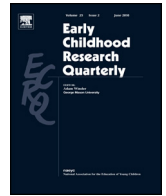




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Head Start, two-generation ESL services, and parent engagement[☆]

Teresa Eckrich Sommer^{a,*}, Celia J. Gomez^b, Hirokazu Yoshikawa^c, Terri Sabol^a,
Elise Chor^d, Amy Sanchez^a, P. Lindsay Chase-Lansdale^a, Jeanne Brooks-Gunn^e

^a Northwestern University, 2040 Sheridan Road, Evanston, IL 60208, United States

^b RAND Corporation, 1776 Main St., Santa Monica, CA 90401, United States

^c New York University, 70 Washington Square South, New York, NY 10012, United States

^d Temple University, 1801 N Broad St., Philadelphia, PA 19122, United States

^e Columbia University, 116th and Broadway, New York, NY 10027, United States

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ABSTRACT

Innovation in English as a Second Language (ESL) services to support Latino immigrant parents and their children is needed, and this study examines a novel program that suggests future directions for the field. The Community Action Project of Tulsa County, Oklahoma's two-generation ESL program recruits parents of children enrolled in Head Start and delivers an ESL curriculum that is contextualized to child development and children's early school experiences. This mixed methods study explores the progress and the perspectives of parents and staff in this ESL program over two semesters ($n = 35$). Among enrollees in each semester, parents had high levels of completion (83% in semester 1; 70% in semester 2) and class attendance (94% in semester 1; 88% in semester 2). Yet, only about half (46%) of the parents completed both semesters 1 and 2. Parents who completed either semester 1 or semesters 1 and 2 did exhibit advancement in their English language skills, moving on average from beginner ESL levels to high intermediate levels based on National Reporting System benchmarks. Data from focus groups with parents and staff suggest that involvement in a two-generation ESL program can support parents' focus on their children, including: (a) alignment of parent curriculum with child development, (b) bidirectional parent and child learning, and (c) an improved sense of parent agency with their children's schooling and other child-related domains. Implications for future two-generation ESL programming are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Nearly 18 million children under the age of 18 in the United States have at least one immigrant parent, and half of foreign-born adults have limited English proficiency. Latino families are disproportionately represented among this group: 62% of adults with limited English proficiency speak Spanish as their primary language. Higher levels of adult English language literacy are associated with increased levels of educational attainment, rates of employment, and wages (Zong & Batalova, 2015). Parents' English language proficiency also plays a critical role in fostering children's development and academic achievement (Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011; Sibley & Dearing, 2014).

Over half of immigrant children live in low-income households (Fortuny, Hernandez, & Chaudry, 2010). Head Start, the largest federally-funded early childhood education program for low-income children, serves close to a quarter of a million Dual Language Learner children (DLL), 80% of whom speak Spanish as their primary language (almost one-fourth of all Head Start children; Moiduddin, Aikens, Tarullo, West, & Zue, 2012; Office of Head Start, 2016). At the same time, only 5% of Head Start parents typically receive English as a Second Language (ESL) services (Office of Head Start, 2016). Head Start's shortage of bilingual teachers and limited availability of translated materials make communication a challenge among immigrant parents with low levels of English proficiency and Head Start teachers and staff (National Head Start Training and Technical Assistance, 2008; Park & McHugh, 2014). A lack of English language skills can also prevent immigrant parents from accessing key social services (e.g., childcare vouchers, nutritional programs, etc.) that support children's development (Park & McHugh, 2014; Waterman, 2009; Yoshikawa, 2011). Fostering home language and literacy is also a key tenet of Head Start's approach to serving dual language learners (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

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* Corresponding author at: 2040 Sheridan Road, Evanston, IL 60208-4100, United States.

E-mail address: t-sommer@northwestern.edu (T.E. Sommer).

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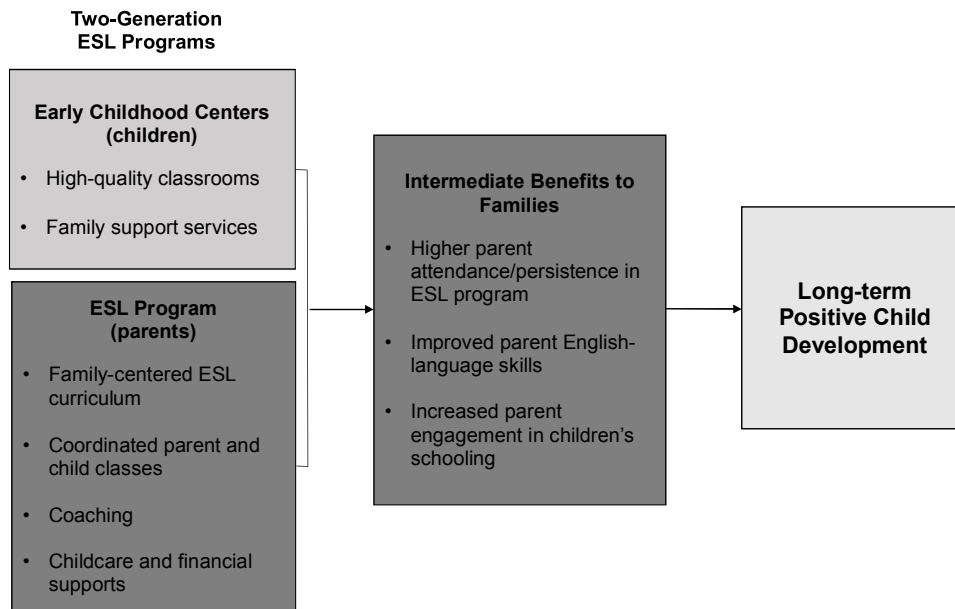


Fig. 1. Change model for two-generation English as a Second Language (ESL) program.
 Note: Light gray shading indicates child-focused inputs and outcomes not directly addressed in this study.

In the current study, we examine the implementation of an ESL program that uses an innovative two-generation approach to serve a largely Latino immigrant population of parents with young children. The program offers parents the opportunity to enroll in ESL classes while their children are participating in Head Start services. It also includes supportive elements that are designed to address common social barriers low-income parents face, including scheduling difficulties, social and cultural isolation, and limited financial resources. Key to a two-generation approach is the recruitment of parents from programs like Head Start in which children are participating in high-quality early childhood education programming, and parents are part of a community of support, including teachers, family advocates, and other low-income parents of young children (Sabol et al., 2015; Sommer et al., 2012). Importantly, the program employs an ESL curriculum that is contextualized to child development and children's Head Start learning outcomes.

We examine parents' progress in and perceptions of an ESL program operated by Community Action Project of Tulsa County (CAP Tulsa), an anti-poverty agency and the local Head Start and Early Head Start administrator. CAP Tulsa's ESL program offers a package of financial and other supportive services to parents of children enrolled in CAP Tulsa's Head Start centers: (a) tuition-free ESL classes for small groups of Head Start parents offered on a daily basis, (b) weekly meetings with a coach and classroom peers designed to improve social connection and practice English language skills, and (c) financial supports, including attendance incentives and childcare vouchers to encourage enrollment and retention. The goal of this study is to understand parents' experiences of this novel program from two perspectives: quantitative indicators of parents' progress (i.e., program completion, persistence, attendance, and English language advancement) and take-up of the program's key supportive elements, and qualitative perceptions of parents and staff as to whether the program supports parents' focus on their children's development and schooling.

Fig. 1 presents our change model for two-generation ESL programs. These programs involve high-quality classrooms and family support services for children based in early childhood centers and an ESL program for parents, which includes a family-centered ESL curriculum and other supportive elements. We expect the following intermediate benefits to families through parent ESL program

participation: higher parent attendance and persistence, improved parent English-language skills, and increased parent engagement in children's schooling. We hypothesize that these benefits will lead to positive child development in the long-term such as school readiness and improved academic achievement, although such indicators are beyond the scope of this study.

2. Background

2.1. Past evidence on ESL services

Starting in the 1970s when the percentage of immigrants in the United States began to rise steadily, ESL instruction became an official component of adult education (part of an amendment to the Adult Education Act of 1966; Center for Applied Linguistics, 2010; Hirschman, 2005; Yong, 2008). Many community-based ESL programs (e.g., programs located in community colleges, K-12 school districts, and community-based organizations) are not well designed for short-term, intensive training because they typically follow open enrollment (i.e., "drop-in, drop-out") policies with few, if any, attendance requirements (Chisman & Crandall, 2007; Tamassia, Lennon, Yamamoto, & Kirsch, 2007). These programs also tend to have limited resources to offer supportive services (e.g., student counseling or coaching or childcare), often the result of chronic underfunding in which enrollment is prioritized over completion and advancement (Eyring, 2014). Under these circumstances, English language learners find it difficult to build and retain new English skills (Condelli, Wrigley, & Yoon, 2008; Good, Masewicz, & Vogel, 2010). Fewer than half (46%) of the ESL students enrolled in federally funded adult education programs during the 2011–2012 academic year gained the skills needed to advance one or more of the six instructional levels designated by the National Reporting System for Adult Education Programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

2.2. Supporting parents' progress through a two-generation program

A subset of today's two-generation programs intentionally and strategically combine workforce training for parents with early

childhood education programs for children. The new idea behind these types of two-generation interventions is to view high-quality early childhood education centers as institutions that can attract parents into education and training and enhance their success (Chase-Lansdale & Brooks-Gunn, 2014). Although early childhood education programs typically focus on child well-being, there is strong developmental theory as well as some empirical evidence that these programs can be the ideal place to support parents (Chase-Lansdale et al., 2017; Gelber & Isen, 2013; Sabol et al., 2015). Furthermore, we hypothesize that a two-generation strategy could better support families by aligning parent and child services, which in turn could alleviate scheduling conflicts, so parents can attend classes while their children are enrolled in early learning programs (Blank, 1997). These programs emphasize quality and intensity of services for both generations.

Parents who advance their human capital (e.g., skills and knowledge) and social capital (e.g., social networks and relationships) may be better able to support their children's schooling and development (Crosnoe & Kalil, 2010; Harding, Morris, & Hughes, 2015). Early childhood education programs like Head Start are places to promote social capital as parents, teachers, and staff interact daily (Small, 2009; Sommer, Sabol, Chase-Lansdale, & Brooks-Gunn, 2016).

An explicit curricular focus on improving parents' understanding and engagement with their children's development and learning may further boost gains for parents and children. Few ESL programs tailor their curricula to the specific interests and needs of parents, and they do not focus on the fact that many immigrant parents are motivated to learn English so that they can better support their children's education (Buttaro & King, 2001; Park & McHugh, 2014; Waterman, 2009). Some ESL programs for parents in K-12 education settings have focused on parent engagement as a way to improve immigrant parents' language skills and communication with their children's teachers, but little is known about their effectiveness (Carlock, 2016; Waterman, 2009). To our knowledge, even descriptive data are lacking.

Combining ESL instruction for parents with early childhood education for children is not a new idea. For example, family literacy programs—interventions that paired early childhood education services with adult education for parents, including adult ESL instruction—aimed to improve the language and literacy skills of low-income parents and children (Pierre, Ricciuti, & Rimdzius, 2005; Van Steensel, McElvany, Kurvers, & Herppich, 2011). Yet the national evaluation of Even Start, a large federally funded family literacy program designed to support parents and children together, found that the intervention had no effect on parents' or children's language and literacy outcomes (Pierre et al., 2005). Even Start, and the family literacy model more broadly, may have been ineffective due to insufficient alignment of parent and child services and inadequate implementation and intensity of the adult education components (Hendrix, 1999; Pierre et al., 2005). Moreover, Even Start's evaluation only included parents who were able to complete study-related assessments in English. Whether a two-generation approach is effective for limited English proficient immigrant parents is yet unknown.

New evidence on CareerAdvance[®], another two-generation program within the CAP Tulsa agency with similar components, suggests the promise of a two-generation approach to support parents' educational persistence and advancement. Like CAP Tulsa's two-generation ESL program, CareerAdvance[®] is designed to offer intensive and quality programming to parents and children with the goal of promoting their human and social capital. CareerAdvance[®] offers tuition-free courses for small groups of Head Start parents combined with financial and other supportive services, and parent courses are coordinated with children's Head Start schedules (Chase-Lansdale et al., 2017; Sommer et al., 2016; Sabol

et al., 2015). Parents' participation in the CareerAdvance[®] health-care certification program was associated with increases in parent certification and employment in the healthcare field, improved optimism and self-efficacy, and increased child Head Start attendance (Chase-Lansdale et al., 2017; Sabol et al., 2015).

Ecological and transactional theories of developmental science emphasize the interconnectedness of parent and child learning, suggesting that parents may begin to see connections between their own learning and their children's education (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Sameroff & Rosenblum, 2006). Children's school participation may lead their parents to increase educational expectations for themselves and to advance their education (Chase-Lansdale & Brooks-Gunn, 2014; Sommer et al., 2012). Children's experiences in Head Start can also help parents see how their own educational attainment is connected to their children's, and thus value advancement more (Caspi, 2000; Knudsen et al., 2006). Additional benefits may occur when parents and children are learning similar content such as English language vocabulary and phonetic awareness at the same time, which may heighten parents' knowledge of their children's development and lead to more educational activities at home, although this theory is yet to be tested. Moreover, by improving their English language skills, parents are likely to develop a sense of agency with their communication skills. With newfound confidence and skills, they may be better able to manage daily family life and interactions with key social institutions (e.g., schools; Hernandez, Denton, & Macartney, 2008; Yoshikawa, 2011). Furthermore, when mothers in particular pursue their own education, they tend to increase engagement with their children's schooling. For example, Mexican immigrant mothers who advanced their own schooling, regardless of degree attainment, increased involvement with their children's schools. This association was strongest for women with the least education at baseline (Crosnoe & Kalil, 2010).

2.3. Key elements of CAP Tulsa's Two-Generation ESL Program

In 2012, CAP Tulsa designed an ESL program that departed from the traditional adult-focused, low-dosage ESL programs. CAP Tulsa's ESL program took a two-generation approach, offering quality and intensive services to parents and children in the same family at the same time and aligning service delivery whenever possible (Chase-Lansdale & Brooks-Gunn, 2014). The agency combined quality, high-dosage ESL instruction for parents with quality, full-day, center-based Head Start services for children (Phillips, Gormley, & Anderson, 2016).

CAP Tulsa's ESL program offers a package of services that draw on the most innovative practices in two-generation approaches, adult education, and ESL services (see Table 1). The central aim of CAP Tulsa's two-generation ESL program is to promote parents' English proficiency by offering a tested curriculum in high dosage (i.e., three class hours per day, three days per week, plus two additional hours of training) that is contextualized to parents' interest and motivation to support their children's learning. At the same time, the program encourages multilingualism and multiculturalism, and does not discourage parents from speaking or reading to children in their home language.

This study is exploratory and designed to examine a novel approach to supporting the English language skills and school engagement of Latino immigrant parents with children enrolled in Head Start. The study addresses two research questions: (a) does a two-generation ESL program promote parent attendance, persistence, and English-language skills; and (b) does a two-generation ESL program support parents' focus on their children's development and schooling?

Table 1
CAP Tulsa's two-generation ESL program: key elements.

Element	Description
Parent ESL classes	
ESL curriculum	
Coaching and family support services	
Peer group meetings	
Financial supports	

3. Method

3.1. Procedure

Our study drew on data from the CAP Tulsa Family Advancement Study, an ongoing, experimental evaluation of CAP Tulsa's General Equivalency Diploma (GED), certified nursing assistant (CNA), and ESL programs. In this study, we focused on CAP Tulsa's ESL program only. CAP Tulsa also separately offers CareerAdvance[®], a college-level career-training program in the healthcare field for parents of children enrolled in Head Start. Parents, including those enrolled in the ESL program, are not eligible for CareerAdvance[®] until they are proficient in English.

3.2. Quantitative sample

The present study included all program participants ($n=35$) within the 2014–2015 timeframe. The program can only support a small number of parents each year, and as a result, each cohort starts at a different time—in either fall or spring. We limited our sample to parents in the first three cohorts in the evaluation—those who entered in fall 2014, spring 2015, and fall 2015—because they were eligible for at least two semesters at the end of spring 2015.

Parents began at two levels of ESL instruction: Beginner ($n=15$) and Intermediate ($n=20$). After one semester, parents who started at the Beginner level could either stay for a second semester at the Beginner level, move to the Intermediate level, or choose to exit the program. Parents who started at the Intermediate level could either stay a second semester at the Intermediate level or exit the program (no Advanced level of instruction was available at that time but has since been added to the program). Thus, parents in both tracks were given the opportunity to complete two semesters of ESL instruction.

Parents were eligible for CAP Tulsa's ESL program based on several selection criteria, including interview scores (e.g., parent motivation for success, schedule availability, transportation, and support network), background checks, and the BEST Plus oral interview assessment to determine English language proficiency and placement (allowable BEST Plus scores of 350–452 for ESL Beginner and 453–524 for ESL Intermediate; [Center for Applied Linguistics, 2010](#)). Parents were largely similar to other Spanish-speaking par-

ents enrolled in CAP Tulsa's Head Start programs, including similar baseline educational levels, levels of mobility, and parent–child relationship quality. The only exceptions were that parents in the ESL program had lower levels of English-language proficiency and were more likely to live in a two parent household at baseline (see Table S1 in Supplementary Materials). Of the first three cohorts ($n=35$), almost all were mothers (94%) and on average were 33.3 years old ($SD=5.8$) at baseline (see Table S2 in Supplementary Materials). Parents were almost all Hispanic (97%), and most parents were born outside of the United States (84% from Mexico). Only 14% of these parents had achieved a postsecondary certificate or degree before starting the program. Forty-three percent (43%) had a high school diploma or GED, and 43% had completed less than a high school education. More than half of the sample (58%) had household incomes between \$15,000 and \$24,999 per year, and the average household size was 2.6 children ($SD=0.9$). The vast majority (94%) lived in two-parent households. Seventy-four percent (74%) were not employed at baseline. All parents had at least one child enrolled in CAP Tulsa's Head Start program when they entered the ESL program. One noteworthy difference is that 6% of completers had a child under two years, compared to 26% of leavers.

3.3. Qualitative sample

All 35 parents in the quantitative sample were recruited by research staff to participate in focus groups. The meetings were held in the late fall of 2014, 2015, and 2016, and 28 parents participated. Parents were assigned to two groups at each time point: those currently enrolled in the ESL program (completers) and those who had left the program (leavers). The 2014 focus groups included parents who had enrolled in fall 2014 (completers only); the 2015 focus groups included parents who had enrolled in fall 2014, spring 2015, and fall 2015 (completers and leavers); and the 2016 focus group included parents who enrolled in each of the three semesters who had left the program (leavers only).

All staff involved in the ESL program at that time ($n=11$), including instructors, coaches, family support specialists, and CAP Tulsa program leadership, were interviewed either individually or in a group with those who held the same position.

3.4. Key program features

Participants are recruited into the ESL program by program staff at their CAP Tulsa Head Start center. CAP Tulsa's ESL curriculum used constructs of child development (e.g., socioemotional learning), school activities (e.g., parent–teacher conferences), and children's learning materials (e.g., early-stage readers) to teach English-language skills and support parents' engagement in their children's learning, both in English and in their home language. The curriculum covered units such as *Health* (e.g., how to make a doctor's appointment), *Community* (e.g., activities to identify community resources that support child development), and *Education* (e.g., lessons to prepare parents for interactions with Head Start teachers; see [Table 2](#)).

CAP Tulsa's ESL curriculum is implemented in courses designed only for parents of children enrolled in CAP Tulsa's Head Start centers and is delivered in small groups (up to 15) each semester. The program's structure allows for a single group of students to advance together with the same instructor. Parents enrolled in either a 16-week ESL Beginner or ESL Intermediate course for a semester. Parents at both levels met for three hours a day, three days per week (9 h total). Each of the three cohorts was taught by the same ESL Beginner or ESL Intermediate instructor.

Parents also had the opportunity to participate in a weekly, two-hour peer group meeting facilitated by the ESL coach. The peer group meetings occurred at the same location as the ESL class with

Table 2
 CAP Tulsa two-generation ESL classroom and peer group meeting objectives and activities.

Curriculum unit or activity focus	Sample classroom/peer group meeting activities
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research U.S. school system and lookup elementary school ratings • Learn and practice vocabulary and sentence structure needed for parent–teacher conferences and Head Start home visits • Learn phrases to discuss children’s developmental milestones • Guest speaker from the school board • Guest speaker from Head Start leadership • Read local school district “Family and Student Success” manual and summarize main points • Brainstorm tips for how parents can help their children be successful in school • Presentation from Head Start mental health specialist about mental health and behavioral services in school
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read and discuss articles on child nutrition and the importance of physical activity • Presentation for local expert on child and adolescent sleep • Presentation from Head Start nutrition team regarding menu planning, reading food labels, and healthy eating • Observe a cooking demonstration
Dialogic reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation on dialogic reading techniques • Practice dialogic reading by reading to onsite daycare students • Brainstorm questions to ask children during dialogic reading sessions • Assignment: read with child at home and post a picture to social media
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn vocabulary needed to identify and access community resources such as the library and local social services • Learn vocabulary to describe child and family social needs and the social services to address them • Research community resources, such as health clinics • Tour local library • Read and fill out a library card application for parent and/or child

the same group of parents. Peer group meetings are designed to supplement classroom instruction. The meetings incorporated a range of activities including presentations from community members and CAP Tulsa staff on topics such as child development, conversation circles to practice English skills, community field trips (e.g., a trip to the local library to take out children’s books), and opportunities to practice developmentally appropriate strategies for reading to their children. Only parents currently enrolled in the ESL program participated in peer group meetings.

Outside the classroom, parents meet individually with the ESL coach twice per semester and with the Head Start caseworker, or family support specialist, on an as-needed basis. Family support specialists assess family needs, help with crisis management, and offer referrals to community resources and services. The ESL coach meets with parents to set goals, measure progress, and receive guidance on educational advancement and employment when applicable. Two of the three cohorts included in this study were assigned to one ESL coach. Due to turnover, the third cohort experienced two temporary coaches and a new ESL coach in 2015. Three of the four coaches spoke Spanish fluently.

CAP Tulsa addressed financial barriers to participation by offering an ESL program that is free of charge. Parents can earn up to \$500 in gas cards as incentives for on-time and regular attendance over the course of one semester, or \$1000 maximum for a year. Free childcare is available for children ages one to five at the same location as the ESL class and peer group meetings. While attending the ESL program, parents are also eligible for childcare vouchers for children who are under age one (or not yet walking) and not enrolled in CAP Tulsa’s Head Start programs.

3.5. Measures

3.5.1. Parents’ progress

This study defined ESL program progress in two ways: (a) ESL program completion, persistence, and class attendance among the full sample; and (b) English language advancement among those who completed each semester. To assess parents’ progress, we employed two types of quantitative data: parent surveys and CAP Tulsa agency administrative data. Parent surveys were adminis-

tered using an in-person interview format at program entry. CAP Tulsa 2014–2015 administrative data included parents’ responses to an annual goal-setting survey administered by family support specialists as well as ESL parents’ progress in the program, which included class and peer group meeting attendance and financial assistance receipt.

3.5.2. ESL program completion and persistence

We examined the completion and persistence rates among semester-one enrollees as well as the completion rate of semester-two enrollees (yes/no). Persistence is defined by whether the participant elected to enroll in a second semester of the ESL program. We also explore parents’ rate of completion of both semesters.

3.5.3. Class attendance

For class attendance, we measured the proportion of class sessions attended out of the number of classes offered during the time the student was enrolled over the course of a semester. If a participant left the program partway through a semester, that individual’s attendance rate is calculated based on the proportion of classes that he or she attended during the time that he or she was enrolled rather than out of the number of classes offered over the course of the whole semester. We also measured the number of hours of class attended per semester based on the assumption that each class lasted three hours. When a parent was tardy, they were counted as fully present.

3.5.4. English language advancement

Parents’ English language advancement is measured using the BEST Plus oral English proficiency assessment (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2005). CAP Tulsa administered the BEST Plus exam to ESL program parents at baseline (before the start of semester 1) and at the end of each semester. Thus, we were only able to examine English language advancement among those who completed each semester.

BEST Plus is designed to assess the oral language proficiency of adult nonnative speakers on their everyday English skills, including topics such as health, family/parenting, and weather. It is a scripted

Table 3
 National Reporting System (NRS) levels, BEST plus score range, and English skills.

NRS level	BEST plus score range	English skill descriptor
Level 1 beginning literacy	≤361	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand isolated words or phrases
Level 2 low beginning	362–427	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand basic greetings, simple phrases and commands Respond to simple questions related to personal information when spoken slowly and with repetition Speaks slowly and with difficulty, while demonstrating little or no control over grammar
Level 3 high beginning	428–452	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand common words, simple phrases, and sentences containing familiar vocabulary Express immediate needs using simple learned phrases or sentences Demonstrates limited control of grammar
Level 4 low intermediate	453–484	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand simple learned phrases and limited new phrases containing familiar vocabulary Can ask and respond to question using simple learned phrases and limited new phrases containing familiar vocabulary Has some control of basic grammar
Level 5 high intermediate	485–524	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate basic survival needs with some help Participate in conversations in limited social situations and use new phrases with hesitation Has inconsistent control of more complex grammar
Level 6 advanced	525–564	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand and communicate in a variety of contexts related to daily life and work Can clarify their own or others' meaning by rewording Exhibit some basic fluency of speech

oral interview that lasts anywhere from 3 to 20 min, depending on the test-taker's proficiency level. The BEST Plus has high inter-rater reliability (.90), as well as a high level of test/retest reliability (.89) and parallel-form reliability (.91). Scores range from 340 to 800 in national samples of ESL students with an average score of 477 and a standard deviation of 90, with higher scores indicating greater English proficiency (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2005). One benefit of using the BEST Plus is that the measure is aligned with the requirements of the National Reporting System (NRS), which sets levels based on achievable listening and speaking skills. The NRS serves as the accountability system for all federally funded and state-administered adult education programs under the Division of Adult Education and Literacy (DAEL) in the U.S. Department of Education (Division of Adult Education and Literacy, 2016). The purpose of the NRS levels is to allow local programs and federal overseers to compare learner progress across agencies and programs. The developers of BEST Plus mapped on their measure to the six NRS levels. In 2012, the developers of BEST Plus created new cut points to determine each level, and we use these cut points for the six levels (see Table 3; Center for Applied Linguistics, 2015). We interpret the changes in BEST Plus scores from baseline to the end of semester 2 using the NRS categories. We also determine whether individuals progress by at least one NRS proficiency level over one year and by how many proficiency levels.

3.5.5. Take-up of program components

CAP Tulsa tracks the take-up of three key program components: peer partner meetings, attendance incentives, and childcare vouchers. Peer partner meetings were offered in-house at CAP Tulsa and led by CAP Tulsa coaches. To measure attendance, we calculated the proportion of peer partner meetings attended out of those offered in each of semesters 1 and 2. As with class attendance, if a participant exited the program before the end of the semester, their attendance is measured only during the portion of the semester in which the participant was enrolled in CAP Tulsa's ESL program. We also measured the dollar value of attendance incentives and childcare assistance or vouchers provided to each participant during semesters 1 and 2. Childcare vouchers were mainly offered for children who are either too young or are on a waitlist to enroll in CAP Tulsa's Head Start services.

Table 4
 Topics addressed across parent and staff focus groups.

Topic	Parent	Staff
Parents' ESL classroom experiences	✓	✓
Strengths and weaknesses of individual program components (i.e., coaching, peer group meetings, and financial incentives)	✓	✓
Improvements in English language skills and the use of English across various settings (i.e., school, work, and daily life)	✓	✓
Parent engagement with their children's learning and school	✓	✓
Development of the program components		✓
Success and challenges of program implementation		✓
Role of key staff members and their interactions with parents		✓

3.5.6. Parent experiences and perceptions

Focus groups and interviews with parents and staff explored potential reasons for parents' progress (or lack of) with exposure to the two-generation ESL program. Parents who enrolled in CAP Tulsa's two-generation ESL program between 2014 and 2015 and staff involved in implementation of the program during this time (e.g., ESL instructors, career coaches, and agency leadership) participated in 60–90-min, semi-structured focus groups in the fall of each year. Members of the research team with expertise in qualitative methods led all focus groups in private spaces at the location where ESL classes were delivered (i.e., the local public school Adult Education Program). Parents were grouped by program level (i.e., ESL Beginner and ESL Intermediate), and parent meetings were conducted in Spanish and excluded agency staff. Eleven staff members participated in focus groups (or interviews) and were assigned by functional responsibilities (i.e., classroom instructors, coaches, and agency administrators) with no other staff present. Staff who developed and implemented the ESL program participated in additional individual interviews in the summer of 2015.

The focus groups were intended to explore successes and challenges in program implementation and possible explanations for whether the program may be supporting parent persistence and progress. Importantly, they were also designed to examine whether and how the program may have supported parents' interest and engagement in their children's development and learning. Refer to Table 4 for an overview of the topics discussed across parent and staff focus groups.

All focus groups were digitally recorded and professionally transcribed. Parent focus groups were conducted in Spanish and then

translated into English. Data were coded (or grouped) by the above domains and newly emerging subthemes that were well matched to the literature, including alignment of the parent curriculum with child development, bidirectional parent and child learning, and parent agency in school and other child-related domains, moving between inductive and deductive analyses (a modified version of grounded theory; see Fine, 2004). Three coders were involved in the research study; the first researcher, an expert in qualitative methods, developed a coding book and trained the other two using NVivo, a qualitative analysis software program. The team then applied NVivo's inter-rater reliability feature on a randomly chosen subset of parent transcripts. Coders had high percentage agreement (92–99%) across our main theme of parents' engagement with their children's development, learning, and schooling. Inter-rater reliability varied across the subthemes with *parents' agency in the school setting* theme having the highest reliability score ($\kappa = .86$; excellent) and *parents' agency in the other child-related domains* theme with the lowest score ($\kappa = .46$; fair to good).

3.5.7. Curricular materials

We reviewed curricular materials related to the development and implementation of CAP Tulsa's ESL program. First, we studied the agency's two-generation ESL program goals and data about the interests and motivation of immigrant parents enrolled in Head Start and Early Head Start programming. We then analyzed CAP Tulsa's ESL program curricula outlines, including goals, objectives, and activity summaries for each class level (i.e., Beginning and Intermediate levels). In a few instances, these included actual classroom or peer group meeting activities completed by parents. Lastly, we reviewed a sample of instructor lesson plans, classroom worksheets and assignments, and peer group meeting materials.

All data sources were used to triangulate evidence to understand how the program was implemented and experienced by parents and staff (Yin, 1994).

4. Results

4.1. Parents' progress

Given the additional supportive elements, we expected that CAP Tulsa's two-generation ESL program would have higher completion rates than single-generation ESL programs. We found that 29 out of 35 parents (83%) completed semester 1 (i.e., completers). The remaining six parents left at some point throughout semester 1 (i.e., leavers). Of those who completed semester 1, 79% went on to enroll in semester 2 (i.e., persisters; 23/29). Six parents elected to leave after completing semester 1, but before semester 2 began. The persistence rate was somewhat lower when we included the full sample of original enrollees, which included both the semester 1 completers and those who left during semester 1 (66%; 23/35). Among the parents who enrolled in semester 2, 16 parents completed the program (70%; 16/23). Seven parents left the program during semester 2. See Fig. S1 in supplementary materials for a figure that depicts parents' pathway of completion and persistence across the two semesters. Average completion, persistence, and class attendance rates are presented in Table 5.

Table 5
Completion, persistence, and attendance among parents enrolled in CAP ESL.

	Enrolled semester 1 (n = 35)	Enrolled semester 2 (n = 23)
Completion		
Completed one semester	0.83	0.70
Completed two semesters	0.46	0.70
Persistence		
Moved on to second semester	0.66	N/A
Attendance		
Average attendance rate ^a	0.94	0.88

^a Number of days attended out of days enrolled.

The completion rate across two semesters among the full sample of parents (including those who left during semester 1, between semesters 1 and 2, and during semester 2) was 46% (16/35). We found high completion rates among those who were enrolled in each semester (83% and 70%, respectively), with lower completion rates when we looked at the proportion of parents who completed both semesters among the full sample of parents who enrolled at semester 1 (46%). On average, students attended 94% of the classes while they were enrolled during semester 1, and 88% of the classes while they were enrolled during semester 2. This translated to 160.66 h ($SD = 52.18$) for semester 1 completers ($n = 29$) and 162.56 h ($SD = 20.56$) for semester 2 completers ($n = 16$).

Lastly, we explored parents' English language advancement among those who completed semester 1 and/or semester 2. Table 6 shows parents' baseline and end of semester BEST Plus scores, as well as the extent to which their BEST Plus scores translated to meaningful gains in levels set by the National Recording System thresholds. We present two panels of results: (a) advancement among parents who completed semester 1 ($n = 29$) and (b) advancement among parents who completed semesters 1 and 2 ($n = 16$).

Among parents who completed semester 1 ($n = 29$), results from *t*-tests indicated that parents made significant increases from their baseline BEST Plus scores to the end of semester 1 ($t(27) = -6.45$, $p < 0.001$). On average, parents increased 1.29 NRS levels and sixty-eight percent of parents increased at least one NRS level. To put this in context, the baseline average BEST scores suggested that parents' baseline English skills would be classified in Level 3: high beginning group. By the end of semester 1, parents on average were classified in Level 5: high intermediate group (see Table 3).

The progression among parents who completed semester 1 and semester 2 was similar. Parents on average started in Level 1: high beginning level, and made significant progress by the end of semester 1 ($t(15) = -4.10$, $p = 0.001$) and semester 2 ($t(14) = -5.71$, $p < 0.001$), where parents ended up on average in Level 5: high intermediate group. Parents who completed both semesters also made significant progress on English scores between the end of semester 1 and the end of semester 2 ($t(14) = -2.53$, $p = 0.02$). On average,

Table 6
English language advancement among parents enrolled in CAP ESL.

	Completed Semester 1 (n = 29)		Completed semesters 1 and 2 (n = 16)		
	Baseline	End	Baseline	End of sem. 1	End of sem. 2
	%/M(SD)		%/M(SD)		
BEST score	441.14 (56.34)	492.07*** ^a (44.35)	431.56 (60.50)	482.38*** ^a (32.24)	497.47*** ^a (23.72)
Increased at least one level		0.68		0.56	0.87
Number of levels increased		1.29 (1.21)		1.13 (1.36)	1.8 (1.26)

*** $p < 0.01$.

^aT-tests were run between end of year and baseline scores.

^bLevels are based on the National Reporting System benchmark.

Table 7
Theme: Participation in a two-generation ESL program can support parents' focus on children.

Subtheme	Definition	Evidence: quotes from parents
Alignment of parent curriculum with child development	Parents identify ways in which the ESL curriculum supports their understanding of child development	<i>[Our coach] gave us a list [of questions]... to ask them [the children] those questions, and they can tell us what they think is going to happen. ... So that children can practice their memory skills and develop them to remember more things while working their imagination.</i> <i>[The ESL coach] helped us to communicate better with our children when we have to read them a story... how we can interact with them to ask them questions about the book, which I had never done before. ... they taught us how to gesture while we are reading the book so that children get excited... to make it more interesting... so that they don't get bored.</i>
Bidirectional parent-child learning	Parents identify ways in which they learn alongside their children	<i>One learns from children, they—I mean, my daughter is just learning the syllables. I say, I'm going to copy her, I mean, one learns from children, they go to school, right? But one learns from them also, and one practices what one learned at school with them.</i> <i>Interviewer: Do you have homework every night? Parent: Yes, it is okay because it is to practice at home what we have seen here. And it also helps me much with my children because I do it with them, even the littlest one, who is now in the CAP too, and she has homework too... the whole family do homework. It makes it easier if you do more, you serve as an example for your children.</i>
Parent agency in school and other child-related domains	Parents identify improved confidence, self-efficacy, and/or independence that helps them to support their children's schooling and well-being	<i>Learning English also has made me feel more secure in myself when I go to a store or when my children need help in their school, I feel, I feel more secure... to be able to defend my children.</i> <i>... If they get sick, I can take them to emergencies. These classes have helped me to communicate, to be able to talk to my children's teachers and not to depend much on my husband because I used to depend much on him... Now I'm more independent... It gives you much confidence because we don't need a translator much.</i>

parents increased 1.13 NRS levels by end of semester 1 and 1.80 levels by end of semester 2. Fifty-six percent of parents increased at least one NRS level by end of semester 1 and 87 percent of parents did so by end of semester 2.

While parents were enrolled in the program, the average peer partner meeting attendance rate was 86% (*SD* = 0.24), or 20 of 24 meetings over one year. ESL parents received an average of \$569 in attendance incentives during enrollment over the course of two semesters (*SD* = 327), with a range from \$0 to \$1000 over one year. Only seven parents received childcare vouchers, receiving an average of \$2570 (*SD* = 2929), which roughly translates to about 507 h of childcare in total. When averaged across all 35 parents, this translated to an average of \$514 in childcare vouchers, or 101.38 h, over the course of the first two semesters (*SD* = 1613), ranging from \$0 to \$7638.

4.1.1. Parents' participation in a two-generation ESL program and a focus on children

In analyzing parent and staff focus group data, we explored one main qualitative theme: whether and how participation in CAP Tulsa's two-generation ESL program supported parents' focus on their children. We identified three subthemes: (a) alignment of the parent curriculum with child development; (b) bidirectional parent and child learning; and (c) parent agency in school and other child-related domains. See Table 7 for definitions and sample evidence of the three subthemes.

4.1.2. Alignment of the parent curriculum with child development

CAP Tulsa's two-generation ESL program was highly intentional in the alignment of its parent curriculum and peer group meetings with child development. However, the actual implementation of the curriculum may have been inconsistent based on the skills of the ESL instructors. ESL instructors in this program were neither child development experts, nor did they have explicit training in Head Start classroom lesson plans and activities, suggesting limits to their ability to support parents' understanding of child development. However, ESL program coaches, who met two hours each week with program participants, were based in Head Start centers, had training in children's classroom learning, and worked closely with family support, giving them a better knowledge base to sup-

Table 8
How parents learn child development using Head Start domains.

Head Start child development domain	Parent description of children's learning (in English)
Perceptual, motor, and physical development	"My child can tie her shoe" "My son can jump"
Cognition (includes mathematics development and scientific reasoning)	"My child can count in two languages"
Language and literacy	"My daughter can read books to my son" "My daughter can write"

port parents' focus on children. For example, in a coaching session unit focused on developmental domains in the Head Start Learning Outcomes Framework, parents wrote sentences in English to describe examples of social and emotional, physical, and cognitive development (see Table 8; Office of Head Start, 2015).

4.1.3. Bidirectional parent and child learning

Parents described ways in which they learned alongside their children at home and linked this learning to their ESL program experiences. Examples of bidirectional parent and child learning included reading together, shared family homework times, and parallel language and literacy development. CAP Tulsa's two-generation ESL program specifically targeted parent-child learning through its ESL curriculum unit, "Parents as Teachers/Family Literacy." Parents described how the activity of dialogic or shared reading "worked" for them, helping them to improve their English skills and their child to increase attention and comprehension. One participant first observed this approach in her child's classroom and then repeated the experience with her own child:

... For example, one book they read about a fish that jumped out of the water, and she asked them [the children] 'What would happen if the fish jumps out of the water?' So she [the coach] taught us to do that at home so that the children use their imagination because if the fish doesn't return to water, it would die, things like that. Yes, we are used to a reading a book like that and for them. I read it like that, and they like it. I mean, when somebody does it like that, they say, 'Yes, mommy, I like it like that.'

Parents described pride in their ability to support their children's development, noting that "one learns from children". A few parents reported that practicing English in front of their children could be a shameful and vulnerable experience.

Sometimes even with the children I feel shameful to speak [in English] because they [her children] say 'You don't know some word.' I tell them 'I am practicing, I am learning some words I know, some words I don't. For that reason, I need you all [the kids] to help me out...'

Yet parents also reported that as their English language skills increased through the program, their negative emotions diminished or disappeared:

Before I felt shameful to speak to my children in English, but I feel like I am learning more now, and I am practicing with my kids more. When I go out and someone asks me something, I can at least talk or understand them.

4.1.4. Parent agency in school and other child-related domains

When some parents entered the ESL program, they reported a lack of confidence and limited ability to engage in day-to-day activities using English. They expressed urgent language needs: "I can't call 911" or "I have trouble enrolling my child in school." At the same time, most parents began the program with strong motivation to support their children's education. Some even sought to protect their children from harm they might experience in school: "That's what I fear here in the United States for my daughters: that they are bullied. (. . .) [And] that they bully us Hispanics. That is always my fear" (ESL Participant). As one ESL staff member described, "Because of the language differences, they don't feel like they have any control or power to really help their kids succeed."

Yet after one or two semesters in the ESL program, many parents described improved confidence, self-efficacy, and/or independence, which they had not typically experienced in other ESL classes. Importantly, parents felt a greater sense of agency in interactions with school staff and other community services related to their children's development (e.g. doctors). Some parents described losing their fear of speaking English and feeling more comfortable approaching situations they had once found difficult to navigate. With improved English skills, parents reported asking questions and gaining direct access to important information about their children's schooling. In-class experiences and success using English with Head Start teachers and staff in the Head Start community also increased parents' self-assurance and independence in engaging with their children's teachers and schools. Parents also developed specific skills in their ESL classes that prepared them for children's school-related activities, such as parent-teacher conferences or home visits:

[The ESL instructor] asked us the questions to ask the teacher: If [the children] are participating, everything. And she writes it on the board, and we have to learn how to ask her the questions. I liked that a lot because this Friday, I have my [parent-teacher conference]. I already copied the questions I'm going to ask on a big piece of paper and I placed them in the kitchen, the bedroom, and so on (. . .) I like it, because she takes the time so we learn how to ask questions during the interview.

Parents also felt better prepared for completing necessary child-related paperwork.

Overall, parents enrolled in CAP Tulsa's two-generation ESL program reported improved communication with doctors and teachers, preparation for key school events such as parent-teacher conferences, and independent completion of school- and health-related administrative forms. There is some evidence that the combination of increased exposure to concepts of child develop-

ment, new opportunities for shared learning with their children, and improved English language skills may have contributed to participants' newfound confidence and agency in school settings and other child-related domains.

5. Discussion

This mixed method study examined the progress and perspectives of low-income parents in one of the only two-generation interventions in the country that recruits parents of children enrolled in Head Start services and offers an ESL curriculum grounded in children's development and Head Start activities. Among enrollees in each semester, parents had high levels of completion and class attendance. However, only about half of the parents completed both semesters. Parents who completed semester 1 or both semesters did exhibit improvement in their English language skills, moving on average from beginner ESL levels to high intermediate levels based on NRS benchmarks. This means that at the start of the program, parents on average could understand common simple words and phrases when spoken slowly and could respond to simple questions with limited control of grammar. By the end of semester 1 or semester 2, parents on average could communicate basic needs, participate in conversation in some social situations, and have some control of more complex grammar. More than half of the parents (56%) increased at least one NRS level by the end of semester 1 and more than three-quarters (87%) did so by the end of semester 2.

Parents also took up the program's supportive elements at high rates. While parents were enrolled in the program, they attended 20 out of 24 meetings over one year. ESL parents also received on average \$569 in attendance incentives during enrollment over two semesters. When averaged across the full sample, parents received \$514 in childcare vouchers or about 101 childcare hours over the course of the first two semesters. Yet even with additional childcare funds for children who were not enrolled in Head Start, attrition was the highest among parents with children under two years. Financial supports also cannot be separated from other types of support. We cannot know how much a single program component was related to parents' high rates of attendance, persistence, or English language advancement.

From the perspectives of parents and staff, CAP Tulsa's two-generation ESL program seemed to support parents' focus on their children. Parents experienced a curriculum that was intentionally designed to support their understanding of child development, reported increased involvement in shared learning activities at home, and described a sense of agency in their children's schools and other child-related settings.

5.1. Immigrant parents' progress in CAP Tulsa's two-generation ESL program

CAP Tulsa's average ESL program attendance and persistence rates appear to be impressive compared to other community-based ESL programs (Chisman & Crandall, 2007), although consistent, high quality data are limited (Kennedy & Walters, 2013). Reports from practitioners and researchers suggest typical attendance rates of 50% (Roberts, 2006; Sunshine, 2012) and completion rates of 25–30% (Schalge & Soga, 2008) among ESL students across a range of community-based programs. Nationwide advancement in English language proficiency in federally funded ESL programs has also been discouraging: only about 46% of students who enroll in an ESL program advance at least one NRS level in a year. The state of the field calls for innovation, and future directions include further testing of a two-generation approach to ESL services from a base of Head Start.

Our findings suggest four promising themes for future two-generation ESL program development and research. First, we hypothesized that a program designed to support parents' motivation to learn English to promote their children's educational success, as well as their own, may be effective (Chase-Lansdale & Brooks-Gunn, 2014; Sommer et al., 2012). The ESL curriculum was designed to support parents' high expectations for and investment in their children, which are strong cultural values among many Latino families (Hernandez & Napierala, 2014; Schneider et al., 2006). Latino parents may make greater progress in English language skills in a two-generation ESL program than a parent-only ESL program because the course content is immediately relevant to their parenting goals and daily experiences at their children's schools, although we could not know for certain (Chisman & Crandell, 2007; Zeidenberg, Cho, & Jenkins, 2010). These goals may be enhanced if ESL program staff are trained in child development, the Head Start curricula and calendar of activities.

Second, parents in the ESL program seemed to engage in additional shared learning activities at home, although we could not know if program participation led to improved parent engagement. Parents became involved in family homework time, serving as role models for their children. They also implemented reading strategies in both English and their home language that demonstrated their understanding of ways to enhance children's cognitive development. These activities suggested potential synergies when parents and children pursue school simultaneously, especially when parents and children were learning similar content such as English language vocabulary and phonetic awareness.

Third, CAP Tulsa's two-generation ESL program seemed to help parents develop a growth mindset, or a belief that effort increases ability and that challenging work is an opportunity to learn and grow (Dweck, 2008; Dweck & Molden, 2000). While the program was not developed with this focus, there was some evidence that parents may have experienced a shift in attitudes about their ability to learn and grow as English speakers and importantly as advocates for their children. Many parents often entered the program with a heightened fear that limited English skills would prevent them from advocating for their children's needs. Yet as they practiced English both at school and at home, and increased engagement in shared learning activities at home, parents seemed to become more comfortable navigating difficult situations, especially those that supported their children's education and health. Such benefits to parents may also have been conferred to their children, although further study is needed.

Lastly, the high dosage of the ESL program may have been a factor in increasing parents' English skills. On average, parents in CAP Tulsa's ESL program attended about 160 h of class instruction in either semester. Nationally, students who enroll in federally funded ESL programs attend significantly less, an average of 130 h of class instruction in a year. In Oklahoma, enrolled students attend an average of 75 h of classes in a year, or about a quarter of the class time of CAP Tulsa ESL students (Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, n.d.). A possibility we can examine for future directions is whether one intensive semester of instruction was better than a low-dosage program for a year. Another area for further research is to examine if the absence of classes at the Advanced level was a reason some parents left the program after one semester and whether the addition of Advanced level classes may have increased persistence.

6. Limitations

There are several limitations of this study. First, this is a descriptive study on parents' progress and parent and staff perspectives in CAP Tulsa's two-generation ESL program. Future studies will exam-

ine causal effects on a broad range of parent and child outcomes, with comparisons to a control group of parents who were not enrolled in the program. Child outcomes which were not measured by the present study, will be especially important for understanding whether the program benefits that accrue to parents have an impact on children. Second, the generalizability of the study is limited to two-generation programs that target parents' English language skills. Two-generation programs may focus on a range of outcomes for parents, including career employment, certification and degree attainment, improved parenting skills, promotion of language and culture, enhanced psychological well-being (e.g., optimism and self-efficacy), and expanded social capital, yet the current study focuses only on two-generation programs that explicitly target parents' English proficiency. Third, we used data from focus groups and interviews to explore whether and how the program supports parents' focus on children, but future studies are needed with designs that can better unpack the mechanisms by which the intervention may affect child outcomes.

7. Conclusion

Despite these limitations, CAP Tulsa's early success in supporting parents' progress in a two-generation ESL program are encouraging, especially improvements in English language skill levels that show higher rates than national averages. Moreover, our results suggest that a two-generation ESL program has the potential to support parents' motivation to learn English to promote their children's educational success as well as their own, increase parent engagement in shared learning activities with their children, and improve parents' confidence and self-efficacy in child-related domains. These benefits may be more likely to occur when combined with high-dosage ESL instruction and supportive services, although additional research is needed. The findings should stimulate more innovation in ESL programming and research that incorporates a two-generation lens.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2018.03.008>.

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