

The Educational Returns to Immigrant Youth Participation in After-School Activities

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Abstract

Youth participation in organized activities has received attention from scholars and policymakers because of its potential to aid in social, cognitive, and emotional development. Specific benefits of participation in out-of-school extracurricular activities include the reinforcement of pro-social norms, an increase in work ethic and self-esteem, and the development of ties to adults and mentors who provide supervision and guidance. But few studies to date have focused on the extent to which immigrant youth participate in organized activities outside of school. In this paper, we analyze a sample from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) to understand patterns of participation in non-school extracurricular activities across immigrant generations, and the effects of such participation on future educational outcomes. Preliminary results suggest that patterns of participation differ for first and second generation immigrants, and these differences may have an impact on the educational achievement of this rapidly growing segment of the youth population.

Introduction

Youth participation in organized activities has received attention from scholars and policymakers because of its potential to aid in social, cognitive, and emotional development. Specific benefits of participation in extracurricular activities include the reinforcement of pro-social norms, an increase in work ethic and self-esteem, and the development of ties to adults and mentors who provide supervision and guidance (Frisco et al 2004; Lareau 2003; Larson and Kleiber 1993; Larson et al. 2004; Eccles and Barber 1999; Eccles and Templeton 2002). Research has also shown that youth participation in school and non-school sponsored activities can facilitate positive outcomes related to educational attainment and civic responsibility in high school and early adulthood (Gardner et al. 2008; McFarland and Thomas 2006; McNeal 1995; Broh 2002).

While we have an understanding of the positive link between organized activities and youth development, few studies focus on race, ethnicity, or immigration status to gain a sense of how participation in these activities may operate differently for the development of non-white, non-native youth. In fact, few studies to date have focused on the extent to which immigrant youth participate in organized activities. In this paper, we fill the gap in the literature by using a nationally-representative data set to understand patterns and predictors of participation in non-school extracurricular activities across immigrant generations, and the effects of such participation on future educational outcomes.

This analysis will provide insights regarding the development and assimilation of immigrant and second-generation youth, who often face difficult economic conditions and social challenges. First-generation immigrant youth often arrive in the U.S. without English language fluency and many immigrant families settle in or near low-income, racial minority neighborhoods which raise risks for youth (Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco 2001; Kibria 1993; Portes and Zhou 1993). Born and raised in the U.S., second-generation youth tend to acculturate to American society at a quicker pace than their immigrant parents and peers, often leading to heightened levels of intergenerational conflict and subsequent psychological distress (Zhou and Bankston 1998; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Gil and Vega 1996). Extracurricular activities could counter the many risk factors that the children of immigrants face, but first- and second-generation youth may have different opportunities for participation than native-born youth depending on the communities they live in, or may avail themselves of different activities depending on their level of acculturation and familial resources. Differing patterns of participation may have ramifications for educational outcomes in the future.

Background Literature

There is scant research on immigrant youth participation in organized activities. The Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) analyzed PSID-Child Development Supplement and NSAF data and found significant differences in out-of-school participation in programs and activities that promote learning and development across socioeconomic status and race (Wimer et al. 2006). Specifically, youth from lower-income families were less likely to participate in out-of-school structured activities compared to youth from higher-income families. In terms of race, Latino youth were underrepresented in these activities, whites were overrepresented, and blacks fell somewhere in between, but other factors such as socioeconomic status were likely to contribute to these differences. The HFRP did not provide any information for Asians as a group despite the fact that their numbers continue to increase. Given the growing diversity within as well as between racial groups, it will be vital to investigate the differences in extracurricular activities by race, ethnicity, and generation. Using ECLS-K data to study on the participation of elementary school children, Raleigh (2008) finds that net of socioeconomic status and family structure, Asian and black immigrants are more likely to participate in music lessons than native-born whites, while Hispanic natives are less likely to participate than their white counterparts. She also finds that all racial groups, regardless of nativity, are less likely to participate in organized sports compared to native-born whites. While this study is helpful in understanding some of the patterns of participation, its focus is limited to elementary school. Okamoto, Hartzog, and Herda (2008) analyzed the patterns and predictors of activity participation among immigrant junior high and high school students using Add Health and NELS. The authors find that, net of several controls, immigrant and second generation respondents are generally less likely to participate in clubs and sports. However, this analysis was confined to school-based activities. In the current paper, we explore patterns of

participation in organized activities outside of schools because this is where youth may gain additional developmental and acculturation experiences (see Lareau 2003). Immigrant youth in particular may have greater access to non-school-sponsored organized activities because of the access that their immigrant communities provide or the programs offered by non-profit organizations that target underserved youth (Zhou et al. 2008). Therefore participation patterns across immigrant generations may appear different in non-school sponsored activities compared to school sponsored activities.

None of the above studies linked out-of-school activity participation among ethnic, racial, and immigrant groups to future outcomes. It is unknown if the children of immigrants participate to the same extent or experience the same benefits from organized out-of-school activity participation that previous literature has found among adolescents and children in general. We build upon past research and focus on the middle- and high-school years to understand the patterns of participation in non-school extracurricular activities across immigrant generations, and how participation in these organized activities affects educational outcomes.

More Literature and Expectations

We expect that participation in organized activities will vary across immigrant generation.

According to assimilation models, immigrant youth who are less acculturated than their native-born peers in terms of English fluency and the adoption of American values and norms, will be less likely to participate in extracurricular activities (see Hirschman 2001; Portes and Zhou 1993) that reflect mainstream American culture and norms, while they will be more likely to participate in activities associated with ethnic culture. In contrast, other studies have used the immigrant optimism hypothesis to understand the assimilation patterns of immigrant youth (Kao and Tienda

1995; Louie 2004). According to this hypothesis, the second generation has the best of both worlds: they have the advantage of mastery of English and growing up in American institutions, but they also inherit their parents' positive attitudes about American society and determination for upward mobility. From this body of research, we expect that second-generation youth will participate in extracurricular activities at rates similar to or even greater than the third-generation, while first generation youth may participate at lower rates. The optimism that second generation youth inherit from their immigrant parents could motivate them to participate in out-of-school activities, particularly in supplemental educational programs that may promote upward mobility (Zhou and Kim 2006). First generation youth may share that optimism, but second generation youth also benefit from higher levels of English proficiency and greater familiarity with American institutions and norms.

Whatever the patterns of participation, we expect that participation in organized activities outside of school influence educational outcomes and social adaptation for immigrant youth similarly to native born youth. Participation in organized structured activities is generally indicative of a familial commitment to positive youth development and pro-social behavior, and exposes youth to adult and peer role models who promote educational and civic engagement. Immigrant youth may experience an added benefit from participation in culture classes and language classes that simultaneously promote educational engagement and the maintenance of their immigrant parents' cultural values, including immigrant optimism.

Data and Methods

The National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) of 1988 was compiled by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES 1900). In 1988, NCES interviewed a random sample of 25 eighth-

graders from each of 1,000 randomly selected middle schools. The students were re-interviewed in 1990, 1992, 1994, and 2000, providing a longitudinal sample of adolescents transitioning into adulthood. The NELS data set also oversampled for Asians and Hispanics, and surveyed parents, teachers, and school administrators in addition to students. These data also provide extensive measures of participation in structured and unstructured activities, both within and outside school. Specifically, NELS contains information on participation in a variety of school clubs, youth groups, neighborhood clubs and other community-based organized activities, as well as the amount of time youth spend on other activities such as homework, watching TV, and working in the labor market. Finally, NELS provides an extensive array of educational achievement variables which captures the experiences of youth as they move through middle and high school.

Our analytical sample contains measures from the youth and parent questionnaires, and we restrict our analysis to respondents who participated in all five waves. After replacing missing values through multiple imputation methods, the final analytic sample contains 11,102 individuals. The control variables are taken from youth and parent data in wave 1, while participation is measured in waves 1 and 2, when the youth were in 8th and 10th grade. The educational outcomes which are regressed on participation variables are taken from waves 3, 4, and 5.

Immigrant generation is measured by two dichotomous variables indicating whether respondents are first generation immigrants (born outside the U.S.) or second generation immigrants (those born in the U.S. of foreign-born parents). If nativity information was available for only one parent, the child is considered to be second generation if she or he was born in the U.S. and the parent was born outside the U.S. The comparison group is the native born, who are those youth who were born in the U.S. of native-born parents.

To measure participation at each wave, we constructed several dichotomous indicators of participation in a variety of activities during the year. We measure participation in community-based extracurricular activities such as classes in art, music and dance; language classes; classes in ethnic history or culture; team sports; youth programs such as the Boys and Girls Clubs or YMCA; religious youth groups; and other neighborhood clubs and programs such as scouting and hobby clubs. Because of the extensive measures of educational outcomes in NELS, we focus on the educational returns to participation by focusing educational achievement, timing of high school graduation, post-high school educational expectations, and enrollment at a four-year university or college.

Independent Variables and Controls

To isolate the effects of participation on our academic outcomes, we will control for a battery of background characteristics and prior levels of our outcomes of interest (see Eccles and Barber 1999). Our independent variables include measures of age, sex, intact family status, race, and parents' socioeconomic status. In the future, we will also include a measure of parents' expectations for their child's education, parents' involvement in school activities and in civic or social organizations in their community. At the zip code-level we will control for racial concentration, percent foreign born, percent below the federal poverty level and percent with bachelor's degrees. Finally, we also control for students' GPA, which serves as a measure of prior academic achievement. All regression analyses will be conducted using Stata's svy command with proper weights to account for the complex survey design and clustering of respondents within schools.¹

¹ Although NCES originally sampled 25 students per school in 1,000 schools in the first wave, the number of high schools represented in NELS waves 2 and 3 was larger due to dispersion between 8th grade and high school, while the number of respondents declined due to attrition and subsampling, leading to much smaller clusters of about 10 respondents per school in the high school waves. Parameter estimates, particularly variance components, are

Preliminary Results

The results indicate that in 8th grade, first- and second-generation youth are less likely than native-born students with U.S.-born parents to participate in out-of-school activities such as team sports, youth programs, and religious youth groups net of gender, age, race, and socioeconomic status. We conclude that immigrant youth are less likely than their counterparts in native families to participate in organized activities outside of school, but the patterns we find do not confirm assimilation or immigrant optimism models. These findings are consistent with past research on immigrant youth participation in school extracurricular activities (see Okamoto et al. 2008), which suggests that it is not the school context which deters immigrant youth from participating in these activities.

When we turn to art classes and culture/language classes, we find that the first generation is equally likely to participate in music, dance and art classes compared to the native born. We also find robust second-generation effects for participation in culture and language classes: the second generation is more likely to take such classes than the native born when race, age, gender and SES are controlled.

These results suggest that immigrant youth participate in fewer activities overall than native born youth in the 8th grade, but as we move forward in developing the paper, we will include additional predictors such as English proficiency, parental practices, and neighborhood characteristics in our models. We will also control for competing time demands. Immigrant youth may spend more time studying, taking care of siblings, or working in the labor force than native-born youth, which could explain why immigrant youth participate in activities outside of school less than their native-born counterparts. We also plan to estimate models linking participation to educational outcomes.

prone to be biased in multilevel logistic regression models where the cluster size is small (Moineddin, Matheson and Glazier 2007), so we chose not to use HLM with the NELS data. However, results are substantially similar for hierarchical and non-hierarchical models.

Preliminary results show that youth experience positive returns to participation in language classes in terms of educational expectation and attending college. However, participation in culture classes is associated with late high school graduation. We do not find any interaction effects between immigrant generation and participation, which suggests that all youth experience the same level of returns on participation, though immigrant youth may be more likely to participate in these activities.

These analyses will provide a fuller picture of the degree to which first- and second-generation immigrant youth engage with institutions that have been found to promote educational success, and what individual, familial, and community-level factors are associated with participation. Further, this research will allow us to identify the community-based activities that are especially beneficial for children of immigrant parents.

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