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Dalla, Rochelle L.; MoulikGupta, Pallabi; Lopez, William E.; and Jones, Vicky, “It’s a Balancing Act!”: Exploring School/Work/Family Interface Issues Among Bilingual, Rural Nebraska, Paraprofessional Educators” (2006). *Faculty Publications, Department of Child, Youth, and Family Studies*. 76.
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“It’s a Balancing Act!”: Exploring School/Work/Family Interface Issues Among Bilingual, Rural Nebraska, Paraprofessional Educators

Rochelle L. Dalla, Pallabi MoulikGupta, William E. Lopez, and Vicky Jones

Abstract

Nebraska’s rural school districts have a rapidly growing Spanish-speaking student body and few qualified instructors to meet their educational needs. This investigation examined factors that promote and challenge the ability of rural Nebraska paraprofessional educators to complete an online B.S. program in elementary education, with a K-12 English as a second language endorsement. Interviews focused on the interface between school, work, and family, with special attention on family system change and adaptation. Twenty-six bilingual paraprofessional educators enrolled (or formerly enrolled) in the education program were interviewed. Twenty were first- ($n = 15$) or second-generation ($n = 5$) immigrant Latino/as. Influences of program involvement on the marital and parent-child relationships are discussed, as are implications for future work with unique populations.

Keywords: distance education, gender, Hispanic, immigrant, rural

Between 1990 and 2000, Nebraska’s Latino/a growth rate eclipsed national averages (108.8 vs. 38.8%; WebArchives, 2000). The rural Nebraska Latino/a growth rate has been particularly substantial because of urban labor market saturation, dissatisfaction with urban crime and schools, and new industry growth in rural areas, especially the meatpacking industry (Broadway, 2000). An influx of immigrant laborers provides a lifeline for economically depleted rural communities (Dalla, Villarruel, Cramer, & Gonzalez-Kruger, 2004), but rapid population growth often overwhelms a community’s ability to provide resources, including health care, housing, and, in particular, education (Broadway). Over the past decade, the number of limited English proficiency and English language learner youth in Nebraska has increased by 1,000% (Nebraska State Education Association [NSEA], 2004). Yet, of 22,000 Nebraska teachers, less than 200 hold a English

as a second language (ESL) endorsement. The problem is especially acute in rural areas that often “... bear the brunt of large-scale immigrant settlement with the fewest financial resources,” (Federation for American Immigration Reform, 2004, p. 7).

Career Ladder Program

To address growing educational concerns, a multiyear career ladder (CL) grant was funded in Nebraska to support rural, bilingual paraeducators as they earn a B.S. degree in elementary education with a K-12 ESL teaching endorsement. CL participants must work full-time as paraeducators (i.e., school employees who work under the supervision of teachers) and maintain full-time student status to complete their degrees by 2007, the final year of funding. Most courses are offered via the Internet; for those

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that are not, students may travel up to 90 min to reach their classrooms. The grant covers tuition and book expenses, and students receive laptop computers, technical support, and a small annual stipend (\$1,100). The CL grant will aid rural Nebraska schools in meeting the educational needs of their diverse student body, but participants must complete the program for its goals to be achieved. Nine of the original 30 students have dropped out. This research sought to identify sources of stress connected with CL program involvement for a predominantly female group of students. Emphasis focused on the exploration of the interface between school, work, and family, with special attention on changes within the marital and parent-child relationships. The ultimate goal was better understanding of work/family processes in order to inform direct service, programmatic intervention, and research involving unique populations.

Background and Significance

Expansionist theory (ET) provided the theoretical lens for focusing the phenomena of interest. ET evolved in reaction to classical gender, work, and family theories (Barnett & Hyde, 2001) and comprises four interrelated principles. First, ET is based on the notion that multiple roles (e.g., worker, parent, spouse) are beneficial for both women and men and strong commitment to one role does not diminish strong commitment to another. A woman may be equally committed to her employee and maternal roles and derive benefits from both. Second, multiple role participation may buffer one from frustration or stress, increase family income, expand support networks, provide opportunities for success, and alter gender-role ideologies. Third, to be most beneficial, number of roles and time demands must be considered. More roles are not always better; overload and distress can occur once upper limits have been achieved. *Role quality* is more critical to mental, physical, and relationship health than the number of roles or amount of time spent in any role. Finally, according to ET, psychological gender differences are small, thus removing the need for highly differentiated roles. However, gender-role attitudes must be acknowledged as these moderate “the relationship between multiple roles and a host of outcome variables” (Barnett & Hyde, p. 789). With its emphasis on multiple roles and their linkages, role quality and quantity, and gender-role

ideologies, ET allows for critical examination of key factors that influence familial navigation of work/home intersections. It is particularly relevant for present purposes, given the many roles (i.e., paraeducator, student, parent, spouse) assumed by CL participants. Further insight into factors impacting role quality, a critical concept in ET, can be gleaned from the work of others. Below, a brief review of the literature is presented in order to delineate potential challenges faced by CL participants in their spousal, parental, student, and professional roles.

Spouse Roles: Gender, Strain, and Housework

Examination of spousal roles, particularly in relation to gendered divisions of labor, suggests that women perform the majority of household and child work. According to ET, role quality may be significantly diminished by feelings of role overload. The literature supports such an assertion. Working women tend to be more tired and get sick more often than their husbands (Hochschild, 1989). In *The Second Shift*, Hochschild described how additional household labor assumed by wives equates to an additional month of 24-hr days a year. Furthermore, over the past 30 years, “men’s underlying feelings about taking responsibility at home have changed much less than women’s feelings have changed about forging some kind of identity at work,” (p. 205). Coltrane (2000) found that men contributed more to family labor when they worked fewer hours, had more education, and endorsed gender equity ideals; women did less when they were employed more hours, had higher incomes, more education, and endorsed gender equity ideals. The implications are substantial. Perceptions of equality in household labor division were associated with less depression and marital satisfaction among wives (Coltrane). Hochschild, too, reported that the happiest couples in her study were those in which men contributed to household and childcare labor.

The majority of research on role strain, gender, and the division of household labor has focused on Caucasian samples although, recently, exploration of these issues within Latino families has gained momentum. Mexican Americans, in particular, report high levels of familism—a deeply ingrained sense of family obligation and orientation (Rumbaut, 1997)—yet, gender and generational role dissonance in marital and parent-child relationships can amplify conflicts and lead to family breakdown among immi-

grant families moving to new sociocultural contexts (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994). Further, gender-role modifications among immigrants may be more dramatic for women than for men because "... the contradictions between home and host cultures are stronger in terms of what constitutes appropriate gender-role behavior," (Espin, 1987, p. 492). Mexican women in America, for instance, are introduced to notions of equal rights for women and children that may cause conflict within (traditional) Latino families (Golding, 1990).

The work of Menjívar (1999) offers further insight. Interviews with Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants suggest that immigration affects gender relations in multidimensional ways, "sometimes transforming and other times affirming them" (p. 601). Female participants often worked more hours and earned more money than their male partners—but the consequences did not automatically translate into greater gender equality and sometimes reinforced gender subordination. However, husbands' attitudes toward their wives employment varied considerably. Some were opposed because it potentially diminished wives' household services and served as a reminder that husbands were not the sole breadwinners. These men responded "by diminishing their own responsibilities [in the home and paid work force] thereby creating great burdens, physically and financially, for the women" (p. 622). Other men appreciated the financial contribution of their wives' employment and still others appeared ambivalent. Menjívar speculated that the differences were related to ethnicity and class; husbands were more oppositional if they believed it prestigious to support their wives. Menjívar further noted that type of work performed by immigrants may influence gender-related values. Through domestic labor, women are often exposed to middle-class American ideologies emphasizing gender equality. But men typically work in positions with peers (e.g., construction, food industry) who share traditional gender-based attitudes, thus affecting "... perceptions of gender relations in families" (p. 622) with immigrant women more likely to strive for gender equality and men opposing such change.

Parent Role

Family work incorporates not only household chores and responsibilities but also labor associated with parenting. Understanding factors, which enhance or

diminish parental role quality then, is important if linkages associated with multiple role demands are to be clarified, as suggested by ET. According to Carlson and Perrewé (1999), more educated working mothers and those with more social support experience lower levels of role strain, as do those whose work environments support parents (e.g., scheduling flexibility). Having younger and temperamentally difficult children also increased role strain (Scharlach, 2001). Morris and Coley (2004) found that financial strain, child-care difficulty, and work transitions increased role strain among low-income, racially diverse women, specifically. They further found that being married or cohabiting did not necessarily protect against strain; it cannot be assumed that the mere presence of an intimate buffers stress associated with mothers' multiple role demands. In fact, Sharma (1999) wrote, "[Working] women's psychological well-being is affected not by children *per se* but by the difficulty in arranging quality child-care, including husband's sharing of parental responsibility" (p. 18).

Student Role Challenges

The participants of this investigation were attempting to earn a bachelors degree in order to pursue teaching careers. As college students, many were unique in a number of respects, including their rural location, compounded by language barriers and limited prior academic experience. These and other converging factors may have significantly challenged their success as college students.

The work of Robinson (1996) informs this research. He identified three categories of underpreparedness that challenge collegiate success, particularly among nontraditional students. *Academically* underprepared students risk failure because of prior educational experiences (e.g., having dropped out) or untreated learning disabilities. *Culturally underprepared* students are often first-generation college entrants who lack role models of collegiate success and whose support systems may not value education. Further, cultural conflicts often emerge among ethnic minority students in predominately White institutions (Richardson & Skinner, 1992). *Emotionally underprepared* students have low self-esteem and self-efficacy, especially regarding academic success. These categories are not mutually exclusive; any combination may threaten academic success. Therefore, underprepared students require remedial courses, intensive tutoring,

and significant encouragement and support (McCabe, 2003). It is possible that CL participants embodied any or all types of "underpreparedness." Unfortunately, their rural residence may also have precluded recommended interventions (e.g., intensive tutoring). Further, because the CL program is primarily distance delivered, limited technological skill may also have challenged their success as college students.

Professional Role Challenges

Participation in the CL program required that individuals maintain full-time paraeducator positions while simultaneously completing course work toward the B.S. degree. Thus, most had assumed four unique roles: spouse, parent, student, and professional. According to ET, adopting multiple roles is not necessarily problematic and may in fact prove beneficial to individual well-being. However, time demands required for each role, in addition to role quality, become increasingly important with each new role acquisition. A growing body of literature discusses strategies for creating high-quality para experiences. Genzok (1997), for instance, noted that paraeducators are increasingly recognized as a vital resource in the classroom and promising pool for remedying the teacher shortage. However, numerous supports are necessary if paraeducators are to be effectively recruited and retained into the teaching force. The most important of these include financial support (e.g., through grants, scholarships, financial aide, and wages; Pickett, 1999), social support (Genzok & French, 2002), and the availability of faculty mentors (Genzok & Baca, 1998). Also important is professional socialization to enhance paras' professional identities through seminar and conference attendance, which may help maintain their commitment to the teaching profession (Pickett). Lacking such supports, paraeducators may be forced to find alternative employment (e.g., for financial reasons), lose interest in their profession, or feel isolated, and that their work is not valued (Genzok).

Informed by the work of others and guided by ET, this investigation sought to explore challenges associated with CL program participation among rural, bilingual paraeducators. Three research questions were addressed. First, to what extent are marital relationships influenced by multiple role demands associated with CL participation? Second, how are parent-child relationships influenced by CL participation?

And finally, what factors appear most influential in supporting paraprofessionals in their adaptation to work/school/family interface challenges?

Methods

Participants

Twenty-six individuals comprised the final sample, including twenty-four women and one man. Their age ranged from 22 to 48 years (average age = 34.8 years). The majority of participants were married ($n = 21$) and had children ($n = 24$). Most were first- ($n = 15$) or second-generation ($n = 5$) Latino/ a immigrants. Home countries included Mexico ($n = 17$), Peru ($n = 1$), Guatemala ($n = 1$), and Honduras ($n = 1$). First-generation immigrants had lived in the United States for 30.5 years (range = 4–37 years). Participants resided in six rural northeast Nebraska communities; length of residence averaged 10 years (range = 2–36 years). Most ($n = 17$) owned their homes and reported an annual combined income less than \$30,000 ($n = 15$), with about 4.2 household residents. Six participants had not completed high school although two of them had received a General Equivalency Diploma (GED). Twenty were active in the CL program and six had dropped out, including the one man in the group.

Three differences emerged between former (i.e., those who had "dropped out") and current program participants. On average, former participants had more children (3.0 vs. 2.3; $p = .08$), and their children tended to be younger (7.0 vs. 12.0 years; $p = .08$). Former participants also lived in their respective communities an average of nearly 6 years less than current participants (5.5 vs. 11.3 years; $p < .01$). Thus, as suggested in the literature, parental role strain among former participants may have been exacerbated because of having more and younger children, in conjunction with difficulty accessing resources (e.g., child care) due to limited community integration. Certainly, analyzing data among a subgroup of six (i.e., former CL group) is questionable because of sample size, but the issues revealed suggest avenues for further exploration.

Procedures

Participants were located through their (current or former) involvement in the CL program. The extended education coordinator (EEC) for northeast

Nebraska located 26 of the original 30 CL program participants. All agreed to participate in the research. A letter was e-mailed to them outlining the study details, including potential benefits and risks. Participants were informed that their research participation would not influence their CL program involvement. Participants met individually with the principal investigator. Each completed a series of questionnaires and then engaged in an open-ended, in-depth, audio-recorded interview (only interview data are reported here). Interviews were conducted in private (e.g., in school library, residence). All participants were bilingual (Spanish/English), and all interviews were conducted in English. Interviews focused on marital support and strain, division of labor, parenting concerns, extended family support, and CL program involvement. The process lasted about 85 min (range = 60–120 min), and participants were compensated. Transcribed data were analyzed using thematic analyses (Aronson, 1994).

Triangulation and member checking helped ensure trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation of *source* was achieved by including current and former CL participants, which allowed for deeper understanding of the phenomena of interest. Triangulation of *method* was achieved through the mixed method approach; when interview and survey data conflicted, the discrepancy was addressed and clarification obtained. The *member check* was also used in that issues raised in one interview were broached in subsequent interviews to obtain multiple perspectives. Also, the EEC provided clarification of various issues (e.g., difficulty in finding paramentors) to ensure that data were understood accurately.

Data Analyses

Thematic analysis was used for analyzing all text-based data (Aronson, 1994). The process began with a thorough reading of all interviews. Next, all interviews were reread and shared patterns of experience, or themes across interviews were extracted. Next, all information related to already classified patterns was identified. This step was critical in that individuals frequently elaborate upon, or provide additional details about, a particular event throughout the course of an interview. Then, similar patterns were combined and catalogued into subthemes. To illustrate, all discussions linking the CL program with marital relationships were coded. Three unique themes in-

volving finances, communication, and division of labor emerged within participants' discussions of influences on their marital relationships because of CL participation. Additional analyses revealed several subthemes involving gender ideology and its relation to family labor. These themes, in addition to all that were revealed during the analyses process are described below. All names reported in the results are pseudonyms.

Results

Most current CL participants ($n = 16$ of 20) reported that the opportunity to earn a B.S. degree and a teaching certificate was "a dream come true." They were excited and hopeful about their futures and indicated that the CL program allowed for a life-long educational goal to be realized. Still, assuming responsibility for full-time work and school, particularly for those individuals with spouses and children and for whom English was a second language, was often described as overwhelming. In fact, one participant summarized the group's feelings when she stated, "I [am always] balancing ... you know the professional life and my personal life and kids—their activities, my husband—his demands from work. [It's] a balancing act I guess. It gets tough at times." Below, factors promoting or hindering (or both) participants' successful CL program completion are presented; CL participation influences on the marital and parent-child relationships are also highlighted.

Program Participation and Marital Relationships

The majority of current program participants were married ($n = 15$) or cohabiting with a male partner ($n = 2$). CL participation was described by most women as having a strong effect on their intimate relationships. Discussion of CL participation influences on the marital relationship largely focused on financial burdens, division of labor, and communication.

Financial burdens. Given the financial incentives for CL participation (e.g., tuition remission, text books, computer), it was surprising to learn that program involvement created financial burdens. Paraprofessionals earn approximately \$16,000 annually. To remain in the CL program, participants were required to be full-time paraeducators and thus were forced to forego employment in more lucrative arenas (e.g.,

packing plant). Blanca, a CL participant, noted the financial hardship this created: "We are talking about \$26,000 less at home. That's a lot of money. I only get \$16,000 or \$17,000 a year. So that was a big difference. So sometimes we struggle. Especially during the summer, we [paras] don't get paid during the summer."

Limited economic resources were problematic for the family unit as a whole, but the financial strain was reported as beginning to permeate the marital relationship, specifically. In some cases, participants reported receiving mixed messages from their partners who on the one hand encouraged CL participation as an investment in the future but on the other hand expressed frustration that people with less education made more money. To illustrate, Maria, who had been involved in the CL program for nearly 36 months, stated, "He [husband] sees that I am going to school, but he doesn't see me making money." Another concurred, "He [husband] says that people with lesser education can make more money than me. He says that I work hard. Some people in the program make \$12 or \$15/hour. So why spend so much time? So I said, 'It's for me it's not the money.' Just to help another child succeed is very satisfying for me."

Two participants, in particular, attributed tension within their marriages to the specific fact that they were advancing educationally, rather than to financial burdens associated with CL program participation. Their husbands were disturbed, it was explained, because their wives were surpassing them educationally, which may translate into greater earning potential. Blanca surmised, "I think it bothers him. He will not state it, but I really think that's his big problem."

Division of labor. Pressure within the marital system was further exacerbated among some couples because of perceived inequality in the household division of labor. Participants who seemed less overwhelmed by the multiple demands on their time and energy reserves were those with partners who were verbally and behaviorally supportive. Numerous participants ($n = 9$) reported that their male partners actively supported CL involvement and demonstrated so by adjusting their behavior to accommodate their wives' busy schedules. Importantly, women with the most supportive partners described them as having flexible gender-role attitudes that seemed to facilitate

their involvement in household and childcare labor. Inez's husband of 5 years was "... really agreeable with everything that I do now. So he helps me a lot ... cooking, clean my house, dishes, and clothes, and everything that concerns the house and family—and I'm glad for that part." And, Ivy, the mother of three who had been married for 24 years, likewise noted, "He [husband] has always been very supportive. He knows that I am working full time and am in school full time. He has been very helpful. When I come home ... The house is clean, and sometimes dinner is there ... he comes and drops me off and picks me up." Lourdes described how she and her husband had adjusted the division of labor in response to her intense schedule:

Well, I am mainly in charge of the food. I mainly cook. But when I don't have time he will cook. For the most part I do the cooking, he does the laundry. And then on the weekend when we do the cleaning of the bathroom and vacuuming . . . we are like . . . you take this and you take that . . . whatever needs to be done.

Interestingly, three of the nine participants reported that their partners assisted with either household chores *or* parenting but not both. Izel's comments are illustrative. She and her husband of 21 years had four children, aged 15–20. She explained, "Parenting wise I think I do more. Kids come to me more; they depend on me more, even when he is around. But most of the chores—he does more." After deep thought, Consuela remarked, "He is getting better at it [parenting]. He is the authority figure in the household. Whatever he says that's the way it has to be done. So that's one of the big things. But, sometimes I see he gets tired and let[s] the kids do whatever. Then I get mad because everything is just chaotic. So, that's when the problem arises."

Participants with supportive male partners described them as understanding the value of education and, further, that short-term family disruptions were necessary for long-term goals to be achieved. To illustrate, Elma and her husband had been married for 27 years; they had two children aged 22 and 6. She described her husband with the following: "He sees how well I have done. He thinks it's amazing. As far as the goal—it's far away. [But] he has got a college degree; he knows that it will be worth it. He knows that in 3

years time things would be easier." Lety, who was raising two biological children and a stepson all younger than 7 years, similarly reported, "He [partner] is really supportive. He just wants me to get it [degree]. If he knows that I have lots of homework, he would take the kids to the park if he has time, he will do it."

Four of these nine women also described the process of marital relationship change relative to their partners' support for the program. Initially, their spouses were not very agreeable to their starting school and, hence, were not supportive. However, these women believed their CL participation had influenced their partners' attitudes, as well as their partners' personal goals. Idalia, for instance, was 33 years old and a second-generation immigrant from Mexico; she and her partner of 13 years had four children. She explained, "Well, at first I don't think he was taking it [her education] seriously. I mean he thought I was doing it I don't know—just for something to do, you know? Now he has started to think about his future too. He is thinking of coming to college. That would be great if he does."

Importantly, three of the nine women explained further that their partners would contribute more to family labor, if they could. However, they were constrained by their own intensive labor demands. Lety explained that her husband "... does whatever he can. [But] all the time he is working." Similarly, Nelli's husband "... works the whole night and gets back home around 7:00 a.m. Many times, his employers hold him till a task is finished. They hold him over. ... So that puts everything on me." Nelli and her husband had emigrated from Mexico 8 years earlier; her husband worked in a pork processing plant.

A clear and distinct contrast emerged between those women who described supportive partners and those who were frustrated by their partners' lack of assistance within the home. In fact, six (35%) CL participants with husbands/partners noted that their partners were supportive only as long as it did not interfere with their primary responsibilities to care for their families. Minimal household and child labor assistance was creating significant stress and discontent among some women. One explained how her husband's rigid attitudes challenged her ability to concentrate during class. She stated, "I'm always watching the clock during class, because I have to be home on time—before he gets home or else he will be upset." Similarly, Frita noted that

He is not very positive about it [CL program]. Sometimes I feel that he is not totally in agreement. He feels that it's taking too much away from the family. He says "your priority is your home and kids—educate the kids and then think about you." At one point he told me "do you want family or do you want school?" He strongly believes that I am a mom and that should be my first thing. I agree with that—but at the same time I think that I have to do something too.

Another participant reported severe sleep deprivation because her husband refused to adjust his behavior to assist her. She was responsible for all household chores and child care, including shopping and meal preparation. Homework was completed late at night, after her family was asleep. Likewise, Norma, a first-generation immigrant from Mexico, explained her workload with the following: "I do laundry, dishes, cooking and everything ... cleaning everything. I am not satisfied. I am working full time, studying full time, house-wife full time. I need some help." She added, "You know, in our culture, the woman is supposed to be at the house and the man is supposed to be working outside. But I never accepted that." Maria, also a first-generation Mexican immigrant, explained, "He [husband] helps with the kids and stuff. He does not help doing supper, washing dishes, or anything. I have to do everything ... he wants me to get my degree. For that he has to help me more. But he doesn't." She continued, "The tension between me and my husband has gotten higher since I've been in the program. I don't know, I guess I have to live with that. Because he's not going to change—he said so."

In contrast to those who reported having husbands who became more supportive through time, two participants felt that their partners became less supportive. As the women's multiple role demands began taking a toll on the family unit, male partners began to doubt whether it was a wise decision for their wives to continue with school. Flora, a CL participant for 2 years, with two more to go, described how things were slowly changing:

He was very excited about it at first. [But] he didn't know [how much] work it would be. But all these 2 years now he ... I don't know ... he is telling me to decide [to remain in the program

or quit]. Last semester, I was very stressed. Working, taking four classes. ... Sometimes he finds me crying. ... Now I feel that he is getting tired.

It was not surprising to learn that several individuals who dropped out of the CL program reported receiving little support from their male partners in managing their multiple role demands. In fact, for several women, this was the primary reason for exiting. Reina's situation is illustrative. She and her husband of 9 years had three children, aged 9, 7, and 8 months. She had become frustrated because "I didn't get to see them [family]. I was at work all day and then I would go home and I would leave. And I did that for a long time. So, it was really hard." She further described the division of family labor in her home: "I would like it to be equal—him [husband] to even spend time with them [kids]. He just works and then he's always tired and needs his sleep. ... I don't think he felt like he should be doing anything or helping as much as he did—he couldn't handle it very well." Bianca was also married, with three children. Like Reina, she explained, "I put myself last versus my family. So with the kids, husband and house and everything, I kind of just let myself out of my dream of going back to school. So I'm waiting for my little one to just be a little older and then I do plan on going back to school." Miranda, too, left the program because of the role strain associated with being "stretched" too thinly, feeling overwhelmed, and lacking a rich support network. In fact, she experienced the additional burden of caring for a gravely ill child. The bottom line was that "I just couldn't take it and I thought, 'I am not going to put any more on myself right now.'"

In sum, of the 17 partnered women, nine were content with the division of family labor (and three of the nine felt their partners were becoming more supportive with time), six were dissatisfied, and two believed their partners used to be supportive but were becoming resistant. Additionally, three individuals indicated that lack of spousal support and associated role strain largely contributed to their exiting the CL program.

Communication. Six participants described lack of communication as the biggest change evident in their partnerships. Because of their exhaustive work and school schedules, oftentimes compounded by their partners' full-time workloads, intimate part-

ners had little time together. For instance, when Rosa was asked to describe changes in her marriage due to program participation, she remarked, "We have less communication between us. I don't have time. I feel I am way too stretched." She was not alone. Nelli explained that because of her husband's work schedule, coupled with her hectic schedule, interaction between them was minimal. Elma's situation was remarkably similar:

Well, we haven't had a lot of time for each other to talk. ... It is so stressful because I don't get to see him often. He works three shifts. During the day I am at school working [as a para], and then I go to school. So by the time I get off, he is already working. He doesn't get off until 2 in the morning.

Another participant, Inez, recognized that she was beginning to treat her husband differently, by taking her frustrations out on him. She admitted, "Sometimes, when I am stressed with the school work, I get mad with him without any reason."

The Parent-Child Relationship

Most participants [$n = 18$ for current program participants; $n = 6$ for former] had children. Children's ages ranged from less than 1 year to 28 years (average child age = 10.4 years). Twelve CL participants had children younger than 8 years. Given the young ages of their children, many were therefore involved in intensive parenting. During the interviews, participants spoke at length about changes within their parent-child relationships. Two themes emerged. First, participants described that their children increasingly viewed them as role models. A second theme was that they had substantially less time available to spend in the parenting role. Both themes are described in more detail below.

Participants as role models. Participants described how they believed their CL program involvement influenced their children; many noted that their children's school confidence had increased, as had their excitement toward school. Blanca's comments illustrate, "I think it [CL participation] has affected the 18-year-old in very positive ways. My son is not afraid of school. He is very excited about it." Participants also described being role models for their children; their children were proud that they were in school and would eventually be educators. Two

women noted that their kids bragged about them to their friends. Norma reported, "The kids are so excited. They just want me to be a teacher already. ... They like to brag, 'my mom goes to school and wants to be a teacher.'" And Flora explained, "Yeah, my little girl says sometimes, 'I want to be a teacher, because you are a teacher.' I said 'no I am not a teacher, but I may be someday.' You know, she is motivated seeing me studying. I think it's a good thing." Similarly, Maria described with pride a conversation with her son in which he exclaimed, "Wow mom, you are really smart!" Being viewed by their children as role models based on their hard work and career prospects provided unexpected benefits. The dynamic created positive energy in the parent-child relationship, and participants felt appreciated by their children, not only for their parenting role, but also for their abilities and competencies. Such benefits, however, were not without costs.

Time and personal resource constraints. Most CL participants with children ($n = 15$ out of 18) reported that the parent-child relationship had been altered because of the amount of time required to maintain active program status. Regardless of children's ages, the majority of participants reported having little time to engage in "fun" activities. Participating in even simple things, such as watching television, seemed like a luxury. To illustrate, Inez described a common interaction between herself and her 8-year-old child: "Sometimes my little kid says, 'mom, could you please come and watch the movie?' I say, 'No, I need to study because I have an assignment.' [And] he says 'You never have time for me anymore.'" Parents with older children described similar issues. Although older children were better able to understand their mothers' busy schedules, the fact that they had limited shared leisure time was still bothersome. Juanita, whose son was 16 years, explained, "Last year he [son] was class president ... and he is pretty busy. [So] he understands [her busy schedule]. He did say that he wished we had more time to go to a movie or do some leisure thing." And in discussing her children, Maria reported, "The older one is always like, 'this house is boring, you never take us anywhere.'"

Unlike participants with older children, those with younger children (i.e., aged 12 and younger) described two additional concerns. First, parents of younger children reported feeling that their ability to

be *responsive* to their children's needs had been compromised. Nelli explained her frustration with the following: "I don't get time to talk to them [children] that much. Here I am taking a test on-line and on the bottom of my computer it says my daughter is calling me. What do I do? I spend less time—[I am] less responsive to their immediate needs." Frita, whose children were aged 12, 7, and 4 felt similarly. She stated, "The little ones say 'why do you have to leave again?' For them it's easier for me to stay [home] because I can fix things for them They kind of have trouble if daddy is there. So for them it's like 'Oh, again? You are going again mummy?'"

Finally, four participants indicated that they were missing out on seeing their children grow up. Sonya, for one, was overwhelmed with anxiety and guilt because her schedule kept her away from her younger son. At the same time, she believed participation in the educational program was a "once in a lifetime opportunity." She was clearly torn that

It's hard for me because my six year old. ... Oh I mean I miss him [crying]. It's really hard, because I am missing out on some of his growing up. I know it's going to be temporary. I keep thinking he would be nine years old and I'll be back in his life. But at the same time, you know, I am not going to get those 3 years back.

Extended Family

The data analyses process revealed important insights into participants' perceptions of role strain as influenced by the presence of or more often, absence of, extended kin and support networks. Twelve CL participants were first-generation Latina immigrants. There were several second- ($n = 3$) and third-generation ($n = 2$) Latina immigrants as well. Three other participants were Caucasian (i.e., non-Latina). Because the rural Midwest is a relatively new settlement area, it was not surprising to learn that first-generation immigrants had few extended family members in close proximity. For them, informal network support was necessarily constricted. Norma, for instance, had immigrated to Nebraska 15 years earlier. She reported minimal contact with her family of origin that remained in Mexico and stated, "To me, my mother and brothers are totally strangers." Although married, her children comprised

her primary support system: "My girls have been very supportive. They would take over some work that I would usually do. I told them if my going to school becomes a problem, I will quit. But they said, 'no mommy. You said when you have a dream, you have to follow. So this is your dream and you have to get it.' So now, that's what's keeping me in the program." And another planned annual family trips to Mexico to visit extended kin, however, "This year we didn't go because of this financial problem, but I call her [mother] every weekend." Anastasia also lacked family support: "I have a cousin here—that's all. All my family is in Mexico." Interestingly, not all participants lacking extended family support were immigrants. Patricia, who was not Latina, reported, "I don't have any family here—other than who I live with [husband and 3 children]."

Only six active CL participants had extended family in close proximity, one of whom was a third-generation Latina, aged 24, who lived with her parents. Four of the remaining five were first-generation immigrants. One had immigrated from Guatemala with her entire family. She described a tightly-knit, very supportive group who spent a great deal of time together. The others reported having only one or two family members physically close, whom they could rely on for emotional or practical support. The sixth woman was Caucasian and single, with two grown children and a toddler. Her mother and sisters were her biggest sources of support.

Informal support networks exert both positive (e.g., buffering) and potentially negative influences on development (Rook, 1985). For participants with extended kin close, provision of support was not necessarily forthcoming. In fact, Lety nearly missed the research interview because of lack of child care. She indicated that her partner's mother sometimes watched their three children. In reality, her mother-in-law's help was "minimal." And when asked if extended family provided assistance, Nelli responded, "[Only] if that's convenient for them ... it [help] cannot be assumed." Still, unlike Domínguez and Watkins (2003) who found that extended kin are sometimes unsupportive of Latinas' upward mobility, lack of family support within this group appeared to be based on geographic distance or intrafamilial dynamics (i.e., conflict and tension) that existed long before the women entered the CL educational program.

Discussion

This investigation explored challenges and supports connected with participation in an online B.S. program, within the context of partner and family relationships. Understanding school/work/family intersections may inform programmatic intervention development, particularly when directed at unique populations. CL participants, largely first- and second-generation immigrant Latinas, were fulfilling life-long dreams that would be otherwise unattainable while simultaneously creating upwardly mobile career trajectories. According to ET, multiple roles are often beneficial, through multiple processes. As expected, participants described numerous benefits associate with their CL involvement, including increased self-confidence and feelings of personal efficacy. Further, they developed a deeper understanding of sociocultural issues and were achieving life-long goals. Indirect benefits also resulted: participants were role models, some experienced greater division of labor equality, and eventually, their contribution to the family income would be substantial.

Multiple roles not only offer many opportunities for success but may also "provide multiple points of frustration and feelings of failure" (Barnett & Hyde, 2001, p. 784). The intense demands of family, school, and work had implications for family life and possibly participation in the program itself. For example, those who dropped out of the program appeared to have surpassed the upper limits by which multiple roles were personally beneficial. Beyond the sheer number of roles adopted, however, role quality appeared at issue. Combining work, student, and family roles was not necessarily unmanageable; being parents to young children while simultaneously lacking child care and partner support was. For six participants, compromised role quality across multiple contexts (i.e., school, work, family) may have largely contributed to their decisions to abandon the CL program entirely.

Spousal and Parenting Roles

The women having the most difficulty managing multiple school/work/family responsibilities were those lacking support from male partners. Male partners' traditional, gender-based attitudes created enormous hardship on some program participants, and marital frustration and discontent had surfaced. In this investigation, male partners appeared most sup-

portive if their wives' work did not supersede their family responsibilities, and further, if wives' income-generating potential was not perceived as threatening. Menjivar's (1999) work is particularly relevant here. Male intimates, particularly those with traditional gender-role ideologies, may actually undermine their partner's attempts at gender-role expansion, especially if the females' advancements create feelings of personal inadequacy or threaten gender-based breadwinner roles. Importantly, male partners were not included in this investigation, and specific information regarding male partners' education, income, or earning potential was not obtained. Nonetheless, these factors may significantly influence gender ideologies and subsequent behaviors (Haddad, 1994). Future, related studies, which include both male and female partners, would likely provide extremely valuable information for designing culturally sensitive programmatic interventions.

Perceived inequity in family labor, especially when coupled with perceptions of limited emotional support, raises significant psych-social concerns. Aranda, Castaneda, Lee, and Sobel (2001) found that Mexican American women with low levels of spousal support reported greater depressive symptomology. Depression was highly correlated with gender-role conflict and concern over raising children in the United States among married Mexican immigrant women (Salgado de Snyder, 1987). Still, female partners are not the only ones "at risk" when marital problems arise. Men are also impacted "through their wives' resentment toward them and through their need to steel themselves against that resentment," (Hochschild, 1989, p. 7). When working with immigrant families, it is particularly important to identify sources of strain unique to the immigrant experience (e.g., acculturation stress, culture shock, isolation, language difficulties; Smart & Smart, 1995), in addition to intrafamilial adaptation strategies (e.g., role expansion) that may exacerbate points of tension.

Knudson-Martin and Mahoney (2005) described several strategies for promoting greater gender equality, including active negotiation of family conflict through communication, conscious challenges to gender entitlements, and focused development of new competencies and skills (e.g., men as primary caregivers). Introduced by trained professionals, these strategies could prove beneficial for any couple motivated toward greater gender equality, regardless

of immigrant status. Nonetheless, marital tension and role strain, particularly related to gendered ideology differences, are not easily eliminated. Any effort to introduce programmatic interventions, particularly those that may upset family routines or threaten gender-role ideologies, should be prepared to address this issue centrally.

Paraeducator/Student Roles

ET encourages exploration of various routes by which multiple role participation may be beneficial and or tension producing. With this in mind, it is possible that the program's value or significance was dismissed by some male partners simply because of its invisibility (i.e., distance delivered). That is, aside from traditionally based gender ideologies, males' resistance to their wives CL participation may have been exacerbated by their limited knowledge about and involvement in the program. Devising strategies to incorporate entire families then, such as through periodic social gatherings or family-based educational activities, may facilitate multiple types of support mechanisms for participants, their spouses, and their children. Further, access to and availability of quality child care would greatly reduce parental role strain, particularly among those with intense parenting burdens because of number of children or children's ages and lack of caregiving equity. This issue is especially acute when working with immigrant families, which may lack informal support in close proximity. Further challenges exist in that Latina mothers generally prefer informal versus formal support (Sabogal, Marin, Otero-Sabogal, VanOss Marin, & Perez-Stable, 1987). Still, extended kin support cannot be assumed.

Furthermore, many participants were first-generation college students, academically deficient, and or embedded within support networks that placed little value on education. They embodied various types of underpreparedness (Robinson, 1996). However, because of immigrant status and rural geography, many lacked extensive support networks that might have alleviated role overload or diminished confidence in the academic or professional arenas. For this population, developing intensive mentoring relationships or devising opportunities for greater personal contact among the para cohort could substantially enhance their informal support networks, thereby improving the quality of their student and professional roles.

Spatial limitations preclude full discussion of the economic implications of program involvement, or the more insidious issue of public educators' low pay, generally speaking. Still, pressure to secure more lucrative employment would likely subside if greater financial incentives were provided. Larger stipends or special vouchers (e.g., for child care) would help ease the financial burden associated with CL participation. Sponsorship from individuals, professional organizations, and corporations has proven successful in other para programs (see Genzuck & Baca, 1998).

Extended Kin and Friendship Networks

Lacking extensive family support, one might speculate that the paraprofessionals maintained friendship networks that could ease the burden of multiple role strain. However, such was not the case. In fact, only four women described having any friends at all with whom they spent time or turned to for assistance. One additional woman noted having "friends" from church and then commented, "[But] I don't go to them with my problems. They come to me." And another explained that she did not have friends per se but that she did enjoy talking to a neighbor who gave "good advice." The general consensus was that any spare time was devoted to family, school, or work. Ivy's comment, "I don't have any time here to make friends," reflected the experiences of the majority. Developing and maintaining friendship networks was clearly the exception. Still, six reported feeling a sense of camaraderie with the other CL participants; despite minimal contact, they enjoyed a shared respect and sense of unity.

Future Work

National concerns over educating language minority (LM) youth are growing exponentially. Teachers with cultural, language, and ethnic backgrounds similar to their LM students may be ideal teachers and effective role models. Expansion of the para program to recruit and train diverse teacher populations appears promising. To illustrate, a Native American CL project is operative in Nebraska, and in Los Angeles a similar program for urban Latino/as exists (Genzuck & Baca, 1998). Yet, interventions must be creatively designed with context and culture in mind (Padilla, 1997). On a broader scale, MacDermid, Roy, and Zvonkovic (2005) also emphasized the central role of context in theory development, noting that linkages between

macrolevel (e.g., culture, economic structures) and microlevel (e.g., daily family routines) phenomena must be clearly identified and articulated.

Finally, this investigation clearly highlights how unintended consequences of professional intervention may dramatically alter individuals, families, and perhaps even communities. One unplanned, but positive impact, included the shared time and space for mothers and their school-aged children to devote to schoolwork and children's growing respect for their mother's academic competence. One potentially deleterious consequence to family stability also surfaced and involved substantial marital strain and tension due to increasingly divergent gender-role ideologies. As evidenced here, unforeseen outcomes of various magnitudes may be created, regardless of good-intended services.

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