

Continuity and change in home literacy practices of Hispanic families with preschool children

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The aim of this qualitative study was to examine how Latino immigrant families incorporate school-based interactive literacy activities into their existing home literacy practices. Findings revealed that Hispanic parents appropriate school-related literacy activities into their existing repertoire when they believed it would best help their children to succeed academically. At the same time, parents modified school-related literacy activities to reflect their existing cultural beliefs and practices. These complex patterns of adapting school literacy practices into home literacy interactions revealed that Hispanic parents: (a) emphasise pleasure and interactivity in literacy activities; (b) merge supportive and direct instruction scaffolding strategies into home literacy instruction; (c) impart moral messages while engaging in interactive literacy activities with their children; and (d) activate linguistic resources by creating opportunities for bilingual literacy events to occur during school-designed interactive literacy activities.

Keywords: *Early childhood education; Family literacy; Hispanic families*

Introduction

Research in early childhood education provides strong support for the practice of involving parents in their children's literacy education (Delgado-Gaitán, 1991). Parent involvement in children's literacy learning has been linked to children's higher reading achievement (Ortiz, Stowe, & Arnold, 2001) and to improved social and emotional skills (Fantuzzo & McWayne, 2002). Research in emergent literacy underscores how parents' beliefs, interaction styles and literacy practices promote early literacy learning (Burgess, Hecht, & Lonigan, 2002; Dickinson & Tabors, 2001; Frijters, Barron, & Brunello, 2000; Purcell-Gates, 1996). Parents' use of strategies such as shared reading (Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998), the use of explanations and

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expansions of children's vocabulary (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001), the introduction of 'rare' words—words that are unfamiliar to the child (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001), teaching songs and rhymes (Christie, 1998) and introduction of the alphabet (Johnston, 1998; Riley, 1996) during the preschool years have all been shown to improve children's literacy learning in school. Furthermore, parents' own literacy habits such as time spent reading and reading enjoyment are related to positive literacy outcomes for children (Burgess et al., 2002).

Although there is a growing body of literature on children's home literacy experiences, most of these studies were conducted with middle-class Anglo families. Relatively few investigations have focused on the home literacy practices of low-income Hispanic families (García, 2000). This paucity of research is problematic when we consider that 22% of the children born in the United States in 2002 were Hispanic (Martin et al., 2005). If current trends in the reading readiness abilities of Hispanic children in the United States hold true, many of these children may enter school without the skills they need to become literate adults. As noted in the national Early Childhood Longitudinal Research Study, reading readiness scores of Hispanic preschool children in the United States are half a standard deviation below their White counterparts at the beginning of the kindergarten year (Lee & Burkam, 2002). This achievement gap persists throughout the kindergarten year in five measured components of reading readiness, that is, letter recognition, beginning sounds, ending sounds, sight words and words in context (West, Denton, & Reaney, 2001).

Family literacy programmes were designed to fill this achievement gap. The Title I Even Start Family Literacy programme promotes intergenerational literacy learning through adult and child education, parenting classes and facilitated parent and child literacy activities. In all Even Start programmes, adult educators provide parents with instruction on how to engage in literacy activities with their preschool children. Parents are subsequently provided opportunities to practice these interactive literacy strategies with their children in the preschool setting under the guidance of a trained early childhood educator. The ultimate goal of these interactive literacy activities is to increase the number and types of parent-child literacy experiences that occur in the home. The integration of the school-based literacy practices into the home literacy practices is particularly important when we consider the fact that children experience more success in reading when the literacy practices in their home environment mirror those practiced in school (Pellegrini, 2001). Thus, it is important to understand if and how Hispanic parents participating in family literacy programmes integrate school literacy practices into their home activities.

Contrary to the literature that indicates that Hispanic families are less likely to be involved in their children's education, Paratore et al. (1999) found that interactive literacy practices are an important part of family life in the Latino community. However, the literacy-related activities practiced in the homes of Hispanic children are likely to be quite different than those advocated by the school (Delgado-Gaitán & Trueba, 1991). In fact it has been shown that many Hispanic families who participate in family literacy programmes withdraw from the programme before completing their personal or educational goals because the home literacy assignments required by the

programme clashed with their child rearing or cultural beliefs (Janes & Kermani, 2001). The discontinuity between family- and school-based literacy practices is often related to educators' lack of awareness about the 'funds of knowledge' (Moll, 1992) that Latino families possess, as well as a lack of understanding of the beliefs about literacy learning that many Hispanic parents hold. For example, reading aloud is not a common practice in low-income Latino families and when parents read aloud to their children they most often focus on teaching moral lessons rather than providing instruction on specific literacy skills (Reese & Gallimore, 2000). This practice runs counter to the shared reading practices known to prevent early reading difficulties in preschool children from other cultural backgrounds (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). On the other hand, Latino families are known to provide their children with direct instruction during literacy instruction (Valdés, 1996). Yet, exposing young children to reading through direct instruction is discouraged by many early childhood educators. They fear that direct skill-based literacy instruction may lessen children's motivation towards reading and lower their feelings of competence (Marcon, 2002). Discontinuity between home-school literacy practices such as these and others may contribute to Hispanic children's low levels of reading readiness at kindergarten entry.

Learning more about how Hispanic families with preschool children attempt to assimilate school-based literacy practices into their existing repertoire of home literacy interactions may serve to strengthen family literacy programming by improving retention rates, continuity between home-school literacy practices, and consequently, children's emergent literacy skills. As noted by Janes and Kermani (2001), Hispanic adults often show their approval of educational programming with their feet: they walk away from programmes that do not correspond to their values and beliefs regardless of the benefits the programme might provide them or their children. In 2000–2001, 46% of Even Start Family Literacy parents in the nation identified themselves as Hispanic or Latino. Of the families that participated in Even Start Family Literacy programmes between 1997–1998 and 2000–2001, 28.4% left the programme within six months (St. Pierre et al., 2003).

Retaining families in Even Start programmes is crucial to furthering children's literacy skills. According to the National Even Start Evaluation (St. Pierre et al., 2003), children who participate more intensively in the early childhood education component of Even Start score higher on standardised literacy measures. Further, parents who participate more intensively in parenting education have children who scored higher on standardised literacy measures. Thus, it is important to uncover the home literacy practices that Latino parents value as well as the school-based practices that they are willing to appropriate into their existing repertoire of home literacy interactions.

Method

The aim of this study was to examine how Latino immigrant families incorporate school-based interactive literacy activities into their existing home literacy practices. More specifically we wondered:

- (1) How do Hispanic parents view school-designed interactive literacy activities?
- (2) What types of instructional strategies do Hispanic parents most often use during school-designed home literacy interactions?
- (3) How do Hispanic parents' beliefs and histories of literacy learning influence the ways that they practice interactive family literacy activities in their home?
- (4) In what ways do other family members participate in school-designed literacy activities intended for preschool children?
- (5) How do Hispanic parents support their children's bilingual language development during home literacy activities?

Setting

This study took place in a Title I Even Start Family Literacy programme located in an urban city in Arizona near the Mexican border. The city has a population of 20,833 and 44.8% of the citizens are from Latin America. The Family Literacy programme has been in operation for 12 years and housed in the local school district. The district serves 6045 students of which 98% are Hispanic. Fifty percent of the students in the district are English language learners and 67% qualify for free or reduced lunch.

Participants

The participants in this study were 13 families enrolled in the Title I Even Start Family Literacy programme and the two teachers who provided parenting education for the programme. All mothers attended the programme four hours per day, five days per week during the 2005–2006 academic year. Their children's preschool programme followed the same schedule. Parents and children participated in separate educational programmes for three hours each morning and came together for the last hour of each day to engage in interactive literacy activities. Mothers had a mean age of 32.7 years; eight were married, two were living with a domestic partner and three identified themselves as single parents. All listed Spanish as their primary language. The average annual income of the families was \$16,350. The average education level of the participants was 10.0 years, with 25% having an eighth-grade education or less. Seven of the parents indicated that they were lawfully present in the United States, the remaining six marked 'other' as their residence status. The children ranged in age from 2.7 to 4.9 years, with an average age of 3.8 years.

Two educators also participated in the study. They had dual roles in the programme. One was the adult education instructor and the other was the early childhood teacher. In addition to providing academic instruction, they shared responsibility for providing parenting education, conducting home visits and documenting parent–child literacy activities in the home. The adult educator holds a Masters' degree in Bilingual & Multicultural Education and has been with the programme since its inception. The early childhood educator holds an Associate's degree in Early Childhood Education and has been with the programme for more than five years.

Materials and procedure

During the first month of school in the 2005–2006 school year, the parenting educator instructed parents on how to teach literacy concepts to their children while playing with materials provided in home literacy bags. The home literacy bags were compiled by the programme staff and each contained the following items: a simple game, two children's books and instructions. Instructions for using the literacy bags were provided in both Spanish and English as was all children's literature. During the initial introduction to the literacy bags, one of the parent educators instructed parents on the concepts addressed by the materials in each bag and provided parents with opportunities to practice playing the games in the bags as well as reading the books in Spanish and English.

Parents were allowed to borrow the literacy bags at any time during the course of the school year. Upon completion of each of the home literacy activities, parents were asked to write a journal entry that included: which literacy bags they used, how they used the materials with their child(ren) and a reflection about what the child and or parent learned as a result of being exposed to the materials in the bags. Each parent wrote an average of 11 journal entries over the course of the study. In total, there were 146 journal entries, all of which were written in Spanish. The journal entries were translated into English by a bilingual research assistant and then qualitatively analysed.

Teacher-recorded anecdotes during home visits to each of the 13 families in the study supplement the parental feedback journals. Anecdotes consisted of teachers' objective and reflective observations of families engaged in interactive literacy activities in the home. In total, there were 84 teacher anecdotal records, averaging approximately 6 records per family.

Data analysis

Parents' journal entries and teachers' anecdotal records were analysed using a Grounded Theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Open coding was completed by two of the three researchers. Researchers read and re-read journal entries and teacher observations, coding data line by line to identify instances related to parents' use of literacy materials and the meaning-interpretations they assigned to their experiences (Erickson, 1986). Teacher observations were then read to identify instances of corroborating evidence related to the literacy practices and attitudes identified in parental reports. Initially, the researchers identified 12 codes which were collapsed into eight families, and finally five themes. Throughout the first phase of the coding, consensus on coding themes and categories were made through discussion. Trustworthiness of initial coding scheme was ensured through the use of a peer examiner who independently read the transcripts, coding data using the scheme developed during the first round of analysis. At that point, any discrepancies in the coding were discussed among all the three authors and consensus was reached on how data should be coded.

Results

Findings revealed that Hispanic parents appropriate school-related literacy activities into their existing repertoire when they believed it would best help their children to succeed academically. At the same time, parents modified school-related literacy activities to reflect their existing cultural beliefs and practices. These complex patterns of adapting school literacy practices into home literacy interactions revealed that Hispanic parents: (a) emphasise pleasure and interactivity in literacy activities; (b) merge supportive and direct instruction scaffolding strategies into home literacy instruction; (c) impart moral messages while engaging in interactive literacy activities with their children; and (d) activate linguistic resources by creating opportunities for bilingual literacy events to occur during school-designed interactive literacy activities.

Emphasising pleasure and interactivity in literacy activities

As is commonly found with the Latino community, a majority of the parents emphasised the significance of literacy as an *afición*, or as a pleasure. In this study, *afición* is characterised verbally through direct references to child and parent enjoyment as well as through parents' positive feedback. Of the 13 parents, 11 parents characterised the home literacy activities as 'fun' activities that 'connect the family'. Active participation by all family members was strongly encouraged. Parents were openly expressive about the positive affective exchange that occurred between them and their children during literacy activities. Queta, a 32-year-old mother of four, frequently wrote about such affective expressions in her journal. For example, she wrote:

Lourdes liked it because it gave her some time with her mother. She likes the numbers because it is much fun. I liked it all. What I really liked is one of the movements is jumping then falling on the floor. Lourdes gave me a kiss and it made me feel grateful to have her.

Many parents also gave evidence that siblings played an important role creating an affective learning climate. Siblings generally played a participatory role in the literacy activities by 'playing on teams', by 'imagining and making things that they were indicated to make together' and by helping to interpret literacy activity instructions. In a few of the journal entries, parents described themselves as observers of their children's interactions rather than as active participants. These characteristically sentimental observations centred on the parent's joy at seeing their children bond with one another. Fernanda, a 34-year-old mother of two children, exemplifies this parental point of view in the following journal entry: 'Laura had a fun afternoon because she was busy with her brothers and cousins with the four activities given and she was very happy. It was a beautiful experience.'

Parents also described the value of endorsing an entertainment perspective towards literacy activities. Creating an atmosphere of enjoyment and entertainment was considered by the parents as a way to motivate their children to engage in literacy activities. Serafina, a 39-year-old woman with three children, expressed:

The game in action is very fun because it has much activity, we throw ourselves on the carpet to play it and we have to get up, sometimes rolling and jumping at the end. A game very active, the boy learned new things to share, and all of us had fun and we had a pleasant time.

Home visitors frequently documented parents' attempts to engage their children by incorporating movement into literacy games. During a visit to Dalia's home, the home visitor described Dalia's efforts to entertain her daughter during a book-reading. Her records read:

Guadalupe's mom is reading to Guadalupe. She keeps Guadalupe entertained by doing movements with her body ... Later they read a book about animals. When it came to the part about the bunny, they both hopped like bunnies. Dalia was very involved in the story and got Guadalupe involved as well.

In addition to using movement, home visitors documented parents' use of different character-voices during shared book-reading. Children responded to this strategy with much excitement, as illustrated in this home visitor's record: 'Dalia changed the tone of her voice for the different characters but read very quietly. Her daughter became very excited while her mom was reading—she would pump her arms in the air!'

According to the parents, the entertainment facet of the activities did not diminish their educational value. A clear example refers to a 'fun' family literacy experience reported by Gitana, a 37-year-old mother of two children. In her journal, Gitana marvelled at the level of learning that occurred during the game as it exceeded her expectations. Additionally, she described herself as an active participant in the learning process. Gitana described this experience as:

My kids had much fun playing this game. We liked it because it was dynamic and we learned even though I didn't think we would. We spent some time with organisation to start the game, then after that, the kids didn't need my guidance, so I participated like one of them and played the game.

Merging supportive and direct instruction scaffolding strategies

All 13 parents reported using a range of scaffolding strategies with their children while engaging in the literacy activities. Because these parents perceived the literacy activities as both entertaining and educational, they reported a tendency to use a relaxed instructional style. Home interactions between parents and children took on scaffolding features associated with informal apprenticeships, such as observation, prompting and demonstration. Parents were particularly attuned to the developmental levels and needs of their children. For example, 11 of the 13 parents recorded detailed observations of their child's current literacy skills in their journals. Fernanda described her daughter's progress in detailed, objective terms:

I made note that Laura confuses the pentagon with the octagon. I think that I have to focus with her on that shape. Her visual dexterity has bettered, she finds shapes easier and it costs her less to wait her turn.

Parents who reported observations of their child's current competencies also expressed a growing awareness of their child's potential for higher levels of literacy

competency. This was most clearly conveyed by the mothers' expressions of wonder when describing their children's accomplishments. For instance, an interactive game of Shapeland[®] inspired Queta to write: 'Lourdes likes the circle, the pentagons, the rectangle, the oval, the heart and the star. She likes all the shapes. She can count till 11. I don't know how she knows this.' In the words of another mother: 'It surprised me how much he understands.'

Parents made reference to the use of prompts and demonstration as strategies for moving children from one level of competency to the next. For example, Calandra, a 38-year-old mother of four, frequently reported prompting her children during literacy activities. In addition to asking her children questions, she would provide partial clues to help the child arrive at the correct response. Reflecting on a game of Shapeland[®], she expressed:

Now the kids play with more ease. He was playing really well and remembering all the shapes. The only one that he confused was the circle with the oval. Before he answered I told him to look at the shapes and the differences between the big one and the small one. After that he answered correctly.

According to home-visiting records, parents tended to use prompting in playful and spontaneous ways and rarely used a formal request-recitation style. Their prompts, while light-hearted and sometimes humorous, indicated high levels of responsiveness to their child's developmental needs, as is illustrated in the following home-visiting record:

Ricardo wanted mom to draw the body parts. Mom said it was his work. He drew the facial features. Mom told him that it would be a good idea to draw some hair or else he would look like his uncle. He laughed and drew some hair. Mom then started to ask the body parts and he did [drew] them.

A majority of the parents also described using demonstration as a tool for guiding, rather than direct instruction. The interactive nature of the literacy activities lent themselves to this strategy since parents were often active participants. Carlota, a 40-year-old mother of two, described her use of this strategy:

Paul [the focus child's brother] counted all of the triangles and after I counted all of the circles and after she counted all of the diamonds. I said that there were 14, but after we found a kite that was the shape of a diamond and so that was one more.

The preceding example of parent scaffolding reflects a subtle but continual pattern of demonstration-to-guided practice. While the parents did not explicitly refer to themselves as teaching models in their journal descriptions of the literacy activities, all 13 parents' entries evidenced frequent use of the demonstration-to-guided practice pattern.

Despite their emphasis on informal scaffolding strategies, these parents also affirmed that they occasionally used explicit instruction to scaffold their children's learning during literacy interactions. The use of explicit instruction in homes is commonly described by Latino families as the *castigo* reading style, characterised by behavioural 'skill and drill' approaches. For many members of the Latino

community, this style engenders early negative school experiences in which reading is perceived as a chore or as a punishment. Thus, many Latino parents have demonstrated considerable resistance towards engaging in the *castigo* reading style at home with their children. Nevertheless, all 13 of the parents reported supporting their children's development of numerical and vocabulary knowledge through such activities as repetitive counting and practicing letter-sound associations (and hence how these associations form syllables and words). A journal entry written by Afra, a 36-year-old mother with four children, provides a clear example of how repetition was the primary mode of instruction during a lesson on adjectives: 'We read the book, Carolina and I. We repeated the adjectives: big, small, fat, thin, etc.' Similarly, Gitana describes using repetitive oral practice with her children as a strategy for learning new vocabulary words: 'I observed there were two or three words that they had difficulties in pronouncing. It served us well to practice these words.' Such exercises likely derive from the parents' cultural models of how reading is best learned. However, much like their parents' original resistance to the *castigo* style, children displayed some evidence of resisting such skill and drill practices. For example, a home visitor noted the following dynamic between a mother and her daughter during a number activity: 'Mom asks her to count. She shakes her head (no). Mom makes her count. She says, "I already counted them all". The child's face is of frustration.'

Siblings generally played a participatory role in the literacy activities by 'playing on teams' or by providing supportive guidance. Afra recounted her six-year-old son Alex demonstrating and questioning his younger sister, four-year-old Carolina, during a board game on colours. Her description of Alex reveals his ability to informally assess and instruct his sister through the scaffolding technique of questioning. Afra described their interaction in her journal: 'Alex and Carolina played [the game] two times. First, Alex asked Carolina with the book, "What colour is it?" and Carolina answered "blue, red, yellow, etc."'

Imparting moral messages

Ten of the parents identified literacy activities as a tool to impart a moral message or to orient children towards good behaviour. Specifically, parents made reference to the importance of the values of reciprocity and cooperation in family literacy interactions. Reciprocity was described by the parents as behaviours that promoted equality, sharing and turn-taking. It is characterised in the parents' journals through expressions such as 'we are all winners', 'learning to share' and 'learning to wait their turn'. Abigail was a 27-year-old woman with two children. Over several journal entries, she describes reinforcing the values of turn-taking and equality with her son. In a later journal entry, she describes his progress:

We played Andy, Nicole, and I. Now Andy is more comfortable with waiting his turn. He felt bad the first time we played because I came in first place. I explained to him that we are all winners, like the game says, and he calmed down and understood for the first time what I told him.

Another indication of parents' motivation to teach their children morals and correct behaviour was their emphasis on teaching cooperation during literacy activities. For many members of the Latino community, interacting with children in a cooperative manner is an important way to establish *confianza* (confidence, reliance, trust). Parents used specific expressions to convey the value of *confianza* to their children, such as 'work in a team', 'follow the rules' and 'get along'. One mother reported her satisfaction at her family's demonstration of cooperation during a literacy game: 'In addition, we had never played a board game with pieces, advancing spaces, and waiting your turn. They coordinated well. I liked that everyone showed interest and followed the rules.' The preceding example also reflects parents' concern with 'following the rules'. The salient feature for them was not their child's skill at *reading* the rules but, rather, whether or not their child was playing *fairly*. To play unfairly was to demonstrate a lack of *respeto* (respect) for others, and parents were quick to redirect this type of behaviour in their children. Orienting the child towards the collective pleasure of the activity was the primary strategy for redirecting children in these situations. Patricia, a 27-year-old mother of three, described an interaction that illustrates this strategy:

With Donald, it costs us a lot of work to make sure he follows the rules because he always wants to be in the heart or the star and he interrupted following the flag or the little face. We explained why he couldn't do that and it made him angry. What is more important was the four of us playing, with nothing else to do. Later he told me that he wanted to play again but didn't know how. I started to explain how to play to him again and he told me it was okay. He would follow the rules.

This is not to say, however, that parents were not responsive to the programme's requests to emphasise specific literacy skills (e.g. vocabulary, phonetics). In fact, as is previously discussed in this article, parents employed a variety of scaffolding strategies aimed at developing their child's literacy competencies. What the evidence suggests is that parents adapted the literacy activities to incorporate both their traditional values carried with them from their homelands and the literacy skills that would ensure their children's success in a new country.

Activating linguistic resources

All 13 of the parents indicated that their children's school success was a primary goal for the families' participation in the programme. Because of the high value placed on their child's education, the parents in this study played an active role in supporting literacy events that they perceived as facilitating their child's school success. The parents' Spanish literacy skills emerged as an important fund of knowledge for parents to draw on when teaching their children literacy at home. A majority of the parents (9 out of 13) reported making a conscious effort to create opportunities for bilingual literacy events to occur during the interactive literacy activities. Such efforts were encouraged by the family literacy programme, as is evidenced in one way by the *bilingual* literacy materials that were provided to families to use in their homes.

Parents frequently reported using English and Spanish back and forth while playing literacy games, reading books or practicing new vocabulary words. For example, Dalia, a 33-year-old mother of three, partnered with her husband during a family game to teach her daughter both the English and Spanish vocabulary words for colours. Dalia reflects on this experience in her journal: 'She was enchanted when I told her colours in Spanish and her dad in English. She confused the colour blue with the brown a lot but she focused much on the colours that she already knows blue–yellow–pink.'

Dalia's account demonstrates how keenly aware parents were of the importance of their role in promoting their child's dual-language proficiency. They actively utilised their primary language to make a literacy event initially comprehensible for their children but were prompt to follow up with the English translation. Similarly, several parents reported the significant role of siblings in assisting younger children with Spanish-to-English translations. For instance, Afra documented an interaction in which her daughter, Raquel, 'partnered with her brothers' during a game of *Shapeland*[®]. She notes how '[Raquel] touched a square and her brothers asked her in English and she knew what part of the body it was'. Spontaneous prompting on the part of siblings was commonly reported in parents' journals as a natural part of family literacy interactions. In other words, parents did not report requesting siblings to engage in this way but, rather, siblings assumed this role on their own.

Parents also reported actively supporting their children's bilingualism through the use of metalinguistic strategies. For example, during literacy events, parents regularly made associations between the written word and oral language explicit to their children. Parents would read written words in books or in games (e.g. cards, instructions, visual labels) aloud to their children while referencing the corresponding word or label, as illustrated by the following interaction recorded by a home visitor: 'Mom is reading *My five senses* book. Mom reads in English and explains how we use each sense in Spanish. Mom points to each word as she reads.' Alternatively, if the child had some familiarity with the activity, the parents would prompt the child to make the correspondence. During the game, 'The Parts of the Body'[®], Luis's mother, Serefina, encouraged him to look at the visuals and to read the labels on the game in order to correctly identify the parts of the body. She stated that he was successful in 'learning where each of his body parts are' and that he was able to recognise some of the words 'in English and he knew them all in Spanish'.

Moreover, parents integrated environmental print and/or artefacts as a way to contextualise the meaning of new words. While reading books, for example, parents would ask their children to relate new words to their own lives. For instance, during a shared book-reading, a home visitor noted how the mother 'saw the first page with food' and this prompted her to ask her daughter 'what she had for lunch'. Another clear example refers to a literacy event that occurred between Carlota and her daughter, Maria. Upon the suggestion of the literacy programme, Carlota and other parents were encouraged to make connections between the shapes learned in the game *Shapeland*[®] with shapes appearing in the child's natural environment. Carlota described how she facilitated this connection by pointing out to Maria the different

shapes in neighbourhood street signs. She described one of these events: ‘The octagon came up when we would pass street signs—the stop sign.’ Her daughter, in turn, demonstrated her own sophisticated understanding of the print–environment relationship. For example, during the same journal entry, Carlota noted: ‘When she touched the star she told me that that shape is easy along with the moon because when she draws the letter “P” as in Ms. Paco and Lopez she makes a similar shape.’

As the programme progressed, children showed more evidence of appropriating these metalinguistic strategies into their own thinking processes. For example, the children would use strategies such as finger-pointing to guide their oral reading of print. In one instance, a child even reminded her mother how to use this strategy. This poignant moment was recorded by a home visitor:

Gitana read a book today. The book was about shapes. As Gitana was reading, her daughter grabbed her finger and put it on each word as her mother read. Gitana read the book in English and asked her questions from each page. Gitana would say important words in English and Spanish so she understood.

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to examine how Hispanic immigrant families incorporate school-based interactive literacy activities into their existing home literacy practices. The findings presented here provide evidence that Hispanic parents actively modify school-designed literacy activities to support their children’s intellectual and moral *educacion*. The parents in this study actively drew upon existing ‘funds of knowledge’ (Moll, 1992) to support their children’s literacy learning. Cultural knowledge and practices were evidenced through parents’ emphasis on pleasurable and interactive literacy experiences (as opposed to *castigo* or school-like literacy experiences), informal scaffolding strategies, moral lessons and maintenance of the families’ primary language.

In contrast to many studies that have suggested that Hispanic parents are disinterested in supporting their children’s formal education (e.g. Valdés, 1996), the parents in this study showed a strong desire to facilitate their children’s literacy development. None of the data analysed in this study suggest that parents resented or resisted practicing school-like models of literacy at home as has been documented elsewhere (Janes & Kermi, 2001). Rather, the parents in this study subtly integrated literacy activities such as shared book-reading into their current repertoire of literacy practices. This is evidenced through both parent and teacher reports that highlight the use of dialogic reading strategies (Lonigan, Bloomfield, Dyer, & Samwel, 1999) and elements of oral storytelling traditions (e.g. engaging children through voice inflection, movement and body gestures) during parent–child shared book-reading experiences.

The parents in this study also valued interactive literacy activities that promoted family connections and learning opportunities for siblings (both younger and older). In their journals, parents reflected on the ways in which the literacy games encouraged family bonding, opportunities for moral education, improving children’s dual-language proficiency and learning academic content. In the process of playing

games with their children, parents discovered a great deal about their children's development (both morally and academically): how children learn through play and how they as parents can support that learning. While the use of board games as a method for teaching language and literacy skills has not been systemically studied, the experiences documented by the families in this study clearly suggest that the games were beneficial for children and parents directly involved in the programme as well as other family members (e.g. siblings).

Based on the findings of this study, it is our contention that the family literacy programme these families attended played an integral role in parents' willingness to appropriate school-based literacy activities into their everyday lives. Specifically, the programme provided the families with bilingual literacy materials (e.g. books, games) so that the parents could play an active role in supporting their children's literacy development (since most parents were not yet fluent in English). The programme's use of bilingual materials also affirmed parents' strong beliefs regarding the need for their children to maintain their primary language and cultural identity. Moreover, the materials were interactive by nature, thus allowing for the participation of immediate family, extended family, and occasionally friends and neighbours which is a common practice in many Hispanic families. Thus, we believe that family literacy programmes serving high percentages of Hispanic families may attain greater retention rates and more positive child outcomes by providing families with flexible home-based curricula materials that offer opportunities for pleasurable bilingual, literacy interactions in which multiple family members might participate.

As an exploratory investigation, the findings from this study are based on a relatively small sample size and the use of a limited number of activities that use board games and corresponding children's literature to facilitate interactive literacy lessons. Further research is needed to examine Hispanic families' adaptations of other types of school-designed literacy activities. Additionally, the subtle ways in which families adapt school-designed literacy activities could be more closely examined through the use of long-term direct observations of children and families in homes and other settings. Interviewing parents before and after the implementation of various types of school-designed literacy activities to assess the impact of each on parent-child literacy interactions would offer additional insight into the types of activities that different cultural groups most easily appropriate. Because all of the families in this study mentioned the benefits of engaging in academically focused game-play with their children, further research into how game-play might facilitate young children's emergent literacy skills is warranted. Finally, future research is also needed to determine the ways in which educational programmes *purposefully adapt* home-based literacy assignments to promote continuity between home-school literacy activities.

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