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**LINKS BETWEEN HOME AND SCHOOL AMONG LOW-INCOME MEXICAN-AMERICAN
AND EUROPEAN-AMERICAN FAMILIES**

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OVERVIEW

The goal of this report is to show how low-income Mexican-American and European-American children's and adolescents' everyday learning activities in the home and parents' aspirations for their children's future are key elements in home-school linkages. After reviewing two models of home-school linkages, we apply the ecocultural approach to analyzing third-, fifth-, and seventh-grade students' participation in chore and homework activities and their parents' aspirations for their personal/moral, educational, and vocational future. Drawing on interviews with these students' parents, we illustrate personnel (parents, siblings, relatives, friends) available to guide children's and adolescents' mastery of homework and chores, parents' direct and indirect instructional scripts, and how parents' future goals and aspirations might shape their present goals and guidance. In reporting our findings, we pay special attention to 1) similarities and differences between the ecology of learning, resources, and vulnerabilities of Mexican-American and European-American families, 2) within-cultural-group variation in families' resources and vulnerabilities, and 3) how families' resources and vulnerabilities, guidance scripts, and aspirations change as children enter adolescence. We conclude with suggestions for how to apply our findings to the design of parent-school partnerships.

INTRODUCTION

Parents value education, often making sacrifices so their children get the education they need to succeed. Yet the realities of poverty and fears about their children's safety can dim parents' aspirations. We can hear both hopes and fears in the following examples:

I support her We are in the U.S. because I want them to study English. We aren't here because we are making money in our jobs or anything like that, or because we are living well. We live better in Mexico. But this effort that I am making is because I want them to study English. (translated from Spanish)

Father of a Mexican-American fifth grader

Things are so bad I think that sending them to high school is dangerous. So many drugs, so many things that are there. But what parent wouldn't want her children to have a lot of schooling? We all want that. I want him to learn a lot. But like I am telling you, I am afraid to send him to school because I don't want him to be ruined. (translated from Spanish)

Mother of a Mexican-American fifth grader

That's what I'm really trying to do, to have a good, safe, secure home life and teach him to be confident with himself. And we discuss now what he'll do when he leaves home. Not that I'm trying to push him out, you know, but I want him to be prepared [I talk to him about] the importance of getting good grades. It's essential. If he wants to go to college, and to be accepted, he has to have good grades.

Mother of a European-American seventh grader

We never really talk about it. People talk to me, "Don't you have a college fund for your kid?" A college fund? I gotta pay the rent this week So I'm not real future-oriented as far as that's concerned Not that we avoid it, but it's just, you know, let's get by today.

Mother of a European-American fifth grader

In the face of these challenges, educators agree that strengthening parents' links with their children's schools is especially important. This is true both for newly immigrated families who are unfamiliar with U.S. schools and for those who are familiar with U. S. schools but are struggling to cope with the stresses of poverty. For the past three years, we have been interviewing parents as part of our research project with low-income Mexican-American and European-American families of third-, fifth-, and seventh-grade students. Our goal has been to learn more about links between home and school learning. We have written this paper for a broad audience, including educators, students preparing to be educators, policy makers, and researchers. In it, we hope to convey how children's and adolescents' everyday home learning activities and parents' aspirations for their children's future play key roles in linking families and schools.

Our paper is organized into five sections. First, we present a short summary of the goals of our research. Second, we consider the two current models of linkages between home and school that are most relevant to our research. Third, we describe our research methods and the subjects who participated in the study. Fourth, we present findings from our research on how families help children and adolescents with chores and homework and on parents' aspirations for their children's personal/moral, educational, and vocational futures. Finally, we

integrate our findings with the two models of home-school linkages and discuss implications of our findings for keeping children and adolescents from low-income backgrounds in school.

THE FAMILY-SCHOOL LEARNING PROJECT

Our research began as an attempt to understand the role of the home in children's and adolescents' academic achievement. In particular, we wanted to take a closer look at the cultural mismatch hypothesis, which suggests that the high academic failure among low-income minority and non-minority students is due to differences in the ways learning, communicating, and setting goals for schooling are socialized in the home and at school. From the start, we suspected that the cultural mismatch hypothesis had limitations. For example, because it describes families as a group, it obscures the fact some low-income students are, in fact, succeeding in school. Thus, our goal was not simply to test this explanation for school failure, but also to get a more differentiated picture of the role of the family in children's and adolescents' schooling.

Much of the literature on the cultural mismatch hypothesis has focused on the early years, especially on preschool through first grade. This presented a problem, because we were interested in studying the role of cultural mismatches in the later years of elementary school and in junior high school. Hence, we decided to begin our project by gathering information about the home learning environments of third-, fifth-, and seventh-grade students from low-income Mexican-American and European-American families. We selected these two groups because they have the highest rate of academic failure (low achievement or school dropout) in our communities.

Our first study entailed interviewing the parents of 72 students in the third, fifth, and seventh grades (36 from each ethnic group). At each grade level, we interviewed an equal number of parents of boys and girls. During a home visit, we asked about the child's or adolescent's learning opportunities at home (especially chores and homework), his or her routine and obligations, and the parents' goals for their children's educational, vocational, and personal development. Later, we returned to interview the children and adolescents. This first study has been completed, and most findings we discuss in this paper stem from the interviews with parents.

These interviews revealed that whereas parents of third graders had a very positive view of their child's behavior and accomplishments at home and at school, this was not always the case for parents of fifth and seventh graders. Although some of these parents expressed positive views of their children, others did not. Hence, we became interested in the potential vulnerability of the fifth graders in their transition into junior high school. This was an especially pressing question in light of the current debate over whether the lack of involvement in and motivation for schooling that has been observed in low-income minority and non-minority junior high school students is evident much earlier, in elementary school.

To address these issues, our second study, which began last year, will follow a group of low-income Mexican-American and European-American fifth graders through seventh grade. We are conducting home visits to interview the parents and the students, and we are observing the students in their classrooms. By gathering information in both the home and the school, we hope to identify similarities and differences between how high-achieving and low-achieving students negotiate the tasks, relationships, and goals embedded in these two important learning contexts.

Our final study will also examine pathways to academic competence and vulnerability in low- income Mexican-American and European-American students. However, rather than examine differences in academic achievement among students within each of these two groups, we will study similarities and differences in academic achievement within the same family. That is, we will attempt to understand why, in some families, all brothers and sisters succeed academically while in others, some succeed and others fail. In preparation for this study, we have added questions to the parent and student interviews that focus on similarities and differences between brothers' and sisters' home and school learning. Parents' and students' answers to these questions will allow us to select the families that will participate in this final study, which will involve case studies of families that show either similarities or differences in siblings' academic achievement.

TWO MODELS OF LINKAGES BETWEEN FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS

Families, educators, and researchers share the goals of increasing the academic and occupational success of students from diverse populations and of strengthening partnerships between schools and families (Cazden, 1988; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Eccles et al., 1993; Epstein, 1991; Garcia, 1992; Gonzales et al., 1993; Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman, & Hempill, 1991; Violand-Sanchez, Sutton, & Ware, 1991). Although there is widespread agreement that parental involvement enhances students' achievement, approaches to involving parents in their children's schooling vary in emphasis. In this paper, we discuss two models that informed our project. The first model seeks to reduce differences between families and schools by teaching parents the ways and expectations of U.S. schools and informing teachers about their students' cultural ways and values. The second model seeks to bring families and schools together in an atmosphere of mutual respect such that both can work together to teach the skills and values that children and adolescents will need to become competent adults.

Increasing the Cultural Matches Between Family and School Learning

According to this model, family learning works best when it resembles patterns of classroom learning. Mismatches between the communication patterns, learning activities and strategies, and educational goals of families and schools are seen as key causes of educational difficulties of low- income minority and non-minority students. Activities focus on reducing such mismatches by changing either families or schools. Interventions aimed at changing families attempt to educate parents about the expectations of the school, provide them with literacy and math activities to do at home, and teach them strategies for helping their children with homework. Interventions focused on changing schools attempt to educate teachers about cultural influences on students' classroom behaviors and to encourage them to devise activities that incorporate the students' culture and communication and learning patterns into the classroom (Heath, 1983; Swap, 1990; Violand-Sanchez et al., 1991).

A risk of this cultural mismatch emphasis is that it may foster the interpretation that differences between families and schools represent deficits in either families or schools. This deficit view may provoke mutual blaming between parents and teachers while overlooking the resources for student learning that are available in each setting.

Another potential source of mismatches lies in the fit between parent involvement activities encouraged by the school and the parents' and students' experiences and skills. For example, many low- income parents have limited schooling and thus may be unable to comply with a teacher's request that they help their children with homework. If the teacher encouraged parents to enlist the help of more schooled family members (e.g., older

siblings) or of community agencies (e.g., Boys' and Girls' Clubs, neighborhood community centers with homework assistance programs), then this mismatch would be minimized. However, teachers must also be sensitive to the possibility that as students approach or enter adolescence, they may resist help with homework or may spend considerable time outside the home, thus reducing the opportunities for family monitoring and involvement.

Age-related declines in teachers' use of parent involvement techniques are illustrated in Figure 1. Becker and Epstein (1982) derived these patterns from a survey which asked teachers to indicate their use of techniques that encourage parents to carry out learning activities in the home as well as the strategies that the teachers employ to help parents carry out these home activities more effectively. They provided three possible interpretations for this decline in teachers' use of different parental involvement techniques or parent-training strategies. First, it is possible that as students move through the elementary school years, the homework becomes much more specialized, and thus teachers may assume that parents are less able to help. Second, teachers may expect older students to regulate their own classroom and homework activities, and thus purposely reduce their requirements for family involvement. Finally, because most attention has been focused on parent involvement in the early grades, teachers may lack information about effective parent involvement activities for the older grades. Our interviews with low-income Mexican-American and European-American parents have revealed that parents' views are quite similar to those reported by the teachers surveyed by Becker and Epstein. Hence, in this situation, a match between teachers' and parents' expectations can result in students failing to receive the help they need. We would suggest that a goal for the future is to devise parent involvement activities that fit the needs, skills, and experiences of older students and their families.

FIGURE 1

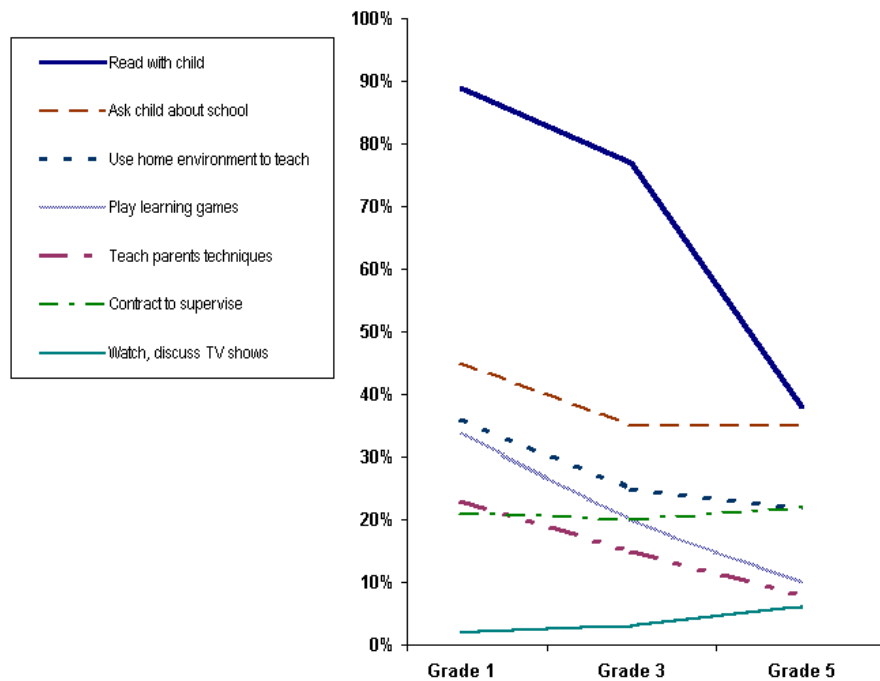


Figure Caption: Active use of parent involvement techniques by grade level. Reprinted with permission from Becker & Epstein, 1982.

Fostering Two-Way Partnerships Between Teachers and Families

Like the previous model, the two-way partnership approach brings the home culture into the school. However, it does so more systematically, such that a multicultural curriculum for the school is created. Activities may begin by incorporating parents' knowledge into the classroom. For example, parents may visit the classroom to share their "funds of knowledge" or students may be given homework assignments that require that they interview their parents about their areas of expertise (Gonzalez et al., 1993). While visiting the class, for instance, one parent might tell of her experiences as the coordinator of a neighborhood food bank, while another might illustrate chemical reactions by explaining how he uses pesticides to protect crops. Researchers and educators may also form partnerships, such as when they study families' instructional patterns to import them into the classroom (Heath, 1983; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988).

It is assumed that bringing parents into the classroom as equal and expert partners in students' achievement creates an atmosphere of mutual respect. Once this trust is established, parents and teachers can develop activities that incorporate parents' expertise into the classroom and teachers' expertise into the home. For example, Delgado-Gaitan (1991), Gallimore and Goldenberg (in press), and Violand-Sanchez et al. (1991) have developed language arts and math activities for families that are based on routine events, such as paying bills, writing letters, and reading magazines or newspapers.

Establishing mutual respect allows for the final step in this partnership model: empowering parents to become advocates for their children (see Comer, 1980; Cummings, 1986; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). This final step is important because students' achievement increases when parents feel comfortable approaching the teacher and principal to share their views and concerns about their children's schooling (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991).

How Our Work Is Informed and Informs These Two Models of Home-School Linkages

Our research is not designed as an intervention, but because we seek to discover home-school linkages and identify untapped resources for learning in homes and schools, we draw on both models to building bridges between home and school. For example, like the cultural matches and mismatches model, we are interested in assessing similarities and differences in the ways children and adolescents learn, communicate, and formulate educational goals at home and at school. From the two-way partnerships model, we draw the idea that families and schools share a commitment to help students succeed and that parents can become strong advocates for their children.

However, we also add two dimensions to these models that we think will provide a richer picture of linkages between home and school learning. First, we explore sources of variability in home and school learning within each cultural group--in the case of our study, low-income Mexican Americans and European Americans. Second, we pay special attention to how home-school linkages change as students move through the elementary school grades into junior high school; that is, we attend to age-related issues.

Why is attention to variability within cultural groups important? Although low-income Mexican- American and European-American children and adolescents have high rates of educational failure, many students from each of these populations excel in school. Identifying home and school characteristics that differentiate the more

successful from the less successful students can help us develop programs that harness resources that promote academic success and reduce the impact of factors that foster risk and school dropout.

Why is attention to age-related changes in students' and parents' needs and skills valuable? Research on the participation of underrepresented groups in higher education has shown that an effective transition into junior high school is crucial for retaining low-income minority and non-minority students (Eccles et al., 1993; Jessor, 1993). Family patterns during the elementary school years are built on children being relatively compliant, spending a significant part of their after-school time at home, and having only one teacher, who sends weekly notes home (although sending home notes or work contracts is not a universal practice). These assumptions may no longer apply in adolescence, when students begin to seek independence, spend less time at home and more time with their friends, and have many different teachers. An additional challenge for immigrant parents who did not progress beyond elementary school is that even if they monitor their children's homework activities and classroom performance, their unfamiliarity with English and school material prevents them from assessing the quality of their children's work. By identifying both resources and vulnerabilities that families have for accommodating to students' age-related and school transitions, we hope to contribute to schools' and universities' efforts to increase the enrollment and retention of low-income minority and non-minority students in higher education.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Ecocultural Approach

Our research builds on the work of other scholars who have used an ecocultural approach to study ecological and cultural aspects of family influences on students' achievement (e.g., Gallimore & Goldenberg, in press; Gonzalez et al., 1993; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Weisner, 1986). This approach provides both educators and researchers with useful tools for learning how families adapt to the challenges of daily living and to their children's and adolescents' development. In particular, the model allows us to dimensionalize linkages between home and school into four components--activity setting, goals, personnel, and instructional scripts--that can be explored as potential sources of similarities and differences between home and school learning.

A key assumption of the ecocultural approach is that children's and adolescents' participation in everyday, routine family activities provides the most pervasive influence on their development. Understanding the nature of these daily activities--how they are patterned, maintained, and adapted to changing family needs--is a key task in understanding family strengths and vulnerabilities (Gallimore, Coots, Gamier, Weisner, & Guthrie, 1993). The ecocultural model also assumes that parents' immediate and long-term goals and aspirations influence their routine patterning of children's and adolescents' learning. For example, involving children in chores may serve both the immediate goal of helping parents with busy schedules run the household as well as the long-term goal of teaching children about family relationships and obligations and about planning and coordinating schedules and activities (Goodnow, 1988).

In this report, we use these ecocultural concepts of activities, goals, personnel, and scripts to learn more about home learning. First, we examine similarities and differences in how Mexican-American and European-American families structure children's and adolescents' participation and learning in the two important routine activities of household chores and homework. Within each of these activity settings, we show how a range of personnel, such as siblings, relatives, and friends, guide students' learning, and how parents' expertise with each

activity influences their instructional scripts. Instructional scripts refer to conversational patterns or interaction routines that parents use to assist their children's learning. The ecocultural approach assumes that these scripts may involve face-to-face instruction or arrangement, coordination, and monitoring of learning opportunities. In this paper, we use the term direct guidance to refer to instructional conversations in which an expert guides a learner's mastery of a task. For example, as illustrated in the following quote, a parent might explain, demonstrate, assist, or correct a child's or adolescent's mastery of chores and homework.

Interviewer: How did you teach Luis' to make breakfast for the family?

Parent: I showed him and explained how to do it cold cereal is what we fix for breakfast, and toast and muffins. How to put them in the toaster, wait until they are cold, you know, every step. How you put the butter, serve the milk, all those things

Mother of a Mexican-American third grader

We use the term indirect guidance to refer to situations in which parents arrange the environment or enlist another person's instructional assistance. For example, they may arrange for an older sibling, relative, teacher, or community expert to provide tutoring, create schedules and routines to ensure that students finish their homework and chores, take actions to protect their children's health and safety, or monitor their activities (Rogoff, 1990; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Weisner, 1986).

One question we explored was whether parents' expertise influences their use of direct and indirect guidance strategies. For example, if parents are more likely to provide direct guidance in areas in which they are knowledgeable, they might provide more direct guidance with chores than with homework activities. However, expertise may not be the only factor that influences parents' guidance patterns. Parents with busy schedules might have the expertise to help directly, but might not have time to do so, and so may arrange for others to help. For example, because we anticipated that the low-income Mexican-American and European-American parents in our sample would have many responsibilities that reduced their time to provide direct help, we investigated whether they would arrange for the help of siblings, extended family members, or individuals in the community. Such a finding would illuminate resources for learning and homework support that have not been tapped consistently in programs aimed at building bridges between families and schools.

Recruitment of Families and Interview Procedures

The families were recruited through letters, phone calls, and referrals from other participating families. They were considered low-income if their children were receiving free or reduced school lunches or were eligible for AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children). Whenever possible, we interviewed both parents.

Our information was gathered during a home visit that lasted approximately one hour. Parents were interviewed in their native language by native speakers. (Interviewers included undergraduate and graduate student research assistants, a paid staff member, and the first and second authors.) Parents were asked questions about family composition (i.e., personnel involved in homework and household chore activities), instructional scripts (i.e., patterns of direct and indirect guidance of chores and homework), and their educational, vocational, and personal/moral goals and values. Sample interview questions appear in the appendix.

RESULTS: RESOURCES AND VULNERABILITIES FOR FAMILY LEARNING

Characteristics of Participating Families

In all the Mexican-American families who participated in the first study, the parents were born in Mexico (typically in the provinces of Michoacan or Jalisco), and the target child was born in the United States. The majority lived in a small rural town in central California. Their poverty was longstanding, and many families lived in dangerous neighborhoods or labor camps. The families had an average of four children, and in most households, both parents lived at home. In one third of the families, an adult relative, typically an aunt or uncle, also lived in the home. In most families both parents were employed, typically as agricultural laborers or in local canneries. Few parents had gone beyond elementary school (most fathers had not gone beyond third grade and most mothers had not gone beyond sixth grade); most parents' English was very limited.

The greatest challenges these families faced with their children's schooling were their relative unfamiliarity with the school system, their limited schooling and English skills, keeping their children safe in their neighborhood and at school, and supervising their children given their long work days. Many families accommodated to these challenges; for example, parents told us that they had arranged for family members to supervise the children, and some volunteered that they had invested in Nintendo games to keep their children inside the home. In our current work (studies two and three) we are assessing whether differences in families' reliance on these accommodations account for differences in children's and adolescents' academic achievement.

Most of the European-American families who agreed to participate in our study lived in a small coastal city in central California. Most were headed by single parents, usually mothers, and included an average of two children. These parents typically indicated that their poverty was recent, due to marital separation or divorce. Seventy-five percent of the families still lived in middle-class neighborhoods and indicated that they were trying to adjust to their diminished income and support systems. The remaining families' poverty was longstanding. They lived in decrepit homes in dangerous neighborhoods; two families had been homeless several times during the past three years. About one third of the households also included another adult, usually a housemate or the parent's partner. Two thirds of the parents were employed in skilled manual labor or in clerical, sales, or housecleaning positions; the remaining parents indicated that they were unemployed and relied on welfare checks or alimony. Most had completed high school and many had some college education; one third of the parents were students at the time of the interview.

The greatest challenges that these families faced with their children's schooling were the emotional and financial stresses of marital separation or divorce, task overload from the absence of other adults or older siblings in the home, and, for a few families, keeping their disenchantment with schools from reducing their support of their children's schooling and educational goals.

Parents' Views of Learning at Home and School

To begin, we highlight four key findings. First, both groups of parents reported that they often relied on older siblings to provide guidance in chores, but only Mexican-American parents regularly enlisted siblings' assistance with homework. Second, both groups of parents provided direct guidance for chore mastery and personal/moral aspirations (e.g., helping children and adolescents become honest, responsible, or caring), but especially as children entered adolescence, only the more schooled European-American parents continued to be

able to provide direct guidance with homework. Third, although parents in both groups voiced high aspirations for their children's educational and vocational achievement, they differed in their knowledge and planning for these aspirations. Fourth, parents of third graders were more likely than parents of fifth and seventh graders to express positive views and high aspirations for their children, a finding that may suggest an age-related dimming of parents' aspirations for their children's future (see Cooper et al., in press). The less positive outlook in the reports of some parents of fifth and seventh graders allows the speculation that the late elementary school years and the transition to junior high school may be key turning points in the educational achievement of low-income minority and non-minority students. As mentioned, this speculation led us to adopt a longitudinal design for our second study.

We now discuss in detail parents' reports of students' learning in the activity settings of housework and homework and their long-term educational, vocational, and personal/moral aspirations. The findings reveal overlaps across the two cultural groups and some distinctive age trends and patterns of resources and vulnerabilities within groups. Because Mexican-American and European-American families structured daily chores very similarly, we will integrate the results for both groups. Because this similarity was not evident in the homework activity setting, we will present the results for each group separately. Finally, we will comment on the implications of these findings for educators who seek to strengthen home-school partnerships.

Housework Activity Settings. Across the third, fifth, and seventh grades, most parents indicated that they expected their children to help with housework and provided direct guidance to increase their children's mastery:

When we go to the laundromat he goes with me, and then I first showed him how you have to separate the clothes, the colors and the whites. And then how you wash so that he can do it. I say, "Look, this is how you do it. This goes here, and that goes there" . . . and I explain how to dry the clothes, the thick ones and the thinner ones Except for ironing he does it [the laundry] well. (translated from Spanish)

Mother of a Mexican-American fifth grader

I showed her how to do the dishes. She watched me doing them for years for one thing. When it became time for her to do 'em I told her and showed her and it's an ongoing thing. I have to tell her all the time, not this way, this way It works better if you try it this way Basically saying these are the expectations, this is the way I want the job done, and correct it if it's not getting done properly. With the cooking which started up with letting 'em make things like heating up a can of soup to helping with the cooking. Now as the girls are getting older, they help me out in the kitchen making salads. Jonah does it too They've progressed from like making their own cereal to making a whole meal.

Mother of a European-American fifth grader

As reported in another paper (Azmitia, Cooper, & Garcia, 1994), although Mexican-American parents were more gender-oriented in their chore assignment than European-American parents (e.g., girls did more cooking and cleaning than boys, and boys did more yard work than girls), the gender differences were slight. However,

Mexican-American parents often volunteered information that allows us to suggest that their goals for encouraging chore mastery in boys and girls differ in some respects. Although they believed that both boys and girls should help with housework, parents of girls often added that girls needed to master chores to prepare for marriage and for taking care of their own household, and parents of boys often volunteered that they anticipated that their sons would live on their own before marrying and thus needed to learn to take care of themselves. European-American parents also offered information about their lack of gender patterns in chore assignment. They told us that because they were single parents with many responsibilities and small families, they had to rely equally on sons' and daughters' help with housework.

In addition to direct guidance, over half of the parents also provided indirect guidance, such as arranging for older siblings to teach and supervise younger children's chores:

I help the younger ones. But the older girls can run the machines. And occasionally I will assign a younger one to an older one if I feel the younger one is not doing a good job or needs help. 'Cause I may not be able to stand there for two or three hours, keep coming back and checking. I can say well, would you make sure that this child stays with this job until it's done?

Mother of a European-American fifth grader

Most parents viewed caring for younger brothers and sisters as especially important, not only for managing the household but for teaching children and adolescents skills they would need to become competent parents and adults.

He has learned to take care of them and take responsibility forgiving them their medicine. He is the oldest [child] and the other children are his responsibility. (translated from Spanish)

Mother of a Mexican-American seventh grader

Although parents had reasons of immediate need to ask their children's help with chores, most also saw chores in broader terms, such as providing opportunities for children to learn about obligations to the family, family relationships, self-regulation, time management, and responsibility (Goodnow, 1988; Goodnow & Delaney, 1989). These reasons were mentioned more often by parents of fifth and seventh graders, a finding that may suggest that parents' age-related timetables influence their instructional goals:

It's important because she is soon going to be an adolescent, and it requires that you think about goals for the household. I wouldn't want to have a daughter who was lazy or worthless a son neither. (translated from Spanish)

Mother of a Mexican-American fifth grader

. . . because there are so many people here that I can't do everything.

Mother of a European-American third grader

I wanted her to learn to be able to cook for herself and if there's not someone there to cook for her later in life or now even.

Mother of a European-American fifth grader

We did not find support for the view widely held by teachers and researchers that chores can be a source of academic vulnerability in Mexican-American families because they compete with homework and school attendance. Many parents indicated that during the week they often excused their children from chores (e.g., making beds, cooking dinner, cleaning the house or yard) and did them themselves so that the children could do homework, or that chores were assigned only on weekends, when there was no homework. Our interviews of the children and adolescents in these families will allow us to determine whether they share their parents' views that there is no competition between chores and homework, or whether such competition increases as adolescents are expected to make greater contributions to family management and survival and as the amount and complexity of homework increase.

Finally, an unanticipated finding was that some parents saw that chores provided a bridge between the home and the school. For example, they reported that their children mastered chores in both settings and that this continuity helped them understand the significance of chores:

She is so good at everything that it seems like somebody else must have taught her (laughs) They do it at her school and it's a really important part of the day.... Every week the chore list changes, so the children have to clean and dust, take out trash and compost, and [clean] erasers and the chalkboard. That's been really encouraged in their school and I don't have to take time every day to see if they do it right. They do that at school and they come back, and they realize that it's something that makes everything go.

Mother of a European-American third grader

Homework Activity Settings. Mexican-American and European-American families organized this activity setting differently. As we anticipated, parents' expertise in this domain influenced their use of direct and indirect instructional scripts. In particular, the more highly schooled European-American parents provided direct guidance in most academic subjects, although some mothers reported they could not help in math. As Mexican-American children surpassed their parents' levels of schooling, these parents usually became unable to provide direct guidance, but many drew on resources at both home and school to help their children indirectly.

Mexican-American Families. Mothers were more likely than fathers to assist with homework. Twenty-five percent of the parents indicated that because of their limited schooling or English, they could not help directly but that they helped by checking that the homework was done, enlisting the help of an older sibling, or

encouraging their child to seek help from the teacher. These indirect forms of guidance were reported more often by parents of older students:

When she was smaller I helped her in everything [homework]. Now, if she can't do it she asks the teacher.... Well, I do help her--we go to the library to get the books she needs. (translated from Spanish)

Mother of a Mexican-American fifth grader

Well, it's a problem, because I have trouble with English. So what I try to do is to encourage him to study. It seems he has figured out that the answers are in the book I only tell him that he review what he reads, that he read and read until he understands--that he is going to find the solution to the problem right there [in what he is reading] when I can't help him. But I do make him check it well. (translated from Spanish)

Father of a Mexican-American seventh grader

For example, last year he had trouble with math. I suggested that he ask his uncle for help, and that he speak with the teacher so he would explain it to him. The best solution was to teach him how to talk to the teacher and ask him questions. (translated from Spanish)

Mother of a Mexican-American seventh grader

As we anticipated, older siblings, especially sisters, were important resources for homework. The helping role of siblings increased with age, perhaps as students surpassed their parents' educational level; by seventh grade, half of the students regularly received help from older sisters and 17% regularly received help from older brothers:

If her brothers are working, she waits until they come home so they can help her work out the problem and she can finish her homework (translated from Spanish)

Mother of a Mexican-American seventh grader

There were also signs of potential vulnerabilities involving siblings' assistance. Some older siblings' own difficulties in school limited the quality of their help.

Also, conflicts sometimes arose when adolescents, busy with their own homework, balked at helping younger brothers or sisters. In some cases, parents intervened. Although this may have benefited the younger child, it is possible that the older one's work may have suffered:

Well, she (Ana, the target child) needed help with some words so she asked the oldest, but the oldest was doing her homework, and when she does her homework she doesn't want anybody to bother her. They

give her some big homework like for graduating, so she told Ana "no." So Ana came over and asked this one (points to another daughter) but this one was doing her homework too [and said no], and so I told her to ask the teacher the next day, but she started to cry so I told her (the middle daughter), "You have to help her." (translated from Spanish)

Parent of a Mexican-American third grader

All Mexican-American parents we interviewed saw homework as important for their children's academic achievement, and many hoped teachers would assign as much homework as possible so their children would do well in school and have good careers. However, some parents, especially those of seventh-grade boys, saw homework as a frequent source of conflict because their sons either did not want to do it or misled them about assignments. All indicated that they tolerated conflict as long as their adolescents finished the work. Some parents also worked with teachers to improve their homework monitoring and manage conflicts:

One parent describes how she solved the problem of her adolescent son not giving her notes from the teacher and principal alerting her of her son's failure to turn in homework:

Alfonso wasn't giving them to me, and the principal and teacher thought I had them, but he was throwing them in the garbage. So the principal and I talked about it and he said, "No problem--I'll just mail them to you." (translated from Spanish)

Mother of a Mexican-American seventh grader

European-American Families. Here, too, mothers were more likely than fathers to help with homework, in part because most fathers did not live in the home.

She always needs help in her homework, so I help her. She tries to get me to do her homework for her. She always asks me about things that she doesn't understand.

Mother of a European-American seventh grader

However, we were surprised by the number of single mothers who reported that their children often telephoned their fathers to get help, especially in math, where some mothers felt they lacked the skills to help effectively. Thus, for European-American single-parent families, the non-custodial parent may be a potential resource for homework that has been overlooked by both educators and researchers.

Unlike Mexican-American families, who drew heavily on older siblings' assistance, older European-American students were seldom asked to help their younger siblings with homework, perhaps because their mothers were able to provide direct assistance for all age groups. However, although older siblings seldom provided direct

help with homework, parents often described how they had spontaneously taught younger children academic skills.

Like Mexican-American families, European-American families also frequently relied on teachers to help children with difficult homework assignments, especially in math.

He asks me. A lot of times I can't even help him with it. I've forgotten how to do math and stuff that I haven't done since I was in school. So if I can help him, I will. If not, I'll just write a note to the teacher saying that I couldn't help with it.

Mother of a European-American fifth grader

European-American parents' reliance on indirect guidance to assist students with math supports our proposal that parents' expertise is one factor in their choice of direct or indirect guidance strategies. In addition, parents felt that as children get older, they should take more responsibility for managing their own homework:

She's just finally learning that it's her responsibility to do her homework and it's her responsibility to get it in her book bag so she can take it to school Last year I remember, even last year would have to say, "Do you have any homework?" Now it's, "Mom, I've got this homework I've got to get it done. If I don't have it done and in tomorrow I'm going to get into trouble, " and you know, she's finally realizing that it's her responsibility.

Mother of a European-American fifth grader

Finally, although most European-American parents generally recognized the importance of homework, approximately 20% expressed ambivalence about it, because they felt the assignments were "busywork," because they believed their children already spent enough time studying at school and should spend their after-school time in family activities, or because homework was a source of conflict. As with the Mexican-American families in our study, conflict about homework was especially marked in the interviews of parents of seventh-grade boys. However, unlike Mexican-American families, who tolerated these conflicts as long as their adolescents did the homework, European-Americans were less tolerant. Perhaps these parents were less tolerant because as single parents they were the sole target of the conflict, because they were already under a high degree of stress because of their recent divorce or poverty, or because they wanted to spend the time that they had available for their children in more positive interactions:

I think seventh graders should not have more than one hour of homework a night . . . but maybe that's too optimistic. I wish he didn't have homework because it causes such problems in the home. It's just horrible. And I would rather when I have time to be with him not be fighting about homework I would rather be doing something with him.... I mean, our whole life is about arguing about homework

practically it seems like. I have to call his teachers and find out what's really happening because he won't tell me what's really happening.

Mother of a European-American seventh grader

Parents' Personal/Moral, Educational, and Vocational Aspirations

Parents in both Mexican-American and European-American groups were similar in their view that raising morally responsible children took priority over other aspirations. This perspective included parents viewing schooling as only one dimension of staying on the good path or *buen camino* and assuming that by ensuring children's health and safety and instilling values such as responsibility, kindness, and honesty, they would foster academic and vocational success. To ensure that their children would attain these personal/moral aspirations, parents closely monitored their children's social behavior and provided direct guidance in the skills or qualities they wanted their children to develop. At first glance, moral qualities may appear to have no links to educational and vocational achievement; however, Reese (1992) has shown that this broader view of education is associated with high academic achievement.

Although parents in both groups saw schooling as a way out of poverty and hoped their children would attend college, they differed in their guidance patterns and in their vulnerabilities.

Mexican-American Parents. Like Gallimore et al. (1993) and Matute Bianchi and Alvarez (1990), we found that parents consistently held high educational and vocational aspirations for their children. Most wanted their children to go to college and become lawyers, doctors, or teachers. Parents who did not have specific educational and vocational goals for their children still had definite ideas about what they would not want for their children. In particular, parents hoped that their children would not have to work in the fields or the canneries as they did.

Anything [any job] as long as it isn't in the fields When I was very young, I started to pick strawberries and I wouldn't want him to do that. (translated from Spanish)

Mother of a Mexican-American fifth grader

Although parents' high aspirations could be considered a resource for their children, a source of vulnerability was seen in parents' varying levels of knowledge as to how to help their children attain such aspirations. Some were aware that school grades were important and that college was required for some vocations:

Well, when he says that he wants to be a police officer I say, "Well mijo, you have to stay in school and to be that, you have to go through high school-- I think that you may even have to go to college. And you have to stay out of trouble, because if you get into a gang and you are part of a gang fight, that is going to go against your record, so you got to behave." (translated from Spanish)

Parent of a Mexican-American third grader

However, none of the parents who hoped their children would become doctors, lawyers, and teachers was aware that these professions require a graduate education, and many were also unaware of financial aid or college application procedures.

Finally, differences related to children's grade level emerged in parents' educational and vocational aspirations. All parents of third graders held high aspirations, but some parents of fifth and seventh graders did not have a positive view of their children's present behavior and achievement or of their future. This negative outlook was expressed in two ways. First, parents of fifth and seventh graders were less likely than parents of third graders to express the desire that their children attend college or graduate school. Second, many of the parents who did express high educational goals mitigated their response by providing many qualifiers, such as noting that this was only a dream because the future was unpredictable, that given their children's present behavior at home or school a bright future was not likely, or that given their present financial situation, college was unrealistic. (See Cooper et al., in press, for a more detailed discussion of these patterns.)

Gallimore (personal communication, February, 1993) and his colleagues have also found an age-related dimming of parents' aspirations in their longitudinal study of Latino children and their families. They found that the dimming was due to parents using information about their children's performance at school (grades, notes from teachers, etc.) to adjust their aspirations. We speculate that the dimming may also reflect parents' concerns about the dangers that their children might confront at school, such as drugs, sex, and violence. For example, when asked about how far she wanted her son to go in school, one Mexican-American mother initially expressed her goal that her son would go to college, but then said that she might prefer that he drop out of school after junior high school because she had heard that the local high school was dangerous and she feared for her son's safety. Our longitudinal study of the transition from elementary school to junior high school will allow us to test this and other speculations.

European-American Parents. European-American parents also held high educational aspirations for their children. Most hoped their children would attend college and about 20% wanted them to attend graduate school. They were less specific about their vocational aspirations, largely because they believed that their children should choose their own vocation. Their greater familiarity with the school system and employment opportunities was evident as they spoke of links between jobs and levels of education as well as college admissions and financial aid procedures:

I would like her to complete high school, and at least four years of college When I grew up, a high school diploma was a real important thing. Now in this day and age, a high school diploma doesn't mean beans.

Mother of a European-American third grader

I'm letting her choose. I'm letting them (daughter and two sons) choose their profession and then I am saying to them, "This is what will be required of you in that profession. You need to research what you're wanting to see, what will be required You need to prepare yourself for college."

Mother of a European-American fifth grader

Those parents who had returned to school saw themselves as providing examples of the benefits of their own study habits as well as of the costs of their having dropped out of high school or college. However, as shown in the following quotes, parents' roles as students can either be a resource or a vulnerability:

For one is the fact that I went back into school is going to be a big help to her. Y'know, and also, I take her going on some cleaning jobs with me and actually knowing how hard it is, and I just told her today coming home from school that she needs a higher education because, I told her, "The more education you get, the more money you make, and actually the easier the job is."

Mother of a European-American fifth grader

I think that maybe his feelings are hurt by me because I haven't spent much time with him in the last three or four years because I've been in school and I don't know that he understands or appreciates what I'm trying to work towards. I'm really trying to be a good role model, for one thing, for trim. All he can see is that I don't have much time for him right now, and so that's been hard.

Mother of a European-American third grader

Despite their greater familiarity with the school system, the low-income European-American parents in our sample also showed the same pattern of age-related dimming of expectations that was evident among Mexican-American parents of fifth and seventh grade students (see Cooper et al., in press). However, their spontaneous comments revealed that they were less concerned about the dangers lurking in the schools than about their own ability to finance their children's higher education or influence their destiny. Possibly, their concerns were heavily influenced by the fact that most of them were adjusting to their recent marital separation or divorce and poverty, and these adjustments may have reduced their self-confidence. Again, our longitudinal study will allow us to test these speculations.

The greater specificity of European-American parents' plans for their children's future appeared to be age-related. Parents of seventh graders were more likely than parents of third and fifth graders to have made detailed plans for their children's future. Parents often reported that these plans had been initiated by their children expressing interest in a particular vocation. It is important to point out, however, that about one third of the parents of seventh graders reported that they had made no plans for their children's educational and vocational future. Also, about a fourth of all parents (third, fifth, and seventh grade) volunteered that they did not feel confident that the school was teaching their children the skills that they would need to attain their educational and vocational aspirations.

The following quotes illustrate these opinions:

Oh boy. I'm not one who dreams about my child's future. I still feel lost in trying to find my own future.

Mother of a European-American fifth grader

I have a real attitude about school It's not that great, I don't think. I don't think they teach you things that you have to know.

Mother of a European-American fifth grader

CONCLUSIONS

We will now integrate our key findings with our earlier discussion of two models of home-school linkages and offer suggestions for incorporating home learning activities into parent involvement activities. We wish to emphasize that despite similarities in home learning among low-income European-American and Mexican-American families, each group and family has unique resources and challenges that we must consider as we develop home-school partnerships.

Is There Evidence of Cultural Mismatches Between Home and School Learning?

Our findings suggest that for Mexican-American families, mismatches may occur in the personnel available to help with learning and in whether teaching is done directly or indirectly. We suggest that parent involvement activities involve not only parents, but also other family members such as siblings and extended kin. However, care must be taken when involving siblings as teachers to ensure that their own schoolwork does not suffer. Parent involvement activities should also reflect the age-related increase in parents' reliance on indirect guidance. Thus, rather than working to teach parents academic skills that they lack, it may be more productive to help them improve those skills they already have, such as how to arrange for others to help with school work and how to monitor their adolescents' schooling more effectively. It also might be worthwhile to design interventions to improve students' study and tutoring skills, so they can help themselves and their younger brothers and sisters. It is clear that parents and schools match in their goal to help students succeed but that parents need information about how to help their children attain their high educational and vocational aspirations. We will address these informational needs as we consider issues in empowering parents.

For European-American families, the matches and mismatches seem to be of a different nature. Although home activities and future aspirations generally match those of the school, single parents experience the challenge of supervising and assisting their children as they adjust to diminished income and emotional support and their increased responsibility. Helping single parents form support networks and use teachers' assistance more effectively may prove useful. Parents may also be alerted about how to capitalize on resources already available in the home. For example, parents described older siblings as teaching younger brothers and sisters chores and general academic skills, and parents may discover that older siblings are also willing and able to help with homework.

It is important to note that 25% of our European-American families exhibited a mismatch that was not evident in any of the Mexican-American families: They felt alienated from school and appeared to have lost confidence in the school's ability to teach their children the academic and vocational skills that they would need to attain their educational and vocational aspirations. This same alienation is evident in our second study, where many European-American parents of low-achieving students have so far declined to participate in the study. Our discussions with principals and teachers at our school sites have revealed that they, too, are concerned with reducing this alienation and increasing parents' confidence in the schools. Hence, this may be a place where researchers, educators, and parents engage in discussions about how to increase these families' involvement in

the schools. These discussions will be facilitated by the fact that all three groups want students to succeed not only in school, but in life.

Before discussing the next model, two cautions are in order. First, the matching approach to home-school partnerships must take into account the wide variability within cultural groups. Thus, care must be taken to implement models that consider the strengths and vulnerabilities of each family. Second, the model needs to reflect age-related transitions and changes in students' skills and needs. Many of our findings converge in showing that adolescents, especially boys, are at special risk for academic failure. The challenge is that as children get older, both parents and schools are less able to supervise them directly. Thus, communication between teachers and parents that takes into account the needs and characteristics of adolescents will prove useful. For example, for younger students, sending a note to school or home is feasible, but adolescents, for a variety of reasons, are less likely to deliver such a note. Most parents are responsive to an evening phone contact, and teachers and parents may benefit from using this form of communication.

What Can We Contribute to Fostering Two-Way Partnerships Between Schools and Families?

Our suggestions stem from our finding that parents reported that most children and adolescents in our sample were largely responsible for scheduling and carrying out chores in the midst of other competing activities. By all indications, most did so competently. Chores appeared to foster responsibility, self-management, understanding of family relationships and obligations, and the development of metacognitive skills such as planning and organizing tasks, and monitoring and evaluating outcomes. By making connections between chores, a familiar activity that children and adolescents do well, and classroom activities, which may be more challenging or even problematic, teachers can help students transfer skills learned in one context to another, thus improving academic mastery. (See Rogoff, 1990, for a more detailed description of fostering learning by bridging familiar and unfamiliar activities, strategies, and domains.)

Teachers can also take time during parent-teacher conferences or classroom meetings to ask parents and students about family resources for homework in particular and for learning in general. For example, one teacher who participated in our study told us that he had inventoried his students' resources and adapted his homework practices accordingly. Because his Mexican-American families felt more comfortable assisting with math, it was heavily represented in homework and more class time was devoted to other subjects. Another teacher told us that she often came early to school and assigned the homework in the morning so students who had limited help at home could draw on her and classmates for assistance. Both teachers noted that these accommodations had improved the quality of the homework and increased the communication between them and their students' families. They added that because they saw them as responsive to their needs, many parents who would not have felt comfortable approaching them in the past now approached them with questions and for suggestions on how to help their children succeed.

One concern that we do have is that Mexican-American parents often expressed complete faith in the school's ability to teach their children the necessary educational and vocational skills, or such respect for school authorities and teachers that they did not think it was their right to question their decisions. Delgado-Gaitan (1991) has noted that these attitudes may reflect parents' unfamiliarity with U.S. school systems and with their rights as parents. Hence, we agree with suggestions by Comer (1980), Cummings (1986), and Delgado-Gaitan (1991) that successful family-school partnerships will require that schools empower parents to advocate for their children and inform them about characteristics they should consider in evaluating the quality of their children's schooling. Finally, Mexican-American parents need information about what is required to achieve the

educational and vocational aspirations they have for their children. This information includes courses that students need to take to meet college entrance requirements, the grades that will be required, and the availability of financial aid packages. Families would also benefit from knowing how to fill out a college application to ensure that it receives full consideration. As part of this effort, we are currently preparing a short newsletter for our parents that contains this information in both English and Spanish and is sensitive to their language and literacy skills.

How Can We Help Low-Income Adolescents Remain in School?

At several points in our report, we have expressed our concern about the apparent age-related dimming of both Mexican-American and European-American parents' vocational and educational aspirations. As a group, fifth and seventh graders appeared more vulnerable than third graders, but because our first study was not longitudinal, we cannot identify the source of this apparent dimming of aspirations and increase in vulnerability. Also, because we did not link these aspirations or vulnerabilities to achievement, we cannot say for certain if they differentiate successful and unsuccessful students. Our second study, which will follow fifth graders through the transition to junior high school, will allow us to address these questions.

In closing, we want to caution our readers that the issues and challenges that we discussed are not unique to low-income minority and non-minority students. These are universal challenges of adolescence and of keeping all students in school (see Eccles et al., 1993). Hence, we must develop programs that help all families and schools guide students toward becoming productive members of their community. We hope that our work will prove useful and stimulating to readers to learn more about home-school linkages in their own communities and to develop successful two-way partnerships between families and schools.

NOTES

1. To protect the families' anonymity, all names have been changed.
2. Copies of our interviews are available upon request.

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APPENDIX

Sample Interview Questions

Demographic Information

Parents were asked for information about the birth place, occupation, age, highest grade completed, and language skills (speak, read, write English and Spanish) of all individuals living in the household. If one of the parents did not reside in the home, the other parent was asked to provide this demographic information for him or her.

Chores

Parents were asked to name all the individuals who did such chores as dishes, fixing things around the house, fixing the car, cleaning the house or bedroom, cooking, child care, running errands, helping adults prepare for work, helping with homework, yard work, taking the trash out, and laundry. Whenever the target child or adolescent was mentioned as doing a particular chore, the parent was asked whether the child carried out the chore alone or simply helped others who carried out the chore.

Then parents were asked to name a chore they had helped their child learn, and for this chore, they were asked:
(A) Why was it important for your child to learn this chore? (B) How did you help your child learn the chore?
(C) How well can your child do this chore? (D) What happens when the child doesn't do the chore?

Homework

Parents were asked whether their child had homework, if so how frequently, and whether their child did the homework after school or in the morning before school (always, sometimes, or never for each time period). Then parents were asked: What happens when your child needs help with homework?

Brothers and Sisters

Parents were asked:

- (A) What things about the home has your child learned from older brothers and sisters?
- (B) What things about the home has your child learned from younger brothers and sisters?
- (C) What things about the home or school has your child taught younger brothers or sisters?

Aspirations

Parents often dream about their children's future. We asked them:

(A) What do you hope for the education that your child will complete?
(How much? What kind?)

(A.1) What kinds of things are you doing to help your child complete that education?

What do you hope for the job that your child will have?
(What kind of job or profession?)

(B.1) What are you doing to help your child attain that job in the future?

(C) What kind of person do you want your child to grow up to be
(values, qualities, habits)?

(C. 1) What are you doing to help your child become the kind of person you'd want him or her to be?

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