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Views of School Success Among Spanish-. and English-.speaking Parents

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Views of School Success Among Spanish- and English-speaking Parents

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As the diversity of American society continues to increase, schools are seeing an influx of children from different cultures. One of the fastest growing minority groups is the Latino population. Research shows that Latino children are at risk for underachievement in American schools; however, the reasons for this are still unknown. Many researchers have speculated that factors such as conflicting cultural value systems, differing academic values, and lower levels of acculturation vis-à-vis the dominant culture influence the underachievement of Latino children. In the present study, I investigate the views of both Spanish-speaking and English-speaking parents to determine whether they differ in their ideas of what constitute academic success. The results of the current study indicated both cross-cultural similarities and differences in parental perceptions of what constitutes school success. Academic achievement was the most important attribute of school success for both the Spanish- and English-speaking parents, though a significantly greater proportion of English-speaking parents listed academic achievement as the main criterion of success in school. Appropriate behaviors were much less frequently listed as the primary criterion of academic success and did not differ between parental groups in terms of the relative proportion of endorsement.

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Our school systems today reflect the diversity of our nation. Our classrooms are filled with faces of differing color and ethnicity. This growing diversity brings challenges to the educational setting. These challenges are not new as the United States has been a country with a high rate of immigration for over 200 years. Frequently, however, the educational success of some groups of children has lagged behind that of others, due to language and cultural differences (DeBlassie & DeBlassie, 1996). Schools across the nation have seen a recent influx of Spanish-speaking children. According to many researchers, Spanish-speaking children are at risk for becoming low achievers, yet the precise causes of this low achievement are still unknown (DeBlassie & DeBlassie). Therefore, educators need to find the most successful ways to teach children from diverse backgrounds, in order to keep these children from falling behind academically and dropping out of school.

There have been many different hypotheses as to why Spanish-speaking children are not making the academic gains needed to meet American achievement standards. Buenning & Tollefson (1987) hypothesized that cultural differences between Mexican-Americans and Anglo-Americans may contribute to the academic underachievement of Mexican-Americans. The basis of their argument is that Mexican-American students are caught between two cultures, home and school, resulting in conflicts between the traditional Mexican values at home and the American cultural values in the school environment. Other researchers have proposed that Mexican-American students are not achieving in school, because parental perceptions of what constitutes intelligence may differ between the cultures, and therefore parents may have different perceptions regarding what it takes to succeed in

school (Okagaki & Sternberg, 1983). Though past research has attributed the academic difficulties of Mexican-American students to a cultural mismatch between the home and school environment (Buenning & Tollefson, 1987; DeBlassie & DeBlassie, 1996; Okagaki & Sternberg, 1993), the specifics of the cultural mismatch have not been clearly defined. Questions remain regarding which particular values are affecting the academic success of Spanish-speaking youth. Without more explicit information on these values, educators cannot solve the problem of academic underachievement.

Academic underachievement may broadly affect many aspects of the student's life, the length of time he/she remains in school, feelings of self-worth and self-esteem, values regarding education and educational goals, his/her contribution to society, and future occupation and income. During childhood, parental attitude is one of the most important influences on a child's value formation and development. Yet, in the past, educational researchers have not explicitly examined parental attitudes regarding school success. Differences across cultures in parental views of school success may be affecting Spanish-speaking children in their school environment. Spanish-speaking children may have lower academic achievement, because their parents' perception of school success differs from that of mainstream American culture.

The goal in conducting the current study is to help school psychologists and educators better understand the possible factors affecting the academic performance of Spanish-speaking students, thereby enabling educators to make appropriate changes. I seek to investigate parental definitions of success and determine whether Spanish-speaking parents have a definition of

school success that is different from that held by parents representing the dominant American culture.

Literature Review

While the following research does not directly address school success as it pertains to the current project, it helps to establish a foundation. The literature review includes information on parental views of intelligence, the value conflict between the Spanish-speaking home and the school environment, the differences in educational goals between cultures, and the effects of acculturation on achievement. In reviewing past research in the area of the education of Spanish-speaking students, it was not clear what differences there might be between Spanish- and English-speaking parents in their views as to what might constitute academic success. In the current study, I seek to remedy the lack of knowledge.

I have used the term *Spanish-speaking* throughout, because it best describes the participants in my study. However, the ethnic origin terms used in the literature review will be those used by specific researchers.

Cultural Views of Intelligence

It is important to note the distinction between intelligence and academic success. In the past, this division has not been clearly made, and the terms intelligence and academic success were often used interchangeably. Intelligence is the capacity to acquire and apply knowledge. Academic success refers to whether a child masters sufficiently well, the knowledge, skills, and attitude that schools require.

Because there is little research specifically addressing Spanish-speaking students and school success, parental conceptions of intelligence have been examined to determine whether

cross-cultural differences existed. Variations in parental perceptions of intelligence were important to examine, because cross-cultural differences could affect a student's success in school. Okagaki and Sternberg (1993) examined the relationship between parental beliefs and their child's school performance. In general, all parents, regardless of ethnicity, wanted their children to be intelligent and have success in school, but the researchers hypothesized that parents of different cultural backgrounds may have different ideas about what intelligence was. The researchers proposed that differences in cultural values affected parental beliefs about intelligence. Specifically, they examined whether parental perceptions of intelligence differed across cultural backgrounds.

Approximately 1,500 parents from Cambodia, Mexico, the Philippines, Vietnam, and native-born Anglo-American and Mexican-American parents were contacted to participate with their child in a study. The group was separated into immigrant parents and American-born parents. The American-born parents were further separated into Anglo-American and Mexican-American. The sample included children from kindergarten, first and second grades, along with their parents and teachers. In the final sample, 675 children and 498 parents completed the questionnaires. The questionnaires were sent through the mail, each having been translated into the appropriate language. Any parents who had difficulty reading the questionnaires or answering the questions were interviewed in person or by phone (Okagaki & Sternberg, 1993).

The results of the study showed that parents from different cultural backgrounds had different perceptions of intelligence. Minority parents showed a broader conception of intelligence than Anglo-American parents. Noncognitive attributes, such as school motivation,

social skills, and self-management skills were as important or even more important than cognitive skills in their definition of intelligence. For example, both Mexican immigrant and Mexican American parents indicated interpersonal skills as being an important factor in intelligence. Anglo-American parents placed more importance on cognitive abilities, such as verbal expression, creativity, and problem-solving abilities (Okagaki & Sternberg, 1993).

Value Differences and the Effect on School Achievement

Several studies have focused on the contrasting values of mainstream American schools and the Latino culture. Researchers have suggested that differences in value systems placed Latino children at a disadvantage academically, because educators may have had different expectations for schooling (i.e., school goals). Okagaki and Sternberg (1993) found that American-born parents (both Mexican and Anglo-American) considered cognitive abilities and learning independence as two of the most important school goals for their children. In contrast, immigrant parents viewed cooperation and compliance as two of the most important school goals for their children. In this study, immigrant parents may have had a different view of what it takes to succeed in the classroom because of the different expectations they had for their child's classroom experience. Immigrant parents placed more importance on behavioral goals, but American-born parents rated academic goals as being more significant.

In another study, researchers examined other value conflicts outside of school goals. Steinburg, Dornbusch, and Brown (1992) investigated three explanations for inferior performance of Hispanic-Americans. They looked at parenting practices, familial values

and education, and children's beliefs about the occupational rewards of academic success. The researchers administered a 30-page questionnaire with a series of psychological inventories and attitudinal indices to 15,000 students across the nation. The schools were selected to reflect the diversity of students across the nation. One third of the sample were students of color, including nearly equal proportions of African-American, Hispanic, and Asian-American adolescents.

The questionnaire contained four categories of psychosocial development, psychosocial adjustment (e.g., measures in areas such as self-esteem and self-reliance), schooling (e.g., measures of school performance, school engagement, and attitudes about school), behavior problems (e.g., measures of drug and alcohol abuse and student misconduct), and psychological distress (e.g., measures of anxiety and depression). The researchers also collected demographic data such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, marital history, immigration history, and language use. In some instances, the researchers included interviews from students and parents. Because the questionnaire was administered to such a large sample, the diversity of the sample was very broad, allowing researchers to evaluate how patterns of development and adjustment differed across cultures. The researchers argued that ethnic differences in school achievement were explained by looking at the interaction among the family, the peer group, and the school (Steinburg et al, 1992).

Steinburg et al. (1992) found that Hispanic children typically were raised in an authoritarian home, which contrasted with the atmosphere of most school classrooms. Schools tended to emphasize autonomy and self-direction, but authoritarian households stressed obedience and conformity. The researchers argued that this placed Hispanic youth at a disadvantage in the classroom. Buenning and Tollefson (1987) also found

similar results. Mexican-American families were highly authoritarian, demonstrating strict child-rearing methods and a strong obedience to authority. The researchers hypothesized that the clash between home and school values may have adversely affected the achievement of Hispanic youth.

In the same study, Steinburg et al. (1992) found that in combination with the authoritarian parenting style of Hispanic children, there was low peer support for academics. Without support from their peers, the authoritarian Hispanic family may have weakened the academic performance of Hispanic youth. In contrast, Asian-American students are also often raised in an authoritarian home, but they have a higher level of peer support for academic success. Therefore, an important predictor of academic success is having both parental and peer support for academics, which is highly congruent for White and Asian-American students, but lower for African-American and Hispanic students.

Steinburg et al. (1992) also asked students the extent to which their friends and parents encouraged them to perform well in school. Hispanic parents were reported to be the most powerful influence on their child's education plans. However, the researchers suggested that the prevalence of an authoritarian parenting style, with its emphasis on obedience and conformity, may not build the independence and self-confidence needed in American schools, placing Hispanic children at a disadvantage.

There were also significant ethnic differences in perceptions of educational outcomes. Though, children across different cultures acknowledged that an education helped in getting a better job in the future, differences existed in the perceived consequences of not receiving an

education. Hispanic students tended to believe that they could acquire a good job without an education. They did not believe that educational failure would have negative consequences (i.e., not getting a good job); therefore, they spent less time and energy on academic work. Asian-American students in comparison had a stronger fear that not performing well would have negative consequences, thus devoting more time to academic work (Steinburg et al., 1992).

DeBlassie and Deblassie (1996) examined the role of cultural values and parenting influences on the education of Hispanic students. The researchers found results similar to those found in the research by Steinburg et al. (1992); Hispanic parents valued education and saw it as a way to rise in socioeconomic status. Similarly, parents were also found to be the most important and influential source of support in the lives of Hispanic youth. The findings were similar to past research, such that, one large component of the underachievement of Hispanic youth was the dissimilarity of educational values between Hispanic and non-Hispanic families.

Another investigation of cultural values was completed by Buenning & Tollefson (1987). The researchers hypothesized that Mexican-American children were caught between two different cultures that have very different value systems, thus producing conflict and placing them at a disadvantage at school. Similar to previous researchers, they identified areas where the two cultures showed a conflict in values. The researchers found the Mexican-American culture was cooperative in nature, while the dominant American culture was competitive. The researchers further reported that the dominant culture defined school success as students who have competitive human relationship styles and field independent cognitive styles (learners who actively participate in their learning environment),

styles which may contradict the values emphasized in the Latino home. Thus, the researchers hypothesized that Mexican-American students are placed in a conflict between their home environment that emphasizes compliance, field dependence, and cooperation and a school environment that emphasizes independence and competition.

Another distinction between the two cultures was the type of cognitive style. Mexican-American families were more field-dependent than Anglo-American families. Field-dependent children use the "spectator" approach to learning, meaning they are not active participants. Field independent learners are students who participate actively in the learning environment, asking questions, for example, when they do not understand instructions or material (Buenning & Tollefson, 1987).

In order to conduct their study, Buenning and Tollefson (1987) recruited students, parents, and teachers from four parochial schools in the Midwest. The students and parents were recruited from schools that were either predominantly Mexican- or Anglo-American. The sample of teachers was less diverse, of the 36 teachers, 35 were Anglo-American and one was Mexican-American. To assess achievement, students were given the *Iowa Test of Basic Skills* (ITBS). Based on the stanine scores, the students were broken down into two groups: high-achievers and low-achievers. Those in the top four stanines were labeled high- achievers, while those in the bottom five stanines were labeled low-achievers. To assess school values and attitudes, two instruments were given to the parents, students, and teachers. The School Environment Preference Survey was used to evaluate compliance to authority in the schools. In addition, the Cognitive Style Adjective Scale (CSAS) assessed field dependence or

independence. The researchers also examined socioeconomic status (SES) by asking questions about the parents' occupation and educational level.

Results of the study showed that Mexican-American students were caught between a culture that valued compliance with authority, field dependence, and cooperation and a school environment that valued independence and competition. Specifically, the results of the study demonstrated that Mexican-American parents and students agreed more strongly than Anglo-American parents and students that compliance to authority was important in school. Interestingly, researchers found that high achieving Mexican-American students did not endorse the traditional values their parents emphasized; rather they reported values similar to those of Anglo-American students. Furthermore, low achieving Mexican-American students adhered to their parents' authoritarian values to a stronger degree than high-achieving Mexican-American students. The researchers suggested that Mexican-American students who are low achievers might not be able to adjust to school expectations due to their strict adherence to the values emphasized at home (Buenning & Tollefson, 1987).

Past researchers have also examined the contrast in cultural values between educators and the Latino population. Past researchers have suggested that another factor affecting the achievement of Latino youth may be the incongruence in values between students and teachers. Maestas (1983) examined the role of value-congruence and achievement and specifically proposed that Mexican-American and nonMexican-American students' achievement differed as a function of the similarity of their values to their teacher's values.

Maestas (1983) selected a Mexican-American and a nonMexican-American sample from six culturally diverse schools across New Mexico and Texas. The ethnicity of the student was determined by their surname and any questions regarding the student's ethnic origin were answered by the school counselor or administrator. An educator sample was also utilized, which was composed of teachers, counselors, and administrators.

Maestas (1983) used the *Study of Values* test to determine value congruence and noncongruence between the groups. This test specifically measures value systems as a function of six basic motives (theoretical, economic, political, aesthetic, social, and religious) and has been shown to provide a valid representation of the dominant values in American society. Maestas also assessed achievement by means of the *Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS)* and the *ITBS,* depending on which instrument was typically used in each particular region.

Maestas (1983) found that nonMexican-American children have educational values closer to teacher expectations than do Mexican-American students. For example, Mexican-American students and nonMexican-American students had a different perception of time constraints: Mexican-Americans viewed time constraints with less urgency than nonMexican-Americans. In contrast, teachers greatly valued time constraints; they wanted homework to be completed and turned in "on time." Mexican-American children generally saw less need to turn homework in on time or complete a test within a given time frame. However, an important finding was that, contrary to prior beliefs, the value congruence/noncongruence between teachers and students was not the important factor in

mediating high achievement. Students who did not hold educational values similar to the teacher were just as likely to have high achievement as those who held values incongruent with the teacher's. Hence in this study, value congruence was not shown to be an important factor in demonstrating high achievement.

Educational Goals

School goals are an important part of succeeding in school. If parental goals are dissimilar from that of the schools, it could negatively impact a student's educational environment. Therefore, the congruence between parent and student goals must be examined. Bigelow and Zhou (2001) conducted a study that examined the parent-child relationship and how it affected the child's views of school success and school goals. The authors investigated whether parents and their children were consistent in the importance they assigned to school success. Specifically, they looked at whether performance goals (e.g., finding a good job, becoming a better person) decreased in importance for both parents and children as social goals increased in importance during adolescence.

Bigelow and Zhou's (2001) sample included Anglo-American students from grades 4, 6, 8, 10, and 12 from both rural and urban areas. A separate sample of students was also asked to write an open-ended essay describing their personal view of school success, which was completed during class time. After analyzing the essays, the researchers found six common school goals; the first of which was acquiring knowledge and achieving high grades. Next was becoming a better person, such as being a good and moral person, and following that were listening and having appropriate social skills. The fourth school goal was making friends and having a social life, followed by acquiring skills for a good job. The last school

goal was learning compliance and completing homework. The initial sample of students and their parents were then given questionnaires regarding these six categories of school goals.

Bigelow and Zhou's (2001) results showed that parents and children were very consistent in their assignment of the importance of school goals across grade levels. Therefore, parents in the study had a great impact on the development of their children's academic goals; in fact, student goals were embedded within the parent-child relationship. Parents influenced their child's success in school by shaping their child's view of appropriate school goals. Therefore, when examining the academic success of children, it is important to analyze parental perceptions, because regardless of culture, they have an enormous impact on their children's academic lives.

School goals of children reflect the prevailing goals of their culture as expressed in the values of the parents. Researchers have suggested that parents have difference ideas regarding what should be taught in school. Okagaki and Sternberg (1993) examined the educational goals of immigrant parents from Cambodia, Mexico, the Philippines, and Vietnam and native born Anglo-American and Mexican-American parents. The goals the researchers specifically examined were academic behaviors (knowledge/thinking skills vs. completing academic tasks in a neat fashion) and social behaviors (social skills vs. socially conforming behaviors like obeying rules). Across most groups of parents, the ratings of academic and social goals were equal. Within social goals, parents placed more importance on teaching obedience than teaching a child appropriate social skills. The primary difference between groups existed within academic behaviors. Mexican-immigrant parents placed more importance on teaching children to print and write neatly than on teaching children to think

independently. Nonimmigrant parents were the opposite; they placed more importance on independent thinking skills than the orderliness of the work. Immigrant parents also placed more importance on neat and orderly work over thinking skills, such as asking questions or thinking critically. These results yielded important information, demonstrating the contrast of academic goals across cultures. Past research on school goals has demonstrated that parents' viewpoints shape the goals of their children, and parents from different ethnic backgrounds also have different expectations for their children's teachers.

Effects of Acculturation on School Achievement

Other researchers have proposed that academic achievement may be affected by the degree of acculturation of a student. Lopez, Ehly, and Garcia-Vasquez (2002) examined two factors associated with achievement, acculturation and social support. According to Lopez et al., acculturation was defined as the process that results in the modification of the culture of a group or individual as the result of having contact with another group or culture. Research showed that adapting to the dominant culture increased the likelihood of succeeding in school. Social support was also important, because minority students may be experiencing stress from the acculturation process in addition to the stress from adjusting to school. The researchers also found that social support helped ameliorate the extent of pressure felt by immigrant students.

Lopez et al.'s (2002) sample included 60 ninth-grade students of Mexican descent in a Southwestern school. Only students who identified their ethnic origin as Mexican or Mexican-American were used in the study. There were also 31 students of other Hispanic descent (e.g., Guatemalan, El Salvadoran, Costa Rican etc,); however, these were not included in the sample for the study because the acculturation questionnaire did

not fit their ethnic group. Participants were volunteers recruited through personal invitation to a presentation of the study. Because a large percentage of the sample did not have standardized state achievement scores in their records, the researchers used the students' grade-point-averages. The Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican American-II (ARSMA-II) (Cueller et al., 1995) was used to measure levels of acculturation of the students. A social support scale, The Social Support Scale for Children (Harter, 1985), was also used to examine students' perceived support from parents, teachers, classmates, and close friends. The Social Support Scale for Children was translated into Spanish for students who requested it. As a part of this process, the principal researcher translated the scale and several bilingual adults from the area reviewed it for clarity.

Lopez et al. (2002) found that students who are highly acculturated or integrated into the dominant culture tend to have higher achievement. Acculturated individuals were able to adopt the values and practices, such as school achievement, of the dominant culture, while still maintaining aspects of their own culture. Therefore, minority students who succeeded in school did so by adopting enough of the dominant culture's values to survive in the school setting.

Summary and Conclusions

The research discussed in this paper provides information about factors that may contribute to underachievement of individuals who are Latino. A consistent finding in the research was that parenting styles and cultural values play an important role in the academic achievement of Latino youth. Past research has suggested that Latino families have value systems which may conflict with mainstream American values, placing Latino

children at a disadvantage in the classroom. However, school success has not been directly evaluated in any of the past research. In the past, school success was defined as performing well in school academically. While this may be the description of school success in mainstream American society, it is possible that Latinos have a different definition of what it means to do well in school. Therefore, we should broaden the definition of school success and open it up for examination. Currently, there is little research that bears specifically on Latino parents' view of school success, which makes the proposed study important, because it will explore a topic that has not been previously researched. Information from the current study could give educators ideas on how to bridge the gap between the two cultures and raise the academic achievement of Latinos.

Current Study

Due to the sparseness of research regarding the factors contributing to the underachievement of Latino youth, an investigation examining parental definitions of school success is warranted. The purpose of the current study was to compare the definitions of school success of Spanish- and English-speaking parents. To examine whether there were differences between Spanish-speaking and English-speaking parents' definition of school success, questionnaires were administered to individuals from both groups. The format of the current questionnaire was different from those of past studies, because an open-ended question was used to examine parental perceptions of school success. It is important to note the current study will not be able to determine why differences occurred between groups; rather the goal of the study is generate hypotheses for future research.

The primary research question was to find out how Spanish and English-speaking parents are similar and different in their views of school success. To answer this question we looked at the data in two ways. First, the initial response that each parent wrote in their definition of school success was compared across language groups. This was done under the assumption that the first statement written by a parent might contain their most important attribute for school success. Second, all written responses by parents were compared across the two language groups. It was hypothesized that Spanish-speaking parents would have a different perspective of school success, based on their cultural values and background. If Spanish-speaking parents were to hold a definition of school success that is distinctly different from the perspective held by English-speaking parents, the incongruence could possibly be affecting Latino students' performance in school.

Method

Participants

The total Spanish- and English-speaking sample included 131 parents of students in kindergarten through fourth grade at an elementary school in a large urban district in the Midwestern United States. Originally, 139 participants filled out questionnaires. However, only 131 of the parents answered the single open-ended question that was used for the current study. Of the 139 parents, 103 were mothers and 36 were fathers. For the final sample, 43 of the parents were English-speaking and 88 were Spanish-speaking. The Spanish-speaking group was from various places throughout Mexico and Latin-America. Specifically, people in the Spanish-speaking group were from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Paraguay, and Puerto Rico. The parents were recruited because their children attended a dual language program, where

students were taught in both Spanish and English. The school was a lower income school; 80.4% of the students were on free/reduced lunch (68% free, 12.4% reduced lunch). The study was part of a larger research project conducted at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Parents were recruited through fliers distributed by teachers at parent-teacher conferences.

Setting

The dual language program at the school was funded by an extramural grant and began in 2000, starting with the kindergarten and first grade classes. Dual language programs differ from both ESL (English as a Second Language) programs and bilingual education programs in the following ways. Bilingual education programs involve the teacher using two languages during instruction, which contrasts with the dual language program, where native English speakers and native Spanish speakers receive instruction in both languages throughout the day and subsequently develop a second language. English as a Second Language programs differ vastly from dual language programs. NonEnglish-speaking students are pulled from the classroom and given independent English instruction to aid in language fluency and to help develop the skills necessary to survive in the classroom (Heron & Harris, 2001).

In developing this particular dual language program, educators had to determine the most effective way to administer instruction. There are different models of dual language instruction, for example 80:20 or 90:10, but the school administration aimed to achieve 50:50 instruction in Spanish and English. For kindergarten through second grade, the students are separated by their native language and receive math and language arts instruction in that language. However, the students are integrated to work on a science or social studies project for

part of the day, where they receive instruction in both languages. When the students reach third grade, the classes are integrated with a ratio of half of the students being native Spanish speakers and the other half being native English speakers. From third grade on, students learn half of the day in English and the other half in Spanish.

Parental involvement in the Dual Language program is essential. Upon their child's entry into the program, parents agreed to be actively involved in their child's school life, participating in activities and volunteer hours at the school. As a result, most of the parents in this program were already active participants in their child's education. This aided the recruitment process, because parents were already accustomed to being active in the school.

Instrumentation

A brief questionnaire was used to address the parents' view of school success. The questionnaire was designed in English, translated into Spanish, and then back translated into English to ensure accuracy. Translators from Omaha Public Schools did the translating and a student fluent in Spanish did the back translating to ensure accuracy of the translation. The student who did the back-translating was a Spanish language major and had a minor in Chicano/Latino Studies. As stated before, this specific research study was part of a larger research project; therefore, only one question from the larger questionnaire was used for the current project. The larger questionnaire contained three sections of open-ended questions and the remainder were closed-ended. The portion of the questionnaire used for the present study was one open-ended question asking parents what school success means to them personally. The question read,

> People often have different ideas about what it means to do well in school. We want to know how you personally define school success for your child. In other words, what does doing well in school mean to you?

The open-ended questions were first in the questionnaire packet. Therefore, parents were free to answer and discuss their perspective of school success without any information from the closed-ended questions guiding their answers. The purpose of the questionnaire was to broaden this area of research, which has been mostly limited to mainstream American society's definition of school success.

Procedure

Parents were recruited through fliers handed out by teachers at student-parent conferences. Questionnaires were administered to two different groups of parents in two rounds of data collection during the 2003-2004 school year. Two rounds, one in the fall and one in the spring, were used to get more participants and to allow for people who were unable to come to the first round of data collection, due to scheduling conflicts. Administration of the questionnaires occurred at the school. The participants met in the cafeteria of the school, where food, drinks, and childcare services were provided for the families while they completed the questionnaires. Questionnaires were available in both Spanish and English. Before filling out the questionnaires, the researchers separated the English- and Spanish-speaking parents. Parents were asked to go the language group with which they felt most comfortable. In each group the questionnaires were read aloud as the parents followed along with their own copy to ensure that all parents were able to read and understand the questionnaires. While the parents were writing down their responses, both Spanish speaking and English speaking individuals circled the room to answer any questions the parents had. Researchers were also

available to read the questionnaire again if needed. Each parent who filled out a questionnaire received 10 dollars for their participation

Data Coding and Analysis

The answers to the questionnaires written in English were transcribed and typed into a microcomputer file. The questionnaires answered in Spanish were transcribed in Spanish, translated into English, and entered into a computer file. The same college student who did the back-translating of the questionnaires, translated the Spanish questionnaires into English. Questions regarding the translations were brought to the dual language research group at the University of Nebraska where two members were also fluent in the Spanish language and could help with the process. The responses to the questionnaires were then coded and analyzed.

First, the parents' answers were entered into an Excel spreadsheet, and each statement of school success a parent listed was recorded as a discrete item. The parent's statements were easily separated because many gave their response in a list format or separated different components by a comma. For the purposes of this paper, the separated parent statements will be called parental responses. "Paying attention", "enjoying school", "getting good grades", and "respecting the teacher" were some examples of common parental responses. The spreadsheet also contained subject number, parent (mother or father), language, gender, grade level, parental educational level, how long they had lived in the United States, and attributes of school success.

Categorization began by placing each attribute listed by the parents on a separate notecard. Next, the notecards were placed into groups based on similar content; for example,

behaving well in school and following school rules were placed in the same group. Any attributes that did not initially fit into a group were set aside in an "other" category. The next step was to re-examine the "other" pile for possible emerging categories or attributes that fit into previously existing categories. This process was repeated three times; each time new categories emerged until the remaining attributes were either ambiguous, too general, or did not relate to the question being asked. Thirteen categories, including the "other" category were formed through this process.

After the categories were developed, each category was given labels that reflected their content and were operationally defined with examples reflecting the content of the category. After each category was given a category label and was operationally defined, the categories were sent to the larger research team working on this project for feedback and suggestions. Categories with similar content were combined to form one large category with many subcategories. For instance, behavior was composed of a) compliance with school rules, b) respecting others, c) attending school, d) being on-task, and e) general behavior. Each subcategory was also given an operational definition and examples (see Appendix for the categories).

The first category formed was the academic category. It was formed by examining the content of the academic responses and after determining that there were two different types of responses, two subcategories were formed: the process of learning and the product of learning. Each subcategory was given an operational definition by giving a broad generalization of the contents of the subcategory. For example, the product of learning shows that the student is learning new information, including things

like getting good grades, completing homework, meeting school/state goals, etc. After the data were analyzed, it was apparent that there were some responses that were too general to fit into one of the above subcategories; therefore, a general academic subcategory was added.

The second category was the behavior domain. This category was separated into four different subcategories; compliance with school rules, respecting others, attending school, and being on-task. Once again, each subcategory was operationally defined and examples were given. For example, compliance with school rules means that the student follows school rules, including things such as not fighting in school, not getting into trouble, following classroom rules, and the like. Similar to the academic category, a general behavior category was added to account for any behavior responses that were too broad to fit into one of the above subcategories.

The social category contained two areas of responses, ones that involved learning social skills and the other involving attitudes towards school. Therefore, the social category was broken down into two subcategories: learning and participating in social skills and feelings towards school. Once again, similar to the academic and behavior categories, each social subcategory was defined to reflect the content of the category. Because, the social domain was also a broad domain, a general social subcategory was added, similar to the academic and behavior categories.

The remaining four categories contained responses which were rather similar in content; therefore, subcategories were not needed. Participating in extracurricular activities was an infrequently cited response. However, it did not fit into any larger

category. Hence it was made into a category of its' own. The category was given a definition that reflected its content and examples were provided.

Preparing for the future was a frequently cited category; however, responses were all very similar in content, and hence there was no need for separate categories. Most of the responses dealt with learning the skills needed to have a better future. A definition was given to reflect this meaning, and examples were provided.

During the coding process, it became apparent that many responses did not fit into any of the above categories; however, they somehow dealt with the general improvement of the child. Therefore, a category was formed to account for responses that mentioned some type of broad improvement of the child that could not be tied to academics, behavior, or social improvement. The category was operationally defined to reflect the content of these responses, and examples were provided.

Some responses did not match the question; therefore, these responses became a separate category and were defined. For example, there should be more one-on-one instruction and it is important to have contact with the teachers. Finally, the last category was for statements which could not be coded because of their ambiguous nature.

Training

After revisions were made to the categorical definitions, training for the coding process was established. Aside from the researcher, a school psychology graduate student who was familiar with the project coded 20% of the data to provide a reliability check. Prior to beginning the coding process, a training session was scheduled between the researcher and the graduate student to review and explain the

definitions of each category. The training session was used to answer any questions and clarify all instructions for the coding process. The training session was used to practice coding data using a sample of the data as a trial to check for reliability between the researcher and the coder. This allowed for further clarification of the definitions if needed and provided a check of the graduate student's understanding of the coding process. After the categories were reviewed, the researcher and graduate student separately coded ten sample items. Although there were no items where the researcher and coder disagreed, there were items whose category placement was questionable. Changes were then made to the categories, rewording definitions or giving more examples when necessary. Next, ten more items were coded independently and questionable items were again discussed. As a result of this phase of the training process, the academic skills category was further refined, separating it into two subcategories. Finally, ten more sample items were coded and 100% agreement was reached.

Following the training session, the actual coding of the data began. Each category was assigned a number and responses were coded to coincide with the category number. An electronic copy of the Excel spreadsheet was sent to the graduate student so that she could code electronically and then send the file back to the researcher. The graduate student coded every fifth entry on the datasheet. A separate column was inserted before each attribute column where the researcher and graduate student placed the coded category number. Intercoder reliability was 90.8%.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed by determining the percentages of parents in each language group who listed a criterion for school success in particular categories. Each parent's ethnic origin was cross-checked against their demographic data given on the questionnaire. Eleven of the parents who were of Mexican descent answered an English questionnaire. However, after further investigation it was found that each of these eleven parents were second generation Americans; thus, they had been born in the United States. Therefore, the two groups had to be operationally defined. Any parent who was a first generation American (born outside of the United States) would be considered to be Spanish-speaking. Parents who were second-, third-, or fourth-generation Americans (born in the United States) were placed in the English-speaking group. Therefore, because these eleven people of Mexican descent chose to answer an English questionnaire and they were born and raised in the United States resulting in them being more acculturated than those in the Spanish-speaking group, they were subsequently kept in the English-speaking group.

The data were analyzed in two different ways. The first response parents made constituted the principal analysis, because it was assumed that the initial or most salient response given was the most important attribute of school success for the parent. I also examined all the statements parents had written in their definition of school success to determine whether category differences existed between language groups when all responses made by parents were considered.

Results

First, there was a difference between language groups in the average number of responses provided by each parent. In general, the English-speaking parents listed more responses than did the Spanish-speaking group (M = 4.44 [191 total responses/43 parents], SD = 2.90, range = 1-17) and (M = 2.57 [226 total responses/88 parents], SD = 1.60, *range* =1-9). English-speaking parents listed significantly more responses than did Spanish-speaking parents, t (129) = +2.84, p <.05, two-tailed.

First-Response Data

I first determined whether differences existed between groups in the type of first response made by parents. For both English- and Spanish-speaking parents, academically related responses comprised the highest percentage of the first response. As shown in Table 1, the English-speaking group had a higher percentage of academic statements than did the Spanish-speaking group. Upon closer examination, a z-test for a difference between proportions showed a significant difference between groups in the propensity to respond with an academically oriented answer, z = -2.23, p < .05, two-tailed test. Therefore, English-speaking parents were more likely to list academically related responses in their definition of school success than Spanish-speaking parents. Due to small cell sizes, only one academic subcategory could be tested for a language group difference. Though Spanish-speaking parents listed the product of learning more frequently than

English-speaking parents, this difference was not statistically reliable, $z = 0.45$, $p > .05$, two-tailed test.

Overall, the percentage of behavior related responses was quite similar for the two groups. There was no difference between Spanish- and English-speaking parents in their propensity to give a behaviorally related response in their answer on the questionnaire, $z = .85$, $p > .05$, two-tailed test. Mirroring this overall result, there were small differences within the behavior category in the content of the behaviors reported by parents from each group. Within the behavior category, Spanish-speaking parents placed slightly more emphasis on compliance with school rules and respecting others. English-speaking parents were more likely to list attending school and on-task behaviors as being indicators of school success.

A larger disparity existed in the social area, where English-speaking parents were more likely to list a socially related response than Spanish-speaking parents, though this tendency could not be assessed for statistical reliability due to the small cell size of the Spanish-speaking sample. In fact, the social domain was the least frequently reported response category by the Spanish-speaking parents. Differences were also apparent when examining the content within the social category. Specifically, for English-speaking parents, learning social skills was the most frequent response within the social category. For Spanish-speaking parents, learning social skills and feelings towards school were equally infrequently mentioned.

As can be seen in Table 1, a difference existed in the importance of school in preparing students for the future. Spanish-speaking parents recognized this as an important part of school success; however, English-speaking parents did not report this criterion as frequently. Again, excessively small cell size (English speakers) did not permit a valid test of statistical reliability for the obtained difference. Finally, Spanish-speaking parents were more likely to list a global response about overall student improvement than were English-speaking parents were.

All Responses

This analysis displayed in Table 2, was completed differently than that for the first response data. Instead of analyzing percentages of persons responding in each category, the researcher examined the percentages of responses classified in each category, regardless of where a response occurred on a parent's list. Therefore, the unit of measure for this part of the data analysis was the response, not the respondent, as was the case for the first-response data. Even though any given parent may be represented more than once in a given category, and others may not be represented at all, the interest in this analysis was to examine all the parents' responses at least at a descriptive level.

Similar to the first-response data, apparent differences and similarities existed between the two language groups when analyzing all responses. The academic category again contained the greatest percentage of responses for both language groups. However, contrary to the case for the first-response data, here there was a much smaller difference between Spanish- and English-speaking parents

in their propensity to give an academically related response. Within the academic category, there were differences similar to those for first-response data. Again, Spanish-speaking parents placed much more emphasis on the product of learning than the process of learning. For English-speaking parents, this difference was less pronounced.

When we examine the frequency of responses of each language group, we see that many of the English-speaking parents made more than one response in each academic category. In fact 29 of the 43 parents who gave an academic response responded more than once across the subcategories. Therefore, not only did more English-speaking parents make academically related responses, they also did so at a higher rate per person. This was true across both the process and product of learning subcategories. In contrast, for the Spanish-speaking group not as many parents made academically related responses. Also, those who did make responses did it less frequently than the English-speaking parents, only 25 out of the 88 parents.

A larger disparity between groups existed in the behavior domain, when examining all responses. As compared to the first-response data, there was a larger difference between the two groups of parents in their propensity to list a behaviorally oriented response. Similar to the first-response data, within the behavior category, Spanish-speaking parents placed somewhat more emphasis on compliance with school rules and respecting others than they did the other

subcategories. In contrast, English-speaking parents were fairly consistent in their view of the relative importance across the behavior subcategories.

In examining the frequency of responses per parent, fewer English-speaking made more than one behaviorally related response. For example, out of the 17 English-speaking parents who made a behavior response, 8 responded more than once. In contrast, of the 40 Spanish-speaking parents, 23 responded more than once.

As was the case with first-response data, English-speaking parents listed socially related responses in their definition of school success more frequently than did Spanish-speaking parents. Examining the subcategories, Spanish-speaking parents were most likely to list a response that fit into the learning and participating in social skills subcategory. Spanish-speaking parents placed less emphasis on the child's feelings towards school. In contrast, English-speaking parents placed equal emphasis on learning social skills and feelings towards school.

Examining the frequency of responses per parent, English-speaking parents were more likely to respond with more than one response in the social category. For example, of the 22 English-speaking parents who made a response in this category, 16 gave more than one. In contrast, Spanish-speaking parents were less likely to give more than one social response; only 6 out of the 18 parents did.

Across both language groups, parents were rather unlikely to list a response that related to participating in extracurricular activities. In the English-speaking group few parents responded in this category; however, two parents listed more than

one response. In the Spanish-speaking group only one parent provided a response fitting this category.

A large discrepancy also existed between groups regarding the importance of school in preparing students for the future. Specifically, Spanish-speaking parents placed more much emphasis on this criterion of academic success. In the preparing for future category, several Spanish-speaking parents provided multiple responses. None of the English-speaking parents did so. In general, a higher percentage of English-speaking parents gave responses that fit "the overall statement of improvement category". This was contrary to the results for first-response data.

Similar to the first response data, Spanish-speaking parents listed a greater proportion of responses that fit in the "answer does not fit the question category" than did English-speaking parents. In addition, the Spanish-speaking parents were more likely to provide multiple responses fitting this category.

Finally, the last category was the noncodeable category. Only one Spanish-speaking parent had a response that fit this category and that was because the answer was not clear enough to translate. No English-speaking parents listed a response that fit this category.

Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to examine parental beliefs about and perceptions of school success. The specific goal in conducting this research was to determine whether differences existed between Spanish- and English-speaking parents in their beliefs concerning what it takes to succeed in school. Results of this research document

similarities and differences between the two language groups in their views as to the criteria for school success.

In the past, researchers have not examined cultural values regarding school success with the format of an open-ended questionnaire as I did in the current study. Parents were allowed to express freely their personal definition of school success for their child.

For both Spanish- and English-speaking parents, academics were the most important part of success in school. Considering first-response data, English-speaking parents were more likely than Spanish-speaking parents to provide an academic response in their definition of school success. Although significant differences were found between Spanish- and English-speaking parents in the first- response data, academics were still the most frequently listed attribute for parents from both groups. Thus, academics are very important to parents from both cultures.

There were also differences between groups in the way academics may be stressed in the home. Within the academic category, both groups of parents recognized the importance of the product of learning (e.g., getting good grades). Differences occurred in the importance of the process of learning (e.g., listening to instruction). English-speaking parents placed more importance on the process of learning than Spanish-speaking parents. Therefore, Spanish-speaking parents may see the product of learning as being more important than the learning process, which may reflect some differences in cultural perspectives regarding learning. It is possible that Spanish-speaking parents place more importance on the product of learning because that is what

teachers stress to them. For example, teachers may emphasize getting good grades, completing assignments, handing in work on-time, meeting school or state goals when talking with parents. These findings are similar to those of Buenning and Tollefson (1987), who reported an important school goal for English-speaking parents, was learning field-independent behaviors such as asking questions. It is possible that English-speaking parents are more likely to recognize that academic success is not only about getting good grades or performing well on tests, but that it is also imperative to learn skills that help a person succeed in the school environment, such as asking questions when things are unclear or learning study skills. This may not be as clear to Spanish-speaking parents due to the nature of the school environment and what is often stressed by educators as important to succeeding in school (e.g., getting good grades).

One qualification to this finding is the design of the study. Due to the open-ended nature of the question, parents were free to list their personal definition of school success. However, the questionnaire was not specific to academics and parents were not asked specifically to rate which part of academics is more important to them, process or product. To examine this area in the future, a questionnaire specific to academics should be used to get more detailed information regarding parental definitions of academic success.

Results showed that academics were the most important part of success in school for both the Spanish-speaking and English-speaking parents. However, there may be differences in the manner in which academics are stressed by parents from different cultures. As a whole, the Spanish-speaking population placed more importance on the

product of learning than the process of learning. English-speaking parents placed equal emphasis on both the product and process of learning.

There were similarities and differences within the behavior domain across the two groups of parents. For the first-response data, Spanish- and English-speaking parents had similar views regarding the importance of behavior to school success. However, in examination of all the data, apparent differences occurred between Spanish- and English-speaking parents. For all responses, approximately twice the percentage of Spanish-speaking parents gave responses that were behavior oriented than did English-speaking parents.

Differences were also apparent within the behavior category. For both the first-response and all the data, Spanish-speaking parents placed more emphasis on compliance with rules and respecting others as being an important part of school success than did English-speaking parents. Past research has shown these behavioral areas to be important to Spanish-speaking parents. Okagaki & Sternberg (1993) found behavioral goals, such as cooperation and compliance, to be highly valued school goals by Spanish-speaking parents. Steinburg et al. (1992) also found that Spanish-speaking parents value compliance and acquiescence to authority at school. The other domains within the behavior category, school attendance and on-task behavior, were similar in importance for Spanish-speaking and English-speaking parents.

If we examine the first-response results only, the results may contradict prior beliefs regarding differences between cultures in the perception of the importance of behavior in the school environment. Past research has shown that Spanish-speaking

parents place more importance on behavioral skills than English-speaking parents (Okagaki & Sternberg, 1993; Steinburg et al., 1992). In the current study, there was no difference between language groups in the first-response data, which is the data set that I believe yielded the parents' most salient thoughts of school success. When looking at the first-response data, Spanish-speaking parents and English-speaking parents were similar in their rating of the importance of a child's behavior to academic success. As stated before, when differences did occur it was between the types of behavior stressed (e.g., compliance with school rules vs. on-task behavior). While both groups of parents have similar perceptions of the importance of behavior, they may have differences in the types of behaviors stressed at home.

One reason the findings of the current study may contradict past findings is the type of study completed. The current study is different from past studies because it featured an open-ended questionnaire. Okagaki and Sternberg (1993) and Steinburg et al., (1992) both used closed-ended questionnaires, each containing sections that related to parent's perceptions of student behavior. This could be part of the reason that the results of the current study differ from past findings. Certainly this is a category of criteria for school success that should be more fully explored in the future. Once again, future researchers may wish to re-examine this issue to determine whether there may indeed be cultural differences in parental perceptions of the importance of appropriate school behaviors.

Spanish- and English-speaking parents also differed in their perceptions of social behavior. Across both the first- and all- responses data sets, English-speaking parents

appeared to place more importance on the social aspect of school than Spanish-speaking parents. Differences were also apparent between groups within the social category. In examination of the social category within all responses, Spanish-speaking parents regarded learning social skills as being more important to school success than the child's feelings about school. English-speaking parents placed equal emphasis on learning social skills and their child's feelings towards school. While the social domain was one of less frequently reported categories, it does demonstrate an area where Spanish-speaking and English-speaking parents may differ in their perceptions of school success. These differences could be due to cultural differences, for example. For Spanish-speaking parents, feelings toward school or learning social skills may not be important for school success. These findings should not suggest that feelings towards school or learning social skills are an unimportant part of a child's life, but for Spanish-speaking parents they may not be as important a part of a child's educational life at school as are other criteria. This question should be more directly studied in the future, either by asking parents directly in an open-ended format or by using a closed-ended questionnaire to get the data.

Interestingly, in both the first- and all- responses data, Spanish-speaking parents were more likely than English-speaking parents to perceive success in school as being an important factor in preparing the child for the future. English-speaking parents did not place great importance on this criterion; in fact, the future domain was one of the least reported criteria for these parents. Deblassie and Deblassie (1996) and Steinburg et al. (1992) both found similar results. They found that parents are one of the most important sources of influence

on Spanish-speaking youth, thus shaping their educational attainment and goals. The researchers also found that Spanish-speaking parents see education as a way for their children to rise in socioeconomic status. Thus, past researchers have found results similar to those of the current study: Spanish-speaking parents see education as a ladder for future social and occupational success. However, we cannot make broad generalizations about this data because it is not known why English-speaking parents did not record school success as being important to the child's future. It may be that the English-speaking parents saw this as an already acknowledged area due to societal beliefs and therefore did not include it in their definition. Past research has shown that students from diverse ethnic backgrounds (including Anglo-American, Asian-American, African-American, and Hispanic populations) felt that getting a good education improved their ability to get a better job in the future (Steinburg, Dornbusch, and Brown, 1992). Therefore, it is possible that English-speaking parents and Spanish-speaking parents may have more similar beliefs concerning this criterion than the data show.

One reason there may have been as many similarities as there were in the current project may be due to the particular sample of participants. As previously stated, in the present study all participants had children enrolled in a dual language program. In dual language programs, cooperative learning is stressed, where students learn from one another and about each others' cultures. Therefore, students in the program are less likely to have preconceived perceptions of cultural differences or stereotypes, because of the cooperative nature of the classroom. The parents of these children also learn about other cultures, lifestyles, and practices by being around their children and the school environment. Therefore, it is possible that nature of the dual language program may have contributed to the similarity in perceptions between the two groups

of parents in this study. Parents of students in the program may have more similarities in beliefs than parents who do not have children in a dual language program.

Another interesting finding was the degree of participation from the parents of the two groups. More Spanish-speaking parents participated in the study than English-speaking parents. In fact, there were approximately twice as many Spanish-speaking parents participating in the study. This information counters the stereotype that Spanish-speaking parents are not active participants in their child's education. The parents from the dual language group not only participated in the current study but were also active participants at the school, volunteering at the school for activities and even helping in the classroom. This information is useful to educators and school personnel, as many people have misconceptions regarding the participation of Spanish-speaking parents. Spanish-speaking parents want to be involved in their child's education. Educators need to work to help them make it happen.

Another commonly held misconception is the participation of fathers across cultures. Many fathers participated in the current study, especially Spanish-speaking fathers. In the Spanish-speaking parental group we saw many mothers and fathers filling out the questionnaires. However, in the English-speaking group there were more mothers than fathers filling out the questionnaires. This further shows the participatory role in education of both fathers and mothers in Latino families.

Implications for Educators

One of the main roles educators have is to help students succeed in school. The results of the current study can be used to help educators better understand just which factors might be contributing to the academic underachievement of Spanish-speaking

students. The results show that Spanish- and English-speaking parents of children in a dual language program are more similar than different in their perceptions of school success, particularly with regard to the role of academics. Therefore, educators need to be aware that, despite similarities in school values between cultures, Spanish-speaking children are still considered to be at-risk academically at school (Lopez, et al., 2002; DeBlassie & DeBlasse, 1996). While it is important to gain knowledge and have an understanding of a student's cultural background, teachers may have to look beyond the differences that may exist between cultures in perceptions of school success to explain the academic difficulties of Spanish-speaking children. It may be important to evaluate the expectations placed on students in American schools. In the future, it will be important to examine the match between school and home and determine how the schools' expectations fit with those at home. In addition, it is important for educators to communicate clearly with parents from all cultures regarding school and classroom goals. Educators need to be very clear with parents regarding the school's expectations of the child and what it takes to succeed in the classroom. Therefore, because of at least some differences in perceptions of what is required for school success across cultures, parents should be made more aware of the expectations of school personnel for their child's classroom performance.

It is important to note that cultural differences should not be seen as a disadvantage; in fact differences between cultures should be recognized and appreciated in our school systems. Any differences in perceptions of school success between cultures should not be interpreted as to encourage a change in values for either culture.

Values are the center of a culture and should not be changed to fit another's standards. Rather, differences between cultures should be embraced and supported in the classroom, as children can learn from each others' differences. By acknowledging both similarities and differences in beliefs across cultures we can help students to be able to adapt better to their school environment and succeed in a diverse world.

Educators should also be aware of possible cultural responses to pedagogy. Parents from different cultures may have had a different educational experience growing up than that of American standards. It is also possible that some parents from diverse ethnic backgrounds may have previously had negative experiences with American schools. Educators need to be aware that all parents regardless of race or ethnicity come from different educational backgrounds. Part of the role as educators is to help parents and their children have a positive experience in our schools. Therefore, it is important for educators to acknowledge that parents from diverse backgrounds may have differences in beliefs regarding instruction, the role of the teacher, the role of the school, and other related activities. Past research has shown that immigrant and nonimmigrant parents have different perceptions of classroom goals and instruction. For example, Okagaki and Sternberg (1993) found that nonimmigrant parents believed it was important for teachers to help students learn problem-solving skills and gain knowledge. Immigrant parents reported that teaching children how to work neatly was as important as teaching to develop the child's knowledge. Therefore, it is up to the educator to help the parent understand the roles of members of the school staff, the school's teaching philosophy, and the expectations of educators, parents, and students.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

Due to the exploratory nature of the current study, a goal was to generate ideas and hypotheses for future research. An obvious question to consider is whether the results would differ for a sample of parents of students not enrolled in a dual language program. In a dual language program, students and parents remain integrated for their entire academic careers. Thus there is true a blending of two cultures. However, results may be vastly different in English- and Spanish- speaking parents of students in regular classrooms. As well, one could ask whether the perception of school success differs according to how long the parent has lived in the United States. The longer the family lives in the United States, the more acculturated the family becomes and their values may change to reflect the majority culture to a greater degree. Finally, it would be interesting to see if there are gender differences in perceptions of school success amongst the Spanish-speaking parents. I would imagine there would not be large differences; however, because the Spanish-speaking culture values authority highly and has traditionally been patriarchical (Buenning & Tollefson, 1987; Steinburg et al., 1992), there may be gender differences in the perceptions between parents.

One of the requirements for participation in a dual language program is participation in school activities by the parents. Hence, in the present study the families were already actively involved in the school environment. It would be interesting to look at parental perspectives of parents who were not active in their child's school. Student definitions of school success should also be examined in the future to determine whether student perceptions are congruent with either school or parental values. To determine the school's definition of school success, researchers could collect teacher data. It would be interesting to see whether there were

differences in the degree of congruence of beliefs between either students and parents or students and school for the different cultures.

One limitation of the current study was exemplified by one of the results. The Spanish-speaking parents had a higher percentage of statements that did not fit into any category. These statements were either were too general or did not match the question that was asked. Part of this could be due to experiential differences; Spanish-speaking parents may not be accustomed to answering open-ended questions. In addition, some of the meaning of the response may have been lost in the translation of the statements. However, when working with populations that speak a different language, similar problems are bound to occur.

Another potential limitation of this study was the number of Spanish-speaking individuals who were classified as English speakers having answered English questionnaires. Once this was discovered, each of these parents was examined in detail regarding the length of time he/she had lived in the United States. Each of these eleven parents were second-generation Americans (meaning they were born in the United States) and they had lived here their entire lives. Hence, second-generation Spanish-speaking Americans were classified as English-speakers for the purposes of the present study.

The relatively smaller number of English-speaking participants might also be considered a limitation, as there were only 43 English-speaking participants and 88 Spanish-speaking participants. In the future, a more nearly equal number of participants from each language group should be sought. It is not known if this affected the results of the current study, but had there been a larger number of English-speaking parents; we would have more

confidence that the responses of the English-speaking parents could be better generalized to other English-speaking parents. With larger numbers of parents in both groups, additional statistical tests would have been possible, as well. Therefore, future studies should aim to have a larger sample size across both language groups.

Finally, while the current study measured parental beliefs about school success, the relationship between parental beliefs and their behaviors were not measured. Therefore, parents' beliefs regarding school success may not be consistent with parental actions. Thus, in order to truly study how family processes affect a child's school performance, an examination of parental behaviors towards school success is warranted. Examining parental behaviors, such as parenting styles would be important to study in the present context, as past researchers have found differences in parenting styles between cultures (Steinburg et al., 1992; Buenning & Tollefson, 1987). In the future, it would also be interesting to examine whether parental behaviors, such as parenting styles, change with the amount of time the family has lived in the United States. Therefore, investigating whether parenting practices change as parents become more acculturated would be an interesting topic for future research, as well.

Conclusion

Research concerning criteria for school success across different cultures and ethnicities is relatively sparse. Past research has shown that Spanish-speaking students are at risk for academic underachievement; the reasons for this problem are still unclear. The results of the present study show similarities and differences in perceptions of school success between cultures. For both Spanish-speaking and English-speaking parents, academics was the most

important criterion of school success. In addition, while differences occurred in the type of school-related behaviors stressed by parents, Spanish-speaking and English-speaking parents had similar perspectives on the overall importance of these behaviors. Examining the first-response data shows relatively small differences between groups, particularly in the behavior domain. As stated before, the first response data were assumed to be the most important, as it was the first attribute of school success parents thought of and listed. Therefore, it is possible that researchers may be placing too much emphasis on the differences between cultural perspectives of school success. As a result, using it as an explanation for the academic underachievement of Spanish-speaking students may not be correct. Examining cultural perspectives using an open-ended questionnaire, few differences were found across cultures. Future researchers may want to examine other factors contributing to the academic underachievement of Spanish-speaking students, because when an open-ended questionnaire format was used to directly compare perceptions of school success, more similarities than differences were found between Spanish-speaking and English-speaking parents. The results of this preliminary study demonstrate that more research is needed in this area before any definitive conclusions can be made.

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Table 1
Percentages of Parents' First Responses by Category

Responses	Spanish-speaking parents	English-speaking parents
Academic: Process of Learning	4.55 (4)	27.91 (12)
Academic: Product of Learning	31.82 (28)	27.91 (12)
Academic: General	3.41 (3)	4.65 (2)
Academic: Total	39.77 (35)	60.47 (26)
Behavior: Compliance with Rules	6.82 (6)	2.32 (1)
Behavior: Respecting Others	9.09 (8)	0 (0)
Behavior: School Attendance	4.55 (4)	9.30 (4)
Behavior: Being On-task	1.14 (1)	4.65 (2)
Behavior: General	1.14 (1)	0 (0)
Behavior: Total	22.73 (20)	16.28 (7)
Social: Learning Social Skills	1.14 (1)	9.30 (4)
Social: Feelings toward School	1.14 (1)	6.98 (3)
Social: General	0 (0)	0 (0)
Social: Total	2.27 (2)	16.28 (7)
Participating in Extracurricular Activities	0 (0)	0 (0)
Preparing for the Future	12.50 (11)	4.65 (2)
Global Statement of Improvement	5.68 (5)	0 (0)
Answer does not match Question	15.91 (14)	2.32 (1)
Non-codeable	1.14 (1)	0 (0)
Total	100.00 (88)	100.00 (43)

Note. The values outside of the parentheses represent percentages. The values inside the parentheses represent the actual number of responses per language group for that category.

Table 2
Percentages of all Responses Classified by Category

Responses	Spanish-speaking parents	English-speaking parents
Academic: Process of Learning	3.98 (9)	14.14 (27)
Academic: Product of Learning	27.43 (62)	23.56 (45)
Academic: General	3.10 (7)	3.66 (7)
Academic: Total	34.51 (78)	41.36 (79)
Behavior: Compliance with Rules	8.85 (20)	2.62 (5)
Behavior: Respecting Others	10.18 (23)	4.71 (9)
Behavior: School Attendance	4.42 (10)	3.66 (7)
Behavior: Being On-task	1.77 (4)	2.62 (5)
Behavior: General	1.33 (3)	0 (0)
Behavior: Total	26.56 (60)	13.61 (26)
Social: Learning Social Skills	4.87 (11)	9.95 (19)
Social: Feelings toward School	2.21 (5)	9.95 (19)
Social: General	0 (0)	1.05 (2)
Social: Total	7.08 (16)	20.94 (40)
Participating in Extracurricular Activities	0.44 (1)	3.14 (6)
Preparing for the Future	11.06 (25)	2.09 (4)
Global Statement of Improvement	2.65 (6)	10.99 (21)
Answer does not match Question	17.26 (39)	7.85 (15)
Non-codeable	0.44 (1)	0 (0)
Total	100.00 (226)	100.00 (191)

Note. The values outside of the parentheses represent percentages. The values inside the parentheses represent the actual number of responses per language group for that category.

Appendix

Categories

1) **Learning Academic Skills** means that the student is learning new information, understands what is being taught, and learning the skills necessary to progress and succeed in school.

   1a) Process of learning means that the student uses skills necessary to succeed in school and understands what is being taught

   ***Examples:** listening in class, asking questions, learning organization skills, working hard, tries their best, does their best, etc

   1b) Product of Learning means that the student is learning new information

   ***Examples:** learning a second language, learning academic content, getting good grades, learning to read, completing homework, turning work in on-time, meeting or exceeding goals or requirements, etc

   1c) Academic General means that the parent listed general academic content that did not fit into either of the above categories

   ***Examples:** good student

2) **Behavior**

   2a) Compliance with School Rules means that the student follows school rules, classroom rules, and playground rules.

   ***Examples:** following school rules, does not fight in school, does not get into trouble, learns right from wrong, etc.

   2b) Respecting Others means that the student shows consideration for teachers, students, and other adults at school

***Examples:** respecting others, respecting teachers, respecting peers, etc.

2c) Attending School means that the student is present at school and arrives on time for school on a regular basis

***Examples:** good attendance does not miss many days, not late for school, not tardy, etc.

2d) Being on-task means that during classroom instruction the student pays attention to what is being taught and follow directions appropriately.

***Examples:** paying attention, engaged in material, etc.

2e) Behavior General means that the parent listed a general behavior response that did not fit into any of the categories.

***Examples:** she/he is good

3) Social/Emotional

3a) Learning and Participating in Social Skills means that the student learns behaviors that help them get along with others.

***Examples:** learns prosocial skills, learns to share, learns good manners, is liked by others, learns how to develop friendships, participates with classmates, learning communication skills, learning to work with others, etc.

3b) Feelings towards school means that the student feels good about going to school.

***Examples:** enjoys school, wants to go to school, excited about school and learning, feels successful about school, interested in learning, not feeling embarrassed in front of class, feeling comfortable class, etc.

3c) General Social means that the parent gave a general social response to questions that did not fit into the above categories.

4) **Participating in Extracurricular Activities** means that children have the opportunity to be involved in non-academic activities in school.

    ***Examples:** excels in art, physical education, or music; has access to extracurricular activities, excels at sports, etc.

5) **Preparing for the Future** means that the student learns skills that will help them advance both personally and professionally.

    ***Examples:** allows them to get a better job, helps them advance in life, helps a person to overcome obstacles in the future, learns responsibilities, learning to be a leader, helps them to become a better person in the future, etc.

6) **Global Statement of Improving the Child as a Whole** means that the parent gave a response relating to overall improvement of the student.

    ***Examples:** develop the whole child, be the best they can be, develops and grows, help the child be better, etc.

7) **Answer Doesn't Match Question or Repeats the Question**

    ***Examples:** do well in school, how he feels about things, should be more 1:1 instruction, school is good, important to have contact with teachers, etc.

8) **Non-codeable Statements** means that the statement was ambiguous and could not be coded