

# LITERACY MEMORIES OF HISPANIC PARENTS: HOW THE PAST INFLUENCES THE PRESENT

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## ABSTRACT

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*Educators continue to advocate for increased family involvement in the education system, so there is value in understanding the reading and literacy histories, beliefs, and actions of parents. It is important for educators to recognize these dynamics because parents not only bring their children to school but they also “bring” the prior memories and experiences of their own schooling. An appreciation of the educational histories of parents, especially in the context of their literacy experiences, can contribute to understanding the perspectives of families, their motives, and actions with schools and teachers in the present.*

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Dufur, Parcel, and Troutman (2013), Egalite (2016), and Hornby and Lafaele (2011) describe the value in analyzing the histories, beliefs, and actions of parents in the framework of education. This is important for educators to understand because parents not only bring their children to school but also their own histories, including early memories, prior experiences, and beliefs based on their experiences with their own schooling, including interactions with parents and teachers. According to the Center on Education Policy (2012), Hornby and Lafaele (2011), and Moll (2001), the educational histories of parents contributes to educators’ understanding of families, their motives, and actions with schools and teachers in present day. These histories, beliefs, and actions are the foundation of the present study.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

This study provides insight into the past educational practices, including home-based and school-based literacy experiences, in the childhood of a pair of Hispanic adults who are now parents. Data gathered from the research documents the historical literacy perceptions, systems, and incidents of the parents as they grew up. The broad research question that guided the data collection asked, *What are the past home-based and school-based family literacy practices within the homes of each of the Hispanic parents?* Gathering data based on this question can contribute to a greater understanding of how the childhood educational experiences of Hispanic parents influenced the way they view and interact with their children’s educators.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Sociocultural theory embraces the social and individual learning and development of individuals, centered within a cultural context (Dehqan & Samar, 2014; John-Steiner & Mahn, 2011).

Contemporary researchers support a sociocultural approach in the acquisition of language, and thus literacy, as the basis for literacy learning (Perry, 2012). A major part of education includes literacy acquisition; educators understand that this acquisition begins in the home and is dependent upon and reflective of the literacy experiences provided through familial interactions (Gutiérrez, Morales, & Martinez, 2009; Moll, 1992). Home-based literacy practices are broad in scope and are viable and valuable forms of literacy (Compton-Lilly, 2003; Page, 2008). However, there is a concern that many times the home literacy practices of non-majority cultures are often marginalized and regarded as non-existent, unimportant, and/or unrelated to school literacy expectations and learning by educators (Compton-Lilly, 2017; Paratore, 2001). In response to this perceived mismatch, many schools approach home-based literacy from a deficit perspective. This viewpoint often causes educators to approach families with the idea of changing family systems (including literacy acquisition and activities) so they are more equivalent to those of the mainstream (Auerbach, 1989; Compton-Lilly, 2003; Taylor, 1997; Valdez, 1996). Learners from non-majority cultures and their families often feel devalued because of the messages this deficit orientation sends. That is, what they do is different from school-based literacy and, therefore, inferior. Many educators regard home-based family literacy practices as non-academic or not contributing to school literacy goals, which can position individuals and families as lesser or inferior within the powerful social hierarchy of the school and community (Compton-Lilly, 2003; Compton-Lilly, 2017; Gee, 1992) This view can be problematic as populations within school are constantly becoming more diverse.

Public school influence often supports the broader power structures of those in the mainstream dominant society, which frames marginalized families as deficit in literacy skills and knowledge, as well as uninvolved and uncaring in assisting their children with literacy acquisition (Bhattacharya, 2010; Compton-Lilly, 2003; Gee, 1992). As this devaluing is predominant in non-majority cultures, the effects can resonate across generations and affect not only home-school relations but also intra-familial relationships, such as parent-child. School-based literacy expectations interfacing with home-based literacy activities frequently create frustrations for minority parents as parents are unsure of what is expected exactly or what dynamics are involved (Burbano & Page 2012; Valdes, 1996).

As educators denigrate home-based literacy, the opportunity to understand and capitalize on the rich and genuine and relevant home-based literacy available from the child and family is lost (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Page, 2008). The present study documents the public school memories of two Hispanic parents, their memories of their own parents in the context of school, their memories of past home-based literacy practices, and their memories of school-based literacy practices. It is anticipated that this documentation can bring attention to an issue occurring daily in a multitude of classrooms.

This study contributes to the limited Hispanic home-based and school-based literacy research by documenting data involving these issues. Present day educators can become aware of and understand these issues to the benefit of every child in their classroom and every parent that accompanies the child to the school.

## METHODOLOGY

This study investigated the sociocultural perspectives of a Hispanic husband and wife, who are also parents of school aged children, in terms of their own school and home-based family literacy

practices and experiences and documented how these experiences interfaced with school-based literacy expectations from public school educators and administrators. The study employed an ethnographic case study approach.

The study documents certain implicit and explicit messages the husband and wife received from teachers and schools during their time as students and now as parents. The study detailed the messages and their consequences and also substantiated the literacy practices occurring in the home. The research employed an ethnographic case study approach to gather data based on guiding questions and providing an open framework for examination and thick description of the subjects' culture, experiences, and beliefs. According to Glesne (1999), ethnography evolves from anthropological practices of revealing patterns of culture through immersion in the field, collecting data primarily by participant observation, interviewing, and field notes: "The analysis of data focuses on description and interpretation of what people say and do" (p. 9). Ethnography allows the researcher to represent the shared beliefs, practices, and behaviors of the culture to be studied, often in the context of case studies. Spindler and Spindler (1987) validate the use of ethnography as a research discipline by stressing that the goal is to discover the cultural knowledge persons have and how it is used in social situations. They also stress the social and cultural dynamics involved in context of literacy and propose ethnography case studies as a means to document these dynamics. For this study, a qualitative approach using interviews, observations, and field notes was used.

## SETTING AND PARTICIPANTS

The setting for the research was the home of the Hispanic husband and wife who were participants in this study. The home was located in a large city in the state of Texas. Michael and Veronica Ramirez (pseudonyms) have been married for nine years and have three children: Anthony (age 15), Michael Jr. (age 10) and Anita (age 8). Michael is 40 and Veronica is 35. Michael is the adoptive father of Anthony and the biological father of Michael Jr. and Anita. Veronica and Michael met when Michael was twenty-five and Veronica was twenty-one, but they did not marry until several years later. Michael is an inside sales representative for an equipment company and, presently, Veronica is a receptionist at a building materials company. Veronica has alternated between staying at home as a full-time mother and working various jobs. Each parent is Hispanic and descendant from families in Mexico. Veronica and Michael are both third-generation citizens of the United States. Both have full time jobs and consider their family middle class. Each grew up in a lower class home, learned English as a second language, spoke mostly Spanish and limited English in the home, were forced to speak only English in school, had parents with limited formal education, and attended public schools in Texas.

Veronica grew up in the city in which her own family now resides, except for a period of one year when she was six years old and her family moved to a much smaller town in central Texas. Veronica's family moved to the smaller town for her father's construction job. Veronica attended 1<sup>st</sup> grade in the public school district of this town. She did not pass this grade. Veronica's father had a heart attack and survived during this time, and the family returned to the urban city after one year. Veronica entered 1<sup>st</sup> grade again in the present city's public school district. She attended elementary, junior high, and high school until tenth grade when she dropped out. Veronica became pregnant at age nineteen. She gave birth to Anthony at age twenty. Anthony's biological father is no longer involved with Anthony or Veronica. She worked various minimum wage jobs and eventually dated and married Michael in 1996, two years after Michael Jr. was born. Veronica is bilingual but considers English her primary language although she grew up speaking Spanish with her family. Veronica's father, with whom she was very close, continued to work in construction until a stroke

caused his retirement in 1976. Veronica's mother worked various jobs, including as a janitor for a local school district until her retirement. Veronica's parent's first language was Spanish. Each also spoke some English. Both were 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, born in the United States.

During the first two visits to the Ramirez home, I realized Michael was shy. While Michael was present during the interviews, he did not contribute much to the conversation. Upon follow-up visits, he did warm up to my presence, offering very thought-provoking insights on various issues. Michael cares deeply about the success of his children. The majority of his life he grew up in the urban city where his family now resides. According to Michael, until age six he lived with his mother in San Antonio, Texas until she "dropped him off" in Hondo, Texas to live with his aunt and grandmother. When Michael was seven, his father came for him and he went to live with his father and stepmother in the large, urban city where he now resides.

Michael's father and stepmother always stressed success for Michael. This success included attending school for an education. Michael graduated from a local high school at age eighteen at the urging of his stepmother. He had decided to drop out, but with the encouragement of his stepmother, he stayed in school until graduation. By this time in Michael's life, his father and stepmother had divorced and he chose to stay and live with his stepmother instead of joining his father and new stepmother and her five children. Michael had various jobs until he became employed in his present position. Michael has been with the same company for twenty-two years. Michael is bilingual but considers English his first language. Spanish was the prevailing language spoken at all his homes while growing up. Michael, like Veronica, was also forced to only speak English while in school.

## DATA SOURCES

Using multiple methods to collect data about a case study phenomenon enhances the interpretative validity of the findings through a process called triangulation (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003). For this case study, the use of interviews, observations, and field notes contributed to the triangulation process. After two visits, I became a "part of the family" as the mother claimed, and a feeling of ease with my presence became apparent. This assisted in my role as a participant-observer. Data collection occurred weekly over an eight-month period.

An underlying premise of this research is that the information acquired will assist teachers and administrators reevaluate negative assumptions about Hispanic families and their homes in a literacy context; understand the literacy dynamics taking place within these homes, families, and communities; and use these dynamics to enhance the school-based literacy education process of Hispanic students and the relationships with Hispanic families.

## FINDINGS

Relevant data were collected based on the memories of Veronica and Michael Ramirez while growing up. This information assisted in answering a research question within this study: *What are the past, home-based family and school-based literacy practices within the homes of each of the Hispanic parents?* These memories offer valuable insight into the early lives of two Hispanic children, now parents, and (1) their home-based family literacy practices, (2) the actions and beliefs of each of their parents, (3) the school-based activities and practices each were involved with, and (4) their experiences attending public school. The four aspects of memories of this

question came to be as I realized each currently influences Veronica and Michael greatly as they intersect with public school educators and a principal where their children attend public school. Intersections are at times negative and impact relationships and success on multiple levels.

### VERONICA AND MICHAEL'S MEMORIES OF THEIR PUBLIC SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

The perceptions of Veronica and Michael about their public school experiences were revealing. Beginning with elementary school, Veronica remembered some very explicit negative school experiences. In 1<sup>st</sup> grade, Veronica moved with her family to a town in central Texas and attended public school. She was one of only a very few Hispanic children in a school dominated by Anglo children and with no Hispanic teachers. According to Veronica, she was in a 1<sup>st</sup> grade classroom with a teacher who was "mean." Veronica perceived herself as unwelcome by the attitudes and verbal comments she repeatedly received from teachers. According to Veronica, she grew so uncomfortable that she would uncontrollably urinate on herself at school on more than one occasion. Veronica reflected on these negative and humiliating experiences and feels they were based on racism because she was in a school with a predominately Anglo student and teacher population.

Veronica also relates her experiences attending another elementary school in the late 1970s within the same urban school district where she now lives and her children attend. Veronica was bused to the nearby elementary school from her home. She recalls how students were mandated by personnel to enter the school each morning; entrance was based on skin color, "Whites entered first, Hispanics second, and blacks third." She stated students were also many times separated within the school based on race. Some classes and recess, according to Veronica, were segregated. Veronica states, "...I remember when we were in class I saw the white people playing outside but I never thought anything twice about it. The blacks and Mexicans went out and played later."

Reflecting on her junior high education experiences, Veronica specifically discussed her perception of an older Anglo teacher as racist. Veronica states the female teacher "didn't like Mexicans and everyone (in the school) was Mexican." Veronica's experiences led her to feel that the school and teachers "did not care" about her and that school "wasn't real life" or relevant to her future success. Veronica states she received no other educational encouragement about school from other teachers beyond third grade: "No other teacher beyond Mrs. Black in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade encouraged me." Veronica admits this perception continued through her educational experiences until she quit high school. Veronica also admits this feeling influences her today with the school and her own children. During one interview, Veronica offered this view, "What do you really use that you learned in high school? Computers do it for you now." Yet in the same conversation Veronica acknowledges the beginning years of school are important. She feels these years lay the foundation in reading, but as you get older and progress through school and other subjects, she questions the relevancy of what is taught, especially in high school. According to Veronica, her father constantly urged her to graduate from high school. When asked why she felt he wanted her to graduate, Veronica reflected, "The only thing my dad said...'Go to school and graduate, go to school and graduate, go to school and graduate.' He never said anything else but to graduate. That's all he wanted." Veronica did not graduate high school, dropping out in 10<sup>th</sup> grade.

Michael's perception of school was not different from Veronica's. Michael stated he also wanted to quit high school many times, but with the constant encouragement of his stepmother, he graduated with a high school diploma. Both admit the lure of money from full-time employment and the



perception that the homework and class activities in high school as perpetually irrelevant contributed to the desire to abandon school.

Veronica and Michael acknowledge their memories of school experiences influence the present as their own children progress through school. Veronica is especially focused on teacher interactions with her children. According to Veronica, she is very mindful of teachers who are “mean to her children;” Examples of “mean” to Veronica include teachers that are impatient with children, have a negative tone in speaking to children, use a constantly raised voice with children, make comments to children that are harmful and humiliating, and are not encouraging to students. According to Veronica, Michael Jr. presently has a teacher who does these things. Veronica has had several conversations with the teacher about these issues and once the conversation got heated. Veronica admits she is very sensitive to these issues based on her own experiences growing up.

### MEMORIES OF VERONICA’S AND MICHAEL’S PARENTS IN THE CONTEXT OF SCHOOL

Luis Moll (2001), who has done extensive research with Hispanic communities, states another example of sociocultural dynamics within families and cultures includes parenting and childbearing beliefs, motivations, and actions. Many times these tenets differ from mainstream Anglo culture for many other cultures. Valdes (1996) agrees that Hispanic families often have parenting styles that differ from those of a more traditional American family “model” that is characteristic of Anglo European families. Sometimes educators negatively misconstrue these differing styles and actions of parenting. Teachers and principals sometimes view parents as not taking the “right approach” toward school-based education and are not adequately involved in their children’s education. For example, many times, Hispanic parents, based on their cultural respect for teachers, will not question the educator. Some teachers view this as uncaring and uninvolved. Also, many Hispanics feel education is the job of the teacher. Parents feel their involvement in the education processes is a sign of disrespect to teachers and the school. Yet, many teachers and administrators regard this action as parents who are unconcerned and uninvolved.

Delgado-Gaitan (1998) reinforces the same idea, indicating that she found that Mexican-American parents instinctively want a better life for their children, but often support their children in ways that do not match the mainstream culture in the United States. Subsequent research on marginalized students by Larson (2010) indicates the same. These viewpoints were reinforced in this study by comments from Veronica and Michael about their parents.

Michael and Veronica verified both sets of their parents adopted the parenting style perspective that, “If you don’t hear anything from the school, everything must be fine. They trusted the school and our teachers.” Both indicated their parents never asked to see report cards, see or assist with homework, or inquired about school. When asked why they thought their parents were not more involved, Veronica said she believes Hispanics are a “passive culture” and this passivity is often based in trust and non-questioning attitudes toward others, especially those in respected positions of power, such as educators.

Veronica said Hispanics trust the school and teachers to do what they are supposed to do to educate their children. During several interviews, Veronica and Michael stressed the sentiment of trust by their Hispanic parents, the sentiment that teachers and schools know what’s best for children and should not be questioned. This cycle continues today as Veronica indicated she will not challenge a teacher because she believes the teacher “knows best” and she trusts them. The Ramirez parents’ parenting style perspective is grounded in trust and belief that educators understand the dynamics

of teaching much more than parents and to interfere or question would be disrespectful to educators. Ultimately, Veronica's perception is that teachers are smarter than she. This cyclical action seems to affirm the findings by Delgado-Gaitan (1998).

Many times educators mistakenly dismiss these parents as uncaring and uninvolved. Many times what may be viewed by the educator as uninterested parents could be a matter of uncontrollable circumstances leading to the inability to be involved, such as job restraints. Dweck, Walton and Cohen (2014) and The Wallace Foundation (2017) suggest the method in which schools are structured may often negatively influence marginalized persons with children in public school. This structure can keep parents from participating in the various activities of the school community. Parents with limited English language speaking skills, who do not work traditional schedules, who are economically challenged, and/or who are uncomfortable in the school setting are viewed as uninterested, when in fact they are interested, but unable to participate.

The perceptions of Veronica and Michael led them to believe that the structure of the schools they attended could have kept their parents at a distance, limiting their comfort level in the school environment. Veronica believes her parents' limited English speaking skills, coupled with not knowing what to ask the teachers about their children's learning, could have contributed to their seeming lack of involvement. Veronica remembers that no one in the school office spoke Spanish, and her parents worked during the day. Veronica felt, "they were too old, too tired, and didn't have much schooling of their own." These aspects could have influenced her parent's lack of involvement. Veronica also states she did not like her parents involved in her schooling. She stated "I didn't tell my parents anything about school. It's the way we were raised. You don't talk about anything. You don't say anything."

When asked if he felt outside influences limited his parents' involvement with him in school, Michael indicated his father and stepmother both worked and that may have limited their involvement in his education. Michael also verified the only time his parents would go to the school was when he was in trouble in high school or was included in school programs. Michael stated his father viewed all learning in school as important, especially learning to speak the English language. Michael's father equated learning and speaking English with success in the larger society in which they lived. In interviews, Michael highlighted that his parents trusted school personnel to help him succeed. He also believes, as does Veronica, that Hispanics trust that schools will do what is appropriate for their children's education and, thus, success. Michael's stepmother, whom he came to respect and value as his actual mother, also displayed her belief in the importance of an education. Michael's father and stepmother divorced when Michael was in high school, and instead of leaving with his father, Michael choose to stay and live with his stepmother. Through her constant educational encouragement, especially when Michael wanted to quit high school in 1985, he succeeded in graduating high school. He stated, "She told me not to quit, that I would regret it." As young parents, Veronica and Michael found themselves repeating the cycles of trust and respect of educators and less parental involvement that were prevalent with their own parents. Veronica stated, "Michael and I both worked. We couldn't always get off work and get up to the school for conferences, meetings, and parties." But Veronica stated, "with each child I became more and more involved because I felt some teachers where not treating them right and I wanted my kids to get the best." Veronica said she still did not feel comfortable because of her education memories, but began to "know what to ask and what to look for to know if the kid's teacher was good" and would "just go up there, even if I didn't want to because they scared me."

## MEMORIES OF VERONICA AND MICHAEL'S HOME-BASED LITERACY PRACTICES WHILE GROWING UP

My interest in the memories of Veronica and Michael about their home-based family literacy practices while growing up unfolded during the data collection process of this study. I wondered (1) what home-based family literacy practices occurred, (2) how frequently these practices occurred, and (3) who was involved. These memories of occurrences and practices many times evolved from the familial funds of knowledge in each parent's household and included what has been referred to as the six elements of literacy: reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and creating visual representations.

Contrary to what she initially indicated, Veronica participated in many home-based literacy practices while growing up. At first, Veronica was convinced she and her family did not create an environment for literacy acquisition. Veronica maintained her family did "nothing" involving literacy activities in her home while she was young. As interviews proceeded and we discussed various components of literacy, Veronica began viewing literacy through a broader lens, beyond only school-based activities. She began to understand that literacy was not just reading a book, doing homework, or going to the library. This revelation caused Veronica's view of literacy in her childhood home to change. As our time together progressed, I noted a change in her perspective on her home-based literacy practices and experiences. Veronica then began to discuss the many literacy activities.

Interviews with Veronica indicated the six elements of literacy (reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and visual representation) were used in her home. In our second interview, Veronica stated her parents could not read or write. Veronica revealed she read all the family bills and wrote out all checks each month. Her parents would sign their name to the checks, but she would complete the rest. Veronica also indicated she counted out money and ran errands for her father. Veronica was adamant her parents could not read or write in Spanish or English. As the interviews progressed, I revisited this topic. Through our interviews, Veronica began to recall instances of reading and writing with her parents within their home. She remembered her father reading "little Mexican books" and had stacks of them all around the house. Veronica's mother wrote and spoke Spanish prayers. Veronica verified both her parents spoke Spanish as their native language. Both also spoke English, though not very well. Veronica remembered her father telling her stories of her family history and his life. She also remembered singing, drawing pictures and hanging them up in their home. Veronica's parents occasionally used their children as translators. These interactions included daily activities such as ordering fast food, reading household bills, and translating school information. While Veronica previously viewed literacy in school-based terms, it became evident with the data collected that literacy was used as a functional component in the lives of her family.

Michael grew up with parents, especially his father, who encouraged assimilation into the dominant, mainstream society in the United States to become, "as successful as possible." Banks (2009) states assimilation is the manner in which a minority person or group gradually adopts the mores and posture of the dominant culture. The foundation behind this adoption is power of the dominant society. In most societies, it is expected that the less dominant group will accept the language, principles, and culture of the dominant group.



Michael said his father felt that to be more successful in the society in which they lived, the English language, including reading, writing, and speaking, must be learned. Michael's father spoke Spanish and limited English. With a directive from his father, Michael spoke primarily English growing up. According to Michael, as he learned to read, write, and speak English in school, his father became content.

Veronica and Michael both recall watching a great deal of television growing up. Michael indicates his family watched English language television shows but viewed Spanish language movies. Michael revealed his father encouraged English language television to accelerate English language learning. Each family also had a set of encyclopedias. Michael's parents purchased their set at the State Fair of Texas and Veronica's mother got their set at her work after it had been thrown in the trash when she was a janitor with another school district in the area. Michael admitted never using their set and Veronica indicated she used their set only once. Michael stated his reading interests were elsewhere. He loved to read comic books as a child and young adult. He indicated he collected many of them through the years and got rid of them only in the past few years.

With a fuller understanding of literacy, including home-based literacy activities, Veronica and Michael realized they accomplished these actions growing up with their parents and are achieving them now in various ways their own children. Although Veronica and Michael are bilingual, they indicate that for their own children, speaking, reading, and writing in English is the key to their success in our society. Both indicate all their children speak only English and know no attributes of Spanish.

### VERONICA AND MICHAEL'S MEMORIES OF SCHOOL-BASED LITERACY PRACTICES

During interviews with Michael and Veronica, the topic of school-based literacy was discussed many times. Included were topics each parent perceived as school-based literacy, including going to the library, doing homework, learning to read, and reading books. Each area included information valuable in understanding Michael and Veronica's perceptions and beliefs of what constitutes literacy attainment and how their school experiences influenced their contemporary beliefs and perceptions.

Veronica's memories of school-based experiences, including literacy experiences, were often negative. These negative experiences began in her 1st grade year in public school in central Texas. Speaking in a resentful tone during an interview, Veronica stated, "That school did not teach me how to read." During that school year, Veronica reached a point of being so scared and intimidated each day at school that she began to urinate uncontrollably on herself in her bed and at school, had bad dreams and played sick, begging her mother to let her stay home.

While Veronica would not divulge extensive information about her school-based literacy learning in the public school, it was apparent from comments and body language during our interviews she continues to have negative recollections about her school learning and experiences. At the conclusion of the school year, Veronica's report card indicated she failed 1st grade. She stated "I did not learn to read so I failed." Veronica acknowledged she was very happy when her family moved back to the city, where she and her family currently live. In September of 1976, Veronica entered the local public elementary school and began 1st grade again. The new school year in a different city and with a different teacher offered Veronica positive encounters with school-based literacy. Veronica vividly remembered her 1st grade literacy experiences in the city school. Veronica fondly recalled learning to read high frequency words with flash cards in a round robin style with Mrs.

West, her 1<sup>st</sup> grade teacher. Veronica also remembered studying spelling words each week. This was a positive memory of her school-based literacy practices. Veronica stated she felt safe in this classroom as the teacher took time to help her learn.

The experiences seemed to create positive, school-based literacy learning for Veronica. During several interviews Veronica talked about Mrs. West being a “little white lady” from whom she learned to read. Veronica remembered the first word she learned, *nine*. The school-based literacy experiences with Mrs. West were in sharp contrast to the previous year of education. Veronica indicated she was supported and understood by Mrs. West in her struggles to read.

Similar to Veronica’s experiences, Michael failed 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. Veronica first told me of Michael’s failing. As I broached this subject with Michael in a later interview, he acknowledged his failure of the grade but did not feel comfortable discussing the issue in depth. He did offer, when asked why he failed, “I don’t know really. I know I had trouble with reading.” In an effort to ease the uncomfortable situation in the interview, I switched to a different subject with Michael. Michael and Veronica indicate their school-based literacy practices were not of great importance to them while growing up and included in these practices was school-based homework. They both stressed they felt a lack of relevancy in what homework activities they were asked to complete by various teachers. They both also acknowledged they did very little of the homework. Veronica admitted when she did do the homework assignments, she “copied off someone the day it was due.” Michael does not remember having homework until high school. Associated with the feeling of non-relevant homework, Michael’s perception of school as a whole was the same. He stated the school did not teach information and promote experiences relevant to his life. He stated, “I didn’t see them teaching me anything I needed to know. School wasn’t real life.” He asserts school was not important to him. Veronica acknowledges the same feelings of non-relevancy of homework she received and school as a whole. She admits this non-relevancy contributed to her quitting school in 10<sup>th</sup> grade.

Veronica and Michael both view literacy as “reading a book.” Associating reading a book with library use, Veronica offered insight into her viewpoint of literacy attainment. When I held a joint interview with both parents, Veronica commented about her library use while attending school. She declared she minimally used the libraries of each school she attended to check out books to read. Veronica remembered only one time utilizing the school library and this was only because the librarian gave her a book and said, “Read it.” She acknowledges reading the book and liking it, but did not get another. Michael said, while in elementary school, he “was made to check out books,” but he never really liked any of them except the *Cat in the Hat* books.

Through our conversations, Veronica and Michael expanded their perceptions and beliefs of what constitutes literacy, including the difference between home-based literacy and school-based literacy. Veronica especially realized school-based learning is more than just homework, going to the library, learning to read, and reading school-based books. But this knowledge also frustrated her as she asked, “Why haven’t my kid’s teachers said this to me before because this would have helped me help my kids learn to read? It would have also helped my kids not have the bad experiences they had with reading like I did.” Veronica discussed some of the reading experiences of her children and acknowledged they have had more positive experiences, but she is also concerned if her children’s teachers are creating classrooms that are safe and encouraging. She stated she always likes to determine “if the teachers are taking their time to help her kids understand and learn to read like Mrs. West did for me.” In the context of relevancy, “I want my kids to learn to read stuff that they will need to help them be good grown-ups and have success.”

## IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATORS

This study values the analysis of the histories, beliefs, and actions of Hispanic parents within the framework of education, including literacy. The underlying assumption is the data has the potential to assist educators refute negative assumptions about Hispanic families and their homes in a context of education and, specifically, literacy, by understanding the literacy dynamics taking place within homes, family, and community. Educators can then use these dynamics to enhance the education of Hispanic students and enrich the relationships with Hispanic families. The data also offers a broader insight for future research involving familial histories and literacy to move education forward.

Specifically, you may think, “How do the experiences of Veronica and Michael impact me as an educator?” You perhaps ask, “Veronica and Michael suffered negatively from certain educational situations in their lives. What can I do to prevent this from occurring again?” The following implications will provide insight for educators.

1. Educators must realize each parent they are in contact with has an educational history. Many times this may be forgotten by educators. It is important for educators to understand this history. These parents not only bring their children to school but also bring their own prior memories and experiences of their schooling, including interactions with teachers. The educational history of Veronica and Michael is remembered negatively and, at times, influences Veronica’s interactions at the schools of their children. Educators should remember the underpinning of parental interactions can be based on educational prior memories that are sometimes negative, positive, or a combination of both.
2. By understanding the educational histories of parents, educators have the ability to gain a deeper value of families, their beliefs, and actions with schools and teachers in the present. Teachers should develop an effective rapport with parents to gain a greater perception of what they value and believe in education, realizing it is these that can influence parental actions with their children and educators.
3. Veronica perceived racism and segregation during her schooling. Educators like to believe these negative personal and societal aspects no longer exist, but some in education, perhaps, have subtle biases that could influence interactions with students and parents. During my literature review for this study my own understanding of racism and segregation increased. I gained a more detailed grasp of several significant, but lesser known, Supreme Court cases including *Méndez v. Westminster* and *Hernández v. Texas*, as well as familiar cases as *Brown v. Board of Education* and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. I suggest educators perform their own review of information that has influenced our society and education system to learn about challenging circumstances and laws that could influence multi-generational lives and improve educational relationships with empathy.
4. As educators we can get tired and impatient, have an off-putting tone, and use a raised voice with our students. These moments in our school days are regretful, but do happen. Yet teachers should be mindful these instances can be regarded by students and parents as uncaring, unprofessional, and uncomfortable. This was evident with the data from Veronica. Teachers need to be mindful of these situations and especially the reasons *why* these are occurring.

5. Educators are trained to establish classrooms that inspire. To create these settings, educators need to ensure they consistently create an encouraging, safe environment with positive encounters with students as well as parents. Memories from Veronica and Michael indicate this rarely happened with them and should motivate educators to inspire students in multiple ways.
6. Associated with offering encouragement and a safe environment, teachers have the power to create student situations that build assurance and motivate continued learning. Veronica stressed only one teacher in her education gave her the reading confidence and a desire to maintain learning. Teachers must never forget that we hold the power to shape reading and learning for students for the rest of their lives.
7. Trust and respect are fundamental human qualities. Veronica and Michael indicated these did not always occur in their educational history. Educators should constantly work to create an environment of trust and respect with parents and students. In an unobtrusive manner, teachers can ask about parent and student lives, their families, and challenges to build a sense of respect.
8. Some educators approach parents' involvement with their children and the school environment from a deficit perspective. On numerous occasions I have heard fellow teachers and administrators proclaim a variation of the following statement, "The parents of my students are not involved with their children. They don't help with homework, come to Parent-Teacher Conferences, and don't read the notes that are sent home." Many of us may have thought or even said the same. It is important to realize parents do care and are involved as much as they can be. We should remember that parents can come from different backgrounds and cultures than our own and approach involvement with school based on cultural norms; these norms could be different from the mainstream norms involving education. It is also critical to remember parents could have differing work schedules that prevent expected school or classroom involvement and should not be negatively judged if this is the case.
9. Numerous times during data collection Veronica and Michael addressed the lack of relevant classroom topics and activities, even to the point to question why exactly they were in school. Teachers should constantly be focused on incorporating the latest applicable information, concepts, and activities within lessons, effectively contributing to student achievement in career and life.
10. I was touched by Veronica's statement, "Why haven't my kid's teachers said this to me before because this would have helped me help my kids learn to read?" This assertion is in reference to understanding the dynamics of school-based literacy and home-based literacy. To share this knowledge with parents, teachers must first fully understand the difference between the two. School-based literacy is reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and visual representation activities centered in academics, and home-based literacy is reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and visual representation focused within the family, home, and community. Each is a valuable form of literacy and should be understood and utilized by teachers to help students and parents realize both are used within their lives.

## CONCLUSIONS

Analyzing the histories, beliefs, and actions of parents in the context of education offers important insight for educators. Educators must remember parents not only bring their children to school but also their own educational histories, including early memories, prior experiences, and beliefs. It is these educational histories of parents, including home-based and school-based literacy practices and experiences, that can contribute to better understandings of families, their motives, and actions

with schools and teachers in present day, creating stronger relationships and achievement for all involved.

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