

“In Hispanic Culture, the Children Are the Jewels of the Family”: An Investigation of Home and Community Culture in a Bilingual Early Care and Education Center Serving Migrant and Seasonal Farm Worker Families

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Abstract

This article investigates how culture shapes instruction in a bilingual early care and education program serving migrant and seasonal farm worker families in rural Wyoming. Interviews with eight early childhood teachers as well as classroom observations were conducted. The investigation is framed around the following research question: How does the culture of the family and the community shape curriculum in the investigated migrant and seasonal early learning program? Data analysis suggested that providing curriculum in the child’s home language is critical to supporting relationships in addition to language development. As well, the importance of educators responding to diverse cultures through showing respect for children and families plus individualizing instruction and care was reflected in the data. Implications for early childhood practitioners are discussed.

Introduction

A body of evidence suggests that instruction shaped by children’s home and community culture is vital to supporting children’s healthy self-esteem, strong identity development, and a sense of belonging—characteristics critical to overall academic achievement (Banks, 2002; Nieto, 2002; Osterman, 2000). American schools have shifted toward cultural and linguistic heterogeneity among students (Garcia & McLaughlin, 1995); however, American teachers are over 90% European American (Nieto, 2000). Given the lack of preparedness of a largely European American teaching force to educate children from diverse cultural backgrounds (Nieto, 2002), English-language learners and ethnically diverse children are at risk of being marginalized in schools (Christian & Bloome, 2004; Moll, 1992). How then do we support educators’ efforts to provide multicultural education that goes beyond an additive feel-good approach to including diversity in curriculum to one “framed within a context of social justice and critical pedagogy, encompassing antiracist and basic education for all students of all backgrounds” (Nieto, 2002, p. 27)?

Studies investigating schooling in diverse settings have presented educators with findings that expand their knowledge, enabling them to learn about providing curriculum from multiple cultural perspectives (Bullock, 2005; Gilliard & Moore, 2007; Lee & Walsh, 2005; Luo & Gilliard, 2006; Moore & Gilliard, 2007; Nagayama & Gilliard, 2005; and Walsh, 2002). For example, Gilliard and Moore (2007) investigated culture and education in tribal early care and education programs on the Flathead Indian Reservation, and Bullock (2005) investigated early learning programs in rural Fiji. This paper extends these efforts to understand culture and education in a bilingual early care and education center serving the primarily Hispanic migrant and seasonal farm worker families in rural Wyoming.

The purpose of this study was to explore the presence of family and community culture in curriculum and instruction at a bilingual early learning program serving migrant and seasonal

farm worker families, including infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. The majority of the families served by this program defined themselves as migrant or seasonal farm workers and as Mexican, Mexican American, or Hispanic. Data were collected by two preservice teachers. One collected data as a culminating field experience for a special topic university class called Cultures and Communities, and one collected data for an independent research project. Both preservice teachers were enrolled in the special topic class, but the latter collected data for another project when enrolled in the class. Two university professors served as investigators for this study, one of whom taught the course and supervised the independent research project that resulted in collection of the data.

Culture and education in a bilingual early learning program serving migrant and seasonal farm worker families were examined through teacher responses to interview questions, field notes taken during classroom observations, and journals written by preservice teachers who collected the data. Journals were reflections of what the preservice teachers learned when interviewing the practicing teachers and observing in the classrooms. The research question framing the study was: How does the culture of the family and community shape curriculum in a migrant early care and education program in rural Wyoming?

Rationale and Conceptual Framework

Bringing the culture and practices of children's homes and communities into classroom instructional and curricular processes can enhance learning experiences and, therefore, the academic success of children from the nondominant culture (Christian & Bloome, 2004; Nieto, 2002; Osterman, 2000). However, it is well documented that children who are culturally and linguistically diverse are expected to adapt to a school culture created by a largely European American teaching force. Educators who belong to the dominant culture are typically ill prepared to deliver curriculum within a culturally relevant context to an increasing population of students who are English-language learners as well as who are from varied ethnic backgrounds (Banks, 2002; Garcia, 2005; Dudley-Marling & Paugh, 2004; and Nieto, 2002). Educators who do not have the same cultural perspectives of the students they teach "often render it difficult to "see" the cultural identities shaping the behaviors and achievement of their students" (Moore, 2004a). What, then, are the consequences of failing to link a child's home and community culture and language to the culture of the school?

According to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986) and Heath's study of language communities (Heath, 1983), language, learned through social interactions with the young child's family, is a tool for thought. That is, before a child has language, his or her actions drive thought; after acquiring language, thoughts drive action. Thus, cognitive development is closely linked to language learned within the context of the unique cultural paradigm of a child's family (Garcia, 2005). Moreover, for young children, language development occurring within the context of family and learning about culture are closely linked (Garcia & McLaughlin, 1995). "If a child's cognitive schemata for operating in the world are culturally bound, what are the effects of trying to learn in an environment where the culture (and language) of the classroom differs from the culture (and language) of the home?" (Garcia, 2005, p. 32). Linguistically and culturally diverse children face the challenge of accommodating existing schemas or creating new ones thus impeding learning and development (Garcia, 2005).

The fact that the population of linguistically and ethnically diverse school-age children is growing in the United States has brought new attention to the reality that our largely European American teaching force is not prepared to offer equal educational opportunities to all children, thus marginalizing minority children (Moll, 1992). The U.S. Census Bureau (Malone, Baluja, Costanzo, & Davis, 2003) estimated that people of color constituted 28% of the nation's population in 2000 and predicted that this population would make up 38% in 2025 and 47% in 2050. In addition, in 2000 approximately 20% of the school-age population in the United States spoke a language other than English in their homes (Malone et al., 2003). Well over half of this

total population of English-language learners, approximately 10 million children in 2000 (Malone et al., 2003), is Spanish speaking (Garcia, 2005). Moreover, Banks (2002) stated that Mexican Americans are the second largest ethnic group of color in the United States and the largest Spanish-speaking ethnic group within the American Hispanic population. The current study examined an early learning program that served mostly Mexican and Mexican American children and families, a group comprising a large population of English-language learners in the United States (Garcia, 2005).

The purpose of this study was to examine the representation of home and community culture in the curriculum of a bilingual early learning program serving predominantly Mexican and Mexican American migrant and seasonal farm worker families and children. The study extends the knowledge base that examines culture in schooling, affording educators opportunities to learn about delivering curriculum from varied cultural perspectives (Bullock, 2005; Gilliard & Moore, 2007; Lee & Walsh, 2005; Luo & Gilliard, 2006; Nagayama & Gilliard, 2005; Walsh, 2002).

Overview of the Study and Method

Participants and Setting

The study participants were one male and seven female early childhood educators with at least one year of teaching experience. The teachers had the following credentials: one held a master's in elementary education; another a bachelor's in elementary education; and the third stated she had an associate's in early childhood education plus a Child Development Associate (CDA) certificate with an infant and toddler specialization as well as a preschool endorsement. The fourth teacher had earned a CDA with an infant and toddler specialization; the fifth was enrolled in CDA classes. The sixth and seventh teachers had limited postsecondary preparation but planned to start taking early childhood classes at the local college in the coming fall semester. The last teacher had no formal postsecondary preparation; he had, however, participated in worksite training on child development.

Five of the educators were Hispanic—one described herself as not Spanish speaking, and three described themselves as White and not Spanish speaking. Two female preservice teachers enrolled in an early childhood associate's degree program in a small university in Montana collected the data. Both preservice teachers were nontraditional in age and described themselves as White. The preservice teachers had at least two years' experience as early childhood educators and had completed at least 24 credits of early childhood education coursework. Data were collected by one of the preservice teachers as a culminating research project for a special topic class called Community and Culture and by the second for an independent research project. Two university professors, both teacher educators, served as investigators for the study. One of the investigators, the first author, was also the instructor for the course and the independent study in which the preservice teachers were enrolled and for which the data for the current study were collected. The second author served as peer reviewer and advisor.

The study took place in a small town in Wyoming. As stated, the setting for the study was a bilingual early care and education program serving migrant and seasonal farm worker Hispanic families and children. Migrant farm worker families are defined as being engaged primarily in agricultural work as well as having changed their geographic location within the preceding two years. Seasonal farm worker families also engage primarily in agricultural work but have not changed their geographical location within the preceding two years (School Readiness Act, 2005). The program primarily served seasonal farm worker families from late August to early May; the seasonal program operated from 8:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. Monday through Friday. During the summer months, the program typically served migrant farm worker families and operated between the hours of 6:00 A.M. and 6:00 P.M. Monday through Saturday to accommodate family

work schedules. Children were bused to and from school for both the seasonal and migrant programs. The program served children birth to age 5, or compulsory school age, and had infant, mobile infant, toddler, and preschool classrooms. Each classroom had two teachers, with at least one teacher who spoke English and one who spoke Spanish.

The Wyoming city in which the early learning program was located had a population of 5,373 people, 2,083 households, and 1,273 families residing in the city (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). As well, the ethnic makeup of the city was 96.4% White, 0.2% Black or African American, 0.4% Asian, 0.1% Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander, and 3.0% some other race; Hispanic or Latino of any race were 6.8% of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). The 1999 median income in this city was \$27,364; in addition, 20.2% of the population with related children under 18 years were below the federal poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

Research Questions and Data Sources

The research was guided by the following question: How does the culture of the family and community shape curriculum in a rural bilingual early learning program serving migrant and seasonal farm worker families?

Prior to the study, the two preservice teachers who collected the data were instructed by their professor in a phenomenological approach to conducting qualitative research (Valle & King, 1978). In addition, they were provided training in interview and observation procedures relevant to qualitative research design (Creswell, 1998; Moore, 2004b). As well, the preservice teachers completed a variety of reflective activities and explored multiple resources on culture and education.

Data were collected as follows: Half of the interviews were conducted by phone, and half of the interviews were conducted at the bilingual early learning program. Eight hours of on-site observation were completed by one of the preservice teachers during the summer Migrant Program operational hours. Interactions between children and teachers were observed in the infant, mobile infant, and toddler classrooms. Data sources for the study included (1) the reflective journals in which the preservice teachers wrote responses to what they were learning about home and school culture in the bilingual early learning program, (2) transcribed interview responses of the early childhood teachers, and (3) field notes taken by the preservice teacher who conducted on-site observations. A copy of the interview questions is provided in the [appendix](#).

Procedures

Two preservice teachers conducted classroom observations and open-ended interviews with eight early childhood educators at a bilingual early learning program serving infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and their families in a small town in Wyoming. Interview sessions were tape recorded and transcribed by the interviewers. The study occurred in July 2006, as part of a culminating experience for a special topic Community and Cultures class as well as an independent research project.

Prior to the study, the preservice educators were asked to respond to a survey that prompted them to reflect on their culture and how their perceptions of varied cultures might influence their instructional beliefs and actions. During data collection, preservice teachers were instructed to keep a journal and reflect on what they were learning about culture and education at the bilingual early learning program. In addition, the preservice teacher who collected data on-site was asked to keep detailed field notes during her classroom observations. At the end of data collection, preservice teachers submitted transcribed interviews, reflective journals, and field notes to both investigators.

Data Analysis

At the end of the course and independent study, the investigators—the first and second authors—along with one of the preservice teachers—the third author—sorted the data by color coding pertinent responses to the research question. Separately, the authors each color coded the responses from the three data sources and transcribed interview responses of the early childhood educators, the preservice teacher's field notes, and both preservice teachers' reflective journals. The authors then compared the coded data for accuracy and discussed any discrepancies or variations. The data were studied another time for the purpose of identifying clarifying themes within the research question. Themes were defined by noting whether at least eight responses from the three data sources supported the main concept of the theme (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Next, the data were re-read, and categorization changes were marked as needed. After discussion of meaning, minor changes were made involving interpretation of responses. Validity of findings was established through careful triangulation of data in which at least three data sources cross-checked the findings for the research question. To be determined as pertinent to the question, a similar response from each data source had to be sorted to a question at least five times (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Results of the Study

The findings of the study are examined through one theme that consistently informed the research question: How does the culture of the family and community shape curriculum in the bilingual early learning program we investigated?

The theme focusing the question was *different ways of responding to culture*. Two categories within this theme consistently emerged: (1) respecting home culture and language and (2) the importance of home language in supporting relationships in addition to language development.

Data sources used to support this theme included preservice teachers' journals, early educators' responses to interview questions, and field notes of the preservice teacher who conducted the on-site observations.

Respecting the Home Culture and Language

The data suggested that respect was vital to the early learning curriculum and to instruction within this program. As one preservice teacher explained in her journal, "The teachers I spoke with really seemed to embrace the children and their particular cultural values and beliefs." For example, educators showed respect through their eagerness to learn about the children and families' culture and language. All of the educators who did not speak Spanish indicated that they were learning Spanish words and trying to use the language more in the classroom. As one educator explained, "I don't speak Spanish, but I am learning; anytime I can, I try to get a word in that I remember like 'sit down' in Spanish." Another teacher mentioned:

Any time I go to Billings [a larger city], I want to get something to help me learn Spanish; then I can help them [the children] ... like when they are crying and I don't understand them; it hurts me and I feel bad. So, it definitely has encouraged me to go and learn more Spanish in the future.

Additionally, all of the educators who did not speak Spanish suggested that their inability to communicate effectively in Spanish was a cultural issue or problem for the children and families. They did not indicate that children and families' inability to speak in English presented a barrier for the educators. The teachers were child and family focused. For example, one early educator stated, "The only thing [cultural issue] is me learning to speak Spanish. My ability to

communicate with parents is harder, too." And another teacher noted, "Probably, my inability to speak Spanish is a cultural issue or another language barrier."

In addition to learning the home language of the children and families, all of the early childhood teachers stated that they consistently sought to understand the culture of the families and the community. For example, teachers were observed writing notes to parents not only to inform parents about their child's day but also to ask questions about home events. The early educators asked the bus drivers to deliver these notes to parents and seek information about how the child was doing at home. As well, they approached interactions with the children and family in a reflective and honoring fashion. For example, one early educator suggested:

I think that you have to be willing to be very open and always "see" the children and families and listen carefully to the parents as well as the child... You know, you might say something that is offensive to their culture without meaning to, and you don't want to do that; you want to make the child feel comfortable because then he or she will learn.

Similarly, another educator stated the following as a teaching priority: "Be respectful of the culture and maybe learn a little bit about it." She continued to describe the importance of investigating what a child likes to do or eat in the home and suggested inviting parents to the program to engage the children in favorite family activities such as making tortillas:

And that way you are doing a classroom activity that brings the child's culture into the classroom. I think that shows the child that it [his culture] is important and that he is important. His culture is important just as is everyone's culture in the classroom. I think if you include it in your instruction the child will feel more comfortable and you will have fewer issues.

Finally, one teacher cautioned that it is important to know individual families and not to assume that all members of an ethnic group have the same customs and beliefs: "Do some research, you know, learn about them. Don't just say they are Hispanic and assume everybody is going to have the same culture."

Another topic that emerged regarding respect was the early childhood teachers' practice of differentiating instruction to meet the needs of the children and families. For example, the most consistent finding across all three data sources was that the program routinely accommodated diverse language needs. Observations revealed that instruction was bilingual in every classroom. As well, items were labeled in both English and Spanish, and books were provided in both Spanish and English in every classroom. As one teacher stated:

If the kids speak only Spanish, then you have to adjust to meet their needs in their own language; that's one of the things we do here. We have people who speak English, too. So, you have to adjust: translate for them or speak your own language so you can accommodate their needs.

One educator talked about individualizing to meet needs of the family by having an interpreter attend parent conferences:

Yes, we have translators. I use a lot of translators for parent conferences. Some parents speak English, but a lot of that is confidence, you know. They are not so confident in speaking English, so I have a translator there so they will feel more comfortable and willing to share.

The educators showed strong respect and empathy for the children by scheduling classroom activities around the families' routines and practices. For example, the children often get up at 4:00 or 4:30 A.M. to catch the bus. They arrive at the program at 6:00 A.M. and do not get on

the bus to go home until 6:00 P.M. Many of the children ride the bus for an hour or more and arrive home around 7:00 P.M. One educator stated:

You know they [the children] are here from 6:00 in the morning until 6:00 at night. I take that into consideration if they are having a bad day.... You have to remember that your schedule or plan for that day may not work, so you do something different.

Another educator talked about accommodating the children by adding soft music to the morning routine to help the children relax so they can sleep if they are tired. She said:

The children arrive asleep on the bus; as soon as we put the music on [in the classroom], they pass out within minutes so we know they are tired. We were not doing that at first but realized they are way tired and have a very long day.

Another example of respect that consistently surfaced in the data was educators valuing family beliefs and practices. For example, all teachers in the study suggested that they follow the parents' lead. One teacher said, "Their culture comes first; we never put it aside." Another stated, "I think a parent knows best with their child. If a parent wanted us to do a certain thing for their child, we would definitely include it." Educators also stated examples of honoring family culture through including routine care practices in the curriculum that reflected the parents' beliefs and practices. For example, one early childhood teacher elaborated:

In our culture, in the Hispanic culture, the infants or the children are the jewels of the family, so they [the parents] protect them. So, that means, if they sit them on their lap and feed them, we have to, too. When we are working with the child, we have to be aware that this child might be spoon fed. So, you want to sit right next to the child and encourage him to use his spoon, and if he can't—well then you help him until that assistance is not needed anymore ... and if they're bottle fed, you want to know if that is a comfort to them. You don't want to take it away from them if that is the case; we don't want them to be all frightened when they come to school and then not get their bottle. We have to remember that their culture is that they drink a bottle at home. We are here to encourage them and maybe slowly work with mom and wean them from the bottle. You have to open up your mind and say that may not be for me or how I'd raise my child but I am not here to raise my child; this is their child, so you have to work with them.

Finally, another educator explained her views in working with families, "Working with families is giving them tools and allowing them to put into place what they believe."

The Importance of Home Language in Supporting Relationships and Language Development

The data in this category revealed that the educators understood that offering curriculum and instruction in the home language is critical to building school relationships and to learning. Stated beliefs and observed interactions illustrated that these early childhood teachers emphasized the importance of using the home language through their daily instruction and care practices. For example, one teacher noted, "Everything in the classroom is written in Spanish and English. Our books are in Spanish and English, and anything that goes home like notes is translated into Spanish." Observations validated that instruction was offered in both Spanish and English, depending on individual children's needs, and that all classroom environments contained instructional materials written in both English and Spanish.

Another educator talked about how important it is for children to learn in their home language so they will feel safe and comfortable in the classroom (a point supported by Osterman, 2000). In order for linguistically and culturally diverse students to feel secure in the school environment,

allowing them to fully and successfully experience the educational process, their teachers must accept and use their home language and culture within the classroom setting (Chavez-Chavez, 1984; Cummins, 1994). One educator described the importance of using the child's home language in building a relationship or an attachment with a child:

Children like to have that comfort because they know only this. So, they are afraid. If a teacher does not speak Spanish or their home language, they don't feel as comfortable or as attached to these people as they do with people who speak their home language. We get that every now and then.

Moreover, data revealed the importance of perpetuating a child's home language at school so he or she can continue to maintain close family ties. A teacher explained, "I think it is important to be able to keep that language [home language] so these children can pass their language and their culture on to their children. I know that is something that is very important to a lot of the parents."

Another educator related a story from a home visit that illustrates the importance of supporting a child's home language in the school setting. Misconceptions engendered by the school culture can be less dominant when the home language is supported in the school (Fishman, 1996; Garcia, 2005). While she was visiting this family, an older child who attended elementary school came home. He was talking to his mother in English, but his mother spoke Spanish. He refused to speak to her in Spanish. His teacher told him he could only speak English at school. When his mother asked him to speak in Spanish, he said in English, "Well, my teacher said I can't speak Spanish anymore. If I speak my Spanish, that takes away my English, and I am not going to learn English right." The early childhood teacher reflected on the situation:

The mother needs to meet with the teacher and make her understand that it is disrespectful when her child will not respond to her in her culture and language. And you are breaking up a family because making a child feel like he can't use his home language could break up the family. You know, being proud of whom they are and feeling part of the community is important. They feel that they are half part of the community because now they can only speak English and can't speak their language. They don't feel whole.

Similarly, Wong Fillmore (1991) described what happens when learning a second language means losing the first:

When parents are unable to talk to their children, they cannot easily convey to them their values, beliefs, understandings, or wisdom about how to cope with their experiences. They cannot teach them about the meaning of work, or about personal responsibility, or what it means to be a moral or ethical person in a world with too many choices and too few guideposts to follow. What is lost are the bits of advice, the *consejos* parents should be able to offer children in their everyday interactions with them. Talk is a crucial link between parents and children: It is how parents impart their cultures to their children and enable them to become the kind of men and women they want them to be. When parents lose the means for socializing and influencing their children, rifts develop and families lose the intimacy that comes from shared beliefs and understandings. (p. 343)

The interview data also showed that instruction in the child's home language is critical to a child's emotional development through building relationships, security, and trust; and it is important to a child's language development. The early childhood teachers explained that maintaining the home language is important to children's overall identity and self-esteem; as well, they suggested that teaching in the home language provides children with a strong foundation for learning English or a second language. An educator suggested:

These children are here and have a right to the best education they can get, including the home language. If we take away something that is going to make them smarter or better adjusted, you take away part of them. So, if you take away their language, then you take away part of their respect and self worth.... Let them know how important their culture is, whether they are from the reservation or if they are Hispanic, whoever we receive from our community.... I don't think I am saying they have to use their home language when they go to school [elementary school] but that we shouldn't take away that home language. We [the early childhood teachers and parents] make a strong foundation with that home language so when they go to school they learn that second language and it is just as strong as the home language.

Another early childhood teacher reflected on how important it is for children who are English-language learners to be included in the classroom. This teacher held a degree in elementary education and was working on an English as a Second Language (ESL) endorsement. She explained:

I think it is a hard case when they get to elementary school and they don't have a teacher who speaks their own language. The child goes outside the classroom to learn something with someone else. So, you are isolating the child.... I believe that every child should be able to participate in the classroom. So, one of my goals is to get an ESL endorsement. If I were a little more prepared for them to adjust my lessons and my curriculum for them without removing them from the classroom, I could teach them.

Discussion

It is well documented that linking a child's personal, social, and cultural literacies to school culture is critical to a child's sense of belonging and achievement (Banks, 2002; Garcia, 2005; Nieto, 2002; Osterman, 2000). Despite this research, educators who belong to the dominant European American culture are often ill prepared to deliver curriculum within a culturally relevant context to an increasing population of students from ethnically and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Banks, 2002; Garcia, 2005; Dudley-Marling & Paugh, 2004; Nieto, 2002). Consequently, minority children are being marginalized within American schools (Dudley-Marling & Paugh, 2004; Moll, 1992; Moore, 2004c). However, the early educators in this study were responsive in practice and insightful in their beliefs about the importance of linking home and community culture to school culture; they worked hard to gather information from parents regarding their beliefs and preferences, providing interpreters and translating school documents when necessary in an effort to honor and incorporate parental wishes into their curriculum and instruction.

In a similar education and culture study conducted on the Flathead Indian Reservation, seven out of eight of the early childhood instructors interviewed were members of or descendents of the Salish and Kootenai tribes (Gilliard & Moore, 2007). In the present study, five out of eight of the teachers were Hispanic. As did the Native teachers who worked in the tribal programs on the Flathead Indian Reservation, the Hispanic teachers in the migrant and seasonal program discussed the ease they experienced when communicating with the children and the families enrolled in their classrooms. In response to a question about how her culture has influenced her instruction, one teacher stated:

My culture has, I think, because I was a migrant child and I know how it feels as a child to go from one place to another—I think that has influenced me to be able to talk to the children in our migrant program and to be able to comfort them. I am able to get down on their level and really understand what they are feeling or afraid of.

Moore and Gilliard (2007) suggested that perhaps when educators share the same community culture as the children they teach, their cultural pedagogy or "the taken-for-granted practices that emerge from deeply embedded cultural beliefs about how children learn and how teachers should teach" (Walsh, 2002, p. 60) is in synch with the home and community culture of the children they teach.

The data clearly revealed the significance of respecting and honoring families' values and beliefs. The motivation of these educators to learn about home culture and language and to use the information to transform curriculum (Moore, 2005) was noteworthy. One educator stated, "Since I started working here, I have definitely learned a lot more about their culture [Hispanic Culture] and want to learn even more. We never push aside the family's culture; it always comes first." Also significant was the fact that the educators viewed transforming curriculum and instruction based on home and community culture of the children and families they served as an opportunity to not only build relationships with the children and families but also to further their own professional development. For example, an educator noted:

The more people you can be around from different cultures, the more it will help you. It's fun you know, learning new things about new cultures. I make sure I am a resourceful teacher so I can be better-rounded. The more you can embrace different cultures, the better.

The educators used the information they learned about the home and community culture to provide individualized instruction and care rather than being frustrated by the preferences of parents, as is often the case with educators who provide a static or fixed curriculum (Goldstein, 2003; Moore, 2005). For example, educators were observed allowing individual children to rest when tired and to have access to their bottles when they arrived tired or waking up in the morning.

Similarly, the educators who did not speak Spanish reported that they saw their lack of knowledge regarding the Spanish language as a barrier to providing culturally responsive education and care and to forming effective parent partnerships. They did not report that the dominant language of the children and families was a cultural barrier, as is generally the case with teachers who believe students should simply learn English and avoid using the home language (Nieto, 2002). Educators used an additive perspective (Lambert, 1975) when discussing bilingual education; that is, these early educators felt that the home language was something to preserve and develop and that the home language would be the foundation for learning a second language. Their practice reflects the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Position Statement responding to linguistic and cultural diversity: "Early education programs should encourage the development of children's home language while fostering the acquisition of English" (NAEYC, 1995, p. 2).

Consistent with the educators' additive perspective of bilingual education was the strong support in the data for the importance of providing curriculum and instruction in the child's home language; findings suggested that the home language was important to fostering relationships and child development. Educators provided instruction in the home language and felt strongly that teaching in children's home language was critical to their self-worth, cultural identity, and overall development. Fishman (1996) suggested that losing one's home language has deleterious effects on one's relationships with family and community, to one's cultural identity, as well as to a person's academic achievement. In addition, Fishman (1996), in an attempt to convey the importance of supporting the perpetuation of one's home language and culture, referred to language as "the soul of the people," "the mind of the people," and "the spirit of the people" (p. 3). As one of the early educators in this study emphasized, "If you take away their language, you take away a part of them [the children]."

Additionally, providing instruction in a child's home language has been linked to academic success. For example, Thomas and Collier's (1997) longitudinal study of school effectiveness for

linguistically and culturally diverse students found instruction in a child's home language to be critical to academic performance. They stated:

The message from our findings is overwhelmingly clear that all language minority groups benefit enormously in the long-term from on-grade-level academic work in the first language. The more children develop the first language academically and cognitively at age-appropriate levels, the more successful they will be in academic achievement in the second language by the end of their school years (Thomas & Collier, 1997, p. 50).

Concluding Thoughts

Despite the limitations to the study—observations were conducted within an 8-hour period with only one program because of limited funding—the findings from this study suggest the following implications for early educators with respect to linking the home and community culture of their students to school culture:

- the importance of respecting and researching parents' beliefs and preferences,
- the need to shape curriculum and teaching based on family values and view points, and
- the significance of supporting relationships and child development through delivering curriculum and instruction in the home language (NAEYC, 1995).

Linking home and community culture to school culture is vital to children's self-worth, sense of belonging, identity, and achievement (Garcia, 2005; Nieto, 2002; Osterman, 2000). Given that 90% of American educators are European American and largely unprepared to provide culturally responsive curriculum and instruction to an increasing population of ethnically and linguistically diverse learners (Nieto, 2002), many children of minority backgrounds are marginalized within our schools (Dudley-Marling & Paugh, 2004; Moll, 1992). Lessons learned from studying ethnically diverse classrooms and educators such as those of this study will afford early educators opportunities to learn about providing curriculum and instruction "framed within a context of social justice and critical pedagogy, encompassing antiracist and basic education for all students of all backgrounds" (Nieto, 2002, p. 27).

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Appendix

Interview Questions

- What is your work title and the name of the school/institution for which you work?
- Please describe any training or education you have had to prepare you for your job as an early childhood educator. Have you taken some college courses or hold a degree or CDA? If so, in what area is your degree?
- Would you please describe your culture and ethnicity?
- Please describe the children you teach. How old are they? Do they have special learning needs? Describe their culture and ethnicity.
- Would you describe your teaching philosophy or beliefs?
- How are aspects of culture or multiple cultures included in your curriculum?
- Please describe a typical day in your classroom.
- How are parents included in your program/classroom?
- Do you believe that your culture has influenced your teaching or instruction? If so, how?
- Do you believe that the culture of the children you teach has influenced your teaching? If so, how?
- How do you individualize instruction around the culture of the children you teach?
- What are some cultural issues that might impact learning in your classroom?
- What do you believe is important for teachers to know about instructing children from diverse cultures or backgrounds?
- Is there anything else you would like to tell me that might be helpful to me as an early childhood teacher who is interested in adapting instruction to cultural differences of learners?