

Learning begins at home: The role of Hispanic mothers as their child's first teacher

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

The study of ethnic minority populations can provide valuable information about diverse subgroups within the larger society and clarify the significance of sociocultural factors in child socialization (Vargas & Busch-Rossnagel, 2003). Parental knowledge about child development has been found to influence conceptualizations of acceptable and normative behaviors and could therefore explain why parents from diverse backgrounds differ in childrearing attitudes, beliefs, and practices (Delgado & Ford, 1998; Huang, Caughy, Genevro, & Miller, 2005). Hispanic mothers, in general, have been characterized according to a deficit model in comparative analyses with their Anglo-American counterparts. This deficit model does not account for the cultural influences inherent in the parental schemas of Hispanic mothers (Cardona, Nicholson, & Fox, 2000). The present study aimed to broaden the existing literature on the values that Mexican mothers have concerning their children's development, the role that culture plays in maternal teaching practices, and to explore the notion of an existing conflict between home and school values in relation to Mexican children's academic achievement.

This study was comprised of a sample of seventy-nine Mexican mothers between the ages of 18-over 40. A questionnaire, designed by the researcher after an examination of the literature and pilot testing, was used to measure maternal values associated with parenting and teaching strategies. In addition to family demographic information (maternal place of birth, education, marital status, family income), the questionnaire included 54 questions and was divided into the following six subscales: child attitude, child learning, teaching, parenting, maternal values about child development, and academic achievement (GPA). Mothers in the study were found to place more emphasis

on their values towards child development than their parenting skills. Maternal values were found to be associated with parenting practices. A significant relationship was also found between child learning and GPA.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Latino groups have been lumped together under the hybrid label of Hispanic by the larger society (Baca Zinn & Pok, 2002). According to data provided by the U.S. Census Bureau, the term Hispanics includes ethnic groups of Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Dominicans, Mexicans, and others who trace their backgrounds to Spanish-speaking countries (Vargas & Busch-Rossnagel, 2003). The official population estimates are that the Hispanic community has become the nation's largest minority community, increasing from 35.3 million in 2000 to 38.8 million in 2002 (Rodriguez & Olswang, 2003). Those of Mexican origin account for 66 % of the Hispanic population and their sustained growth is expected due to higher birth rates and continued immigration from Mexico (Rodriguez & Olswang, 2003). The study of ethnic minority populations can provide valuable information about diverse subgroups within the larger society and clarify the importance of sociocultural factors in child socialization (Vargas & Busch-Rossnagel, 2003). For the purpose of presenting significant findings in past research, the term Hispanics will be used in the current paper to identify the various groups of mothers from Spanish-speaking countries. These findings will be used to identify the cultural influence on parenting and teaching for a sub-group of Hispanic mothers (mothers of Mexican descent) in the current study. The term Mexican mothers will be used to discuss mothers who participated in the current study.

Parental knowledge about child development has been found to influence conceptualizations of acceptable and normative behaviors and could therefore explain why parents from diverse backgrounds differ in childrearing attitudes, beliefs, and practices (Delgado & Ford, 1998; Huang, Caughy, Genevro, & Miller, 2005). Research

focusing on the parenting practices of Anglo-American and Mexican-American mothers often has relied upon comparative analyses between the two groups. Hispanic mothers in general have been characterized according to a deficit model. This perspective portrays Hispanic mothers as possessing inferior parenting skills in comparative studies which characterize the parenting of middle-class, Anglo-American mothers, who are considered the norm for optimal child development (Calzada & Eyberg, 2002). This deficit model approach however, is limited and ignores the cultural influences inherent in the parental schemas of Hispanic mothers (Cardona, Nicholson, & Fox, 2000).

One area that has exemplified this deficit model approach is the examination of Hispanic mothers' views of children's learning and development. For example, some researchers have described Mexican parents as punitive and authoritarian, based on the cultural value of respect for authority (Calzada & Eyberg, 2002; Varela, Sanchez-Sosa, Riveros, Vernberg, Mitchell, & Mashunkashey, 2004). In comparative analyses between Latina and European mothers, Latinas were found to use more directive strategies and more nonverbal (modeling or visual cues) and fewer verbal strategies, such as inquiries and praise when interacting with their children. Yet, further analyses have found Latinas to utilize less controlling and less nonverbal teaching strategies than European mothers (Teichman & Contreras-Grau, 2006). Such findings make it difficult to obtain a clear picture of the values and parenting practices of Hispanic parents. Further clarity can be gained by examining the values of Hispanic mothers not from a deficit approach, but from the perspective that these values should be respected and understood in their own right.

The impact of culture on maternal teaching strategies is important in understanding why Mexican mothers parent as they do. In Hispanic cultures, development of skills which enable the individual to be accepted by the group (or the community) is considered crucial (Delgado & Ford, 1998). Mexican mothers have viewed their parenting as the most influential factor in their child's development, particularly the development of social behaviors. According to Arcia and Johnson (1998), direct verbal instruction was most commonly cited as the determinant of the development of desirable childhood characteristics, with compliance being the most salient. Mothers believed that children learned best by repeatedly being told what and how to do things and that physical punishment was an acceptable means of discipline in order to instill "desirable traits" of obedience, respect, and a sense of familism into their young children. Hispanic mothers, in general, have been found to use more directives, visual cues, and modeling in a structured teaching style (Arcia & Johnson, 1998; Moreno, 2000; Vargas & Busch-Rossnagel, 2003). Because these mothers have been found to provide their children with a more restricted learning environment, while focusing their teaching on appropriate socialization skills, their teaching and parenting practices have been associated with the authoritarian parenting style (Vargas & Busch-Rossnagel, 2003). However, the role that culture plays in shaping teaching and parenting strategies has been overlooked. Latino families, including those of Mexican descent, are guided by their cultural values in parenting and are more likely to encourage the social development of their children and place less emphasis on the child's achievement of developmental milestones and competitiveness than mainstream families (Klein & Chen, 2001). These

values influence parenting strategies, including those associated with teaching and children's learning.

Significant differences related to parental views of how children learn have been associated with the parental role of teacher. Observed differences in the teaching styles of minority mothers and mothers of the dominant culture led researchers to conclude that minority and low-income mothers are not providing optimal teaching experiences that promote the academic success of their children (Moreno, 1997). Maternal cognitions, with maternal knowledge as one dimension, have been shown to play an integral role in parenting and child development. Maternal knowledge has been studied in the past in relation to knowledge of the timing of developmental milestones, mothers' conceptualizations concerning how to parent, and strategies to utilize during parent-child interactions (Huang et al., 2005). According to research in this area, mothers who are knowledgeable about child development are more likely to establish a sensitive mother-child relationship and environment that is suited to meet the needs of the developing child. Similarly, mothers with limited child development knowledge have exhibited unrealistic expectations of their children and are more likely to utilize ineffective parenting strategies, such as harsh and inconsistent discipline, thus promoting less optimal child development (Huang et al., 2005). These findings suggest that maternal knowledge and parenting practices are important not only for the child's development at home, but also the child's experience in school.

The traditional educational system in the United States operates as a monocultural system, validating and transmitting the culture of the dominant society, including ways of thinking and speaking (Espinosa, 2006). Linguistic and cultural understandings can

enhance the teacher's ability to develop trusting relationships which encourage Hispanic students to stay connected to school. When teachers and students develop a trusting relationship, the learning environment and the student's potential for success is enhanced (Garcia, Jensen, & Cuellar, 2006). The findings of Figueroa-Moseley et al. (2006) also contend that Latino parents who value education and believe in their child's ability to succeed and actively participate in their child's schooling, enhance the likelihood of their child's academic success. Garcia et al. (2006) argued that a solid understanding of parents' culture and expectations can help teachers and schools to avoid alienation of Hispanic families. The one-size-fits-all framework of addressing the needs of Hispanic parents as if they have the same needs and experiences as their white, middle-class counterparts does not address ethnic diversity (De Gaetano, 2007). A culturally-responsive approach incorporates the students' histories, language, early experiences, and values in the classroom activities, while providing instruction which is compatible with cultural values and aimed at improving academic learning (Espinosa, 2006).

The Hispanic cultural emphasis on family cohesiveness, respect, and moral development may provide a foundation of social security and a safe and secure early learning environment for the children of Mexican immigrant families (Espinosa, 2006). The knowledge of Hispanic values and the connection to sociocultural theory can be used by teachers to gain a better understanding of the relationships between language, culture, and cognitive development (Espinosa, 2006). According to Vygotsky, in order to understand the social interactions between peers or adults and children, the historically-formed, cultural context of that interaction must be accounted for. The child engages in social interactions, learning from others more competent in culturally-appropriate skills

(Tudge & Winterhoff, 1993). Instruction is seen as useful only when it moves a child to a new level of development. According to Vygotsky, learning enhances a variety of developmental processes that are only able to mature when the child is interacting with people in his or her environment and in collaboration with peers (Tudge & Winterhoff, 1993). According to Espinosa (2006), the use of this theory explains how individual development is shaped by social interaction and that knowledge (learning) is then created by the interactions between teachers and students. When Hispanic children enter school, they encounter a classroom environment which is remarkably different from their home environment. From a sociocultural perspective, for children who are not native English speakers, this difference may create a linguistic and cultural disconnect placing them at risk for an interruption in cognitive development and poor academic achievement (Espinosa, 2006).

A culturally-responsive approach to children's education can be informed by previous research on the values of Hispanic families. Hispanic culture has been found to emphasize family cohesiveness, respect, and moral development, while focusing maternal teaching strategies on social skills as a prerequisite for school readiness (Espinosa, 2006). Likewise, the values of *convivir*; interacting with, sharing, or helping others, *bien educado*; having good manners, and *respeto*; having respect for adults and others were found to be influential in helping children to become good citizens and ease their integration into the community with acceptance (Delgado & Ford, 1998). Additional research is needed to more clearly understand the values of education and development of Hispanic families.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Hispanic families have often been viewed from a deficit model approach. Past studies have relied on comparative analyses between Anglo-American mothers and their Mexican-American counterparts. By recognizing the interactive styles of white, middle-class mothers as the norm for optimal child development, Hispanic mothers in general have been labeled as deficient and incapable of providing children with an environment suitable to promote successful adjustment to the larger community in general, and to school in particular (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994). It is important to note that this between-group comparison strategy is limited by not accounting for the cultural meanings associated with interaction styles and parental values. This results in an unclear picture of what Hispanic mothers value, how they parent, and what they believe in, specifically about children's development, learning, and how best to teach them.

### Deficit model

Normative parenting practices and beliefs have been primarily based on Caucasian families, ignoring the role of culture in parenting. In comparative analyses with Anglo-American mothers, Hispanic mothers have been labeled as controlling, relying on the use of physical interventions and therefore associated with the authoritarian parenting style (Calzada & Eyberg, 2002). According to Calzada et al. (2002), the Hispanic values of familism (which dictates individual reciprocity between family members), respeto (or respectfulness), conformity to parental and extended family authority, and simpatia (referring to an individual's desire to conform and strive for harmony within interpersonal relationships) have been used to characterize the culture's uniqueness. The significance of these traditional, cultural values and their impact on

parenting has often been ignored. Although the focus of the present study is to examine the views held by mothers of Mexican descent, it is important to note the traditional, cultural values held by Hispanic mothers in general. An understanding of how these values have shaped the parenting practices and maternal teaching strategies of Hispanic mothers, may shed more insight into why these particular mothers parent as they do and more importantly how educators may ultimately gain more parental support and bridge the gap between home values and values associated with the American public school system.

In a study by Calzada et al. (2002), normative data on the parenting practices, dimensions, and patterns of both Dominican and Puerto Rican mothers were collected as a means to explore the differences in maternal behaviors among two Hispanic subgroups. The study included 130 mothers, 70 of whom were Puerto Rican and 60 were Dominican. An additional 34 mothers were included in the factor analyses of the parenting practices measure. All of the participants were recruited through advertisements in the metropolitan areas of Florida, New York, and Chicago. The Parenting Styles and Dimensions measure (PSD; Robinson, Hart, Mandleco, & Frost Olsen, 1996) corresponds to Baumrind's authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive parenting style constructs and was used to measure maternal parenting style, although it has not been standardized for use with Hispanic families. The PSD is a 52-item parent-report measure of parenting practices. Parents respond to items on 11 subscales measuring the parenting dimensions of: Warmth and Involvement; Reasoning/Induction; Democratic Participation; Good Natured/Easy Going; Verbal Hostility; Corporal Punishment; Nonreasoning/Punitive Strategies; Directiveness; Lack of Follow-Through; Ignoring Misbehavior; and Lacks

Self-Confidence on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). The Parent Practices Questionnaire (PPQ; Strayhorn & Weidman, 1988), a 34-item parent report measure of parenting behaviors was used to measure parenting behaviors associated with child behavior problems. Parents responded to questions by choosing a response from a set of five to seven choices reflecting the frequency with which the parent engages in a behavior (never to always) or the specific behavior the parent would choose in a parenting situation (i.e., the discipline tactic used). For this study, an exploratory factor analysis was used with the PPQ to identify two factors: Named Negative Interactive (which included five-items related to the use of yelling, physical punishment, and disapproval) and Named Positive Interaction (which also included five-items measuring the use of praise, child-focused play, and positive verbal descriptions). Scores on the Negative Interaction dimension ranged from 0 to 30, with lower scores representing more frequent interactions. The Positive Interaction scores had a range of 0 to 30, with higher scores representing more frequent positive mother-child interactions. The Marin Acculturation Scale (MAS; Marin, Sabogal, VanOss Marin, Otero-Sabogal, & Perez-Stable, 1987), developed with a sample of Hispanics, is a 12-point self-report measure used to provide a maternal acculturation score. All participants were given these measures in a packet to be completed independently at home or in the presence of the researcher. Maternal responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale and possible scores ranged from 12 to 60, with higher scores representing higher acculturation. Items on the scale are related to Language Use, Media, and Ethnic Social Relations.

The study resulted in findings contrary to past research that has described Hispanic families as relying on physical discipline for behavioral management and as less

likely to praise their children. Overall, the Hispanic mothers in this study reported engaging in high levels of positive parenting practices associated with the authoritative parenting pattern, while avoiding punitive, harsh, and inconsistent parenting practices associated with the authoritarian parenting pattern. The divergence of these conclusions from former studies helped shape the formulation of ideas related to the current study.

Although most research on parenting styles and practices has focused on the dominant Anglo, middle-class culture, the values which guide parenting practices within the larger society have been found to differ when studied within the contexts of culture and socioeconomic level (Cardona, Nicholson, & Fox, 2000). Proponents of the cultural deficit theory believe that persistent poverty creates cognitive deprivation, ignorance, and low aspirations (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994). The beliefs and values that influence patterns of childrearing within the same society differ from one culture to another and from one socioeconomic level to another (Cardona et al., 2000). According to Cardona et al. (2000), research on the socialization and family processes within the Hispanic family has resulted in inconsistent findings. Hispanic families have been described as warm, nurturing, egalitarian, and family oriented by some researchers and punitive and authoritarian by others.

In a study conducted by Cardona et al. (2000), married Hispanic and Anglo mothers with either a lower or higher SES were recruited for the purpose of comparing the parenting practices of mothers from these cultural groups. Acculturation was controlled for and only those mothers who had assimilated into the dominant culture were accepted for the study. Potential participants were recruited from day care centers, family resource centers, and schools, churches, and community agencies. The participants

included 38 Hispanic and 38 Anglo-American mothers of children between the ages of 3-5 years old. Both ethnic groups included a sample of 19 mothers from higher SES families and 19 from lower SES families.

The Parenting Behavior Checklist (PBC; Fox, 1994), which measures parenting expectations and practices, was administered to the participants either individually or in a group setting. Three subscales were formed from factor analysis: expectations, nurturing, and discipline. The Hispanic mothers scored higher on the discipline subscale than did the Anglo-American mothers, while Anglo-American mothers scored higher on the nurturing scale. The higher SES mothers reported more frequent use of discipline than did lower SES mothers and as a group, the Hispanic mothers reported more use of corporal punishment and religious values as a form of discipline.

The results indicate that for this sample of Hispanic women, their parenting characteristics may not be consistent with an authoritarian parenting style. Although their discipline scores were higher than those of Anglo-American mothers, they were not excessively different. The low scores on the nurturing subscale may be relative to the types of nurturing activities measured by the PBC. Past researchers (e.g., Kagen & Ender, 1975; Vazquez-Rodriguez, 1979) have found that Hispanic mothers give their children fewer material rewards and more affective rewards, which are not measured by the PBC. An important limitation to the study was that the data were gathered from maternal self-reports. Future studies could benefit from direct observational measures of mother-child interactions.

Also it is important to note the positive qualities of authoritative parenting in Mexican families and the possible motivators for parenting from an authoritarian

perspective. For Mexican families living in the United States, authoritarian parenting emphasizes respect for authority and has been proposed to be consistent with Mexican culture, while serving an adaptive function (Varela, Sanchez-Sosa, Riveros, Vernberg, Mitchell, & Mashunkashey, 2004). Due to a cultural value of respect for authority, it may be expected that Mexican parents would be more likely than Anglo-American parents to utilize a more authoritarian parenting style.

For a study conducted by Varela et al. (2004), participants were recruited with the purpose of understanding the effects of Mexican culture on parenting style. Participants included 150 children between the ages of 10 and 14, and their Mexican American, Mexican immigrant, and Caucasian-non-Hispanic parents. The Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ; Buri, 1991) is based on Baumrind's parenting prototypes and is composed of a 30-item questionnaire that measures the authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive parenting styles. The PAQ was translated from English to Spanish through a committee approach and differences in translation were minimal and reconciled through consensus. The Cultural Lifestyles Inventory (CLI; Mendoza, 1989) measures self-reported assimilation to the Caucasian-non-Hispanic culture by children and the parents of Mexican descent. The CLI consists of 29 items which assess three dimensions of acculturation: cultural resistance, cultural shift, and cultural incorporation. The CLI scoring system yields one overall assimilation score and represents the extent to which Mexican descent parents and their children seek out and participate in the majority culture, while also retracting from their own culture. Values of 1 to 5 were assigned to the multiple-choice items, with lower scores indicating lower assimilation. The scores were summed across items and then divided by the number of items to attain the average score.

The findings indicate that among all groups of parents, more authoritative parenting strategies were utilized. Mexican-descent parents reportedly utilized a parenting orientation which combines controlling, harsh parenting strategies with a more reason-oriented and accepting style. The study's findings suggest the possibility that ethnic minority status, rather than affiliation to Mexican culture contribute to greater use of an authoritarian parenting style in Mexican-descent families living in the U.S. Further examinations are needed to identify the adaptive functions and potential negative aspects of stricter parenting methods as a result of ecological challenges faced by these families.

#### Cultural context of parenting

Parental perceptions concerning child development are influenced by complex interactions among cultural, social, and economic factors. An understanding of how parents from culturally diverse backgrounds view the development of their children may further explain why these parents value the development of specific skills in their children (Delgado & Ford, 1998). According to Delgado & Ford (1998), it is important for researchers to study children within the socio-cultural context in which they are raised because development cannot be separated from the unique cultural heritage of children.

Generational status, as an influence in childrearing practices, has been defined by Buriel (1993). In relation to those of Mexican descent, first-generation parents are those who were born in Mexico and later migrated to the United States. Their family income is typically low, resulting from parents' low education levels and limited knowledge of the English language. First-generation children are raised in homes where Spanish is the dominant language spoken, with exposure to English stemming from participation in the American public school system. The second-generation represents the U.S.-born children

of immigrant parents and although Spanish continues to serve as their native language, English becomes the dominant language with the onset of school. The third-generation and those thereafter refer to those individuals of Mexican descent with U.S.-born parents (and grandparents). These families are unique in that they do not have any direct parental links to Mexico via immigration, English has been the primary language in both the home and at school, and all family educational experiences have taken place in the United States.

In a study by Buriel (1993), parents of first-and second-generation children differed from parents of third-generation children in terms of social and cultural variables like language, education, and income. The participants included 317 Mexican American parents of 186 seventh grade students from three Los Angeles communities who had been selected from an initial pool of 500 Mexican American students. Parents were contacted by letter, written in both English and Spanish, for their interest to participate and were later interviewed by telephone. Efforts were made to interview both parents during the same telephone call. The childrearing dimensions examined in the study were identified by LeVine and Bartz (1979) in their study of low-income Mexican American, African American, and Euro-American parents. Levine et al. (1979) identified seven childrearing dimensions representing a combination of items from the Parent Attitude Research Instrument (Schaefer & Bell, 1958) and the Cornell Parent Behavior Description questionnaire (Devereaux, Bronfenbrenner, & Rodgers, 1969) These childrearing dimensions included: parental press for child's autonomy, parental press for child's productive use of time, parental press for equality between parent and child, parental strictness toward child, parental permissiveness with child, parental support of child, and

parental control of child. These childrearing dimensions were then measured in a 25-item questionnaire. The support and control items were measured using a five-point Likert format (never to very often) and the remaining five dimensions were measured using a four-point Likert format (strongly agree to strongly disagree). Parents were asked to answer items as they related to their parent-adolescent relationship. Parents' education and annual family income were used as measures of socioeconomic status. Parent-adolescent Spanish/English language usage and length of parents' U.S. residence were used as cultural variables.

According to the results, mothers of third-generation students differed significantly from mothers of first- and second-generation students, who did not differ from each other. The mothers of third-generation students were viewed as more supportive and controlling, while the mothers of first- and second-generation students valued early autonomy and more productive use of time, while also being stricter with their children. The immigration experience distinguished mothers of first- and second-generation students from those of third-generation students. Immigration removes families from the security of their native communities and places them into a new environment which lacks extended kinship networks. Immigrant parents scored higher on socialization practices characterized by the factor of Responsibility. This factor was defined as having an expectation for early self-reliance and for adherence to family rules within an open parent-adolescent relationship. The U.S. born mothers, however, scored higher on the socialization practices which were characterized by the factor of Concern. This factor was defined as having emotional support and an expectation of proper behavior at home and school. These mothers were more acculturated because of growing

up in the United States, reducing some level of responsibility that they must place on their children for the family's survival. The higher level of acculturation, therefore, reduces the expression of a responsibility style of socialization found in immigrant families and emphasizes a more concern style of socialization, further reflecting a shift towards the childrearing norms of mainstream American society.

Guitierrez, Sameroff, & Karrer (1988) also examined the factors influencing parental reasoning concerning development among Mexican American and Anglo American mothers. Social class and acculturation variability in parents of Mexican heritage also was examined. Sixty-nine Mexican-American mothers who had been divided into three acculturation groups and a group of 20 Anglo-American mothers were recruited from preschools and day-cares in Chicago to participate in the study. Socioeconomic status was established using a modification of the Hollingshead two-factor index of social position (ISP). The Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americans (ARSMA; Cuellar, Harris, & Jasso, 1980) was used to measure acculturation, including language familiarity, usage, and reference; ethnic identity and generation; reading, writing, and cultural exposure; and ethnic interaction. This 20-item scale was used to distinguish those who were very "Mexicanized" to those who were very "Anglicized" by scoring each item on a 5-point Likert scale and then averaging across items into the two acculturation groups. Based on the ARSMA scores mothers were categorized into three non-overlapping groups: least acculturated mothers, moderately acculturated mothers, and highly acculturated mothers. The Concepts of Development Vignettes (CODV; Sameroff & Feil, 1985) were used to assess the mothers' ability to produce complex developmental explanations. The CODV consists of six vignettes

depicting developmental problems common to all cultures. The vignettes were explained to the mothers and mothers responses were scored into six levels of complexity, which included: transition to categorical, categorical, transition to compensating, compensating, transition to perspectivistic, and perspectivistic.

The results of the study indicated that diversity exists between Mexican-American mothers' concepts of development. Acculturation was found to be significantly related to the manner in which mothers explained the developmental process. This was evidenced by the finding of more acculturated mothers using more complex compensating or perspectivist concepts of development than those less acculturated. The acculturation variable was also found to be more significant among mothers from higher SES backgrounds. This group gave higher responses on the CODV than those from lower SES backgrounds. The results raised the question of what affects a mother's ability to think at more complex levels and the significance of the acculturation process on a mother's parental reasoning concerning development.

The acculturation of families is important because it exists within the context of immigration and is influential in synthesizing cultural beliefs, including parenting values and practices (Guitierrez, Sameroff, & Karrer, 1988). According to Guitierrez et al. (1988), the experience of adapting to a new culture may influence Mexican American mothers' parental schemas. Immigrant mothers have already experienced a stressful event, which includes seeking survival in terms of finding employment and adequate housing. Once separated from their place of origin, these mothers go through a process of trying to assimilate into the dominant culture, while maintaining their own cultural values and traditions. As Guitierrez et al. (1988) point out, those mothers able to accept values

of the dominant culture, while at the same time retaining values and traditions of their own culture, are more likely to be optimistic about their children's development.

#### Maternal teaching within the context of culture

Significant differences related to parental views of how children learn have been found to be associated with the parental role of teacher. The differences between cultural views associated with this particular role exist in defining what is taught and how it is taught (Klein & Chen, 2001). Maternal cognitions, with maternal knowledge as one dimension, have been shown to play an integral role in parenting and child development. Maternal knowledge has been studied in the past in relation to knowledge of the timing of developmental milestones, mothers' conceptualizations concerning how to parent, and strategies to utilize during parent-child interactions (Huang et al., 2005). According to research in this area, mothers who are knowledgeable about child development are more likely to establish an environment which is suited to meet the needs of their children's development, while also establishing more sensitive mother-child interactions. On the other hand, mothers with limited knowledge exhibit unrealistic expectations of their children and are more likely to utilize ineffective parenting strategies, such as harsh and inconsistent discipline, thus promoting less optimal child development (Huang et al., 2005).

In a study by Huang et al. (2005), the parenting behaviors characterized by the quality of the home environment, quality of the parent-toddler interaction in a teaching context, and the quality of the interaction within a free-play context were investigated in order to determine whether the association between maternal knowledge and parenting varied by race. The relationship of parental knowledge at 2-4 months and parenting

behaviors at 16-18 months was also assessed. Three hundred seventy-eight families, who originally participated in the Healthy Steps for Young Children Embedded Observational Study, were selected to participate in the study. The sample of mothers was interviewed by telephone when their children were 2-4 months of age and later observed when their children were 16-18 and 34-37 months of age in a teaching and free-play task.

The Knowledge of Infant Development Inventory (KIDI; MacPhee, 1981) was used to measure maternal knowledge of child development. Thirty of the original 75 items of the KIDI were used to describe a typical infant's behavior at a given point in time, including motor, perceptual, and cognitive milestones, as well as parenting responses of crying, feeding, and diapering. For a subset of 17 items relating to norms and milestones, if mothers disagreed with the statements they were subsequently asked if these statements were true for a younger or older child. An underestimate score and an overestimate score were computed for these specific items. Underestimate from the measure referred to mothers' incorrect estimation that the child is too young to be capable to perform a given task. Overestimate refers to the mothers' incorrect estimate of the child's capability to perform a task that is actually too difficult for the child at that given age. Three proportion scores were then computed including the percentage of correct answers, the percentage of items which underestimated development, and the percentage of items which overestimated development.

Additionally, three parenting behaviors were measured. The Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment Inventory, Infant/Toddler Version (HOME; Bradley & Caldwell, 1984) was used to assess the home environment provided by the parents. Specifically, it measures the quantity and quality of social, emotional, and cognitive

support provided to the child in the home environment, including parental interaction with the child and available materials and stimulation. The Parent/Caregiver Involvement Scale (P/CIS; Farran et al., 1987) is a behavioral rating scale of caregiver interaction with young children ages 3 to 36 months and was used to assess the quality of the mother's involvement with her child during a video-taped free play session. The P/CIS is comprised of 11 parenting aspects related to the construct of maternal sensitivity, each rated on a five-point scale of Amount, Quality, and Appropriateness in the mother-child interaction. For this particular study, only the quality and appropriateness scores were used due to their relation to maternal sensitivity. The teaching scale of the Nursing Child Assessment by Satellite Training (NCAST; Barnard, 1978; Sumner & Spietz, 1994) consists of 73-items organized into six subscales. The subscales of the NCAST measured maternal and child behavior, but only the maternal scales (50-items) were used and then combined into one maternal behavioral scale. Higher scores indicated a more optimal mother-child relationship and more sensitivity in parenting.

The results of the study indicated that maternal race and ethnicity were influential in explaining the association between parental knowledge and parenting behavior. For Hispanic mothers, knowledge of child development was related to all four measures of parenting behaviors. Higher accurate level of child development knowledge was associated with a higher score on the HOME scale measure of parental interaction, materials and stimulation provided, organization of the home and child acceptance, the P/CIS measure of quality of involvement, and the P/CIS measure of appropriateness in the parent-child interaction. Higher accuracy of child development knowledge was associated with lower scores on the NCAST for Hispanic mothers. Greater

underestimation of child development was associated with higher scores on the HOME scale and higher quality of mother-child interaction as measured by the P/CIS Appropriateness. The results indicate that Hispanic mothers with more accurate knowledge of child development were more likely to spend more time teaching their children the suggested task and less likely to exhibit praise during the task when the child was frustrated. These mothers also were less likely to allow for child exploration before giving instructions and less likely to signal that the child had completed the task when the teaching was complete.

#### Desirable traits vs. developmental milestones

Parents' childrearing values include desirable characteristics they wish to instill in their children (Rodriguez & Olswang, 2003). In the Mexican culture, cohesion, warmth, and close sibling ties are encouraged and even perceived as important in order for children to integrate into the community (Delgado & Ford, 1998). Studies have consistently portrayed Hispanic parents as having a strong respect for proper demeanor. The values of *convivir* (interacting with, sharing, or helping others), *bien educado* (having good manners), and *respeto* (having respect for adults) were viewed as playing an integral role in children's acceptance into the larger community and ultimately, their ability to become good citizens (Delgado et al., 1998). These values have been shown to be the driving force from which Hispanic mothers have instructed their children. Mexican mothers were found to view developmental milestones like learning to walk and talk as behaviors that occur naturally over time and that their teaching is less influential in this developmental process (Delgado & Ford, 1998). Arcia et al. (1998) reported that mothers highly valued having a sense of right and wrong, being a good student, obedience,

responsibility, and respect. On the other hand, they did not desire for their children to develop the following traits: competition, independence, leaving the family, and curiosity. Mexican mothers were found to place higher value on conformity as opposed to self-direction (Rodriguez & Olswang, 2003; Delgado & Ford, 1998).

In a study by Arcia et al. (1998), maternal understanding regarding the nature of child development and how children develop specific values was examined. Potential participants were recruited from announcements at a health clinic. The sample of participants included 15 mothers with at least one child under the age of eight years old. With the exception of one mother, all mothers were born in Mexico and had an average length of U.S. residence of 6 years. A Q-sort task of parental values was used along with open-ended questions to describe maternal schemas of child development. The items were chosen to elicit maternal values which transcend specific situations, represent abstract goals, and reflect a coherent set of attitudes (Holden & Edwards, 1989). The Q-sort consisted of a set of 15 cards, each having a characteristic that could be ascribed to a child. Mothers were asked to sort the cards into three groups of five cards corresponding to the value of the characteristic (very important, somewhat important, and not important). Mothers were then asked to set aside the two most important cards from the very important group and the two least important from the not important group. Mothers were then asked to provide examples of these characteristics. Finally, mothers were asked if they saw characteristics in American children that they did not wish to see in their own children. The goal of the open-ended questioning was to provide reasoning for why characteristics were given their ascribed values and to have mothers explain why children differed in the degree to which they possessed the desired characteristics. The five

highest ranked items in the Q-sort were identified as: to have a sense of right and wrong, to be a good student, to be obedient, to be responsible, and to be respectful. The least desirable characteristics included: wanting to be the best, being independent, being close to the family, and wanting to know how or why things happen. The notions of being independent, responsible, and respectful were often equated with one another. Wanting to be the first or the best was not positively viewed and was seen as doing a poor job because of rushing, being pampered, or being badly behaved. It was also believed that being the first had the meaning of one trying to take more than their equal share and to ensure that others do not receive the recognition they deserve.

Overall, mothers agreed that they desired for their children to be obedient. Along these lines, children should be compliant, well-behaved, respectful, and quick to understand parental values. It was not desired for children to acquire a selfishness associated with wanting more than others, putting themselves ahead of others, or being assertive. It was believed that in order for their children to acquire desirable childhood characteristics, they must teach them through direct verbal instruction. The mothers believed that children learn by repeatedly being told what to do and how to do things. It was acceptable for mothers to scold, reprimand, and rebuke for the sake of educating their young children. Modeling was not recognized as a means for teaching children. The interviews suggested that mothers felt it was their job to mold their children with desirable traits. The child was perceived as an inactive learner dependent on parental instruction. Understanding was viewed as central to child behavior and was used in reference to both the cognitive process of comprehension and compliance. It was assumed that children were able to understand if they were obedient. The findings

suggest that although the identified parenting behaviors may not be optimal for children's academic achievement, they are consistent with the parents' understating of their children's needs and with their own perceived responsibility towards their children.

In a study conducted by Delgado & Ford (1998), parental perceptions of child development were examined. Researchers have noted that in order to understand parental beliefs about child development, one must consider the cultural socioeconomic conditions that either enhance or constrain those belief systems. The purposeful sampling procedures ensured that the small sample size of 8 was representative of the low-income Mexican-American families residing within the Southwestern Texas community. Ethnographic data were collected primarily through in-depth interviews with the participants. The interviews were guided by open-ended questions, created to capture the participants' own meanings and constructs. The initial questions were based on a review of the literature regarding child development among culturally-diverse populations. Interviews were conducted mainly with mothers, although three fathers were actively involved in the interview process. All participants were interviewed three times over a six-month period to gain a better understanding of their perceptions regarding child development. Data also were collected regarding the factors which influenced child development. Other sources of data included observations of the participants in their home and other community settings, as well as a detailed description of the participants and their environments. A journal or diary of experiences and personal reflections was kept by both investigators to assist in understanding the context of the findings.

The results of the study indicated that all parents expressed a strong sense of respect and obedience to adults. Parents also believed that their children will develop into

a *bien educado* person, or well-educated person. The parents believed that it was their role to teach their children right from wrong, to value religion, and to help them become good citizens. Overall, a strong sense of familism, respect for others, and to be well-educated were among the most important parental values. Parents were in agreement that developmental changes were important for their children to attain these changes indicated a sense of normalcy in children. Parents believed that children would attain these stages naturally and that the most influential factors to these changes were the parents themselves, nutrition, and the environment. *Convivir* and *bien educado* were values that parents believed children should acquire. The first value relates to learning how to share and help through the parent-child relationship. This was seen as essential in the development of additional relationships with children and adults. The latter value of *bien educado* was described by parents as having a child who has good manners and is respectful to others. Respect was equated with a strong sense of obedience towards adults.

As an influential force in their children's social development, Hispanic mothers depicted themselves as being responsible for providing their children with experiences which foster development. According to Arcia & Johnson (1998), Mexican mothers adhered to a cultural model of child development in their parenting that is strikingly different than that which is typically accepted in western cultures. Mexican mothers were found to characterize their children as "inactive learners" whose understanding of social behaviors develops slowly through parental direction and instruction. A structured teaching style, illustrated by the use of more directives, visual cues, and modeling was also characteristic of the method employed by Hispanic mothers. Mothers believed that

children learn best by repeatedly being told what and how to do things and that physical punishment, like spanking, was an acceptable form of discipline in order to instill those “desirable traits” of obedience, respect, and a sense of familism into their young children. In Hispanic cultures, the development of skills which enable the individual to be accepted by the group (or dominant community) is recognized as essential (Delgado & Ford, 1998).

#### Learning: the home-school connection

The traditional educational system exists as a monocultural system. Therefore, it is likely that values of Hispanic families may clash with those of the traditional system. In relation to families of different cultures, parenting practices have been found to impact academic achievement. The values of respeto (obedience towards parents or elders), familismo (tendency to place great importance on family attachments, loyalty, and reciprocity, and to devalue relationships outside the family), and allocentrism (tendency for people to define themselves through their relationships, emphasizing social relationships and highlighting group goals as opposed to individual ones) have been identified as Hispanic cultural values, which not only affect parenting but more importantly, academic performance and adjustment (La Roche & Shriberg, 2004).

With an unquestionable value on respeto (respect for authority), Delgado-Gaitan (1994) found that immigrant, Mexican families expected their children to be good listeners and to raise questions was considered rebellious. Respect was often demonstrated in the politeness that characterized children’s interactions with adults. Children were expected to listen to adults and to respond, out of respect, only when asked to. When children complied with parents, then their role within the family system was

understood. Respeto may be highly valued from a familial sense, but further investigations should focus on the value that the American school system places on respect and whether it is believed to be influential in academic achievement.

According to La Roche & Shriberg (2004), cultural differences between the home and school environment are often misunderstood and misconstrued by educators as learning or behavioral problems. This “deficiency model” does not recognize the strengths and abilities of non-white students and fails to capitalize on the knowledge and cultural resources that Hispanic students contribute to the school experience (Espinosa, 2006).

The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate the values that Mexican mothers have concerning their children’s development and the role that culture plays in parental teaching practices. The significance of maternal values of *convivir*, *bien educado*, and *respeto* also will be explored as the driving force from which mothers have instructed their children. Furthermore, this dissertation will explore whether or not there are discrepancies between maternal home values and maternal school values in relation to children’s academic achievement. Four hypotheses will be examined in the current study.

#### Hypotheses

1. It is hypothesized that Mexican mothers will value developmental skills associated with their children’s socialization within the larger group and above all, a sense of respect for adults and others.

2. It is hypothesized that there will be an association between Mexican mothers’ beliefs and practices.

3. It is hypothesized that both mother's parenting practices and maternal teaching will contribute to maternal values.

4. It is hypothesized that discrepancies will be found between maternal home values and maternal school values as related to children's academic achievement.

## **METHODS**

No prior instrument focusing on maternal parenting and teaching values for Mexican mothers was available for this particular study. The study's questions emerged from previous interviews with Mexican mothers and information available through the literature review. These were compiled into a 54 question 4 point-Likert scale (strongly agree to strongly disagree) questionnaire (see Appendix A). Use of this instrument and proposed methodology was approved by the Institutional Research Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at Texas Tech University in the Spring of 2009.

### **Participants**

Participants in the current study were recruited from an elementary school located in South Texas. Letters describing the study were sent home with all students in Kindergarten through third grade at the selected campus. Potential participants were asked to return a signed consent form to participate in the study if they met the following criteria: a) participants must be a mother of Mexican descent, b) must have at least one natural-born child between the ages of 5-8 years old, c) must have at least one natural-born child registered as a student in Kindergarten through third-grade at the selected campus, d) and must be willing to complete and return the study's questionnaire concerning maternal parenting and teaching values. The letter describing the study and the questionnaire were both written in English. No participants requested a Spanish version of the documents, which would have been provided upon request. Although the age of mothers or marital status was not initially factored into the recruiting process, this information was recorded on the questionnaire and utilized later as the data were

analyzed. If mothers had children in more than one of the selected study's grades, they were only allowed to participate once.

The pool for potential participants was anticipated to be high because respondents were drawn from the selected campuses' 12 classes in Kindergarten through third grade. Each class averaged 20 students and more than 90% of those students were from mothers of Mexican descent. At least 200 mothers qualified for the study. Of this population, 79 Mexican mothers participated in the study. Participating mothers were directed, according to the information letter, to return the questionnaire by a specified due date. Mothers were then qualified to be placed into a drawing for a gift card. One participating mother from each grade level was selected in the drawing as a form of appreciation for participation in the study.

#### Procedures

The study's questionnaires were distributed to mothers in waves in an effort to help monitor data collection. The first wave of questionnaires was sent home with Kindergarten students. A letter explaining the study and a consent form to participate was handed to mothers in an envelope with a questionnaire with a pre-assigned ID number. The researcher personally collected all consent forms and questionnaires in the school's main office. A time-frame of 2 weeks was allotted for the return of these questionnaires before the second wave, which included those handed to mothers of students in first grade. Mothers were advised to physically return the questionnaire, by the specified date, to the school's main office. The researcher was present before and after school to receive the questionnaires and hand the mothers a ticket which was used in a drawing. The same procedure and time-frame was applied to all grade levels until all questionnaires were

handed to participating mothers. This time-frame allowed the researcher to check over questionnaires and then enter results into established data files. All questionnaires were completed anonymously and stored in a locked cabinet to maintain confidentiality. Only the PI and the graduate researcher had access to the data files.

### Measures

The questionnaire used to gather information regarding maternal values associated with parenting and teaching was completed by each mother.

### Pilot Study

Pilot testing was performed with 4 mothers who were acquainted with the researcher and willing to complete the assessment and provide feedback to help clarify any language that was ambiguous. Items for this questionnaire were based on a review of the literature associated with the parenting and teaching practices of Hispanic mothers and confirmed through the comments of mothers participating in the pilot testing. Use of this instrument was approved by the Institutional Research Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at Texas Tech University. These mothers completed the questionnaire, drafted by the researcher, and then met with the researcher to evaluate each question. Based on the feedback provided from all four participants, the questionnaire was revised in an effort to insure that all questions were easy to understand and that each one addressed the goals of the study. Participants in the pilot study agreed that the questionnaire was useful in evaluating the parenting and teaching practices of Hispanic mothers.

## Demographics

The questionnaire included demographic information (i.e., maternal place of birth, occupation, native language, education, marital status, family income, and child academic achievement). The demographic variables were evaluated in the following manner:

- a) Maternal place of birth: measured as a nominal variable (1 = United States, 2 = Mexico, 3 = Other).
- b) Education: measured as an ordinal variable (1 = high school graduate, 2 = GED, 3 = associate's degree, 4 = bachelor's degree, 5 = master's degree, 6 = Ph. D.).
- c) Marital status: measured as a nominal variable (1 = single, 2 = married, 3 = separated, 4 = divorced, 5 = widowed).
- d) Family income: measured as an interval variable (1 = less than \$20,000 per year, 2 = \$20,000-\$29,999, 3 = \$30,000-\$39,999, 4 = \$40,000-\$49,999, 5 = \$50,000-\$59,999, 6 = \$60,000-\$69,999, 7 = \$70,000 or more).

Although data were collected on maternal native language and occupation, it was determined that ethnicity was a better indicator of maternal values so use of these variables was not used in the final analyses. Child academic achievement, as measured by GPA, fell into a predictable pattern based on current philosophies of assessment which allows students to test, re-teach, and then re-test. This current practice makes it rare for students to receive anything less than an average of 80%. Student overall grade was measured in all major academic subjects, including: reading, math, science, social studies, and language arts with grades ranging from A to F at the beginning of the school

year. The academic subjects were coded on a 5-point scale (4 = A, 3= B, 2= C, 1 = D, and 0 = F).

In addition to the family demographic information, the questionnaire included 54 questions, divided into 6 subscales with responses on a 4-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree:

- a) Child attitude: this subscale measured responses on items related to child attitude toward learning. An example used to measure this subscale included: “My child speaks positively about his/her classroom peers.”
- b) Child learning: this subscale measured responses on items related to child learning. An example used to measure this subscale included: “The teacher provides options as in stations, centers, or independent work for students to choose from once they complete their work.”
- c) Teaching: this subscale measured responses on items related to maternal teaching. An example used to measure this subscale included: “I set aside time each night to help my child with his/her homework.”
- d) Parenting: this subscale measured responses on items related to maternal parenting values. An example used to measure this subscale included: “It is important that my child respects adults, which includes me and his/her teachers”.
- e) Values about child development: this subscale measured responses on items related to maternal values about child development. An example used to measure this subscale included: “I believe that if my child listens, then my child will be able to learn.”

Responses to items within each category were averaged to form composite scores of *child attitude* ( $\alpha = .17$ ), *child learning* ( $\alpha = .68$ ), *maternal teaching* ( $\alpha = .64$ ), *maternal parenting* ( $\alpha = .55$ ), and *maternal values regarding child development* ( $\alpha = .83$ ). Due to the fact that some of the reliability coefficients yielded poor or unacceptable ratings, the reliability of the measures are concerning. In a future study, the reliability could be increased by any one or a combination of the following : using a different method than the Likert scale to gain the score, clarifying the instructions in the survey and to the participants, increasing the motivation of participants to complete the survey, increasing the number of items in the survey, eliminating unclear items, increasing the number of times the survey is given, and/or increasing the number of participants in the sample size (Salkind, 1991).

## RESULTS

Seventy-nine mothers completed the questionnaire. Mothers ranged in age from 18-25 years to over 40 years, with the majority of mothers aged 31-35 years. Forty-four mothers were high school graduates, 14 had a GED, 10 had a bachelor's degree, and 1 had a Ph. D. Family income in this sample ranged from less than \$20,000 a year to over \$70,000. Twenty four families earned less than \$20,000. Fifty-two of the mothers were born in the United States, 25 were born in Mexico, and two were born elsewhere. The majority of mothers (47) were native Spanish language speakers and 32 were native English language speakers. Descriptive statistics were computed on each composite variables: *child attitude*, *child learning*, *maternal parenting*, *maternal teaching*, and *maternal values regarding child development* (see table 1).

Hypothesis 1: Mexican mothers will value developmental skills associated with their children's socialization and a sense of respect for adults no more than the value they place on parental involvement. A t-Test was performed between *maternal parenting* and *maternal values*. A significant difference was found between the *maternal parenting* and *maternal values* ( $t(78) = 39.47, p < .00$ ). Mothers rated maternal values about child development ( $M = 1.74$ ) higher than maternal parenting ( $M = 1.6$ ). Therefore, mothers in this sample placed more emphasis on their values towards child development than their parenting skills (see Table 1).

Table 1

*Means and Standard Deviations of Composite Variables*

Composite Variable	M	SD	Items
Child Attitude	2.14	.34	3
Child Learning	1.92	.38	6
Maternal Teaching	1.78	.43	8
Maternal Parenting *	1.61	.36	11
Maternal Values *	1.74	.34	17

\* Variables used in Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 2: Maternal parenting and maternal teaching practices will be associated with maternal values about child development. Bivariate correlations were computed to test this hypothesis (see Table 2). As shown in the table, maternal parenting is positively associated with maternal values ( $r = .41, p < .01$ ). Maternal teaching is not significantly associated with maternal values in the current sample ( $r = .15, n.s.$ ). The findings suggest that maternal values about child development are associated with parenting practices.

Table 2

*Correlations for Composite Variables*

Composite Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
Child Attitude	1.00	.20	.03	.12	-.17	.26**
Child Learning	.14	1.00	.15	.41**	.17	.42**
Parent Involvement	.03	.15	1.00	.11	-.11	.20
Maternal Parenting	.12	.41**	.11	1.00	.41**	.38**
Maternal Values	-.17	.17	-.11	.41**	1.00	.15
Maternal Teaching	.26*	.42**	.20	.38**	.15	1.00

\* $p < .05$

\*\* $p < .01$

Hypothesis 3: Maternal parenting practices and maternal teaching practices will both contribute to maternal values about child development. A regression was used to test this hypothesis. The dependent variable was maternal values and the independent variables of maternal parenting and maternal teaching were used (see Table 3). Both maternal parenting and maternal teaching were found to contribute to the values held by Mexican mothers. Combined, parenting and teaching accounted for 2% of the variance in maternal values about child development.

Table 3

Regression Analyses Predicting Maternal Values about Child Development from Maternal Parenting and Maternal Teaching

Predictor	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$
Maternal parenting	.02	0.30*
Maternal teaching		.11*

\* $p < .05$

Hypothesis 4: Discrepancies will be found between maternal home values and maternal school values as related to academic achievement. It is hypothesized that the maternal home and maternal school values held by mothers are differentiated from a child's level of school achievement, as measured by a child's overall grade point average on the report card (GPA). GPA was reported by mothers. Mothers selected a grade of A, B, C, D, or F on the following subjects: reading, math, science, social studies, and language arts. Due to the fact that mothers only reported A and B, the range of grade point values reported was 1.0. There was no reported value below 3.0 and no value above 4.0. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to show that there are group differences

between home and school values (with values as the independent variable) as related to GPA (dependent variable). No relationship was found between maternal values and GPA,  $F(24,54) = 1.03, p = .45$ . Mothers scored similarly in their values about child development when compared to their child's overall GPA. An initial ANOVA was performed to see if there were group differences between child learning (as the independent variable) and GPA (as the dependent variable). A significant relationship was found between these variables,  $F(10, 68) = 3.16, p < .01$ . An additional ANOVA was performed to see if there were group differences between maternal teaching and GPA. No significant relationship was found between these variables,  $F(38, 40) = 1.47, p = .12$ .

## DISCUSSION

Past studies concerning the parenting practices of Hispanic mothers have often relied upon comparative analyses with Anglo-American mothers. In these studies, Hispanic mothers have been characterized, according to a deficit model of parenting, as possessing inferior parenting skills (e.g., Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; Calzada et al. 2002). Reliance on a deficit model, however, does not account for the role that culture plays in shaping teaching and parenting practices. The impact of culture on maternal teaching strategies is important in order to understand why Hispanic mothers parent as they do. Latino families, in general, are guided by their cultural values and have been found to encourage the social development of their children while placing less emphasis on the child's achievement of developmental milestones and competitiveness than mainstream families (Klein & Chen, 2001). The purpose of this study was to explore the values that Mexican mothers had concerning their children's development and the role that culture played in shaping parental teaching practices.

For the first hypothesis, a significant difference was found between maternal parenting, as associated with parental involvement at school, and maternal values. Mothers rated their maternal values about child development higher than statements related to maternal parenting. Mothers in this sample placed more emphasis on their values towards child development, which emphasized a sense of respect for adults and developmental skills associated with the child's socialization congruent with Arcia and Johnson (1998) who reported that Mexican mothers highly valued their child having a sense of right and wrong, being a good student, obedience, responsibility, and respect. Arcia and Johnson (1998) indicated that obedience was deemed a desirable trait because it was assumed that children were able to understand if they were obedient.

The current study's finding also is consistent with previous research concerning parental perceptions of child development among Mexican-American families. According to previous research by Delgado and Ford (1998), a strong sense of familism, respect for others, and being well-educated were among the most important parental values. The fact that Mexican mothers in the current study were found to value the desirable traits of respect and obedience more than their parental involvement fits well with past research. In Hispanic cultures, the development of those skills which enable the individual to be accepted by the group (or dominant community in this sense) has been recognized as essential (Delgado & Ford, 1998). The values of *convivir*, *bien educado*, and *respeto* were viewed as the driving force from which Hispanic mothers, in general, have instructed their children.

The findings from the current study indicate that there is congruence between firmly held maternal values concerning child development and maternal actions, as reflected in maternal parenting. The mothers' values of instilling desirable traits, associated with respect, listening, and the acquisition of developmental milestones, seemed to be compatible with being more involved in their child's school and spending more time helping their child with homework. Similarly, Huang and colleagues (2005) found that mothers knowledgeable about child development were found more likely to establish an environment suitable to meeting the needs of their children's development, while also establishing more sensitive mother-child interactions. Hispanic mothers have been found to view themselves as being responsible for providing their children with the experiences which foster development. Arcia and Johnson (1998) found that the notions of being obedient, responsible, and respectful were often related with one

another. They also highlighted that mothers viewed their children as inactive learners, requiring direct parental instruction. The findings in the current study are consistent with previous results in that mothers agreed that they desired for their children to be obedient. The parental responsibility to meet the needs of their child, as expressed in instilling traits of respect and obedience, is also evident in maternal responses in the current study.

Both maternal parenting and maternal teaching were found to contribute to maternal values about child development. The higher mothers scored on maternal parenting and maternal teaching, the more positively they scored in their values about child development. According to past studies, mothers who are knowledgeable about child development have been found to establish an environment more suitable to meet the needs of their child's development, while also establishing more sensitive mother-child interactions (Huang et al., 2005). The parenting strategies used by Mexican mothers (consistent and often harsh discipline), along with the teaching methods used (modeling and verbal directives), contribute to the maternal values. The more tightly held these values, the more likely mothers desired for their children to acquire desirable traits associated with having good manners and respect (Delgado et al., 1998). The current study's findings are consistent with past research in that maternal values have been found to be the driving force from which Hispanic mothers have parented and instructed their children (Arcia et al., 1998; Delgado et al., 1998).

Although no significant relationship was found between maternal home and school values as related to GPA (academic achievement) in this study, it is still important to note salient findings in past studies. Because traditional educational exists as a monocultural system, it is likely that the values of Hispanic families may not coincide

with those of the traditional system. Parenting practices have been found to impact academic achievement (e.g., La Roche & Shriberg, 2004). From a cultural model of child development, Hispanic mothers emphasized the socialization of their children as a means for preparation of school experiences. According to La Roche & Shriberg (2004), the conflict between traditional, Hispanic values and those values accepted by the American school system have continued to plague the academic progress of Hispanic students and hindered the involvement of parents.

## LIMITATIONS

Although the present study provides insight into linkages between Mexican mothers' beliefs about child development and parenting practices, it also is important to acknowledge limitations associated with the study. First, the sample size ( $N = 79$ ) could have been increased if additional letters were sent home, explaining the purpose of the study and encouraging maternal participation. Additionally, the researcher could have used neighboring campuses with similar populations to enhance the number of eligible participants.

Secondly, the researcher could have translated the letters to mothers and the study's questionnaire in an effort to encourage mothers whose native language is Spanish to participate in the study. In doing so, the researcher may have found a significant relationship between language and maternal values about child development, maternal teaching, and/or maternal parenting. By providing these forms in Spanish, the study's sample size may also have been enhanced.

Although the mothers interviewed for the pilot study ( $N = 4$ ) shared a common belief that the questionnaire designed by the researcher would be useful in evaluating the parenting and teaching practices of Mexican mothers, a larger sample size may have ensured that all questions were easily understood and relevant to this population. The researcher may have used other questions or added additional questions to some areas in an effort to create a more valid questionnaire.

## **FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

The goals of this study were to add to the existing literature on the values that Mexican mothers have concerning their children's development, the role that culture plays in maternal teaching practices, and to explore the notion of an existing conflict between home and school values in relation to Mexican children's academic achievement.

Additional research should focus on the discrepancies between the home and learning environment and how those differences affect academic performance for Mexican students in general. Past research has noted that cultural differences between home and school environments often are misunderstood and then misconstrued by educators as learning or behavior issues (La Roche & Shriberg, 2004).

Comparative analyses between Anglo and Hispanic students often have created a deficiency model in the literature. Unfortunately this model does not account for the strengths and abilities of non-white students and fails to capitalize on the knowledge and cultural resources that Hispanic students contribute to the school experience (Espinosa, 2006). Linguistic and cultural understanding can enhance a teacher's ability to develop trusting relationships, which encourages Hispanic students to stay connected to schools. With this understanding, teachers will be able to choose more appropriate instructional materials and advocate for curricula which are designed to meet the linguistic and cultural needs of these students. According to Garcia and colleagues (2006), when teachers and students develop a trusting relationship, the learning environment also benefits and the child's potential for academic success is enhanced.

Continued research focusing on pairing traditional Hispanic values with academic principles may be beneficial for teachers to recognize the strengths of these students, while providing them with insight on ways to strengthen other skills as well. Greater

communication between school and parents would inform incoming kindergarten parents of the rigor and expectations of the public school system. When Latino parents' cultures are focused on in positive ways, they are more adequately engaged in their child's schooling (De Gaetano, 2007). Also, teachers could use more in-service training on cultural nuances that can be recognized and maximized. One application of this research could be to construct a model for educator use that helps merge these traditional values with the demands of public education.

Overall, the current study highlights the need for additional research that promotes the benefits of traditional Hispanic values as related to academic success and parental involvement. The educational system validates the dominant culture. The ways of thinking, speaking, and behaving, as well as the language and values of the dominant group, are thus promoted in schools (De Gaetano, 2007). The sense of monocultural education does not promote the cultural diversity within today's school settings. A culturally responsive approach in schools accounts for students' families in the process of teaching and learning (De Gaetano, 2007). The study's findings are congruent with past findings in research with high performing schools which serve Mexican American students in that these schools addressed community and family involvement and linked curricula and instructional techniques to students' funds of knowledge and cultural backgrounds (Scribner & Scribner, 2001). The study also adds to existing literature and highlights the need for a more congruent fit between classroom values and practices and the home environment. The ways in which learning begins in the home environment and the influence of culture on mothers' parenting and teaching practices should be understood as a framework for student knowledge. Student learning may flourish when

educators understand this framework, acknowledge the role that Mexican mothers have as their child's first teacher, and then utilize teaching methods which are culturally sensitive.

## **PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS**

Past studies have agreed that school readiness is highly valued. In 1989 President Bush prioritized school readiness with America 2000, an educational goal that all children in America will enter school ready to learn by the year 2000 (Lewitt & Baker, 1995). Included in this goal was the notion or objective that every parent in the United States will act as their child's first teacher and devote time each day to helping their child learn and that parents will have access to the training and support they need (Lewitt & Baker, 1995). The fact that mothers in the current study placed more emphasis on maternal values about child development, which included having a sense of respect for adults, than they did on parental involvement is an important finding because of the cultural implications related to maternal values. These mothers accepted their role of child's first teacher but only in the context of teaching with Hispanic traditional values as their driving force for instruction. From a cultural perspective of child development, Hispanic mothers have emphasized the socialization of their children as a means for school preparedness (La Roche & Shriberg, 2004). Without an understanding of the influential role that culture plays in maternal parenting and teaching practices, Hispanic mothers' efforts and values may continue to be seen as deficient in comparison to the ways in which Anglo American mothers prepare their children for school.

Unfortunately, the low average educational attainment level of Hispanic parents has raised concern because of the correlation with much lower academic achievement that Hispanic students have relative to White students throughout the K – 12 years (Garcia et al., 2006). High quality preschool programs have created a positive early start for many children, especially those from low SES backgrounds. According to Garcia and colleagues (2006), a strong predictor of high quality pre-K programs is the background

and training of its teachers. The correlation between teacher education level and educational quality is now acknowledged at the federal level; as the U.S. Department of Education considers “teacher expertise” to be the “crucial ingredient” for high quality early childhood education ( Garcia et al., 2006).

According to Garcia et al. (2006), only one out of five educators teaching students from multilingual backgrounds reported feeling prepared to meet the needs of these students. With awareness that student-teacher relationships are a key component in the quality of an early educational environment, linguistic and cultural understanding is crucial for teachers wanting to develop trusting relationships which keep Hispanic students connected to schools (Garcia et al., 2006). In addition to this challenge, teachers need to find culturally appropriate ways to attract and involve more Hispanic parents so that teachers, students, and parents are all working together for the success of the student. Parental involvement is vital if minority students, in general, are to become empowered. Hispanic parents have become more aware of the critical role they play in their child’s learning and have been found to act as allies when they view the school setting as beneficial to their child (De Gaetano, 2007). The fact that the mothers in the current study agreed that they felt confident in their role as their child’s first teacher and that they emphasized traditional Hispanic values of respect and obedience more than parental involvement adds to the importance of a culturally-sensitive approach to teaching. With a firm understanding of parents’ cultures and expectations, teachers and schools may avoid alienating families who often felt disrespected or unwelcomed at their child’s school (Garcia et al., 2006). Because the mothers in the current study shared the belief that maternal teaching practices should focus on socialization, listening, respect, and

obedience, both school administrators and teachers need to become more aware of the multiple ways in which learning occurs in the home environment and then how that can be used to reinforce and support learning in the school environment (De Gaetano, 2007). With a more culturally-sensitive approach to teaching, educators may finally bridge the gap between the home and school connection, Hispanic students may begin to flourish in the classroom, and parental participation in schools may increase. This could really change the climate for many schools in predominately Hispanic neighborhoods, reinforcing the ideal that parents really do care about their children's education and respect the fact that teachers are there to support and encourage their endeavors at home.

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**APPENDIX A:**  
**QUESTIONNAIRE**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

The purpose of this survey is to gather information regarding mothers' views concerning the parent-teacher relationship, the quality of their child's education, and parental involvement. Please answer ALL questions to the best of your knowledge and return to Tina Brooks. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

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Family Information

Your Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Your Place of birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Your Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

What is your native language? \_\_\_\_\_

Highest degree received (circle one):

1. high school graduate
2. GED
3. associate's degree
4. bachelor's degree
5. master's degree
6. Ph. D.

Family income (circle one):

1. less than \$20,000 per year
2. \$20,000 – \$29,999
3. \$30,000 - \$39,999
4. \$40,000 - \$49,999
5. \$50,000 - \$59,999
6. \$60,000 - \$69,999
7. \$70,000 or more

Marital status (circle one):

1. single
2. married
3. separated
4. divorced
5. widowed

Ages and grade level of children:

\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

What is your ethnicity? (circle one):



Y

N

Child Attitude:

Answer the following questions about your child in Kindergarten.

9. My child speaks positively about his/her classroom peers.  
a. strongly agree      b. agree      c. disagree      d. strongly disagree
10. My child speaks positively about his/her classroom teacher.  
a. strongly agree      b. agree      c. disagree      d. strongly disagree
11. My child often complains about being bored at school.  
a. strongly agree      b. agree      c. disagree      d. strongly disagree

Child learning:

Answer the following questions about your child in Kindergarten.

12. I think that my child's class work may be too easy for him/her.  
a. strongly agree      b. agree      c. disagree      d. strongly disagree
13. The teacher provides options as in stations, centers, or independent work for students to choose from once they complete their work.  
a. strongly agree      b. agree      c. disagree      d. strongly disagree
14. I believe using stations, centers, or independent work is a beneficial way to learn.  
a. strongly agree      b. agree      c. disagree      d. strongly disagree
15. I feel that my child will be prepared for the next grade level.  
a. strongly agree      b. agree      c. disagree      d. strongly disagree
16. I feel confident that my child will be prepared for the TAKS tests required in his/her grade level.  
a. strongly agree      b. agree      c. disagree      d. strongly disagree
17. I feel that my child is being challenged by his/her teacher.  
a. strongly agree      b. agree      c. disagree      d. strongly disagree

Teaching:

Answer the following questions about your child in Kindergarten.

18. I have met with the teacher about my child's need to be challenged.  
a. never      b. once      c. twice      d. 3 or more times      e. n/a
19. When I spoke with the teacher about the need for my child to be challenged, the teacher supported my concerns and created a plan for my child.

- a. strongly agree    b. agree    c. disagree    d. never spoke with the teacher
20. When I have a concern about my child's academic performance, I feel comfortable addressing my concern with the teacher.
- a. strongly agree    b. agree    c. disagree    d. I've never had a concern
21. I set aside time each night to help my child with his/her homework.
- a. strongly agree    b. agree    c. disagree    d. strongly disagree
22. I set aside time each night to read to or with my child.
- a. strongly agree    b. agree    c. disagree    d. strongly disagree
23. I feel confident in my abilities to help my child with school work at home.
- a. strongly agree    b. agree    c. disagree    d. strongly disagree
24. The teacher has provided me with suggestions and materials to help my child at home.
- a. strongly agree    b. agree    c. disagree    d. strongly disagree
25. I believe the teacher's suggestions to help my child are helpful.
- a. strongly agree    b. agree    c. disagree    d. strongly disagree

Parenting:

Answer the following questions about your child in Kindergarten.

26. When the teacher wants to meet with me about my child's academic progress or behavior, I choose to
- a. meet with the teacher in person
  - b. call the teacher
  - c. communicate through email or by letter
  - d. do not have time to meet with the teacher
27. When there are P.T.A or other school-related meetings at school, I
- a. attend every one
  - b. attend about half of them
  - c. attend very few
  - d. do not have the time to attend such meetings
28. When there are "Open House" or "Meet the Teacher" nights at school, I
- a. attend every one
  - b. attend about half of them
  - c. attend very few
  - d. just do not have the time to attend on such nights
29. Reasons for me not attending P.T.A, other school-related meetings, or Open House nights include, but are not limited to (check all that apply):

- transportation issues
- child care issues
- work-related issues
- no interest in these meetings

30. I have been involved at my child's school in the following ways (check all that apply):

- volunteered in the classroom as an aid
- volunteered as a field-trip chaperone
- volunteered in the office, library, or cafeteria
- donated necessary items requested by the school
- participated in most fundraisers set by the school

31. I am satisfied with my child's school.

- a. strongly agree      b. agree      c. disagree      d. strongly disagree

32. I am satisfied with my child's teacher.

- a. strongly agree      b. agree      c. disagree      d. strongly disagree

34. I am confident in my role as mother.

- a. strongly agree      b. agree      c. disagree      d. strongly disagree

35. I feel that I am to set a good example for my child's behavior by telling him/her what is expected at home and at school.

- a. strongly agree      b. agree      c. disagree      d. strongly disagree

36. It is very important that my child respects adults, which includes me and his/her teachers.

- a. strongly agree      b. agree      c. disagree      d. strongly disagree

37. When my child does not follow the rules that I have set, the consequences may be spanking, grounding, or taking a privilege away.

- a. strongly agree      b. agree      c. disagree      d. strongly disagree

Values:

Answer the following questions about your child in Kindergarten.

38. Respect is the most important trait that I can instill in my child.

- a. strongly agree      b. agree      c. disagree      d. strongly disagree

39. Listening or minding is also a trait that I value and wish to instill in my child.

- a. strongly agree      b. agree      c. disagree      d. strongly disagree

40. I believe that if my child listens, then my child will be able to learn.

- a. strongly agree      b. agree      c. disagree      d. strongly disagree

41. I believe that if my child listens to his/her teacher, then my child will be able to perform well in school.  
a. strongly agree      b. agree      c. disagree      d. strongly disagree
42. I believe that by being respectful, my child will be able to make friends in school and enjoy the overall climate of the classroom.  
a. strongly agree      b. agree      c. disagree      d. strongly disagree
43. I believe that a child should learn to walk before they reach their first birthday.  
a. strongly agree      b. agree      c. disagree      d. strongly disagree
44. I believe that a child should make sounds before they can say words.  
a. strongly agree      b. agree      c. disagree      d. strongly disagree
45. I believe that a child should be toilet-trained by the time they reach their second birthday.  
a. strongly agree      b. agree      c. disagree      d. strongly disagree
46. I believe a child should sleep in their own bed and in their own room by the time they reach their second birthday.  
a. strongly agree      b. agree      c. disagree      d. strongly disagree
47. I believe a child should be able to feed themselves by the time they reach the age of three.  
a. strongly agree      b. agree      c. disagree      d. strongly disagree
48. I believe a child should be able to dress themselves before they enter Pre-Kindergarten (or age 4).  
a. strongly agree      b. agree      c. disagree      d. strongly disagree
49. I believe a child is capable of making their own choices when (as in what to eat, what to play with, and how to dress) by the time they reach the age of 4.  
a. strongly agree      b. agree      c. disagree      d. strongly disagree
50. I believe a child should be able to write their first and last name before entering Kindergarten.  
a. strongly agree      b. agree      c. disagree      d. strongly disagree
51. I believe a child should be able to read before entering Kindergarten.  
a. strongly agree      b. agree      c. disagree      d. strongly disagree
52. It is my responsibility to teach my child how to write their name and read before they enter school.  
a. strongly agree      b. agree      c. disagree      d. strongly disagree

53. It is my responsibility to teach my child how to behave and listen before they enter school.

- a. strongly agree      b. agree      c. disagree      d. strongly disagree

54. I am confident in my role as my child's first teacher.

- a. strongly agree      b. agree      c. disagree      d. strongly disagree