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Recommended Citation
Bernhard, Judith K.; Torres, Fidelia; Nirdosh, Suparna; and Freire, Marlinda, "Latin Americans in a Canadian Primary School: Perspectives of Parents, Teachers and Children on Cultural Identity and Academic Achievement" (1997). *Early Childhood Education Publications and Research.* Paper 11.
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Latin Americans in a Canadian Primary School: Perspectives of Parents, Teachers and Children on Cultural Identity and Academic Achievement*

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Newcomers of ever increasing diversity, if not themselves of high socio-economic status, are seen by many Canadians as struggling -- with some success -- to ensure a brighter future for their children. Yet some minority immigrant children do not eagerly scramble for better lives; for some immigrant groups and cohorts,

Funding for the project described has been generously provided by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The authors wish to thank the school principal, teachers, and all the families for their participation in the study. This paper has benefited from the helpful comments of our colleagues: Harold White, Gonzalo Martinez, Patricia Corson, David Corson, Guida Man, John Lord, Veronica Pacini, Denese Coulbeck, Janet Gonzalez-Mena and three anonymous reviewers. Special thanks to Fernando Mata, research officer of the Multiculturalism Program -- Canadian Heritage for support with census tables. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to the first author, Dr. Judith Bernhard at Ryerson Polytechnic University, Toronto, Ontario.

© Canadian Journal of Regional Science/Revue canadienne des sciences régionales, XX:1,2
(Spring-Summer/Printemps-Été 1997), 217-237.
ISSN: 0705-4580 Printed in Canada/Imprimé au Canada

high-school performance proves elusive, and the educational system in fact seems consistently to undermine motivation. As Monica, a nine-year-old Nicaraguan girl in our study said,

> "First I thought I was going to be a ballerina; then I thought I was going to be a singer; then I thought I was going to be a painter; then I thought I was going to be a doctor for people, then I thought I was going to be a doctor for pets; then I thought I was going to be nothing".

For the larger study, of which this is a part, data were collected to illuminate the lived experiences of Latin-American families as they struggle to adapt to the Canadian educational system. Our central purpose in the present paper, within an Ontario setting, is to look at: a) educators' common-place explanations of the children's sometimes problematic academic performance, particularly in terms of ineffective parental involvement including (inferred) ill effects of family maintenance of Spanish in the home; b) parents' efforts to help their children's educational process; and c) parents' experiences in maintaining cultural identity and language in the family. We propose that common hindrances of parental effectiveness in supporting their children in school reflect a struggle between a dominant and a subordinate culture. The notion of cultural capital helps explain the results of the cultural mismatch. The issue of maintaining two cultures -- biculturalism -- is investigated, and data are presented about the parents' lack of consensus and information on that issue.

Background

Canada is a nation of approximately 30 million people, of whom 17% are immigrants. Under the current 5-year plan, Canada accepts approximately 235,000 immigrants yearly (Statistics Canada 1998). The 1996 Census reveals that 3.2 million Canadians identify themselves as members of a visible minority. Compare this to 1.9 million in 1991 and 1.0 million in 1981 (Statistics Canada 1998). Toronto, Canada's largest city, is home to 1.4 million persons who identify themselves as part of a visible minority. Each year between 70,000 and 80,000 immigrants and refugees make Toronto their new home. They represent over half the total number of immigrants who settle in the province of Ontario, and about one third of those who come to Canada, on an annual basis (Ornstein 1997).

The diversity in the Canadian population is also illustrated in the variety of languages represented. According to Statistics Canada (1993), 32% of the total population report a home language other than English or French. Canadian figures for those with Spanish as a mother tongue more than doubled from 70,000 in 1981 to 187,000 in 1996 (Statistics Canada 1998). Latin-American migrants represent one of the fastest growing groups in Canada and the United States (Coates et al 1990). In 1991, approximately 56,000 people in the Greater Metro Toronto area identified Spanish as their first language, an increase of about

30,000 or 87% since 1981 (Statistics Canada 1993). Tables 1 and 2 below show the number of Latin American children and adolescents living in Canada and Ontario by Ethnic Origin and Age.

As the Tables show, the number of Latin Americans in Canada is close to 400,000. About 51% of them identify themselves as Spanish and the remaining

TABLE 1 Latin American Children and Adolescents in Canada by Ethnic Origin and Age

Geography: Canada	S/M Ethnic Origin: Total			
	All ages	0-4	5-9	10-14
Spanish	204365	18970	17875	17635
Cuban	4265	460	445	310
Central/South American Indian	9285	965	870	775
Argentinian	7115	690	715	795
Chilean	33835	3230	3210	3080
Colombian	8525	1010	825	725
Ecuadorian	6910	655	615	695
Guatemalan	8460	1235	1090	815
Hispanic	5275	580	485	485
Mexican	23300	3110	3055	2320
Nicaraguan	4895	500	555	585
Latin/Central/South American n.i.e.	30365	3320	3290	3095
Paraguayan	705	120	130	80
Peruvian	14160	1545	1650	1320
Salvadorean	24125	2690	3030	2570
Uruguayan	2940	300	345	235
Venezuelan	4580	655	495	425
Honduran	1820	265	280	170
Panamanian	1690	215	110	155
Costa Rican	1115	165	120	180
Total	397730	40680	39190	36450

Note: Special Tabulations from the 1996 Census of Canada prepared by Statistics Canada for the Department of Canadian Heritage. The authors would like to thank Fernando Mata, Research Officer of the Multiculturalism Program – Heritage Canada for making these tables available for the study.

TABLE 2 Latin American Children and Adolescents in Ontario by Ethnic Origin and Age

Geography: Ontario	S/M Ethnic Origin: Total			
	All ages	0-4	5-9	10-14
Spanish	96280	8940	8575	8585
Cuban	2305	255	280	170
Central/South American Indian	4380	520	420	350
Argentinian	3540	365	395	335
Chilean	10875	1000	975	1000
Colombian	4145	460	350	340
Ecuadorian	5930	585	470	590
Guatemalan	2960	435	385	225
Hispanic	3260	400	275	285
Mexican	8210	1075	1040	775
Nicaraguan	2480	280	290	300
Latin/Central/South American n.i.e.	16185	1790	1665	1525
Paraguayan	120	30	30	--
Peruvian	5570	650	670	445
Salvadorean	9480	1065	1130	1110
Uruguayan	1850	200	225	145
Venezuelan	1945	210	180	135
Honduran	440	50	60	40
Panamanian	925	85	70	80

Costa Rican	435	85	15	55
Total	181315	18480	17500	16490

Note: Special Tabulations from the 1996 Census of Canada prepared by Statistics Canada for the Department of Canadian Heritage. The authors would like to thank Fernando Mata, Research Officer of the Multiculturalism Program – Heritage Canada for making these tables available for the study.

identify themselves as belonging to particular ethnic origins by country.

Although there is a scarcity of research evidence based on ethnic or language groups, what is known is disquieting. A Toronto Board of Education survey (Brown 1994) showed that Latin American children, along with Black and African students, had disproportionately low academic achievement as reflected in assignment to Basic-level programs. Further, a Toronto high-school study (Drever 1996) reported that Latin American students become disengaged from school at a rapid pace. If these difficulties are not addressed, problems ensue both for the educational system and for the children; because of the high rate of influx, the problems can be expected to worsen.

Studies have demonstrated the positive impact of parent involvement on minority children's educational outcomes (for example, Delgado-Gaitan 1990; Diaz Soto 1997; Trueba 1984). Yet Latino parents are generally said not to be involved in the schools, and teachers' assumption that parents understand how the educational system works can lead to serious problems (Bernhard and Freire 1996; Bernhard et al 1998; Blakely 1983). Rather than faulting these mothers and fathers for "poor parenting skills" and ineffective efforts to assist their children's schooling, it is important to gain a deeper knowledge of how Latin American parents can be effectively drawn into educational decision-making processes.

Theoretical Framework

Our social-theoretical framework is, first of all, structural. Systemic disadvantages are considered to be multiple, based on class, race, and gender (Apple 1992; Ng 1993). Power is seen as diffused in institutions and everyday practices of society (Bourdieu 1986; Cannella 1997; Corson 1998; Looker 1994), and in accord with Bourdieu (1986) and Lareau (1989) we construe "cultural capital" as embodied in the dispositions (habits) and capabilities that enable a person of a particular background and social stratum to live satisfactorily, to work and reproduce in his or her social position. The second framework on which we draw is cultural ecological theory. Anthropologists G. and L. Spindler have viewed schooling as "a mandated cultural process" (1990). Teachers transmit mainstream values and unwittingly undermine minority students' cultural identity. Students with endangered selves react in ways which contribute to their enduring marginalization (Trueba 1993). Concepts proposed by other ecological theorists, Ogbu (1987), Suarez-Orozco (1989), De Vos and Suarez-Orozco (1990), and Cummins

(1989) help explain why some minorities, including immigrant minorities, have poor school outcomes in terms of historical experience of groups as well as their present, socially constructed position of disadvantage.

The term biculturalism is used by several authors to denote a desirable goal whereby the person retains a particular ethnic identity and simultaneously has, as an adult, the ability to function well in the mainstream culture, or, for the case of Canada, in the mainstream bi-national culture (Corson 1998; Darder 1991). Biculturalism, however, admits to several varieties and gradations. For instance, it remains an open question whether facility in the first language is an absolute necessity. As examples of many immigrant groups in Canada show, language can be temporarily displaced by the majority language culture and yet a strong sense of native culture is retained. Yet if biculturalism is a desired outcome for some researchers and parents, it has been reported that a number of parents support quick assimilation with the attendant loss of the home language (Wong-Fillmore 1991). Although an argument could be raised about the reasons parents believe they have no viable choice, the controversy as such is beyond the scope of this paper. We will simply report the variety of parental views and the possible determinants.

Research Issues

Although a variety of data were used to come to an understanding of the issues, an approach based on case histories has been chosen here to illustrate the issues within the limitations of the present paper. The case histories that follow are chosen to help illuminate these particular issues in educational adaptation as already mentioned above:

- educators' inferences about parental involvement and values;
- parent's knowledge and efforts to support their children's educational process; and
- parents' efforts to maintain cultural identity in relation to social and academic outcomes.

Method: Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

This study is part of an extensive research project on Latin American children, their teachers and families. Through participant observation in one designated school in Toronto (Fine 1991; Suarez-Orozco 1989), field notes, school records, home visits and teacher interviews, Spanish-speaking investigators captured the perspectives of 10 students, their parents and teachers. An additional 35 families from other schools in the same city were interviewed to test the trustworthiness of the analysis of the ten cases. We are a team of researchers, including a professor of Early Childhood Education involved in pre service teacher training, a psychiatrist with the Board of Education, and two teachers of young children.

Three of us are Latin American and are fluent in Spanish.

In elaborating our method it is important to note that we are working toward a systemic diagnosis of problems that simultaneously reflects the lived experience of the participants involved. We are not, at present, seeking to compare the experiences of Latin American immigrants with those of other backgrounds; commonalties must be the subject of rigorous comparative investigation. We are not seeking to assign blame, since the good intentions of teachers and school administrators are, in our view, beyond dispute. We are examining the institutional processes of a particular context as lived by the participants and questioning outcomes that occur despite the good will of those involved. While we affirm the good will of educators, we also recognize the validity of the sentiments of persons from immigrant backgrounds who may feel unfairly or poorly treated. We recommend caution in any attempt to generalize the reported findings beyond the present context. The aim of our study is the betterment of the existing situation in the tradition of Herbert (1996) and McGuire (1987); we were able to carry it out because of friendly cooperation among all stakeholders to improve service delivery.

We used a qualitative, ethnographic method based on a naturalistic, cultural contextual paradigm in the following three components of our work:

Child Consultation

We sought voluntary participation of ten Latin-American children in three designated classrooms (grades 2, 6, and kindergarten) with school and family consent. The first two classrooms were selected in consultation with the school principal. The third classroom was selected as a response to the request of a teacher at the school. A Spanish-speaking researcher recorded observations of the children in their daily classroom activities. We also conducted individual interviews with the children in the school.

Family Consultation

We made one or two home visits and interviewed the families of the ten child participants. The additional thirty-five families were visited twice in their homes. Interviews were conducted in Spanish, by two members of the research team. At the beginning of the interview, we explained that the purpose was to understand the children's situation in the school and to find out how we could provide support. During the interview, we sought to establish a non-authoritarian role by engaging in friendly, non-threatening interactions with the families to gain trust and facilitate communication. In home interviews, we guaranteed anonymity and used a number of open-ended questions (for example, What have been your experiences with the school this term? How do you see your child's progress at

school?). After trust was established and permission granted by the family, the interviews were audio taped. Field notes and tape transcriptions were thematically analyzed.

Teacher Consultation

The objective in this component was to investigate a process in which teachers adapt their practices and respond to Latin-American students and the kinds of issues experienced in working with the children. We collaborated with the teachers in the designated classrooms and documented their experiences with the children through field notes and classroom observations, conversations with teachers outside of the classroom, and journals about the experience of collaboration.

Data analysis was conducted by the research team at various points during the data collection stage. Several themes emerged that were followed up in later interviews and observations.

The present paper uses a case-study approach focused on three participants to illustrate types of explanations of school outcomes in terms of parental involvement and to address the issues posed above. Because this is a small-scale study in which the children are still at the school, names and countries have been changed to protect confidentiality; the accounts are not, in any way, composites, but are of three actual families.

Case Histories: Findings and Discussion

The Case of Monica

When she was two years old, Monica's family migrated to Canada from Nicaragua. Although only Spanish is spoken in the home, Monica's baby-sitter spoke only English during the first three years. Neither parent speaks English; their factory jobs require only marginal use of the language. Monica's school performance is low. She is compliant and appears rather discouraged, as evidenced in her statement we quoted at the beginning of the present paper.

Monica's family prizes its Nicaraguan heritage, which they view as their primary culture. They see themselves as sojourners in Canada and talk about the eventual return to their native country. They look upon adjustments to Canadian society as temporary impositions, not as a long-term mechanism for integration. Clearly, they wish to avoid assimilation.

Her parents pride themselves on having brought up an obedient and respectful child who speaks good Spanish for her age. Monica's family plans to return to their native country when she turns 10 years of age so that she will grow up

having respect for her family and she will be protected from "the way children in Canada go astray. " Keeping alive the notion of returning to the home country and knowing how to communicate with relatives has been a key factor in her upbringing.

> *"Para mí es importante eso sí [saber hablar español] y también en la casa ella siempre se acuerda, nosotros también siempre hablamos español, siempre le hacemos acordar que es bonito también allá, entonces siempre le hacemos acordar para que sepa cuando volvamos. Los niños sí, como que se pierden [en este paîs], no hay cariño para los papás, no es el respeto como por ejemplo como yo le tengo a mis padres, no, entonces yo no quiero que eso pase con mi hija. Por eso es que decidimos ir a Nicaragua apenas que ella tenga diez años. Ella sabe que cuandocumpla diez años vamos para Nicaragua y ahí que comienze el nuevo año".* «For me [knowing how to speak Spanish] is important ... at home she always remembers, we too, we always speak it, we always remind her that it is beautiful there too ... we always remind her so when we will go back, she will know. [In this country] the children, one loses them, there is no love and tenderness toward the parents, it is not the respect for example, like I have toward my parents, I don't want this to happen to my daughter. That's why we decided we are going back to Nicaragua as soon as she turns 10. She knows that as soon as she turns 10 we are leaving and let her start the new [school] year there».

At this time, Monica is 8 years old and in grade three. In the last year or so, it has become evident that Monica has difficulty in school. Her parents are very supportive of her education and want to help in any way possible. The main concern the parents have is the lack of match between Monica's efforts at school and her marks.

> "*Yo quisiera saber cómo... qué es lo que necesita Monica? Porque en sus reportes el profesor le manda que ella necesita más matemáticas, más 'reading' y en la casa a pesar que nosotros no hablamos mucho inglés, siempre le ayudamos en todo. Ella siempre hace sus tareas y sabe lo que le preguntamos, pero su reporte siempre viene como que le falta".* «I would like to know how... what it is that Monica needs? Why in the report cards the teacher says she needs more math, more reading and at home, although we don't speak much English, we are always helping her in everything. She always does her homework and knows everything we ask her, but the report card always arrives as if she is failing».

In discussing the situation with Monica's parents, they suggest that being in

a split-grade class has resulted in unrealistic expectations being placed on their daughter. The teacher shares the puzzlement over her performance. He agrees that in spite of putting tremendous effort into her school work, she is not doing well.

> "Monica is having difficulties ... academically ... she's reading about a year below grade level ... she's a dedicated worker, tries really hard but has just had a bit of difficulty learning the process of reading, learning to recognize words. My sense of the family is that they are very supportive ... they work with her on a regular basis and they have reward systems so she's always really keen to do her spelling...".

The teacher theorizes about the source of Monica's difficulties.

> "They [Monica's parents] are concerned and want to do what they can to work with her at home but are in that difficult situation of wanting to help the child in a language which they don't know and are not really quite sure what to do .... I think they feel a bit at a loss as to how to help her. She [Monica] has difficulty with vowels in English as opposed to vowels in Spanish, and so being able to learn both the sounds in English and Spanish and to sound out words is difficult. And I think her home is almost entirely Spanish spoken... I'm not sure directly what sort of impact that has but I think that may well make it more difficult for her to be picking up reading English".

In spite of strong motivation and parents who take time each day to support her with her school work, it appears that, without intervention, Monica is not headed for academic success. She will likely lack high-school level proficiency in any language, will continue to underachieve, and she and her parents will become increasingly marginalized. Monica has already lowered her expectations for herself.

Toward an Integrative Explanation for Monica's Situation

Although several of the stakeholders remain unsure as to the source of Monica's problems, our unique position of hearing multiple perspectives enables us to propose the following approaches for consideration.

First, Monica's health seems normal for her age. Her temperament is good-natured and somewhat docile. She avoids conflicts and disagreements with others. Monica's cooperativeness and non assertiveness have a cultural basis yet the overlap of gender and class factors must also be considered. This explanation is corroborated by one of the teaching staff at the school.

> "She [Monica] is Hispanic and is too good. The parents have taught her that she has to obey the teacher, that she has to behave well in class, not to interrupt so if she does not understand something, she will not put her hand up to ask. In this [Canadian] system if the children are not aggressive they stay behind. Many times she [Monica] misses an opportunity because she is too slow compared to the others. She has great interest and tremendous motivation".

It is important not to take Monica's lack of promoting herself simply as an inborn trait but to look at the context in which it emerges and how it could be dealt with to her advantage. The parents' efforts to train her in obedience are part of their overall commitment to maintaining her cultural identity.

A second avenue of explanation for Monica's situation might involve the unfortunate timing of her being faced with a second language. Several researchers have pointed out the ill effects of having to learn a second language while the first- language proficiency has not been attained (Corson 1993; Cummins 1996; Wong-Fillmore 1991). Without intervention, Monica's English skills will likely continue to be poorly developed, yet probably she will not have the opportunity (at home or school) to develop Spanish skills at a level that would be comparable to that of high- school students in a Latin-American country. Our speculation is that her Spanish will be primarily kept up as an oral means of communication with the family; her low English performance could well send her, within Ontario, in the direction of the special educational system.

A third avenue has to do with the picture Monica's parents have of her classroom. They themselves have very little formal education in either language. They attach a great deal of importance to Monica's achieving success in school; if unsophisticated, they are very supportive emotionally. Yet the parents' concerted efforts necessarily rely on their own cultural capital, formed according to their life experiences in their home culture. These efforts in the present context, are, almost of necessity, ineffective. They take time each day to help her with her schoolwork, inspect her report cards, and try to understand her difficulties. The parents concentrate on drilling Monica on basic tasks such as pronunciation. They are apparently unaware that the class environment is informally structured and that the teacher calls for a high degree of independence in the children. The upshot of this type of preparation is that Monica is not well equipped for the rough-and-tumble interactions which are quite common in her school and classroom as in the Canadian educational system in general. She fails to assert her own views with enough vigor to thrive in the competitive school environment.

There is some indication that her parents do not fully appreciate the competitiveness, individualism, and free-for-all aspects of classroom activity. Monica's parents may have simply assumed that every well- behaved child gets a fair and equal opportunity to demonstrate his or her knowledge during an uninterrupted six-hour period. In this situation of cultural mismatch, Monica's ability to perform is undermined. Our observations of the classroom corroborate that it is

indeed a lively and competitive environment, typical of Canadian urban schools; The more retiring students face a disadvantage. In Monica's case, if she has such a tendency, it is unfortunately reinforced by her parents' advice to be compliant and obedient.

Monica's mother is at the school three times every day to drop off and pick up her daughter. Nonetheless, she sees the teacher as the authority, and does not speak to him or ask any questions. On the other hand it may be suggested that the teacher regularly misses the opportunity to establish rapport and dialogue with the mother that could be beneficial for Monica's school performance.

The Case of Jorge

Jorge is a healthy-looking third grader whose mother describes him as a miracle, as the time of his birth coincided with improved times for the family. His father, originally from Guatemala, is a computer programmer, and his mother, from Ecuador, works at a large department store. His mother looks over his work and has a history of being involved in the school on a volunteer basis. Both parents speak English. Jorge has always received good marks at school and is seen as having excellent academic potential.

Jorge is the youngest of four children. Although he spoke only Spanish until school age, upon beginning kindergarten, Jorge 'forgot' how to speak the language. Now he is able to understand only a few Spanish words and can speak with great difficulty. Jorge's mother explains,

> "*En mi casa es una mezcla, una mezcla estamos hablando y eso es metiendo el español y metiendo el inglés, metiendo el español y metiendo el inglés y eso como un spanglish que le llama eso es lo que se habla en la casa y si hubo un tiempo en que pusimos una regla que no más ingles en la casa pues para que el aprendiera [español] pero llegaba el tiempo en que otra vez se nos olvidaba y empezabos a meterle el inglés y el inglés y el inglés"*. «In our house it is a mix, we are talking and mixing Spanish and mixed with English it is like a Spanglish ... there was a time when we put a rule that there would be no more English in the house so he would learn it [Spanish] but then again we would forget so we would start inserting English and English and English».

The family often attends Latin American parties, and the parents participate in traditional dances. His mother believes it is important not to influence children too much with patriotism and to let them choose what they want. She does, however, wish there was a way to help him realize the value of Spanish without putting him off.

> *"Me gustaría si hubiese mas tiempo [en la escuela] para clases de español... Yo le ayudaba al profesor de las clases de Heritage, y se le*

> *hacía muy dificil [al profesor]; los mas grandes lo ven como una forma de entretención... Me gusta la idea que él [Jorge] eligió hacer su trabajo sobre Guatemala, es muy bueno que la escuela haga estas cosas, si pidieran que los padres vengan a trabajar con los niños, esto también ayudaría"*. «I would like it if there was more time [at school] for Spanish classes... I used to help out the teacher in the Heritage Language classes and it would be very hard [for the teacher]; the older children see this as a form of entertainment ... I like the fact he [Jorge] chose to do his project on Guatemala, it is very good that the school does these things, if they asked parents to come in and work with the children, this would also help».

The mother's query about why the school does not ask parents to come in can be interpreted as indicating a feeling of being unable, themselves, to bring this about. Although the mother feels great satisfaction in seeing her children begin to value Spanish and the home country, she does not see a role for herself in encouraging this sort of activity, but mainly envisions such a role for the school.

In Jorge's case, the parents are acutely aware of the issue of class participation and its relation to judged school performance. With that goal in mind, they routinely encourage him to be more outgoing in the classroom:

> "*Nosotros estamos atentos a lo que hizo; si ya terminó dejéme ver qué es lo que hizo y si algo hizo malo le decimos por qué hizo esto así a ver vuélvalo a leer a ver que dice usted ahí está algo malo a ver si lo encuentra qué es lo que está malo. Pero de lo contrario él lo hace solo pero si no entiende, él pide ayuda al papa él dice 'daddy I don't understand this explain it to me', o a veces le decimos 'por qué no le preguntó a la profesora', dice 'I'm too shy' le decimos, 'para eso está la profesora!'"*. «We are on top of everything he is doing at school; if he finishes it, [we say], let me see what you've done, if he did something wrong, we ask him, why did you do it like this? Let's see, read it again, now what do you say? There is something wrong here, let's see if you find what's wrong? Other times he does it by himself but if he does not understand he asks his father, 'Daddy I don't understand this explain it to me.' Sometimes we say, 'Why didn't you ask the teacher?' he says, 'I'm too shy', and we say, 'That's what the teacher is there for!'».

As a result of Jorge's efforts in his class and the input from his parents, he is reported by his teachers to be excelling in every academic subject. When asked what factors contribute to his success, one teacher cited the following reasons:

> "Jorge seems unusually mature for a kid his age ... he's much bigger than kids his age ... he also seems to be a very solid kid emotionally just sort of more mature, stable, thoughtful than a lot of the other kids ...

> And so corresponding with that he seems to have academic abilities that are somewhat above what you'd expect. I've just met with his mother (end of year) and I don't think I met with his father but his mother is certainly very supportive of school ... she seems to be quite busy and doesn't come in a lot but she takes an active interest when she comes in at interview times and once in a while will stop by to find out how he's doing. My sense is that they work with him at home and they really value what is happening at school. When he's not doing his homework or something, his mother will call me just to make sure that we're [mother and teacher] working together".

The teacher appreciates the fact that the parents fully support the efforts of the school.

> "... Jorge's parents speak English at home and I think that's one of the big helps... my sense is that partly as a result of that they are more involved in the school and willing to find, or able to find out what's going on and offer support and that sort of thing".

It is our suggestion that teacher-perceived parental supportiveness is linked with the use of English at home.

The expectations Jorge has for himself are in the direction of biculturalism and bilingualism. He envisions becoming, within English-speaking Canada, bilingual in English and Spanish.

> "When I was a baby I used to know nothing but Spanish. After my mom decided that I should learn more English and when she taught me English, I forgot all about Spanish. Now I only know English. I want to learn Spanish and English ... Because when I go to parties people ask me stuff in Spanish, and I just go away".

Toward an Integrative Explanation of Jorge's Situation

A deeper account of the determinants of Jorge's situation is now offered. Jorge is at the moment, essentially unilingual English. The family communicates in English in the home, and this is reported as a typical assimilative strategy (Wong-Fillmore 1991). In light of the growing evidence of the cognitive and social benefits of helping young children become bilingual and bicultural (Corson 1993; Cummins 1996; Dolson 1985; Hagman and Lahdenpera 1988; Hakuta 1986), we believe that Jorge is undergoing a serious loss in that he is not becoming bilingual/bicultural. There is little talk by the teacher of possible loss, in the long run, if Jorge does not remain firmly rooted in his own culture (that is, if he fails to learn the home language or is unable to stay connected with his

family). Jorge's parents however, have arrived at their own approach to adaptation in the English-Speaking Canadian setting. Despite their own affirmations of cultural identity in terms of their Latin-American social circle, they are putting their son's survival and success, as they see it, above his cultural identity. They are apparently making judgments about the prerequisites for success in Canadian society as they understand it. Although we are among the researchers who endorse bicultural goals, it is crucial to recognize the variety of parental viewpoints about this issue. Such viewpoints should not merely be dismissed as naive. It is entirely possible that their children are being well equipped to survive but making required sacrifices in the area of home culture. Further, investigations are needed to ascertain what parents' goals are and the possibly viable ways that they envision adapting to a dominant English- and French-speaking society.

Jorge's parents encourage him to be assertive in the classroom and to overcome what they call his shyness. They presumably have their own reasons for this; nonetheless, it is fortunate that he puts himself forward in the class, which is highly competitive. The parents' encouragement of assertiveness raises the issue of whether they are expecting him to fit into a masculine gender role. The teacher's observations support this conclusion.

> “One thing I noticed here when we were dividing things [talking about other Spanish children in the class], is the ones who are having difficulty are female and the one who's not is male. I guess that's one question that comes up because I know for some of the families there is a real thrust [emphasis] on academics for the boys and not with the girls; and kids tend to rise to the expectations”.

In the present case the cultural adaptation of the child shows the influence of a gender variable.

The Case of Isabel

Isabel is a thirteen-year-old student who was born in El Salvador and arrived in Canada at six years of age. The four children live with the parents and grandmother. The father speaks English at a very basic level, the mother only Spanish. Father works night-shifts; the mother and paternal grandmother stay home with the children. The family speaks only Spanish at home, and Isabel's proficiency in Spanish is solid.

When discussing their values and familial practices, Isabel's parents referred to the family closeness as an important part of the child's upbringing. These parents believed it was key for the parents to "be on top" of their children's activities, to know where they were at all times, what issues the children were dealing with.

> "*... en mi forma de pensar creo que alguien debe permanecer en casa, tiene que estar pendiente de la alimentación y de lo que están haciendo...ellos [mis hijos] vienen aquí a almorzar todos los días ... todos los días su sopa ... Ahora mi hijo mayor no puede venir a casa, está en el high school pero igual tengo un amigo que tiene un restaurante y allá va y almuerza todos los días*". «...in my view someone has to stay at home [one of the parents] to be in touch with them [the children] to make sure they are eating well, and supervise what they are doing ... they [my children] come here every day for lunch ... every day their soup.... Now my older son is in high school so he can't come home, but I have a friend who has a restaurant and he goes there to eat lunch every day».

The parents' values generated conflicts with those of Isabel's teachers regarding the desirability of children's rights of privacy. Isabel's teacher describes her as a strong student who is centered, and excelling in all subjects. The father is perceived as unwilling to cooperate with the school's efforts and viewed by the teacher as being too authoritarian.

> "I think she [Isabel] is very afraid of the consequences at home ... which may make her behave ... so I am very cautious about what I tell the father. He [Isabel's father] is always in the school, I see him all the time, he picks them up for lunch, I think there is so much control. Mr. I. has this attitude, you know, like he is the one that rules everything. Just the other day I heard that Isabel had written something in her journal about a boy who had asked to kiss her. Apparently the father read this and wanted to discipline her. Although it was not her fault ... also her diary is something confidential, he shouldn't be reading this ... I think now he wants to know the name of the boy".

The parents are suspicious of efforts to "help" immigrants and have had negative experiences with their older child in terms of standardized testing and the special educational system. Isabel is articulate in stating her own views:

> "I am Salvadoreña, and because my brothers were born here, I am partly Canadian. When people ask me where I am from, I say I am from El Salvador but a Canadian resident. We are Hispanos and we are proud of where we come from and that we speak Spanish. One never knows if when you grow up you will need it for work so it is always good to have one more language. I also like it because I can talk to my family".

Toward an Integrative Explanation for Isabel's Situation

In analyzing Isabel's case, the following points stand out. First, Isabel, in our view, is developing her identity in such a way as to be bilingual and bicultural, within English-speaking Canadian society, and is poised to take a part in that diverse situation. She is benefiting from this additive process and can be expected to be successful in school. It is noted that such additivity is occurring in conjunction with strong maintenance of Spanish as the language of the home. As a young Canadian adult, she will have access to many working and social opportunities given her bilingual proficiency and bicultural identity. Isabel's future as we hypothesize it, exemplifies the virtues of a bicultural approach. Readers may form their own conclusions about the relative advantages of the approaches of Isabel's and Jorge's families.

Second, the father's behaviour is consistent with the family's cultural identity. He is attempting to maintain control to ensure his children do not assimilate too much. In Western society, and in this particular case, the so-called authoritarian parenting style is seen in a negative light. The teacher we quoted above describes the father's style as being uncooperative. Without attempting to judge the finer points of the father's behaviour, his general pattern is consistent with a particular father role that is normal in his cultural context. Further, it can be argued that the family's very "un-cooperativeness" is the source of family strength in maintaining cultural identity. It is likely that this style has allowed him to maintain harmony at home and to promote the family's self-identification as Latin Americans. It is expected that changes will take place over time as the family integrates to the new society.

Isabel's family prizes interdependence among its members; independence is not a primary goal. They have little concern about her privacy and continue being involved in every aspect of her life. The family's close involvement in each other's affairs is cast, according to Western standards, as intrusive (for example, regarding her diary). Their socialization practices are designed to create closeness and interdependence within the family. It is important to stress that Isabel's subordination to her father is apparently not extended to the school's teachers, although she remains respectful. In the school's view, she is relatively independent.

Isabel's parents think that children can become too stubborn and independent. They are concerned that their daughter will become too independent and wish her to maintain interrelationships over the entire life span; this desire is culturally based. Family closeness and connections are priorities, rather than eventual self sufficiency, which they believe comes naturally without need for training. An analogy proposed by our colleague, Janet Gonzalez-Mena (Bernhard and Gonzalez-Mena 1997) is that Isabel's family see themselves as an inseparable unit -- like a hand with fingers. According to the hand image, the fingers are separate entities but only function as part of the whole. Cut one finger off and it is useless. Parents who view the family as a hand rear their children for interdependence, not independence. The separation-individuation process has a different meaning.

Although Isabel's father is a frequent visitor to the school, the relations are tense and there is a lack of trust on both sides. Due to the limited English ability of the parents, a translator must be used for all communication. The perception of the teacher is that the father is overly strict and unreasonable with his daughter. It is maintained here that there can be no context-free judgment of Isabel's father. As noted above, the "difficult nature" of the father may, from another perspective, bring strength to the family's adaptation process.

Conclusion

The three case studies suggest a number of larger issues about which we now briefly comment. Some of the difficulties reported can be conceptualized in terms of mismatch between the cultural capital of the families and that required by the school (Bourdieu 1986; Lareau 1989; Looker 1994). Where this mismatch occurs, the minority skills, knowledge and styles are unintentionally devalued; maintenance of family cultural identity becomes problematic as people try to shed patterns and ways of life that do not lead to achievement. Isabel was able to overcome this mismatch, partly because of her father's persistence in maintaining cultural ways and adding to them. Jorge's family, in contrast, assumed a more assimilative approach to ensuring the child's academic success. While the outcome may be labeled "subtractive" by some researchers, we propose that it is necessary to go beyond such labels and reach a better understanding of issues through further investigation.

Teachers' assessment of appropriate support is highly culture-bound and focused on specific models of parent collaboration such as backing up the expert teacher, ensuring the assigned homework gets completed on time, keeping track of day-to-day incidents, telephoning the school, and offering to help. The type of parental involvement that was not as effective occurred when parents limited themselves to helping children with homework, drilling on specific skills, and trying to stay out the teachers' domain (for example, Monica; cf. Jorge).

The values taught by these parents were far less individualistic than is common among teachers. As we saw in Monica's case, the parents' advice and guidance to their daughter is determined by a culturally-bound view of the educational system, namely, that of a very formal classroom in which children comply with instructions given by the teacher. As already argued, in the present context, the parents' cultural capital cannot be used to advantage. In this sense, the teachers' judgments about the effectiveness of parents' efforts have some foundation.

All of the parents seem to be reacting to the overwhelming impact of the

dominant culture. If children learn to look at their home culture as inferior, they may take in a negative view of themselves (Bernhard et al 1998; Cummins 1996; Diaz Soto 1997; Hidalgo 1998), especially if they are also poor. Naturally they want to be part of the "better culture". This assimilative effort often results in the rejection of aspects of themselves and their families (Rodriguez 1982; Wong-Fillmore 1991). If the argument for biculturalism can be further substantiated, the implication is that the child's mother tongue can be maintained; the children may end up with more positive views of themselves as bilingual citizens. The case of Isabel suggests the promise of this approach. Teachers, early childhood educators, and other personnel need to become more aware of bicultural issues, and we are confident that through parent-teacher dialogue, better outcomes can be achieved.

During our interviews with all three families, we heard great concern regarding the importance of maintaining a Latin-American identity. All acknowledged that Latin American cultural identity for their children was difficult for them to achieve, and such statements were common among other families of the sample. Because of the lack of role models in the school, parents had different views regarding what they thought the school should do, if anything, in helping to maintain Latin-American identity. It is imperative for educators to respect these views, draw upon the parents' cultural capital, and engage in sensitive collaboration with the parents in defining the proper goals for the education of their children.

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