Continuity and Variability in the Parental Involvement and Advocacy Beliefs of Latino Families of Young Children: Finding the Potential for a Collective Voice

Tina M. Durand and Nicole A. Perez

Abstract

Parental involvement is an important component of children's school success. Although the literature on parental involvement among Latino families is growing and moving from deficit-based perspectives, very few studies have examined the parental involvement beliefs and practices of Latino families who vary across demographic and sociocultural lines within the same school community. This qualitative study explored Latino parents' beliefs about children's education, their involvement and advocacy beliefs and practices, and their perceptions of feeling welcome at their children's school. In-depth interviews were conducted with 12 parents of preschool and kindergarten children who attended a bilingual school. Qualitative descriptive analyses revealed that the majority of parents espoused the cultural value of *educación,* engaged in learning activities at home, and viewed themselves as living models of behavior for children, regardless of their education or immigrant status. Only first generation immigrant parents made explicit reference to children's futures. All parents attributed supportive relationships with school personnel and a bilingual climate as the most important sources of feeling welcome at school. However, parents with more education valued what they perceived as an "open door policy" and were more vocal in critiquing policies. Findings have implications for the development of multicultural competence among teachers and for ways diverse Latino families might develop a shared voice within the school sector.

Key Words: parental involvement, parents, advocacy, Latino families, cultural beliefs, social class, school partnerships, voice, preschool, kindergarten

Introduction

Research over the past several decades has documented a positive link between parental involvement and children's school success (Domina, 2005; Eccles & Harold, 1993; Epstein, 2011). Although there is increasing evidence that high levels of parental involvement are associated with high levels of achievement across children's school careers (see reviews by Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2003, 2007), parental involvement and advocacy may be particularly important during pivotal developmental transitions, such as the movement into preschool and kindergarten, which often constitute families' first experience with the particulars of formal schooling (Pianta, Cox, & Snow, 2007).

As the United States continues to fulfill its destiny as a nation of immigrants, schools have attempted to incorporate the voices of diverse groups of parents in ways that support children's learning and development, as evidenced by collaborations with parent organizations such as ACORN and the National PTA (Weiss, 2008). At the federal government level, Section 1118—Parental Involvement—of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) includes a more concerted focus on the structures and processes that are needed to involve all families in their children's education, such as more comprehensive professional development for both educators and parents, concrete opportunities to involve parents both within and outside the school building, and communications with parents that are clear, timely, and in languages that all parents can understand (Epstein, 2005). Despite this, parental involvement and engagement among Latinos, the largest ethnic minority group in the U.S., has often been widely misunderstood and framed within a deficit perspective that characterizes this group as "uninvolved" or "unwilling," carrying with it the implication that Latino parents do not actively invest in their children's educational outcomes (see Carreón, Drake, & Barton, 2005; Diaz Soto, 2007; López, 2001; Ramirez, 2008).

Delgado Gaitan (2004) writes at length about the inherent strengths that exist among Latino families regardless of educational, social, or economic standing, such as the salience of the family; an emphasis on respect, discipline, and proper behavior; a high value for education; and high expectations for children's academic success. Resituating Latino parental involvement within a strengths-based perspective requires that educators and practitioners become familiar with the cultural beliefs, socialization practices, and varied forms of cultural and social capital diverse groups of Latino parents activate to support

their children's learning if these professionals truly seek to forge meaningful, successful partnerships with such families. This requires examining important sources of continuity and discontinuity in the beliefs and practices that might exist across Latino families who vary across demographic and sociocultural lines. For example, how do Latino families who differ in terms of their education, income, and immigrant status talk about education for children? How do they perceive their children's earliest school experiences and their respective roles in supporting these? In this qualitative investigation, we examine the diverse ways Latino parents of preschool and kindergarten children talk about their children's education, their own involvement practices, and their perceptions of the climate of their children's schools. Ultimately, we ask the question: Are U.S. schools in the 21st century places that feel supportive and validating to all Latino parents or only some Latino parents? Indeed, parents' voices must be the primary vehicle through which we gather insights to this question.

The Latino Population, Children, and Education

As a group, the Latino population of the United States is highly diverse. Suárez-Orozco and Páez (2002) define Latinos as that segment of the U.S. population that traces its descent to the Spanish-speaking, Latin American, and Caribbean worlds. Hence, respective Latino subgroups have varied histories, worldviews, and sociopolitical and economic circumstances. Latinos are currently the largest ethnic minority group in the U.S., representing 16.3% of the total population in 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Within this context, educating young Latino children has been cited as an "urgent demographic imperative" (Garcia & Jensen, 2009, p. 3). Latino children are not only the largest ethnic minority group in the U.S., but also the youngest and fastest growing. This growth is particularly alarming in light of recent socioeconomic trends. In 2003, Latinos comprised 21.4 % of the total population of children under 5 years old, yet they also accounted for nearly 34% of young children living in poverty in the same census (Barrueco, Lopez, & Miles, 2007).

Approximately three in four Latino children live in homes in which at least some Spanish is spoken regularly, and as such, they present with a unique linguistic profile (Garcia & Jensen, 2009). However, the schooling of Latino children has been described by Valenzuela (1999) as "subtractive" rather than empowering, characterized by decontextualized, reductionist pedagogies that serve to strip Latino children of their primary resources—their language, culture, and family resources. Indeed, in his ethnographic work with classroom teachers working with high percentages of Latino children, Ramirez (2008) found that teachers were often hesitant or resistant to learning about the cultural beliefs, values, and perspectives of Latino parents, unknowingly

perpetuating what Delpit (1995) calls an "ignorance of community norms," which can have devastating effects on home–school relationships and on children's school trajectories. Hence, for educators who serve Latino children, awareness and sensitivity to the diverse cultural norms and values of the families from which they come is tantamount to effective pedagogy.

Latino Parental Involvement

The literature on parental involvement among Latino families is complex and evolving. Historically, the parental involvement rates of Latino families in children's schools have been described as low to nonexistent, particularly when compared to those of EuroAmerican families (Lee & Bowen, 2006; Moles, 1993; Nicolau & Ramos, 1990). Latino parents' differential rates of involvement have often been largely attributed to discrepancies between family values and beliefs about schooling, such as family ties, honor, and immediate gratification, and those assumed to be important for school success in this country (Goldenberg, Gallimore, & Reese, 2005). Moreover, a variety of factors, such as a potential language barrier and an inability to be physically present in schools, combined with the relatively poor school attainment of Latino children, have contributed to the perception among teachers that Latino families are uninvolved and not invested in their children's education (see review by Hill & Torres, 2010).

In the last decade, however, the literature on parental involvement among Latinos has become less reliant on stereotypic notions of this diverse population in favor of more nuanced approaches to examining both continuity and discontinuity in beliefs and values between those of the home and those of the school (Goldenberg et al., 2005), while acknowledging a wider variety of ways that Latino families support their children's learning and development. Indeed, research indicates that Latino parents strongly value education and have high expectations for their children (Fuligni, 2007). Qualitative research with Latino families has challenged and stretched the parameters of traditional notions of parental involvement as a set of scripted, school-sanctioned activities to more localized, culturally relevant means of support, such as instilling the importance of education through parental discussions and modeling of hard work (López, 2001), assisting children with homework, study skills, and study time (Ramirez, 2004), daily conversation about school and scrutinizing information sent home (Carreón et al., 2005), and capitalizing on the "funds of knowledge" that are generated by daily household life and work (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). This research encourages educators and schools to adopt a broader and more inclusive attitude toward the myriad ways diverse families are involved in their children's learning. As well, it legitimizes the more

"subtle" aspects of parental involvement (e.g., communication, high expectations) that have been found to be particularly salient and powerful with regard to children's outcomes in recent meta-analyses (see Jeynes, 2010).

Indeed, if the goal of education in a multicultural democracy is the empowerment and transformation of its citizens and the communities in which they live, ethnic minority parents' strong engagement and presence within the school sector is necessary and cannot be underscored enough (Fine, 1993). Hence, the only way to avoid a "one size fits all," "de-racialized" approach to parental involvement—in which the discourse, goals, and agenda are set by White, middle-class parents—is for ethnic minority parents' voices to be legitimized and heard and their collective presence to be felt within schools (Crozier, 2001). This is not without its challenges, however, due to the potential intersection of ethnicity, race, and social class with regard to parents' school involvement levels. Research on social class and parental involvement has shown that middle-class parents capitalize on higher levels of the forms of social and cultural capital recognized and valued by schools in their interactions with children's schools, positioning them to be more confident, vocal, and powerful in their involvement and advocacy efforts (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2009; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

Empirical studies and interventions aimed at increasing Latino parents' sense of empowerment and participation through increasing the various forms of capital they might employ in schools is growing. For example, De Gaetano (2007) implemented a three-year project with Latino families aimed at increasing both informal (i.e., at-home support) and formal (i.e., parents' engagement at school) parental participation by increasing their knowledge and appreciation of the pervasiveness of native culture in their lives and the crucial role they held in children's learning and by increasing parents' cultural capital regarding the workings of the school through observation and dialogue. More recently, Bolívar and Chrispeels (2011) describe a 12-week parent leadership development program focusing on increasing social and intellectual capital for Latino parents, resulting in increased engagement in the school sector and the creation of several organizations by participants that continue to provide institutional and community support to families. These projects represent concrete steps toward what Fine (1993) terms "a struggle to resuscitate the public sphere of public education" (p. 683), where parents, educators, and researchers work across lines of power, class, race, and gender to transform schools into truly meaningful, culturally responsive communities.

Goals and Objectives of the Present Study

As noted by Carreón et al. (2005), an in-depth understanding of parental involvement requires an examination of the cultural beliefs and values that

underlie and motivate their actions. Although empirical studies have begun to provide a more nuanced understanding of the education and involvement beliefs and practices of Latino families, the majority have focused on Latino families who have very low income and little or no formal education. Very few studies have examined the beliefs and practices of Latino families with varying levels of education and income within the same school community, thereby precluding the opportunity to explore important continuities and discontinuities among them. Amidst such variability may be potentially exciting spaces where diverse families who possess different forms of capital might work together in complementary, yet collaborative ways for the good of their children, schools, and communities.

In this qualitative investigation, we seek to contribute to the aforementioned literature that celebrates and legitimizes the voices of Latino parents, capitalizes on their inherent strengths and strong value of education, and centers them as key figures and potential advocates in their children's earliest school experiences. Indeed, an understanding of Latino parents' involvement beliefs and practices in the earliest years of schooling might set the stage for more informed, collaborative, and fruitful partnerships with families that can support children's best outcomes as they move through the elementary grades. Toward this end, we conducted in-depth interviews with mothers and fathers of children in preschool and kindergarten at a two-way bilingual school, guided by the following questions: (1) What are parents' cultural beliefs regarding education and their parental roles? (2) What contextual factors influence their beliefs and involvement within the school setting? and (3) What are their perceptions of the school climate and environment (i.e., do they feel welcome at school)? We examine cultural and demographic sources of both continuity and variability in my analysis of their responses, providing a nuanced understanding of the nature of their cultural beliefs, the ways in which their beliefs are informed by their respective histories and sociocultural circumstances, and their potential for authentic collaborations with teachers, schools, and most notably, with each other.

Method

The School Site

The study was conducted at a public, preK–8 school that serves approximately 400 children in an urban city in the Northeast. Approximately 91% of the children enrolled are of diverse Latino origin (e.g., Puerto Rican, Dominican, South American, Central American). The school uses a two-way English/Spanish bilingual curriculum, one of only several that exist in the state. In

this model, children are taught in both Spanish and English across all subjects using a continuous progress model, whereby languages are systematically embedded throughout the curriculum, with full bilingualism as the set goal. Hence, all lead teachers and specialists and most administrators (e.g., building principal, curriculum coordinator) at the school are fully bilingual in English and Spanish.

The long-standing relationship between the school and my (i.e., the first author's) academic institution (e.g., as a site for student teachers and other faculty projects) provided the initial scaffolding for my entry into the school community. A more personal connection with the building principal was made during the academic year prior to this study when I served as faculty host to a visiting scholar who spent some of her time (accompanied by me) at this school site. Once this connection was established, all aspects of the research plan, timeline, and potential outcomes were discussed first with the school principal, then with the K1 (preschool)–K2 (kindergarten) team of lead teachers, since parents of children in these earliest grades were the focus for this investigation. There were two K1 classrooms and two K2 classrooms in the school building; each classroom had between 18–23 children, one lead teacher, and one classroom paraprofessional, respectively. Hence, parents from all four K1–K2 classrooms were the focus of this study.

Participants

Participants were 12 parents of preschool and kindergarten (10 preschool, two kindergarten) children who were enrolled full time at the school. Ten participants were women (all biological mothers), and two were men (both biological fathers); mean age of participants was 35 years. Parents were of diverse Latino origin; five reported their ethnicity as Dominican, three Puerto Rican, two Salvadorian, and two reported Latino/multiethnic. The majority of parents (i.e., 8) were born outside of the continental U.S. Among this group, four had been residing in the U.S. for 10 years or less (2, 6, 9, and 10 years, respectively), and the remaining four had been living in the U.S. for more than 10 years (12, 21, 22, and 30 years, respectively). Parents' language usage in the home with the target children was diverse: Four parents reported that they spoke Spanish most often at home with their children, four reported English, and four reported that they used both languages equally.

In terms of reported parental education and yearly household income, study participants were extremely diverse (Table 1). Four parents' highest level of education was high school, and three parents reported they had less than a high school education (one was working on her GED). However, two parents reported they had attended some college, and the remaining three parents held

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Families (*n* = 12)

	N	*%*	*M (SD)*
Parent relationship to child			
Mother	10	83.3	
Father	2	16.7	
Parent age			34.8 (6.5)
Parent marital status			
Married	4	33.3	
Partner/cohabitating	5	41.7	
Single	3	25.0	
Parent place of birth			
Latin America/Puerto Rico	8	66.7	
Continental U.S.	4	33.3	
Parent years living in the U.S.[a]			14.13 (9.53)
Parent reported ethnicity			
Dominican	5	41.7	
Puerto Rican	3	25.0	
Central American	2	16.7	
Latina, multiethnic	1	8.3	
Latina, unspecified	1	8.3	
Parent level of education			
No formal schooling	1	8.3	
Some high school	2	16.7	
High school diploma	4	33.3	
Some college	2	16.7	
Bachelor's	1	8.3	
Graduate	2	16.7	
Parent household income			
Less than $20,000	3	25.0	
$20-40,000	2	16.7	
$40-60,000	2	16.7	
$60-80,000	1	8.3	
$80-100,000	2	16.7	
Over $100,000	2	16.7	
Parent employment			
Full-time	8	66.7	
Part-time	1	8.3	
Unemployed	3	25.0	
Language interview conducted			
Spanish	4	33.3	
English	7	58.3	
Bilingual	1	8.3	

Note. [a] Includes only parents born outside the continental U.S.

Bachelor's degrees or higher. Three parents had extremely low annual incomes (less than $20,000), four parents reported incomes between $20,000–60,000, one parent between $60,000–80,000, and the remaining four reported incomes of above $80,000. Parental education was highly correlated with yearly household income ($r = .77$, $p < .01$). Nine parents reported they were married or cohabitating with a long-term partner; three reported they were single.

Data Collection Procedures

To establish an overall context for the research, the K1–K2 teaching team (two preschool and two kindergarten lead teachers) participated in individual, semistructured interviews with me regarding their parental involvement beliefs and practices in the months before parents were interviewed.[1] I also spent some time observing lessons and activities in teachers' classrooms. Subsequently, all four teachers disseminated a bilingual letter and consent form that described the study to all parents of children in their classrooms, respectively, inviting and encouraging them to participate. Approximately 58–60 invitations/forms were disseminated across the four classrooms. Parents who returned consent forms in the affirmative were contacted by telephone or in person before or after school to schedule interviews; hence, all parents self-selected to participate in the study. Although a total of 18 parents[2] returned consent forms indicating their desire to be interviewed, four were unable to participate due to unforeseen circumstances (e.g., illness, work situation, inability to be contacted).

In-depth interviews were conducted with parents during the spring of the children's school year (March–June, 2010). Eight interviews were conducted by me and my research assistant, a fully bilingual, native Spanish speaker. Interviews were conducted in the school building, in a quiet, private space in the library, and one interview was conducted by me at a local nearby university (the mother's place of work). Due to scheduling constraints, three interviews were conducted by me over the phone. All interviews were conducted in the parents' preferred language and were audiotaped (including the three phone interviews) and later professionally transcribed verbatim. Seven interviews were conducted in English and the remaining five were conducted in Spanish. In particular, Spanish interviews were transcribed by a professional, accredited translator who transcribed the interviews verbatim, first in Spanish, then in English, using back translation for accuracy. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes on average.

The general focus for the in-depth interviews was determined prior to data collection. Hence, interviews followed a semistructured format, with some closed (e.g., have you participated in any of the following events at school this year?) but mostly open-ended questions being asked in each interview, such as

the following: What do you think is special/you could change in your child? What do you see as some of the most important things you do in helping [child] grow up? What does it mean for a child to be educated? Do you think you should be involved in your child's learning at home? What kinds of things do you do? Are you involved with teachers and staff at school/how? Are you involved with other parents in your child's classroom/how? Do you feel welcome at school/why? What is the best/most difficult thing about the school? Parents were encouraged to answer in their own words, and the interviews were conducted in an informal, conversational manner. Throughout the interviews, we often repeated parents' answers back to them to ensure clarity and to give them the opportunity to elaborate or qualify their responses.

Participant Trust

As noted by Maxwell (1992) and Angen (2000), qualitative interviews and their resultant "texts" are not objective accounts of reality, but socially constructed entities, negotiated by both researcher and respondent, and shaped by the contexts and manner in which they take place. They are social situations that inherently involve a relationship between the interviewer and the participant (Fontana & Frey, 2000). Hence, establishing trust with participants is essential to both the success of the interview and the validity of participants' responses. Several participants were familiar with me because I had spent time in their children's classrooms in the weeks prior to the interviews. In addition, we carefully followed best practices regarding qualitative interview techniques. Specifically, my research assistant and I established and maintained rapport with the participants throughout the interview process; many times, this was "led" in Spanish by my assistant, who is Latina and also from an urban, multicultural community that was similar to that of the participants. We also engaged in "interactive" listening as discussed in Fontana and Frey (2000). Of course, the cross-sectional design of this study did not allow for the kind of trust between researcher and participant that can result from more longitudinal work. Hence, the data here must be interpreted with this caveat in mind.

Researcher Reflexivity

Reflexivity is the process of reflecting critically on the self as engaged in research; it demands that we explore and analyze the complexities and contradictions inherent in the research process (e.g., interpretations of truth, multiple agendas, issues of power) and on the meaning we make and present from the experience (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). It is a conscious acknowledgement of being both inquirer and respondent.

While detailed notes on my observations and comments regarding the interview process were written after each respective interview, the majority of my

reflections and much of my reflexive praxis were guided by Reinharz's (1997, 2011) contention that there are multiple selves that emerge and are in fact created in the field and that these selves must be explored in terms of how they impact the conduct of research, the interactions between researcher and participant, and the interpretation and representation of the findings. In particular, I reflected often on my stance as a EuroAmerican, academic researcher—in effect, an outsider in this particular community—and how this influenced participants' responses and candor with me. Yet, notwithstanding the challenges that these aspects of self might have brought forth, I believe my interactions with parents were greatly mediated by components of my personal self that were salient here: my former position as an early childhood public school teacher who was very comfortable and skilled at engaging with parents of young children, and my position as an academic from a working-class background. This latter, seemingly contradictory position of having some understanding and direct experience with divergent worldviews and sources of knowledge that might be attributed to social class rendered me, I believe, less intimidating and more approachable to all families. As well, as researchers, our understanding of phenomena was stretched through the conduct of these interviews, which were often profoundly humbling. For example, one young mother agreed to meet with us after her long work shift, yawning throughout the entire interview. I found myself pondering the question: If agreeing to meet with researchers after a long work day to discuss education and involvement wasn't an example of commitment and support of her daughter's education, what was?

In essence, then, the practice of reflexivity in thought and writing throughout this project served neither to ensure that the data "[emerged] scientifically pure and squeaky clean" (Burman, 1997, p. 796), nor that the findings were untrustworthy and irrelevant, but served as an ongoing process through which I interrogated my own positionality, stance, and assumptions about the research topic and the ways in which aspects of myself might be perceived by the participants. This process enabled me to receive information from families in an open, accepting, and sometimes surprising way and to represent their experiences in a careful, sensitive, and informed manner.

Qualitative Approach and Analysis

Qualitative content analysis, where the intent is to describe content of a more latent—as opposed to purely manifest (e.g., frequencies of codes, means)—nature (Sandelowski, 2000), was the method utilized to examine parent interview data. Specific analysis of interview data followed the steps outlined and defined by Weber (1985) and Downe-Wamboldt (1992), focusing on target sections of the interviews. Emerging codes, defined as a segment

of text that conveyed a unified message, idea, or thought, were developed and considered in terms of their dimensions or characteristics in the process of constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). It became apparent that while some codes were representative of the majority of parents, others varied across levels of parents' education and immigrant status. Hence, final coding of transcripts focused specifically on variations both within and across codes in terms of education and immigration status, two variables that have been shown to account for variations in mothers' childrearing and educational beliefs and practices with children, and children's education and health-related outcomes (see Laosa, 1980; LeVine, LeVine, & Schnell, 2001; Tapia Uribe, LeVine, & LeVine, 1994). Throughout the analysis process, I consulted with a multicultural peer group of qualitative researchers to ensure validity of emergent codes and themes.

Results and Discussion

Based on qualitative analyses, important continuities and discontinuities emerged in the voices of parents as they discussed education, parental involvement, their roles in supporting their children's growth and learning, and their perceptions of the school environment. Results are organized in terms of illustrative categories or themes that capture parents' diverse views on these issues. Discussion of the results is integrated throughout this section as well, in order to provide a rich synthesis of the data and my interpretations (see Sandelowski & Barroso, 2003). All names of participants used throughout are pseudonyms, and dates given refer to interview dates.

Continuity: The Strong Presence of *Educación*

The centrality of the parental role in facilitating the childrearing goal of *educación* was reflected across the majority of interviews, regardless of parents' education or immigrant status. The term *educación* is a core cultural value among Latinos of all national origins, rooted within an interdependent framework (see review by Halgunseth, Ispa, & Rudy, 2006). *Educación* is more comprehensive than its English cognate "education;" in *educación*, moral, interpersonal, and academic goals are not separated, but intimately linked (Valenzuela, 1999). In her ethnographic work with Mexican immigrant families, Valdés (1996) noted that parents often mentioned the moral education of their children when discussing education. Similarly, in a study of Mexican immigrant families by Goldenberg and Gallimore (1995), parents' definitions of education did not center exclusively on academics, but included morality, proper behavior, good manners, and respect for elders.

Eleven out of 12 parents that we spoke with reflected this more robust definition of education, with a strong focus on good behavior across contexts. For example, two mothers (one who was completing her GED and one with less than a high school diploma) commented on desired behaviors of children when asked to discuss what education meant to them:

> Just upbringing, training, because they will continue in the habits you form with them…for me, it's basic—education is training in the home as well as school. [Nelda, 5/12/10]

> Education is very important, because it's good when a child—you know—it's just a matter of politeness, when he says "thank you," when he says "excuse me," when he says he is sorry when he does something wrong. [Sophia, 5/11/10]

Similar sentiments were also expressed by more formally educated mothers, whose definitions illustrate the fusion of academic and social outcomes:

> Education…to me it means more like problem solving skills, not just academics, but social problem solving skills…because once they leave school and enter the social world with both adults and other children, teaching them about fairness and compassion…so the academics, but also like social, social skills. [Cara, 5/7/10]

> Well, I guess an educated person is someone who is well mannered and knows how to get along in the world in a cordial way…but it would also mean having the knowledge to get along in the world and make good decisions. [Lila, 4/27/10]

Overall, I noted that most parents appeared comfortable answering this question and that little or no "tension" existed between education as being either school-based or experientially based. For the majority of parents, these were mutually constituted aspects of their definitions. As well, parents' definitions of education focused on children's success not just in school, but in life, and were very future oriented. Of particular interest was that although eight out of twelve parents made reference to children's futures in their respective definitions, four parents explicitly used the word "future" in their descriptions, and each of these parents had been born outside of the U.S. As noted by Michael, who had no formal schooling in his home country of El Salvador:

> I think it's good, what they are teaching her at this school, she's learning really well—they treat her very well—in everything, her education. It's very important…just that they teach her well, for a better future. [6/11/10]

This explicit orientation to children's successful futures may well be a unique feature and inherent strength of immigrant families living in the U.S., whose expectations and aspirations for better lives for their children may be more urgent and imperative than those of native families and who immigrate with high hopes of expanding educational opportunities for their children (see Delgado Gaitan, 2004; Lansford, Deater-Deckard, & Bornstein, 2007).

Interestingly, the only parent who did not articulate traditional *educación* values in her definition of the construct was, in fact, highly educated and born in the U.S. Instead, Maria's definition of education focused on purely conceptual cognitive skills and learning outcomes, as exemplified by her words here:

> Now what it [education] means to me is that a child or an adult has the desire to explore, to open things up, to unpack things, to look at things critically, to challenge, to wear new hats…and unfortunately, I think the curriculum in most cases, not all, but in many cases it actually beats the desire to learn out of a kid, rather than reinforces this stuff. [4/28/10]

Maria's focus on education as a process-oriented activity where open-ended exploration and critical analysis is central is consistent with LeVine et al.'s (2001) ongoing work that illustrates the effect of maternal schooling on mothers' use of language with young children. Specifically, maternal schooling promotes an increase in verbal, rather than proximal, interaction and the use of a more decontextualized, abstract, academic language. In both LeVine's work and the results noted above, we see a shift from knowledge as derived from and embedded in practical, shared, everyday experiences, to a more constructivist perspective, where the construction of knowledge is a largely solo process, dependent upon the individual's cognitive readiness and sophistication in accommodating "novel" environmental inputs.

In sum, the views and definitions of education expressed here by parents across all levels of education reflect the tenacity of more traditional *educación* values on parents' cognitions and also the potential impact of formal schooling on their education- and learning-related beliefs. Indeed, the nature of ethnic minority and immigrant parents' beliefs and practices are multifaceted and complex, based on the adaptation of long-term cultural goals, values, and aspirations for children to their current contextual experiences (e.g., social interactions, work/educational experience, economic condition, location of residence) within the host culture (García Coll & Pachter, 2002; Weisner, 2005).

Continuity: Parents as "Academic Teachers," "Guides," and "Living Models"

In our conversations with parents and my analysis of transcripts, it was clear that these parents cast themselves as the most central figures in their child's lives; put another way, they considered themselves as the true purveyors of the *educación* values illustrated in the previous section. This was true for all parents, regardless of their demographic characteristics. When asked to articulate the most important aspects of their roles as parents in helping their children grow up, three major dimensions emerged: acting as "teachers" by providing support for schoolwork, functioning as "guides," and serving as living "models" of behavior. I discuss each dimension separately.

It was the case that every parent reported that they provided direct instructional support with homework and engaged in school-based activities with children that involved reading, writing, crafts, games, and counting, such as expressed here by Dana, who had attended some college:

> Sometimes when we are climbing—we live on the 5th floor, so we have to take the stairs—we count the steps, like one by one…and sometimes, when I'm cooking, I'll ask him to give me two cups, then what's half of that…I just try and tell him, like, numbers and stuff…and I read to him a lot….We have games that we play that are with letters and numbers, so I think that helps him, too. [6/17/10]

Similarly, Norma, a mother with less than a high school education, described engaging in a variety of school-based activities, noting both their frequency and their challenges:

> At the very least every day I check his backpack, and I sit with him and do his homework in the workbook, and I help him…and to read…he loves to read with me…they go to the library and get books, and I help him with that. Since he's in the youngest grades, the most difficult for me is to push him to recognize letters and read and that sort of thing. You have to have a lot of patience—he forgets everything; it's hard. [5/11/10]

In a practical sense, the finding that all parents—including those with little or no formal education—appeared comfortable supporting children's academic development might be the result of two things in particular: (1) children here are in the earliest grades of school, and their schoolwork is manageable for all parents, and (2) the fact that these children's teachers are very explicit about the activities they want parents to support at home, offering structured materials, guidelines, and hands-on trainings for parents about how to engage in early literacy activities that focus on children's oral language, vocabulary, and comprehension. During my time in the children's classrooms, I noticed the

variety of materials (e.g., books, journals, manipulatives) that were sent home with children on a regular basis. When asked about this, teachers reported to me that providing families with explicit strategies for interacting with books in ways that would reinforce what they were doing in the classroom was a primary objective of the preschool and kindergarten programs. Such practices are examples of the ways schools might involve and encourage parents who might be unfamiliar with the more "emergent" approaches to literacy instruction that are employed by many early childhood teachers in the U.S., as has been documented in other studies with immigrant Latino families (see Reese & Gallimore, 2000).

Theoretically, these findings illustrate both the changing nature of parents' beliefs and practices and the limitations of relying on stereotypical, simplistic notions of Latino parenting practices around education and schooling. Although previous, excellent qualitative work with Latino families (e.g., Holloway, Rambaud, Fuller, & Eggers-Piérola, 1995; Valdés, 1996) suggested that Latino parents often do not consider direct support of children's academic learning (i.e., shared reading, homework instruction) as part of their parental role, more recent studies (see Durand, 2010b; Farver, Xu, Eppe, & Lonigan, 2006; Goldenberg et al., 2005) are more consistent with the findings here, which provide evidence that Latino families *do* engage in academic activities and support for schooling at home, at least in the early years, and that this support can be mediated by teachers and schools in sensitive, empowering ways.

It was the case, however, that all parents appeared most confident and were most eloquent in their descriptions of themselves as children's "guides" and living "models" of behavior. This might be expected, since cross-cultural studies reveal that, as a group, Latino parents tend to endorse and engage in higher levels of direction, modeling, rule setting, and decision making than EuroAmerican parents (see review by Halgunseth et al., 2006). For example, one mother with a high school education articulated that the most important part of her role as a mother was the day-to-day guidance—the "little things" —that she provided:

> So I just think it's the little things you have to do, you have to do the day-to-day things, and you have to let them know, and you have to show them how to do things, you can't just expect them to know—and they aren't going to learn on their own, you have to guide them—that's why they need the guidance. [Ilena, 5/10/10]

Dana elaborated on the salience of family and expanded upon the concept of guidance to refer to the exertion of "control" over children:

> I think my family played a big part in my life, the way I am today, and I want to pass that on to my kids…not that they will be just like me, but

they will have some family values…you have to guide them…to be on top of them, because, you know, look what's happening in [city] right now, many kids are getting killed and stuff…I'm not saying that's happening because their families aren't there—I'm not saying that—but I'm saying that if you know where your kids are and you know, they are like kids, and you have to have some control over them, and you try to teach them right from wrong all the time, and so then I think they will think twice before they do things. [6/17/10]

The notion of parents as guides can also be viewed within the cultural value of *familismo*, which also emerges as an important theme among U.S. Latinos, taken as a group (Harwood, Leyendecker, Carlson, Asencio, & Miller, 2002). *Familismo* refers to family closeness, cohesion, and interdependence, an expectation and reliance on family members—including intergenerational and extended kin—as primary sources of instrumental and emotional support, and the commitment to the family over individual needs and desires (Cauce & Domenech-Rodríguez, 2002; Falicov, 2005). The aforementioned quote by Dana illustrates both the primacy and potential for *familismo* values to exert a protective influence on children's growth and development.

Related to the concept of guides were parents' vivid portrayals of themselves as tangible models for children to look up to and base their actions on; put another way, parental modeling might be a way of teaching children to act in accordance with *familismo* values. Joanna's description illustrates this vividly:

I correct her when things are wrong, teach her about things that may be right or wrong, and show her the right way of things—because what you show them is what they grow up to be. [5/4/10]

Nelda, who was completing her GED, noted that education was the most important thing that she did to support her daughter, but she defined this very specifically, in terms of the living example she was setting:

The most important [thing I give as a parent] is education—and the most difficult. Look at me—she [daughter] really looks at me—I didn't study, I didn't prepare, I do the work that I have to get through it, but I have to depend on her father. So, for me, education is the inheritance you give to your children. [5/12/10]

Interestingly, although the aforementioned dimensions of the parental role were expressed by all parents, two of the most educated parents' definitions included an explicit focus on spending time and simply "being present" as integral components of their parental role. Lila and Maria, when asked about the most important tasks of parenting, responded immediately with the following:

> To be present, one must be present…to do the homework, have dinner, read books…and just sit together sometimes, I think slowing things down sometimes so you are attending to your children is, I mean listening is important—I don't think our society allows for much of that, so you have to actively embrace it…we don't do any video games at all, any of those kinds of things, they kind of cripple a kid's creativity. [Lila, 4/28/10]

> I guess spending a lot of time, time with him, just talking to him, yeah, and getting him to spend time with his brother and sister…just because doing this I get an idea of what's going on in his head, and he always has such interesting things to say. [Maria, 4/27/10]

The previous two responses also include reference to children's cognitive and language capacities, casting the child as an active agent in his/her own development, which is consistent with the more constructivist view of learning expressed earlier by these mothers, in particular. Notwithstanding this variability, however, the centrality of the parental role in helping children to learn and grow was a thread that was woven throughout the parents' narratives, over and above demographic differences among them. These differences, however, did account for several interesting sources of variability in parents' specific perceptions of the school environment, and the emergence and strength of their voices in articulating their points of view.

Discontinuity: The "Openness" of the School

In their descriptions and expressed feelings about their interactions with the school, all parents had mostly positive sentiments; in fact, they liked the school very much. However, the concept of "openness," or the school being a place that had an "open-door" policy was expressed only by three mothers—Lila, Maria, and Dana—all three college-educated. When asked about what, exactly, she liked about the school, Maria quickly noted that "I feel very welcome at school, I have never felt unwelcome there…I feel like I can just go in and hang out, and I have no reason to be there" [4/28/10]. She later notes explicitly that that the school has what she perceives to be an "open-door policy." Similarly, Lila comments on teachers contributing to a fundamental openness within the school:

> The teachers by and large are very open…they're always like "give me a second, let me finish what I'm doing here, then I'm with you," and they are, and then they are open to talk, and, um, the fact that everything is sort of open, you know, is very good. [4/27/10]

However, there was no mention of the school being "open" by any of the other parents, suggesting that a sense of openness, which seemed to be defined by these mothers in terms of an ability to move about freely within the school at unscheduled times, might be a desired attribute or quality that is more salient to parents with more education. In a practical sense, the levels of education and respective household incomes of these three mothers, which were the highest of all participants, also may account for their responses; parents with professional careers may have jobs that afford more flexible, negotiable hours, as was the case with Maria and Dana, or the financial resources/support to be a "stay-at-home" parent, as was the case with Lila. Both opportunities afford these parents' a greater ability to be physically present at school or to just "drop in" for no specific reason, unlike what may be the case for parents with limited education or income whose work often involves inflexible schedules or unpredictable hours, inhibiting their school involvement practices (Lee & Bowen, 2006; Sheldon, 2002).

On a more conceptual level, more educated parents' high regard for this construct of "openness" may reflect a difference in their consciousness and perceptions of the relationship between the school and their parental roles. In her ethnographic work with both upper-middle- and low-income families, Lareau (2003) consistently found that more affluent, educated parents did not question their membership and advocacy within the school and often felt more entitled to time with children's teachers and school administrators, while less educated, working-class families considered children's school lives to be "a separate realm, and one in which [parents are] infrequent visitors" (p. 214).

Discontinuity: Parents as Advocates

Related to the concept of openness was the sense of advocacy on behalf of children and families that was expressed by only a few parents. Three parents spoke at great length about how they had either advocated strongly for certain outcomes for their child, as reflected in the words of Maria, "I fought hard to get them transferred here" [4/28/10], and Lila, "I think particularly in social situations [child] had a few social issues at the beginning, and I felt that my job was to sort of alert the teachers about what the situation was and to have them pay attention" [4/27/10], or had strong feelings that more support and organizing was needed for preschool and kindergarten parents. Each of these mothers had been born in the U.S., and although Maria and Lila were college-educated, as noted previously, Ilena had only a high school education, yet spoke most eloquently about how the parents of the youngest children in a preK–8 school had a unique set of circumstances:

I speak to other parents in the morning when I see them, but I just wish there was like more involvement within the family and that maybe, that the preschool, kindergarten, and first grade classes could work together, even if it's meeting in the library at 7:30 in the morning and coming up with ideas or events or anything…like a parent council just for K1 and K2 parents…it's just different issues we have with the youngest that may not make it up there, but these concerns could be put together, emailed up to [principal's] space…I know parents are busy, but they could open an email up, they can do it from home, or we could even do phone calls. [5/10/10]

However, no other parents that we interviewed made any mention of attempts (or plans) to articulate certain practices or policies for children and families to anyone within the school community. To a large extent, the nature of these parents' early relations with schools is consistent with the aforementioned literature that notes both ethnic and class-based differences in parents' school involvement practices and advocacy, which suggest that the tendency for parents to question teachers about their practices, ask for clarification, or advocate for certain issues is a practice more commonly seen among White, upper-SES, formally educated parents, who draw upon higher levels of financial, social, and cultural capital when interacting with schools. In the case of Ilena, although she may not draw upon a particularly high level of financial or educational capital, her particular work experience undoubtedly afforded her significant social and cultural capital: she was employed as a secretary in the central office of the school system and had attended the school system herself, rendering her more familiar with the overall landscape and culture of the school and the school district as a whole and more likely to receive critical information and resources from school personnel. Hence, she may have been more confident in voicing her concerns and ideas to me and in her ability to carry them out.

Discontinuity: Confusion vs. Complaints

When asked to comment on the kinds of things children were doing in school or various school policies, some differences emerged in terms of the content of parents' responses. Two parents, both with little or no college education, expressed surprise or confusion about the kinds of things their children were expected to do in school, as illustrated by Ernesto regarding the curriculum and expectations of his son's teacher:

Yes, I am very [surprised]—he has to learn a lot, a lot of things, just so much…it's hard for him, but he does have more confidence now. [5/17/10]

Joanna, who had only been residing in the U.S. for 6 years but had taken some college courses in the Dominican Republic, expressed confusion about some of her daughter's materials, but with much reluctance and hesitancy:

…the math book, sometimes I think that maybe they, I don't know, it's too little, I don't know if that's the way, that it's right, it's not hard, but… it's not that I don't like it, I don't know. [5/4/10]

In contrast, those parents who were college-educated had more to say in the way of critique regarding aspects of the school curriculum or specific policies, as noted by Cara, who had a Master's degree:

I taught K1, so I'm kind of familiar with [the curriculum], so I wasn't surprised. So I knew what to expect, but that doesn't mean I agree. I think it's very academically based; I think kids need more time to explore and to, and to just free play. There are often times where he [child] says to me that he's expected to sit quietly all day, yeah, even at lunch…so I think they need a little more time to be 5-year-olds—it's too rigid, you know? They need time at school to free play and use their imagination and not such structured activities. [5/7/10]

Interestingly, five parents—almost half of the sample—expressed either no strong opinion on the schools' expectations for children (e.g., "no, I don't have any complaints," "I'm not surprised with anything") or responded with only positive comments. These five parents all had less than a high school education, and all but one had been living in the U.S. for less than 12 years. This positive sentiment was clearly expressed by Nelda, who was in the process of completing her GED and had only been living in the U.S. for two years:

I'm very pleased with the school, overall. My older daughter didn't read or write [in the Dominican Republic] until she was ten. Nothing. And she learned to read and write here, this year. [5/12/10]

Nelda's positive response contains an expressed comparison between her children's current educational experiences and the ones they had in her native country. Indeed, the educational beliefs and attitudes of foreign-born parents are shaped by their particular experiences with formal schooling in their countries of origin (Fuligni & Fuligni, 2007).

In her ethnographic work with both upper-middle- and low-income families, Lareau (2003) noted that low-income parents were hesitant to discuss or voice concerns regarding school-related issues because of feelings of insecurity and inferiority with school personnel and curricula and because of their own negative experiences with school. With specific regard to Latino families, Delgado Gaitan (2004) notes that parent involvement and advocacy in the school may often be compromised by language issues but is often more nuanced than

this; many Latinos' experiences with schools in the United States have been ones of estrangement, conflict, and inequity. Since immigrant Latino parents see schooling as the only possible vehicle for their children's futures, they may view the costs of raising concerns as simply too great. These observations may help to explain the overall satisfaction and lack of discontent with children's early school experiences that was reported by many parents in the present study. As well, the high percentage of Latino children and families in the school may have added to parents' overall feelings of contentment.

Notwithstanding this, it may be accurate to say from these data that parents' voices tend to become stronger and more frequently utilized as a function of the parents' education and years living in the U.S. Even if this is the case, however, schools often remain challenged to consider parents' unique perspectives. Fine (1993), recasting parental involvement as parental empowerment, noted that parents are often not seen as being "entitled" to strong voices within the school sector, thereby removing the opportunity to work collaboratively with educators and with each other in creating a vibrant, responsive school community. Immigrant parents, in particular, often find that their beliefs and actions have less power than those of other school actors, due to limited familiarity with English, less access and opportunity to form social networks, and the activation of different forms of cultural capital (e.g., life experiences; Carreón et al., 2005).

In the final section, I explore what might be considered both a necessary precursor and first step in forming authentic collaborations between schools and Latino families: parents' sense of whether or not they feel welcome in the school environment. Indeed, only within a context of belonging and trust will parents from diverse sociocultural locations come together to raise their voices, ideas, and concerns, creating the potential for collective change and advocacy.

Schools Where People Come Together: Parents' Sense of Belonging

Amidst the differences in parents' views regarding the expectations of the school and their advocacy beliefs and practices were factors that were consistently reported by nearly all of the parents as contributing to their feelings of belonging and feeling welcome at school. We asked parents directly whether they felt welcome at school and whether school felt like it was a place where families belonged and to comment on why this was so. Eleven of 12 parents answered in the affirmative immediately, many actually evidencing what appeared to be surprise at the question (the parent who was hesitant to respond in the affirmative had an issue with the before-school supervision of her preschooler and noted that it influenced her feeling welcome within the school). The most commonly cited (10 out of 12 respondents) reason for their positive

responses focused on attitudes among the teachers, administrators, and staff and the relationships that parents felt that they had with them. Parents perceived teachers as being friendly, outgoing, supportive, and generous in taking the time to provide them with assistance or answer questions. Illustrative is Norma's comment:

> I feel very welcome, always. For one thing, the attention they give. The teachers are always in a good mood, and whoever's working in the front office always has a smile, and when you have a question, they at least listen to you. [5/11/10]

Building on this, Ernesto's response also alludes to the willingness of teachers to openly acknowledge parents, yet also suggests that teachers and school personnel contribute positively to the overall school climate:

> Yes! I feel always welcome. The energy, confidence here—they [teachers and staff] welcome you with an open hand, with no regrets…it's like a happy school. They welcome you…and the joy! All the activities—there are like so many activities they welcome you to, plays and everything. It's just a happy school. [5/17/10]

Although most descriptions centered on the parent as the "recipient" of teachers' welcoming attitudes and outreach practices, three parents noted that they felt welcome at school because of teachers' attitudes toward their children. For example, Michael answered he felt like he was welcome at school because:

> They treat my daughter well. I think the teacher that I met was really good. She's teaching her well, and they are educating her very nicely. [Is there something you think they could do more of?] They are good to my daughter, everything's good. The teacher is good, very happy, and they take care of her. [6/11/10]

Clearly, then, people and relationships were integral components of parents' feelings about whether they felt welcomed and like they belonged in the school community. Although the centrality of positive relationships may well be a universally critical component to successful home–school connections for all ethnic and cultural groups, this may hold particular salience for Latino families, who have a greater tendency than do EuroAmerican families to adhere to childrearing beliefs and values which are consonant with a more sociocentric perspective, which emphasizes the fundamental connectedness of humans to one another (Harwood et al., 2002). As in other empirical work with Latino families (e.g., Ceballo, 2004; Delgado Gaitan, 1994, 2004; Durand, 2011), we see a strong emphasis on relationships with significant others—family members, teachers, and adult mentors—as central to the educational endeavor.

The second most commonly noted factor that accounted for parents' feelings of belonging within the school were what I refer to here as components of culture, most notably, the fact that the school was a truly bilingual community. While the majority of parents made some reference to the bilingual atmosphere at some point during the interview, seven of the twelve noted that it was, in fact, what they valued most about the school and what they liked the best about being there. Ilena spoke at length about her excitement about her daughter's recent enrollment in the school, focusing on her child's rapidly emerging fluency in Spanish:

> When I brought my daughter into this school we were very excited, and within two weeks she started speaking in Spanish, little words…and it was just amazing. I have a tendency to go from Spanish to English and English to Spanish, and she follows me…she'll just be like "mom, Spanish," or "mom, English," or "today mom we were in English/Spanish"…I just think that aspect is unbelievable, I just think that, I wish almost every school had that opportunity with languages for kids, and for the families. [5/10/11]

Since language significantly mediates our experience and understanding of the world (Vygostky, 1986) and is a critical dimension of one's cultural identity, it is not surprising that the majority of parents made reference to the bilingual curriculum in their descriptions of what was positive and noteworthy about the school. Maria, in particular, passionately articulated the powerful role that bilingualism has played in affirming the cultural and linguistic heritages of Latino children and families at the school:

> It's distinctive, you know. I think the two-way immersion changes the absolute feel of the school for the better. I think what the [school] does that other schools strive to do but can't is truly give the kids the message that we value where you come from, and we value what you bring to the table…like in a Sheltered English immersion school I know, you are not building on anything that they know, so let's erase who you are, because we don't actually value you. I believe it's really profound, it's saying to the kids and the families—we value this, and we value you as people. [4/28/10]

It is important to note that although Maria's words are striking, she was the only parent to comment explicitly on the link between language and cultural heritage. Interestingly, Maria was also the only parent to mention other components of culture as contributing to her positive feelings within the school:

> I just like the way I feel, just the way it feels when you go in—there are definitely differences in the Latino dominant community vs. a White-

dominated community, one of them being if you walk into the office there, you might see a whole bunch of people hanging around eating rice and beans; you are never going to see that at some of the other schools. The way people touch and hold your kids…I like that emphasis. [4/28/10]

Maria's status as a doctoral candidate may well have influenced her ability and willingness to articulate the relations between culture, school climate, and ethnic (Latino) identity. Even so, I was initially surprised that only one parent mentioned other "tangible" aspects of Latino culture besides language. However, such results might be interpreted with regard to the inherent power structure that exists within schools and within the U.S. in general; Latino families expect schools to be (and they often are) largely EuroAmerican, White institutions, and parents may not be inclined or empowered to challenge this (de la Piedra, Munter, & Girón, 2006; Carreón et al., 2005; Ramirez, 2003). However, if schools—especially those that are embedded in multicultural communities—are truly to be environments that validate children's and their families' diverse cultural heritages, educational professionals must be open and willing to stand in solidarity with Latino and other ethnically diverse families and to utilize the additional sources of cultural capital they possess. Indeed, such families can serve as vital resources for the entire school community.

Conclusion

Examining the continuities and discontinuities in the perspectives of Latino parents with different educational and sociocultural circumstances can inform the development of multicultural competence among teachers and schools and can provide insights into the ways that diverse families might develop a shared voice within the school sector. First, the fact that Latino families across the demographic spectrum highly value education should be encouraging for schools and teachers and help to diminish the perception that Latino families are not invested in children's schooling. As well, being knowledgeable about cultural values such as *educación* and *familismo* among Latino families can help educators to build on children's home cultures and experiences and to interpret parents' actions with a more informed, less value-laden point of view, thereby serving them more effectively. Although cultural knowledge does not render us able to accurately predict the behavior of individuals, it does contribute to "a certain mindset…a certain process of sensitivity that becomes automatic" (Durand, 2010a, p. 837) when interacting with diverse families. This mindset is a critical component to forming mutually rewarding home–school partnerships between ethnically diverse families and schools.

The fact that relationships emerged as the most significant contributor to parents' sense of feeling welcome at school in this study further validates the need for cultural competence among educators. This is critical and is consistent with Mapp's (2003) work that suggests that although programmatic aspects of family involvement initiatives taken by schools (e.g., Open House) are important, establishing meaningful relationships between parents and school staff are of particular import in influencing parents' desire to be involved. These relationships must build on culture and language, however; when Latino parents' cultures are focused on in authentic, respectful ways, they are more likely to be substantively engaged in schools (Diaz Soto, 2007). Insights from Latino parents are integral to this process, but they often may not trust themselves as "experts" due to their historically marginalized position in U.S. schools. As shown by De Gaetano (2007) in her ethnographic work with Latino families (and perhaps seen in the present study), the primacy of language and culture in the learning process is often not self-evident but can be increasingly recognized and valued by families when they are given the opportunity to engage in authentic dialogue and reflection on their experiences together. Put simply, families in De Gaetano's study became more empowered and involved as their cultural awareness increased.

Lastly, what are the potential spaces where parents' diverse voices might come together? Despite the "tensions" that may exist in the discrepancies between high- and low-educated and/or immigrant and nonimmigrant parents' perceptions of the school, advocacy efforts, and practical realities (i.e., that constrain their ability to be involved), I suggest here that parents can work together in complementary ways to create shared outcomes and a common vision for the schools that serve their children. When different parents take the lead and utilize their particular resources and connections to reach out to each other, safe spaces might be created where diverse parents can offer their perspectives and ideas in different ways and in different contexts. For example, although parents with less education and experience in U.S. schools may not feel comfortable attending a large group meeting in the school library, they may appreciate an opportunity to talk informally about their particular experiences with a few parents at a local park. In turn, their contributions might be brought to the larger parent group. In order to ensure that the interests of one group do not become dominant, parents must be willing to reach out and connect across sociocultural lines, however, rather than simply engaging those individuals who share similar educational backgrounds or live in the same neighborhood, for example.

As noted by Cucchiara and Horvat (2009), it may in fact be the case that more educated parents in the middle class may often take on leading and particularly agentic roles in advocating for change within schools. However, in

their work on middle-class parental involvement in two urban public schools, Cucchiara and Horvat (2009) found that when middle-class parental involvement was not exclusively individualistically driven but included a focus on the entire school community and on securing resources and advantages for all children and families, change was more sustainable and more widely felt. Hence, although it may be the case that certain parents may be on the "front lines" in their involvement and communication with school personnel, their efforts, which obviously will include their own children's best interests, must work toward a shared vision and a collective voice that is representative of all parents. Indeed, as the Latino presence in the U.S. continues to grow, the time has come for schools to really listen to Latino families and for Latino families to really listen to each other as they work together to create vibrant schools that educate and empower children, celebrate children's cultural heritages, and serve as sites of change within communities.

Endnotes

[1]Results of these teacher interviews are not included here, as they are not the explicit focus of the present investigation.

[2]Two of these families identified as EuroAmerican/Caucasian. Although they did participate in interviews, only the transcripts of the 12 parents who identified as Latino were selected for the present investigation.

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Tina M. Durand is an associate professor in the Department of Psychology and Human Development at Wheelock College. Her teaching and research interests include how sociocultural factors influence the early school experiences of ethnic minority children; the psychology of race, parents' cultural beliefs, and school involvement; and forming effective home–school partnerships between ethnic minority families and urban schools. Prior to her work at Wheelock, Dr. Durand was an early childhood specialist, practicum supervisor of both graduate and undergraduate student teachers, and an early childhood public school teacher. Correspondence concerning this article may be addressed to Dr. Tina M. Durand, Wheelock College, 200 The Riverway, Boston, MA 02215 or email tdurand@wheelock.edu

Nicole A. Perez is an undergraduate student majoring in Psychology/Human Development and Child Life and a prospective student in the Child Life and Family Studies Dual Degree program at Wheelock College.