A Mother's Humiliation: School Organizational Violence Toward Latina Mothers

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Abstract

This paper examines how Latina mothers experience violence in schools through everyday interactions with those positioned with greater power in our society. Drawing on Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence, the article discusses how deficit perspectives held toward Latina mothers and the privileging of White, middle-class frames result in symbolic violence. Some of the consequences that these episodes of violence produce for Latina mothers personally and for their participation in schooling are revealed. A caring encounter is presented as a contrast to show that some educators do come to their interactions with Latina mothers prepared to listen and learn from their diverse ways of doing. This article suggests an ideological stance that must be present for caring encounters to take place and some implications for teacher and administrative credentialing programs.

Key Words: Latino, Latina, mothers, home–school relationships, symbolic violence, Bourdieu, parent involvement, caring, school staff, deficit views

Introduction

The literature on parent involvement clearly documents the chasm that exists between school personnel and parents in low-income communities of color and specifically in Latino immigrant communities (López, 2001; Valdés, 1996). Though schools may espouse a goal of more equitable relationships with

families in such communities, the persistence of entrenched deficit perspectives toward Latino communities (Volk & Long, 2005) and a "White frame" perspective on schooling work to virtually ensure that such a goal will not be met (Feagin, 2010). "Parent involvement" itself is conceptualized from the dominant culture perspective as entailing specific parental activities, attitudes, and dispositions toward schools (López, 2001). As in other "fields" of interaction in which relations of power are enacted, the actors—teachers, administrators, and parents—are implicitly expected by those with more power to take on particular roles. These roles tend to reflect the broader relations of power in the society as a whole (Bourdieu, 1991).

Latina mothers in the U.S. occupy spaces within school contexts that define them, not only as parents without the professional status of school personnel, but also as racial and linguistic minority women, commonly perceived as "passive, feeble, unintelligent, and dependant," (Gulman, Reiss, & Zudkawich, 2007, para. 6). With this perception in mind, they are typically assumed to have little knowledge about education and child development issues. Further, the community-specific cultural capital (knowledge, skills, and resources) that allows them to survive and sometimes thrive (Moll & Greenburg, 1990) within a hostile and racist society remains unrecognized, and they are often stereotyped as powerless and subsequently silenced or dismissed (Salas, 2004; Shannon, 1996).

As a former teacher and now an ethnographer studying Latina/o communities and their schools, I was aware of the ways in which Latina mothers are positioned and often mistreated in schools (see Monzó, 2005). Positionality refers to one's social placement within the hierarchical structure of our society. Latina mothers, due to racism, sexism, and classism, are often placed at the bottom of this hierarchy and treated accordingly. Having recently joined the ranks of other Latina mothers (my son is now school-age), I am now more acutely aware of this positionality and, more importantly, have *felt* its effects at a physical, psychological, and emotional level. Thus, I have come to recognize it as a form of institutionalized violence—a nonphysical form of violence that is normalized and even rewarded through current accountability systems and that leaves Latina mothers feeling violated, manifested through fear, guilt, and excessive self-monitoring.

Drawing on Bourdieu's (1991) concept of symbolic violence and Nel Noddings' (1984) concept of caring, I develop an argument about the sociocultural and historical nature of institutionalized violence in schools and, specifically, toward communities of color (read: mothers, as we are the face of the community in schools), focusing on leadership as a construct that serves to legitimize institutional violence. I share several "episodes of violence" that I have been

privy to either through personal experience or through research with Latina mothers. I share our stories of humiliation and lay bare our instinctual fear in the moment of face-to-face interaction with an oppressive institution whose ever-present ideologies reveal an entrenched racism in the act of discounting the cultural practices and values of the communities they are meant to "serve."

My goal in this paper is to lend credence to the many Latina mothers' voices that get discounted through demeaning labels: "submissive," "nonassertive," "undereducated," that suggest difficulties with the system are a function of *OUR* failure to advocate for our children. Inherent in this goal is to challenge deficit theorizing (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, & Teddy, 1993) and to encourage school personnel—administrators and teachers—to think and ask before making assumptions about families that they have little knowledge about, to take the time to listen to what we are saying, and to be flexible in their recommendations. Inherent, as well, in this goal is a plea for reflection—the idea that perhaps Latina mothers have different worldviews and, thus, think differently than the dominant group regarding what is the best education for their children—and that school personnel make an honest attempt at caring (Noddings, 1984).

Institutionalized Violence: Symbolic Violence in Our Schools

Although as an educator of future teachers I have a strong conviction that schools and education *can* become an important vehicle for equity, it is also clear to me that many current education policies and practices sustain and may further increase inequities (Fusarelli, 2004). It can be strongly argued that, from inception, schooling has served to "fix" the "problems" of diverse peoples in order to maintain the intellectual and cultural superiority of the dominant group (Feagin, 2010). That some people of color, women, and other marginalized groups will succeed in the system is what legitimizes the institution of schooling as a viable path for social and economic mobility and sustains the metanarrative that anyone who "possesses" sufficient intellect and motivation can succeed (Prilleltensky & Gonick, 1996).

However, these structural constraints are dependent on people's willingness to accept the dominant discourses that embed a state of "naturalness" and "invisibility" to the hierarchy. Theoretically speaking, when these discourses are interrogated and systems of oppression brought to light, a ripple effect of counterhegemonic action (action that challenges existing oppressive structures) *can* take place (Apple, 2004; Giroux, 2001).

Part of interrogating these discourses is deconstructing common everyday practices and beliefs that underlie our education system and that are enacted

unconsciously until these practices are examined through an "other" cultural lens and made "strange" (Spindler, 1982). Violence (in varying forms) has been socioculturally and historically situated within our education system from inception to the present. Our education system and educators (often with good intentions) have used violence to manage children's behaviors, eradicate indigenous languages and cultural practices, impose religious activity, and indoctrinate young people to what is determined by the state (and those whose interests it serves) to be worthy and/or needed in society (Reyhner, 1993). Indeed, the control of bodies is consistently applied in schools as children are expected to seek permission to speak or move around the classroom. In this process of "classroom management," many aspects of natural behavior are unnecessarily restricted (Rothstein-Fisch & Trumbull, 2008). While some of this physical control may be necessary to ensure access to learning, it is important to understand that expectations of "appropriate" behaviors and those conducive to learning are socioculturally and historically developed rather than natural. Not surprisingly, then, students of color are believed to behave "inappropriately" in the classroom due to having discourse styles and/or kinesthetic behaviors that differ from those of White, middle-class students (Au & Kawakami, 1994). In addition, many minority students often receive excessive consequences for breaking rules (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2000).

More common in U.S. schools recently is what has been termed by Pierre Bourdieu (1991) symbolic violence, or the imposition of power manifested through policy and practice that sustain existing power relations based on arbitrary factors (race, class, and gender) that are seen as "natural." According to Bourdieu, symbolic violence is objectified as physical objects, such as diplomas that exemplify cultural capital, and evidenced in a person's "habitus." The habitus refers to an individual's schemas, perceptions, preferences, and ways of interacting within a particular "field." A person is socialized into a particular habitus that is highly dependent on class, race, culture, and other social categories that define our opportunities in society.

A field involves a context where social relations get played out through different positionalities (Bourdieu, 1991). The extent to which an individual player is adept at performing the habitus associated with her or his particular social role, the more that positionality (and the power associated with it) will become invisible, seen as an "inalienable right" of the individual and her or his role. For Latina immigrant mothers, their habitus may be embedded with an unconscious acceptance of a lack of power and rights (Monzó, 2009b). However, such habitus may be resisted once the person becomes aware of its unfair limitations (Scott, 1990).

In schools, symbolic violence is enacted most commonly on children by school personnel who are adults and is legitimized through the idea that adults,

and teachers or educators specifically, know what is best for children. Adults have both the physical and social power to enact violence on children with little expectation of retaliation from those children. Parent retaliation against such violence is often determined by their level of cultural capital and economic means for bringing the law to bear on the education system.

Critical race theory posits race as a category of difference used to justify the unequal relations of power that sustain a capitalist economy but also one that exists outside of class relations and interacts with class (Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009). Race plays a central role in all our interactions, both individual and institutional. From this perspective, symbolic violence toward Latina mothers is part and parcel of broader institutionalized ideologies about Latina mothers, *because* of our race and how we are socially defined.

It is important to note here that race is a social construction developed historically as a means by which to divide and sort people into categories that would sustain power among a few (Feagin, 2010). Latinos are conceived as a mixture of races and categorized, more specifically, as an ethnicity. However, I contend that people in the United States experience their worlds as racialized beings. Being Latino is considered a social identity that is parallel to that of being Black and Asian. Furthermore, all of these social identities are defined similarly as "minority" (regardless of the numbers they may represent in a given context) in comparison to the dominant group, Whites. I recognize that Latinas are a very diverse group, representing different countries of origin, class, English proficiency, and time in the United States. An important distinction is that there may be significant cultural and linguistic differences between those Latinas who identify as immigrant and those whose families' have been here for generations. Nonetheless, stereotypes of Latinas exist because there is a general lack of recognition about these differences and most are, at least initially, taken to represent the stereotype of the poor, non-English-speaking immigrant.

The school in most Latino communities is a field in which different relations of power exist among the various parties that interact. The typical administrator, White from a middle-class upbringing, brings objectified forms of capital to her or his interactions with those who have less power. These objectified forms of capital are used as symbolic violence to hold power over and sustain unequal relations of power within the school context and within the broader society. The principal, for example, conceived in our society as the leader within the school context, holds power over other positions within the field. This power is evidenced through "the principal's office," the place where the principal wields the greatest power, further evidenced through the displaying of her or his diplomas that legitimize her/his power and serves (intentionally or not) to intimidate those who do not hold equivalent degrees or knowledge

in education, specifically. Further, a White, middle-class principal is at "home" in a leadership position within a Latino community as the broader society's racial stratification is replicated in this context and the "naturalness" of her/his positioning rarely gets interrogated. Typically, the principal's power and all-knowing stance with respect to children and education go unchallenged, and the principal is able to dictate, sermonize, demand, expect, and detail the procedures to be followed for whatever the particular situation demands. Latina parents are positioned as limited in English, undereducated, lacking knowledge of the education system, not knowing their rights, and lacking the economic, cultural, and social capital necessary to complain or make demands of the school system or anyone working within it, especially the principal or other administrative figures.

While those who have studied authority and leadership in organizations point to some leaders adopting the "charismatic" leader role in order to yield the greatest power (Robinson & Kerr, 2009), it seems that the episodes of violence detailed below suggest that in minority communities this may not even be seen as necessary, given the powerlessness with which Latina mothers are stereotyped in our society (O'Brien, 2011). Instead, these episodes show disrespect and dismissal among administrative personnel toward Latina mothers and little regard for how these episodes may be interpreted by the mothers. The risk of retaliation is considered minimal, and the symbolic violence is enacted without evidence of concern for the effect on the mother, although, perhaps, with a belief that their particular demand is the "best" thing for the children.

Home-School Relations in Latino Communities

The assumption, perhaps subconscious, that Latina mothers are unlikely to make demands on schools becomes evident when we examine the literature on home–school relations in Latino communities. This body of research has documented that Latino parents often feel unwelcome in schools and that the cultural understandings and expectations they bring to bear on their interactions within school spaces clash with those expected among school personnel in the United States (Valdés, 1996). This often results in school personnel interacting with Latino parents from a deficit perspective (Volk & Long, 2005), assuming Latino parents do not care about their children's education (Valdés, 1996, 1998). For example, based on an ethnographic study of "Garden School" where a large Latino immigrant population had rapidly replaced a predominantly White and middle-class community, Valdés (1998) writes,

> According to one teacher at the school who worked closely with the La-tino community, teachers at Garden could predict few of the problems

their new students would encounter. Most knew little about poverty. They had little notion of why working parents might not be able to make midday appointments with their children's teachers. They suspected disinterest, apathy, and even antagonism and were baffled and troubled by the failure of these parents to "care" about their children. (p. 5)

Another study (Salas, 2004) found that Mexican immigrant mothers were disrespected and ultimately silenced by the ways in which school personnel interacted with them at IEP meetings. The examples provided by Salas indicate a lack of responsiveness to the mothers' language needs and to the realities of their lives and led to mothers feeling awkward in the school context and opting to remain silent. Similarly, in another study of mothers of adolescents with disabilities, the Latina mothers experienced similar dismissal and silencing in their attempts to advocate for their children within schools and other social service agencies (Shapiro, Monzó, Rueda, Gomez, & Blacher, 2004).

Some studies have documented that Latino parents are often misinformed or minimally informed about language placement options, their children's academic performance, and other school matters (Monzó, 2005; Valdés, 1996). For example, elsewhere I have documented how Latino parents' legal right to "choose" bilingual education for their children was thwarted by school leaders who deceptively placed students in bilingual programs in the same classes with English immersion students and told the teacher to "just teach in English" (Monzó, 2005).

Unfortunately, many educators know little about the lives of Latino immigrant families, resulting in perceptions of either uncaring or uninvolved Latino parents. However, studies have shown that Latino parents find multiple ways to support their children's education by fostering a strong value for academic success. Specifically, they offer *consejos* (advice) that foster academic aspirations (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994), share personal narratives of their own struggles that underline their strength, courage, perseverance, and resourcefulness (Delgado-Gaitan, 2005), and dream with their children about their lives as professionals (Monzó & Rueda, 2001).

Some studies have also shown that Latino parents can and do mobilize to support each other and their children with schooling (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001, 2005). The work by Delgado-Gaitan (2001) in Carpinteria, California showed that when Latino parents mobilized to make demands on the educational system and garner support from school personnel, they were successful in getting the educational system to respond to their demands, including with respect to providing bilingual education programs. Also, research on "funds of knowledge" has shown that Latino families participate in networks of exchange that offer a wealth of knowledge and resources that can aid in children's learning of content and of English (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992).

These ethnographic studies (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001, 2005; Salas, 2004; Valdéz, 1996) have brought to light the very real pain, fears, and hopes that Latina mothers experience related to their own and their children's schooling. They have also provided a more contextualized view of the multiple and interrelated barriers that many Latina mothers face in supporting their children's academic success, including keeping multiple jobs to make ends meet, learning English with little time or strong academic basis in their own primary language, and understanding the culture of U.S. schooling (Monzó, 2009a; Valdés, 1996, 1998).

Fortunately, some educators have begun to interact with students and parents through a "humanizing pedagogy" that involves dialogue, drawing on community resources, and having high academic expectations (Huerta, 2011). An exciting example of this can be found in the Bridging Cultures project that helped teacher–researchers gain a deep understanding of individualistic and collectivist value systems (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2001). While cautioning against stereotyping, the authors show that teachers' new understanding of these differences resulted in teacher–parent interactions that reflected a deep appreciation for the role Latino parents can play in their children's education, for their preferred ways of interacting, and for the specific challenges and affordances of families. Specifically, the authors documented group parent–teacher conferences that promoted dialogue between parents and teacher, greater informal interactions with parents around issues beyond academics that underlie an interest in the whole family, and finding flexible solutions for interacting with parents whose children are bussed into the school outside of their communities (Trumbull et al., 2001).

Auerbach (2009) has documented how four school leaders with a social justice commitment developed programs and activities within their schools to actively engage Latino families. What was evident among all of these principals was a strong belief in the strengths of Latino families, actively and personally drawing on the parents' resources, and being responsive to their interests and needs for the betterment of not only their children's education but also of the community. They saw schools as playing the role of serving communities. Activities that these principals developed included a yearly colloquium for parents that addressed the broader sociopolitical factors impacting Latino communities; a "Parents as Authors" program; house meetings in classrooms where teacher and parents share personal stories of their lives related to education; and home visits geared toward helping teachers to better understand the realities of their students' lives and accommodate to their needs.

Methods

The data that informs this paper is drawn from two ethnographic studies and an autoethnography that examined the experiences of Latino immigrant families with schools. The two ethnographic studies (Monzó, 2009a; Monzó & Rueda, 2001) had similar approaches to data collection. Across the two studies, I visited a total of 10 families in their homes and accompanied them on community outings (including school functions) to explore children's language, literacy, and other cultural productions. Approximately 250 home and community *visitas* were held with these families, ranging between 10 visits and 50 visits each. Focal children in each family were followed at their respective schools. Formal (audiotaped) and informal conversations often dealt with the families' interactions with school personnel, their knowledge of school practices and policies, and their understandings of school language programs, afterschool programs, and course selections. Thematic protocols were used for formal interviews, but these were conducted as open-ended and reciprocal conversations that allowed maximum input from participants to share what was meaningful to each of them. They often asked me for information about school matters and to accompany them to parent–teacher conferences, meetings with the principal, and other school functions.

The autoethnography stemmed from a research project with a colleague in which we examined our racialized experiences as women of color (Monzó & Soohoo, 2011). Over snacks and lunch in our homes and at our favorite restaurants, we enjoyed six days of dialoguing (3–5 hours each) about our past experiences as racial and linguistic minority women. We also exchanged a series of letters (20) to each other in which we shared painful incidents and reflected on our feelings and on the broader social implications of these experiences. We analyzed current events around issues of race and deconstructed the meanings.

An important outcome of this work was the recollection of my own painful memories and the realization that I held a deep sense of rage and desire to make the world see Latinos through counterframes. I immigrated at the age of four from Cuba and was raised in Miami, Florida until the age of 14 when my family moved to Los Angeles where we experienced a different sociopolitical reality. Los Angeles reflected the broader society's deficit perspective toward Latinos, and the Spanish language—which my parents had made sure I did not lose—was not valued. I have lived and/or worked in California with Latino immigrant communities, especially Mexican and Central American communities, for the past 30 years. My professional trajectory has involved working as a Spanish bilingual paraprofessional, a bilingual teacher, and currently preparing future teachers to work with culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Let me clarify that rage, from my perspective, is not a destructive senti-ment toward any one individual or the dominant group, but rather it is a deep sense of injustice at structural inequalities. Such rage can become a source of strength toward collective personal and systemic change with others of *all* col-ors who have a deep desire for social justice. Subsequent to the project with my colleague, and perhaps after being sensitized to looking at my own racialized experiences, I began to systematically document the racial microaggressions (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000) I was experiencing at my son's school. I also documented my memories of past schooling encounters, searching for both painful *and* positive memories of dealings with schools.

The data from these studies was systematically analyzed for episodes of vio-lence and caring encounters with school personnel. A grounded approach via line-by-line and axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was utilized to make sense of the embedded meanings behind the episodes found in the data and the ways mothers described and reacted to these encounters.

Episodes of Violence Toward Latina Mothers

In this section, I detail three of the many episodes of violence enacted to-ward Latina mothers that I have either been privy to, experienced, or heard about through mothers' stories about their experiences with schools. Each episode is titled through the Latina counterframe in which race and ethnic-ity become a central category that demarks these episodes. I do this in order to reveal the perception of the Latina mothers who argue that these episodes would likely look different if they were enacted toward White and middle-class mothers. An important note is that although I focus on Latina mothers in this paper, the literature discussed above suggests that episodes of violence may be as likely to occur with other linguistic minority mothers and other mothers of color. Because symbolic violence is about power inequities, it is likely evi-denced largely among nondominant groups. However, this does not preclude that at individual levels, White women and even White, middle-class men may at times have similar experiences. (Note: All names used are pseudonyms.)

Rolling the Eyes at a Mother's Vulnerability Is Acceptable…*If She Is Latina*

Sra. Ruiz shared with me that she felt betrayed by the Latina school office clerk to whom she had confided the difficulties she was having bringing her child to school. The mother had recently had to leave the child overnight with his father, and since then he had not wanted to be separated from his moth-er. Sra. Ruiz explained that when she walked to the classroom to drop off her

child, she had to try to pry her child's arms from around her to get him into his classroom. This happened repeatedly, and no one at the school offered support during these times. Not long after this, Sra. Ruiz had a meeting with the principal; the office clerk was present and used the information Sra.Ruiz had trustingly shared with her to suggest that Sra. Ruiz did not bring her child to school because the child did not wish to attend. After some time had passed, Sra. Ruiz shared her feeling of betrayal over this incident with the office clerk and the principal. I observed that while she was explaining her voice broke, and her eyes became watery. The principal's reaction was to roll her eyes at Sra. Ruiz's emotional response.

Here, the violence is in the principal's presumption of superiority toward the Latina mother enacted through the roll of the eyes. This act, in our society, is usually considered offensive and dismissive. It suggests that the principal interpreted the Latina mother's emotional response as either inauthentic or an overreaction. Both of these reactions are commonly exemplified in dominant group responses toward people of color as "too sensitive" or "playing the race card" whenever they point out that they have been wronged (Feagin, 2010). Rolling the eyes is especially considered inappropriate in a professional context.

"There's Nothing We Can Do for You"…*If You're a Latina Mother*

Luisa was a high school student who was failing her algebra class and complained that her teacher did not help the students learn the material. Her mother, Sra. Torres, went to speak to the teacher who indicated her grades were based on her lack of understanding and not on a failure to complete assignments. He suggested afterschool tutoring. After receiving tutoring, Luisa still failed another exam. When the teacher refused to give the student a copy of the failed exam to examine her mistakes, Sra. Torres decided to ask the counselor to switch her daughter to a different class and instructor.

I accompanied Sra. Torres and Luisa to speak with the counselor. We sat opposite the counselor's desk. Sra. Torres made her request in heavily accented but comprehensible English. The counselor immediately stated, "There's nothing we can do." He went on to explain that students could not switch classes whenever they chose, and he said there were no open spaces in other classes. I had been watching and listening but had not spoken. After the counselor's response, I noted the immediate look of resignation in Sra. Torres' eyes as she first looked at me and then hunched over and looked down. I then spoke up in English and noted the counselor's immediate shift in his eyes as he straightened up and looked at me for the first time. I said, looking at him and with an authoritative voice, "She is her mother, and she has the right as such to ask that her child be moved if she is unhappy with the teacher." The counselor looked

directly at me for about two seconds and then stood up and said he needed to talk it over with the principal. He returned less than five minutes later, looked at his computer, and said that he would do it this time.

Here, it was my cultural capital that was respected and not the mother's request. Symbolic violence is evident in his refusal to consider the request made by the Latina mother presumed to have little power or knowledge of the system. Both the counselor and the mother adhered to society's notions of who has power and who does not. His immediate response after my request suggests that he assumed I might have the power and knowledge to take the issue to someone with greater authority than his. Given the speed at which the change was made, we can assume that he had not been truthful about the lack of space, evidence of his summarily dismissing her request.

Let's Assume a Parent Doesn't Know What's Best for Her Kids…*If She's Latina*

Sra. Ramirez's son Carlos became ill with the flu when he was in kindergarten. Sr. Ramirez is a physician and thus knew that the best way of caring for the child would be to keep him home from school to rest, drink fluids, and take Tylenol®. After one week of absences, Carlos still had a bad cough but his temperature had returned to normal. Sra. Ramirez took Carlos to school. She wrote a note herself, as her mother had done when she was a child and was ill. The note explained the week's absence. She left it with the school office clerk. A few hours later, Sra. Ramirez received a call from the school because her son was crying at the nurse's office complaining of an earache. Sra. Ramirez picked up her son from school and this time took him to the clinic where he was given antibiotics and told to stay home from school for the remainder of the week. The doctor wrote a note for the days following the visit. While at the doctor's visit, Sra. Ramirez recalled that they had made travel plans prior to Carlos's illness, and she asked the doctor if it would be ok to go on the two-day trip to Mammoth. The doctor had said that by the following week, Carlos's earache should be fine, and he should be able go to Mammoth, so the family went.

Upon returning to school, Sra. Ramirez was told by the school office clerk that she had to have a meeting with the principal. Sra. Ramirez was previously a teacher, and now is a teacher educator. She is familiar with schools and schooling in the United States. However, as Carlos was her first child, this was her first year experiencing the public school as a parent. She assumed it would be an informal talk in which the principal would ask why the child had been out for so long, and she would explain the circumstances. She was unprepared for what followed. The office clerk escorted her into the principal's office. Around the small table in the office sat the principal and Carlos's teacher. Sra.

Ramirez was asked to sit, and the office clerk also sat down. The principal had a pencil and pad on which she took notes of what was said at the meeting. The office clerk had files in front of her.

Clerk: We did not get a note from you for Carlos's absences.

Sra. Ramirez: I gave you one.

Clerk: (Looking in a file folder). I have a doctor's note for the second week he was out but not for the first.

Sra. Ramirez: I did not take him to the doctor the first week. He had the flu, with fever and a bad cough. My husband is a physician, so we knew his doctor would only prescribe Tylenol®.

Office Clerk: But we still need a note for those days.

Sra. Ramirez: I wrote a note. I handed it to you a few days ago.

Principal: It's not excused unless it is from the doctor. You are only allowed three unexcused absences in the year.

Sra. Ramirez: Okay, I know that now. But he was ill the first absent days. You must know because when I brought him back he still had a bad cough, and the nurse called me to pick him up because he had gotten an ear infection.

Principal: You need a doctor's note if he is absent three days or more. That's the way it is everywhere. When I am out for more than three days, I have to bring a doctor's note.

Sra. Ramirez: Well, there's no reason to take him to the doctor where he is likely to get more sick as a result of contact with other sick patients when we already know what is wrong with him.

Principal: When I am sick three days, I have to bring a doctor's note.

Sra. Ramirez: Well, I don't have to do that in my position, so I did not know.

Principal: When I am sick three days, I have to bring a doctor's note.

Sra. Ramirez: (staring at the principal, not sure what to say since she keeps repeating herself)

Clerk: You mentioned Carlos sometimes doesn't want to come to school.

Sra. Ramirez: Yes, he doesn't want to come to school, but that doesn't mean I don't bring him to school!

Office Clerk: Well, we have to report everything in case the District Attorney asks for it.

Principal: Ms. Flores (Carlos's teacher) is here to tell us how Carlos is doing.

Teacher: (eyes wide, looking apprehensive) Well I know that you (speaking to Sra. Ramirez) have been concerned about his social skills, but I see him playing well with all the kids.

Sra. Ramirez: Well, I already know what is going on. He doesn't want to come to school because he doesn't want to stay in the afterschool program. We're taking care of it. We have to find some alternate child care options.

Teacher: But he seems happy in class.

Sra. Ramirez: He may seem happy in class, but at home he cries for days in anticipation of the days he goes to the afterschool program. I know it is that he only stays Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, and as a result he hasn't been able to make friends that easily.

Principal: Why don't you leave him for the five days? It's a good program.

Sra. Ramirez: Actually, I think its too academic for a kindergartner, and I think he benefits from what he and I can do together on the days I can pick him up after school.

Principal: (raised eyebrows, shaking her head) I disagree. He will do much better in a structured program. I would leave him every day. He will get used to it.

Sra. Ramirez: I don't want to do that. We'll figure something out (standing to leave).

At first glance the scenario above seems benign enough. The principal enacted her role as the school leader to enquire about excessive unexcused absences and to inform the parent about the law regarding absences. The formal nature of the interaction and the roles enacted by the leader (principal), supporting actors (clerk and teacher), and the target of "intervention" (parent) are not surprising. These are common interactions in spaces where someone has institutional power vis-à-vis another, such as a doctor's office where a doctor recommends treatments or explains an illness. In such contexts, the symbolic power of the individual is manifested through her/his demeanor, the specialized language she/he uses, the physical space, and the cultural tools utilized. Symbolic violence comes about when these artificial aspects are utilized by the professional in such a way that makes her/his power seem "natural" and goes unchallenged.

However, when one deconstructs the embedded messages in the context above, it becomes evident that the messages are utilized in such a way that they dehumanize and devalue the Latina mother. First, the parent, Sra. Ramirez, is a Latina woman. As such, any mention of legal concerns is sure to raise her level of anxiety. The history of racial profiling among police departments in communities of color has been well documented, and most people of color grow up fearing the legal institution (Glover, 2009). In addition, the racial disproportionality in the child welfare system is well documented, a fact recognized as a consequence of cultural difference and/or poverty (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011), but that nonetheless may lead to the common stereotype of being "abusive" and "neglectful" toward children as evidenced. The fear of having your child taken away from you by children's social services due to mistaken assumptions is many Latina mothers' greatest fear. With education, this

fear is intensified as the wise words of family and friends are verified through research that supports that Latino families do not fare well in legal matters (Walker, Senger, Villarruel, & Arboleda, 2004). Anytime the police (in this case, the DA) are mentioned in the presence of a person of color it IS a direct threat of violence.

Second, the formality of the context and the power it bestowed upon the principal was used as a means to alter and, thus, control the mother's actions. The meeting in the principal's office that places the parent within the principal's domain, the group of supports that the principal assembles, the notes that the principal takes and can be used as "evidence," and the "request" for a meeting are all cultural tools that bestow power upon the principal and, at the same time, point to her existing power in being able to assemble their use.

Finally, there is the violence of dehumanization and devaluation of a person through the questioning tactics that make Sra. Ramirez feel defensive, the repetition from the principal that suggests Sra. Ramirez *needs* repetition to understand, the lack of response to Sra. Ramirez's statement that she did not know about the three-day proof rule and that she does not have that rule in her own job, which suggests the principal was not listening or did not believe her. In addition, the principal was dismissive with respect to Sra. Ramirez's concern for her son's social fears and for her choice of not keeping him in school until late in the evening every day when it was not necessary to do so. Indeed, the principal's statement that the child needs the structure suggested that her knowledge of education matters is sufficient and more useful in determining the best course of action for a child. This discounts and undermines a mother's intimate knowledge of her child. The lack of cultural awareness that the principal displayed by not acknowledging the value that Latina mothers place on being the primary caretakers of their children (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001) suggests a disdain for the culture, particularly given that the said school serves an almost entirely Latino and African American community.

Feeling Violated

I am using the phrase, "feeling violated," to describe the reactions that Latina mothers experience when faced with episodes of violence, such as those described above. These consequences are manifested in observable activity and in thought processes. I believe—as do many of the Latinas I have studied with—episodes of violence occur because of our gender and race and the assumptions that we pose little threat to the perpetrators. Below, I highlight common reactions of the Latina mothers.

Astonishment

It seems that no matter how often one experiences episodes of violence, a sense of astonishment often prevails as the immediate reaction. Typically, we feel tongue-tied, our minds go blank, and as we exit the scene we ask ourselves, "What just happened?" Only later do we consider all of the many ways we should have responded. While I can understand how an immigrant Latina mother who does not know the education system well may feel intimidated, the impetus for this paper was spawned as I began to experience first-hand the fear that renders Latina mothers silent and/or defensive during these episodes of violence. Even with the cultural capital that my experience in education and my advanced degree provides, I have reacted to episodes of violence in ways that resembled those of the many Latina mothers I have observed in similar situations. It is as if, in the face of institutionalized violence, we instinctually perceive ourselves through the eyes of the dominant group—absurd for having our particular worldview and powerless to challenge the dominant perspectives of school personnel.

That these episodes of violence have happened to me, even though school personnel know I am a faculty member in a teacher education program, suggests that regardless of a Latina mother's life and/or professional experience, when she enters her child's school, she is perceived and treated according to firmly held assumptions about Latina mothers as undereducated, lacking knowledge of the education system, and having few resources to aid in self-advocacy. While as education professionals we insist that teachers must know their students well in order to tap into their strengths and understand their needs (Bartolome, 2004; Moll & Arnot-Hopffer, 2005), we address mothers in our schools as if they come devoid of personal histories and current life circumstances that impact their worldviews and daily functioning.

Excessive Self-Monitoring

When confronted with symbolic violence, the Latina mothers I know and I often reacted by excessively questioning our own practices and our views on the matter at hand. "Was I wrong in the practices that were critiqued?" "Was I wrong in taking offense at the approach the principal took in discussing it with me?" We play the scene over and over again in our own minds, and we share what happened with family and friends in order to gauge their reactions to see if they lend validity to our perspective.

Often we wonder what we could or should have done differently to avoid the confrontation. As with victims of other forms of violence against women, Latina mothers question whether the assault was deserved and whether there

would have been something we could have done differently to avoid the violence (Cascardi & O'Leary, 1992). Most of the time our "fault" boils down to having "other" values and lifestyles, ones that do not match the expectations of schools that function from a White racial frame (Feagin, 2010).

For example, truancy is an important matter to monitor. Young people may not see the long-term benefits of education and may be negatively impacted academically by excessive absences (Wilson, Malcolm, Edward, & Davidson, 2008). However, presumptions of truancy should not be made without evidence, and flexibility in what constitutes an excused absence is needed as a means to acknowledge parental rights, cultural values, and the specific situations of families. Family vacations, visits to one's home country, and other special outings provide important learning opportunities for children, including Latino children in working-class families (Faustiche Orellana, 2009; Moll & Greenberg, 1990). Further, attending to the needs of one's social networks has been shown to be critically important for low-income immigrant families, even though they may sometimes interfere with school hours and homework activities (Valdés, 1996). Instead of blanket regulations, the child's progress in school should be taken into consideration and plans for home study or other supports made. Unfortunately, truancy is increasingly marked by racial profiling (Blume, 2011), and Latino and other parents of color are positioned as "uncaring" parents who must be *forced* to send their children to school as if these parents did not value education.

My data suggests that sometimes Latina mothers recognize that our practices could be challenged, but it is in the approach taken by school personnel that we take primary offense. In these cases, the sense of being violated came not from the actions or critiques made but from the cultural insensitivity with which they were handled. We see that there was a lack of understanding of our particular situation and an inability to really hear and try to understand our explanations. We see the cultural bias and wonder why the state must regulate those things we feel should fall within the parent's sphere of decision-making.

An important aspect of symbolic violence is that because it is seen as "natural" it makes the targets of violence question the validity of their own perceptions, including the sense that they have been violated. Again, in similar fashion to other forms of violence against women, Latina mothers interrogate, not only the actions that resulted in the assault, but also their feelings of having been violated. The dismissal of our concerns, including the perpetrator's rolling of the eyes (see episodes of violence above), are examples of common "little" ways in which we are dehumanized by being made to feel less capable of rational thoughts.

Avoiding the Perpetrator

One of the results of violence, symbolic or otherwise, is an attempt to avoid facing repeated offenses. For Latina mothers, this has meant staying away from the school and/or being silenced (Salas, 1994). It may mean that assistance is not sought when needed. There is a sense of betrayal inherent when the notion that "we are in this together" only applies as long as I follow all the guidelines set forth by the school and/or the state, and when I do not, there is little concern on the part of the school as to why. This inflexibility and lack of understanding threatens home–school relations in Latina/o communities where people's lives are impacted by multiple jobs and/or joblessness, other class-related issues, cultural differences, varying language needs, and a multitude of other personal and structural circumstances.

Fear of Retaliation

In many cases, Latina mothers who feel violated prefer to live out their pain in silence for fear of retaliation against their children. This is the consistent first response when I have asked mothers why they did not complain or express their sense of unfairness regarding episodes of violence. It has also been my response when the same question has been posed to me. We fear that even if the perpetrator is not the teacher, our complaints will trickle down to the classroom level. We fear being labeled a "problem parent" whose infamous reputation will follow our children from year to year, possibly affecting their opportunities in the classroom, relationships with teachers, and grading.

Leading Through Caring: "I Am a Mother Too"

These episodes of symbolic violence are predicated on the deficit perspectives inherent in stereotypes of Latino families (Volk & Long, 2005). In each case, the education leaders were acting on their expectations of the mother based on broader stereotypes of the community. Without questioning these interactions, the educators failed to challenge the typical way in which school personnel and parents typically enact power relations. But each of these episodes could have been transformed into "caring encounters" (Noddings, 1992). The common use of the term is too intangible to be operationalized well and has resulted in misunderstandings between students and teachers who interpret caring in different ways (Valenzuela, 1999). Nel Noddings (1992) has proposed that actions are manifestations of caring only when both parties interpret the act as one of caring. From this approach, a teacher cannot indicate acts that belittle or create distance as acts of caring in the name of increased academic performance if students do not interpret these acts similarly. Caring from this

approach views the child as a whole person and a unique individual. This suggests that students must be viewed as people with feelings and ideas, impacted by multiple sociocultural factors, and who learn continuously and make mistakes in that process. While students' academic growth is important, their socio-emotional development—how they view themselves and the world and the relationships they develop—are as, if not more, important. This framework for caring is captured well by Michael Katz (2005) in an address to parents:

> When we care, we open ourselves up to accepting and receiving the other in his/her full otherness, in his/her full individuality—we accept and receive the other's thoughts and feelings without critical judgment—for understanding and accepting the other is more important than judging him or her. To be "cared for" in a caring encounter is to be fully received, fully accepted, fully appreciated. It is to be validated in one's essential human-ness. It is to be affirmed in one's basic value as a person with worth and dignity. There is no substitute for this kind of "caring" in becoming a healthy person who can go on to live a flourishing life. (Caring section, para. 2)

Elsewhere (Monzó & Rueda, 2003), I have argued that caring for students of color means recognizing their differences, seeing and/or looking for the strengths that these differences create, and being willing to listen, mediate, and advocate on their behalf as needed. Although this work on caring has been used to discuss relationships between teachers and students, it can be extended to address home–school relations. With respect to Latina mothers, caring involves understanding their social position as women of color in our country and the many difficulties that this positioning creates. However, caring also must acknowledge that every cultural group develops resources and strengths and that people who are marginalized have to develop and garner their resources for survival in ways that the dominant group may not need to do. When leaders and other school personnel begin to understand and listen to Latino communities and Latina mothers, in particular, they will come to their interactions with an attitude that shows respect and a willingness to listen and learn. This is how caring encounters take shape. Consider the following example of a caring encounter.

When Sra. Cruz first placed her child in preschool, he was four years old and until then had been cared for primarily by his mother. Sra. Cruz selected a school that was known for its bilingual emphasis and its emphasis on play as a form of development, even though it meant driving quite a distance each day to reach it. The school's director was Filipino, and all but one of the teachers and staff members were Latinas fluent in Spanish and English. Upon her child's enrollment, the mother was encouraged to stay for a few days with her son at

the school throughout the day until he became comfortable with the context, the teachers, and the other children. On the first day that Sra. Cruz was going to leave her child at the preschool on his own, the child screamed and cried, grabbing onto his mother to stop her from leaving. Slowly, the teacher pried his little hands from his mother and held him comfortingly, reminding him that she would return for him in a few hours and trying to engage him in play. Sra. Cruz walked out of the school at the staffs' urging with tears in her eyes. The school's director followed Sra. Cruz onto the street, called her back, and reassured her that her son would be ok:

> We will call you in a little while and let you know how he is doing…I know how hard it is for you. I am a mother too. I cried all day long the first time I left my son at daycare.

Indeed the director called Sra. Cruz within two hours to tell her that her son had calmed down and was playing with the other children.

This episode exemplifies the notion of caring as Sra. Cruz tells the story with emotion, recalling that she felt supported and understood by the director's willingness to come out and speak to her after the emotional scene and to call her to report on her son's well being. Empathy was evident in this episode as the director was able to connect with her own feelings as a mother to understand the situation, and she made herself vulnerable to Sra. Cruz by sharing her similar experience with her own child. Here, power differences were removed as the director acknowledges the mother's role as caretaker who should be given an update without her having to request it.

Consider the differences between this episode of caring and the episodes of violence described earlier. In this caring episode, it is the mothers' caring for her child, her desire to keep him with her as much as possible, and the mother's rights as primary decision-maker to be made aware of her child's progress that is seen as natural, whereas in the episodes of violence it is the difference in power and the educator's presumed greater knowledge of what is best for the child that is taken as natural.

Caring for Latina Mothers: Suggestions for Leading With Caring

Below, I discuss various ways in which caring encounters between Latina mothers and school personnel can be fostered to replace the common mode of interacting through violence described above.

Start With the Assumption of Love

Studies (see, e.g., the research synthesis by Henderson & Mapp, 2002) have consistently shown that parents love their children and want what is best for

them (unless severely impaired by substance abuse or mental illness). Latino parents consistently express a desire for their children to have more opportunities than they themselves had (Monzó, 2005). When we assume that mothers love their children and want the best for them, we can come to these interactions with an open mind to understand what, rather than who, the problem may be. We can then move to solutions that are flexible and take into account the family's constraints and resources.

Start With the Assumption That Latino Parents Value Education for Their Children

Too often educators comment that "those parents don't care about their children's education" when the parents do not behave as expected (Valdés, 1996, 1998). For example, when Latino parents fail to attend a particular school function, the assumption that is often made is that they do not value education. Educators do not always recognize that, unlike middle-class parents who can afford childcare and may have the social network from which they can draw support, Latino immigrant families may not be able to afford childcare, may not have family or friends to watch their children, or may be unable to take time off of work to attend school functions. Numerous studies have shown that the assumption that Latino parents do not value education is false. Latino parents have a strong value for education and believe that an education will lead their children to social and economic mobility (Monzó, 2009a; Reese, Garnier, Gallimore, & Goldenberg, 2000). Studies have also shown that Latino parents are involved with their children's schooling but that these practices are different than those commonly practiced among middle-class families (López, 2001).

Learn to Value Our Cultural Differences

All cultures are sustainable and develop activities and values that help them survive in the contexts in which they live (Rueda, Monzó, & Arzubiaga, 2003). Latino cultures in the U.S. are no different. They engage in the practices that both help them survive the constraints of their position in society as working-class people of color and as linguistic minorities. These contexts also support particular affordances, such as a sense of responsibility to the family that may translate into increased engagement with school (Monzó, 2009a) and cultural and linguistic brokering opportunities (Faustiche Orellana, 2009). When we recognize that all cultures have both valuable resources and constraints that may look different and show up in different spaces, we learn to recognize the actions that we do not understand or that we would do differently as a matter of cultural difference. This understanding helps us to minimize judgments about

cultural differences because we do not understand the differences' origins, what needs they may meet, or how they support the growth and development of group members. For example, when a child is unable to do their homework because they have a family function to attend, we as educators tend to judge this negatively, assuming a lesser value for education than for family outings. However, many of us educators do not know enough about the cultures of our students to understand the reciprocal nature of exchange practices that must be maintained among Latino immigrant families for survival (Moll & Greenberg, 1990; Valdés, 1996). If we did, we would understand that the Latina mother is weighing her options and choosing the lesser of two evils, particularly when the homework can be done the following night. In addition, if we knew what goes on in these other activities that drew the child away from her homework, we may realize that these offer important opportunities for learning and development, and we may even tailor our homework activities to help identify and draw upon these resources (Moll et al., 1992).

Caring encounters require that school personnel come into any interaction with a Latina mother understanding that their knowledge of Latino cultural differences is limited and that these are marked not just by ethnicity but also by their positioning in our society. Thus, even Latina administrators and teachers may not understand fully the cultures of Latina mothers as their levels of education and income have moved them into different social spaces. When they come into an interaction with the assumption that the Latina mother must have important cultural constraints that impact the particular concern and that in some way the alternative they propose may have important affordances, then the school personnel will be *looking for* the resources that the situation supports. The concern, then, may be dealt with in terms of positive solutions that support both family needs and the academic needs of the child and/or needs of the school.

Listen and Hear—Usually Our Stories Are Real

I understand that there comes a point in which leaders who manage large systems such as schools may become desensitized to the specific circumstances of specific families, teachers, students, or staff members and that they may feel that people's explanations sound like excuses. However, if leaders could realize that situations that arise on a regular basis often only do so because there are so many people under their supervision, they would realize that, on an individual basis, the need to bend rules or make exceptions or deal with concerns is likely infrequent and related to only a small number of cases. If we consider that Latina mothers engage in multiple school-related tasks on a daily basis, year after year (taking children to and from school, dealing with attendance issues,

organizing school supplies, washing uniforms, helping with homework, motivating their children, and more), then we may realize that, in the big picture, the issues that arise are quite few. Too often Latina mothers face leaders and other school personnel who wear a desensitized veil that does not allow them to really hear what the Latina mothers are saying and, thus, they dismiss the significance of the comments or simply do not believe them. Over and over, Latina mothers express their need to be heard in schools (Salas, 2004).

Mothers' Knowledge *IS* Important

School administrators and other school personnel bring important knowledge of the field of education, the school system, learning, and instruction. However, all mothers, including Latina mothers, bring important specific knowledge about their children. Learning does not occur in a vacuum but rather in specific sociocultural contexts (Vygotsky, 1934/1987). The child does not enter the school grounds devoid of history and outside influences, and no one at the school can know this information better than a child's mother or primary caregiver. Further, teachers and principals observe students often in limited and contrived contexts, and although children spend much time in school, the attention of teachers and administrators is almost always divided among large groups of children. Therefore, the level of attention to one child at any given moment is rarely greater than that which a mother can provide. The assumption that the mother's knowledge about her child cannot contribute to decision-making about the child's academic context is erroneous and based on a false assumption that cognition is separate from other sociocultural factors, including economic, social, emotional, political, and health-related factors (Goldstein, 1999). While a principal can explain her or his understanding of an academic concern via examples of other children or the literature on child development and make recommendations accordingly, these recommendations must be weighed with a mother's knowledge of the individual needs of her child as well as what makes sense to her culturally and realistically, given their family's specific life constraints and affordances, and a family's goals for its children should be taken into account.

Why Does It Have to Be So Hard? Accommodate to the Community

The assumption that the community must accommodate to the cultural contexts of schools has been proven problematic (Au & Kawakami, 1994). If schools are to serve lower income communities of color, then schools must negotiate the opportunities afforded to families and to Latina mothers, specifically, to become involved with schools. Schools serving Latino students cannot

expect that low-income parents will be able to leave their jobs or take time off to attend school functions. Often such functions occur too early in the day for working parents. Rarely are there alternative opportunities for parents who work multiple jobs. Latina/o parents hold different values and engage in different cultural practices than the mainstream, but attempts to understand what these may be and alter school policies to meet these differences are only rarely documented. The community's needs, cultural values, and wishes must be part of the discussion when policy and activities are designed. For example, school functions in Latina/o communities should always include language and cultural scaffolds to make families feel welcome. Multiple venues and times should be available to accommodate the community's needs. Materials should be made available in Spanish. The political context of being a linguistic minority should be acknowledged as a factor in mothers' comfort level in the school and therefore mediated in culturally appropriate ways.

Don't Be an Agent of the State. Be the Professional You Are!

Current accountability systems and English-only policies go against what most of us as educators know is good for students (Dodge, 2009; Linton, 2007). I understand that administrators are responsible for complying with state and district regulations. However, many state and district regulations are mandated without specificity in the implementation (Revilla & Asato, 2002). As professionals educating teachers, we often encourage them to do what is right for students regardless of what the state demands. If the state wants performance on standardized tests, we tell teachers to take standardized tests seriously but to focus first on helping students become critical and analytical thinkers, engaging young minds, and building relationships (Díaz-Rico, 2010). We tell teachers to use whatever means they have available to support English learners, including using their primary language, being culturally responsive, and making all students feel valued and proud of their ethnic and racial diversity (Cummins et al., 2005). Many teacher educators encourage preservice teachers to be advocates of their students (Soohoo, 2004).

In similar fashion, school leaders must be advocates for the community that their school serves (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, & Hernandez, 2003). As a professional, it is important to know what the community needs and what their resources are, to be willing to learn from them, and to use their skills and knowledge to do what is right for the students and their community. Learning about the school community can be achieved through multiple means, including building relationships with families, organizing parent-based committees, spending time outside of school in the neighborhood, and developing community-based projects that students can be engaged in and that can inform

teachers and school leaders. Trumbull et al. (2003) document how teacher research can be a powerful tool for learning about a community and can also develop in teachers a sense of caring for, engagement with, and advocacy toward the community.

In California, for example, current state policy and regulations do not support the needs of our racially and linguistically diverse communities (Collier & Auerbach, 2011). Rather than using a punitive and inflexible system to encourage attendance, school leaders can be flexible about providing solutions for parents who travel for work or family matters and must take their children with them. School administrators can create schoolwide policy that allows for flexibility with homework, having it turned in weekly rather than daily. School leaders can encourage teachers to assign homework that relates to activities that children can do with parents and that do not need translation. Leaders can be instrumental in helping Latino students recognize their own potential and the strengths they bring to our society by encouraging community members to share their language and other skills with students through classroom presentations, leading instructional groups, or reading to the students in Spanish.

Preparing Leaders for Diverse Schools

The data and ideas posed above suggest the need to increase awareness about home–school relations in Latino and other nondominant communities as part of the requirements for teacher and administrative credential programs and other leadership programs in education. Education programs must provide avenues for students who will work in schools to learn to interact effectively with Latino and other nondominant groups. Students must have a strong grasp on theory related to cultural differences and sociopolitical factors impacting racial and linguistic minority populations. Further, they must have the opportunity to interact with and see firsthand the strengths and resources that Latino and other communities of color draw from to manage their lives and to support their children's education. Various projects with teachers have shown that engaging teachers in action research within communities of people that are different from themselves leads to increased understanding of the community, changes in teacher organization and pedagogy to reflect a collectivist orientation, better home–school relations, and adopting an advocacy role (Moll et al., 1992; Trumbull et al., 2003). Thus, course assignments should be developed that take preservice teachers and other future educators into the community and have them directly interacting with families. These should be extensive projects that involve a large portion of the semester so that students can gain a deeper and more nuanced understanding than they would

obtain from brief activities. Another promising approach can be gleaned from the work of Sutterby, Rubin, and Abrego (2007), in which preservice teachers worked with Latino students in a reading tutoring program that included weekly interactions with family members. Preservice teachers were supported through conversation starters that helped them gain information regarding the students' home practices and interests and the families' goals for their children. These regular and respectful interactions fostered *amistades* (friendships) between the preservice teachers and the families.

Future teachers and education leaders must read about and analyze culturally responsive strategies used by other teachers and administrators and be encouraged to develop their own innovative, strength-based approaches to home–school relations. Specialized courses on the topic of home–school relations and the cultural and sociopolitical factors impacting nondominant groups are especially appropriate for masters and doctoral level programs. Credential programs must extend readings, discussions, and assignments related to culturally responsive instruction to interacting with parents and community members. Although credential programs are often tightly structured given state demands on curriculum, drawing diverse faculty with expertise in working with culturally and linguistically diverse students often leads to greater inclusion of diversity issues across courses in addition to the concentration of this material in one diversity course (McKinney & Capper, 2010). Furthermore, course assignments that address pedagogical skills can often be combined with diversity concerns in order to infuse best practices for the teaching of culturally diverse students across the program.

An especially important approach is to develop a praxis component to coursework in which preservice teachers and other education leaders are able to experience firsthand what a school that reaches out to the community looks and feels like. This offers education students the opportunity to interact with families and see other teachers and educators interacting with families in respectful ways. An important component of this may be the use of Professional Development Schools (PDS) as described by de la Piedra, Munter, and Giron (2006) that can influence and be influenced by university faculty and research in ways that support strong home–school relations with families and communities being viewed as a central aspect of structuring best education practices for diverse students. de la Piedra et al. (2006) suggest that, as a result of involvement in schools that actually sustain strong and positive home–school relations, preservice teachers gained respect for low-income and immigrant families, challenged their own stereotypes, and learned how to interact with families in collaborative ways. An important aspect of this work is that it also allowed Latino preservice teachers to affirm their histories and to draw on these to enhance their own learning and their interactions with families.

In this article, I have shown that Latina mothers often experience symbolic violence in school contexts and that this may have painful psychological consequences and keep mothers from actively participating in schools. I have shown that a caring approach is one that builds on the strengths of Latino communities, listens carefully to their concerns, recognizes their values and needs, and works *with* Latina mothers to create the best learning contexts for their children. As discussed above, an important starting place for transforming schools into caring contexts for Latino communities is bringing awareness, empathy, and expertise to teachers and other school personnel. I believe that, when employed systematically, a caring approach toward home–school relations can have an important positive impact on the students, the school, and the entire community.

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