?

Taken together, there is mounting evidence that Parents as Teachers is both culturally relevant and efficacious for demonstrating positive outcomes for Latinx families. The research to date reinforces the policy of PAT to work and provide services in a flexible and culturally relevant manner. This flexibility can also be seen in the feedback loop wherein responsiveness to families prompts revisions to both the curriculum content and implementation strategies, which further enhance PAT's cultural relevance and efficacy for Latinx families. As Parents as Teachers continues to serve diverse families, it can take several steps to ensure that Latinx families are served in a respectful, meaningful, and authentic way.

- Continue to engage in and collaborate with research that examines a wide range of parent and child outcomes for Latinx families.
- Welcome and prioritize the voices of Latinx families and parent educators to inspire and inform the learning agenda around culturally relevant PAT delivery.
- Follow up on needs identified through the learning agenda to inform curriculum revisions and training.
- Apply a DEIA lens consistently to training, curriculum development, implementation, screening/surveillance, and outcomes assessment processes.

- Modify materials following equitable communication principles.⁴³

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