

Chapter 8

Family Life Education With Latino Immigrant Families

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Providing family life education services to Latino populations requires the educator to consider the diversity and variation found in the group. Educators must take the time to fully understand the dynamics involved and be prepared to set aside stereotypes and traditional ideas. Strategies that may work with other majority cultural groups may not be as effective with Latino populations (Bairstow, Berry, & Driscoll, 2002). There are many factors to consider, such as language, acculturation, generational status, socioeconomic status, and life history. There are also many stereotypes and prejudices regarding Latino populations that may impede effective teaching. Effective family life educators must have a deep appreciation and understanding of the many complexities found within Latino culture that allow for culturally competent services.

We, the authors of this chapter, are both bilingual and have a variety of experiences working with Latino immigrant populations from which we have drawn in writing this chapter.

I (Schvaneveldt) have developed, directed, and implemented a variety of family life education programs with Latino audiences. Latino families are also a focus of much of my university teaching and research, including a recent Fulbright to Ecuador that informed family life education program development in the United States.

I (Behnke) have developed numerous programs to serve Spanish-speaking audiences over the past 12 years in addition to applied research in issues related to Latino immigrant families. I also oversee a collaborative of researchers and Latino-serving professionals in the South.

DEFINING THE POPULATION

Hispanic is a term that was adopted by the U.S. government in the early 1970s to identify persons from Latin American origin. The term originally referred to persons from Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, or Spanish cultures. The term *Hispanic* does not refer to a specific racial group (European, African, or Asian racial ancestry) but refers to a person with ties to Spain (Súarez-Orozco & Pérez, 2002). Recently, the term *Hispanic* has been criticized as a label because it conjures connections to Spanish colonialism. Subsequently, the term *Latino* has emerged as an alternative name for individuals who have ties to Latin America and the Spanish language, and this term is used throughout the chapter (Martín Alcoff, 2005).

The Latino cultural group is the largest ethnic minority group in the United States (Súarez-Orozco & Pérez, 2002). In 2010, the Latino population in the United States numbered over 50 million people and comprised 16% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). It is projected that the U.S. Latino population will grow to 132 million by the year 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). Most Latinos in the United States are native born (61.9%); among the remaining two fifths who are foreign born, most were born in Mexico (24.3%), with 5.5% born in Central America, 4.4% born in South America, and 3.9% born in countries in the Caribbean (e.g., Cuba, Dominican Republic) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). The principal country of origin for Latinos residing in the United States is Mexico (63%), Puerto Rico (9.2%), Cuba (3.5%), El Salvador (3.3%), the Dominican Republic (2.8%), and Guatemala (2.1%); all other Spanish-speaking Central and South American countries combined comprise 16.1% of the U.S. Latino population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Thus, the Latino population in the United States has many cultural variations and includes many diverse traditions.

We share these brief statistics to demonstrate that when working with a specific population, family life educators must be careful to hold in check personal biases. When working with Latinos, it is often helpful to know where they are from originally or with what country they identify. Some families may have lived in the United States for many years but still identify with their country of origin (e.g., Los Guatemaltecos—families from Guatemala) or families from Mexico by their state in Mexico (Los Sinaloenses—families from Sinaloa). There are millions of people of Spanish descent who do not speak Spanish and millions of people who speak Spanish (Latinos) but are not of Spanish descent (e.g., indigenous groups). Further, the Latino population includes people of various nationalities, races, religious traditions, socioeconomic levels, cultures, and customs. Though the majority of families may initially be from Mexico, over 20 different countries associate themselves with being part of Latin America, and the diversity among these groups is multifaceted.

Other demographic characteristics to consider are that Latinos report a much younger average age (27) than Caucasian (41), African American (32), or Asian American (36) groups, reflecting both the high fertility rate among Latinos and the lack of older aged Latinos currently in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). In fact, there are more children under the age of 5 among Latinos than any other age category (17.5%). By contrast, just 5% of the Caucasian population is under the age of 5. Similar to the larger U.S. population, the median age at first marriage is 27.5 for males and 25.9 for females. While both English and Spanish are spoken in the majority of Latino households, 20.1% speak English only at home as their primary language compared to over 94% of the Caucasian population. The differences are even more distinct when considering whether a person is foreign-born or native to the United States. Over 72% of foreign-born Latinos report they speak English less than very well compared to 12.7% of native-born Latinos (Pew Hispanic Center, 2011).

Unique Aspects of Latino Families

It is important for family life educators to understand the roles of education and income in defining Latino families. Educational attainment is important to consider in promoting family strengths and child well-being among Latino populations. Nearly 13% of Latinos have earned a college degree. School dropout rates among Latinos are very high, with nearly 40% quitting school before earning their high school degree. Educational challenges are even greater for foreign-born Latinos with 34.4% of foreign-born Latinos ages 25 and older reporting less than a ninth grade education and only 10.2% having earned a college degree (Pew Hispanic Center, 2011).

In terms of income, median household incomes in 2008 showed Latinos earn \$38,000 a year as compared to \$66,000 by Asians, \$56,000 by whites, and \$47,000 by blacks. Median personal earnings were also lower with an average of \$24,442 for native-born and \$20,368 for foreign-born Latinos. By contrast, Asian Americans earned \$35,542, Caucasians earned \$31,570, and African Americans \$24,951 in median annual income (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). It is very important to note that many of the “unique” characteristics often attributed to Latino populations are confounded with income and educational disparities. We argue that many of the challenges and “deficits” identified among Latinos are often incorrectly attributed to cultural deficits. Many of the challenges identified within the Latino family can be attributed directly to limited educational attainment and income disparities that impact the well-being of the adults and children in families. Family life educators should use caution to avoid the mistake of attributing challenges and deficits within families based upon cultural aspects of the Latino culture and instead should look at ways to enhance educational and income opportunities for the families they serve.

It is necessary to recognize the social and economic diversity within the Latino population and to note that not all Latinos occupy the lower strata of the social hierarchy. At the same time, on nearly every measure of socioeconomic status, Latinos lag behind national averages on socioeconomic indicators (Vidal de Haymes & Kitty, 2007). While the majority of Latinos are native-born U.S. citizens, most have at least one immigrant family member, often residing under the same roof, who may not be a U.S. citizen (Vidal de Haymes & Kitty, 2007). Complicating things on another level, Latino clientele are less likely to own their homes or have health insurance, which can be associated with family instability. Government estimates show that 48.9% of Hispanics owned homes, compared to 74.9% of the Caucasian population (Kochhlar, Gonzalez-Barrera, & Dockterman, 2009),

Education and income may also be related to level of acculturation, which comprises another unique aspect of Latino families of which family life educators should be aware. Phinney and Devich-Navarro (1997) described U.S. ethnic groups as fitting into four major categories of acculturation. *Assimilated* refers to individuals who have adopted the majority cultural values and retain little to no cultural traditions unique to their original culture. *Separated* refers to individuals who reject the majority culture and retain most if not all of their original cultural traditions. Separated individuals tend to have little direct contact with the majority culture and may not learn English or mainstream American norms and customs. *Marginalized* refers to individuals who struggle to identify with either their traditional culture or the majority culture. *Acculturated* refers to persons who have developed a balance between their traditional culture and the majority culture. The acculturated view illustrates that many Latinos attempt to achieve a balance of living in the United States by maintaining their traditional culture while adapting to function within the majority U.S. culture. Not all Latinos fall into the same status of acculturation. Many are assimilated, being part of the majority American culture for many generations. Others are separated and have little to no contact with the majority culture. Many may feel marginalized and have difficulty connecting to either the majority or their Latino culture.

Some argue that understanding a Latino family's level of acculturation or their level of bicultural orientation is a useful strategy for helping them (Hispanic Healthy Marriage Initiative [HHMI], n.d.-a). However, there are many Latino families who have made the goal to return to their country of origin and may be less motivated to acculturate into the majority culture. In addition, migrant workers may stay in the United States seasonally and are often less motivated to adapt to the majority culture.

Another point of view regarding acculturation is that integration and acculturation into the majority culture is segmented or disjointed (Parra Cardona,

Busby, & Wampler, 2004). Thus, individuals may be more acculturated or integrated in some areas of life, such as education and occupation, but less integrated in other areas such as preference of music, food, and language spoken at home. Most likely, the majority of Latino immigrants have segmented levels of acculturation that vary with exposure to and integration into their communities. It is important for family life educators to understand that the individuals and families they serve may often have differing levels of acculturation and thus one should customize their curriculum to meet the needs of their population.

Strengths and Assets of Latino Immigrant Families

There are many unique aspects of Latino families that can be considered strengths or assets, including *familismo*, *simpatia*, *personalismo*, *machismo* and *marianismo*, and religion. An understanding of these aspects of Latino families can help family life educators to build upon the unique strengths of Latino families.

Familismo

Collectivism and individualism are important cultural themes to consider in understanding Latino culture (Triandis, 2001). Collectivism is defined as interdependency among in-groups (family, tribe, nation, etc.). Group goals may take precedence over individual goals, and behavior is communally shaped (Triandis, 2001). On the other hand, individualism is focused more on individual goals taking precedence over group goals. Latino culture leans more toward a collectivist cultural orientation. The more normative approach in collectivist cultures emphasizes family responsibilities and interdependence to maintain family groups.

The collectivist orientation, which is common among Latino families, is referred to as familismo, or familism. Familismo refers to a strong emphasis and connection to family members as a whole and reflects a willingness to put the needs of family members before individual needs (Falicov, 2007). Family life educators should recognize that the Latino culture tends to emphasize parenting, family activities, and family obligations more than the just the couple dynamics (HHMI, n.d.-b).

Many Latinos live in extended family groups, and children typically live at home until they get married (Falicov, 2007). Family members often care for elderly members as well as children. The U.S. Census Bureau (2009) reports that of all the racial and ethnic groups in the United States, Latinos are *much* more likely than the others to be living in a family setting and are least likely to have a household composed of a single person.

Simpatia

Another important cultural consideration to recognize is *simpatia*, or politeness. This refers to the importance of pleasant and polite social interactions and the avoidance of direct conflict or disagreement (Falicov, 2007). The cultural value of *simpatia* and *respeto* may make their Spanish-speaking clients less likely to disagree openly in a group setting, especially when it comes to recent immigrants or first-generation families. Thus, some individuals may be reluctant to express their true feelings about a topic or something they have learned. Approaches that involve direct and open communication and conflict resolution techniques may be viewed as rude and aggressive. Children are often taught to be “*buen educado*” or well-mannered (Rodriguez, 1999). Thus, children are taught to be polite, deferent to adults, and well-mannered. Children may be reluctant to engage in direct interaction with adults outside the family and will refrain from being loud or boisterous.

Personalismo

Personalismo refers to the personal space and closeness that is expressed by shaking hands, giving hugs, or touching as manifestations of appreciation and affection (HHMI, n.d.-a). Thus, family life educators should recognize the importance of being friendly, engaging, and personal. Acting in a formal, brusque, or disengaged way will most likely be viewed as cold and uninviting. One common tradition among many Latino cultural groups (but certainly not all) is the use of the *besito*, or little kiss, which is done when people touch cheek to cheek while make a “kiss” sound with their lips. This is a sign of admiration or *cariño*. It is important to note that this only occurs between a man and a woman or between two women but never between two men.

Machismo and Marianismo

Gender roles are also an important consideration when working with Latino families. Machismo refers to notion of males being the patriarchal figures in the family and the primary decision maker (Falicov, 2007). Machismo is often misunderstood to refer to dominance over women. Historically, machismo referred to the chivalrous notion of providing for and protecting family members. Contemporary views of “macho” conjure views of physical strength, sexual prowess, withholding emotions, tolerating pain, and being “man enough” to transcend challenges. It also relates to the strength and work ethic that is characterized by Latinos (HHMI, n.d.-a). A contemporary view of machismo refers to a male who is a hardworking provider and protector and does not allow challenges to impact his ability to do so.

Marianismo refers to women being sexually conservative and focused on her children and family. A traditional view of female gender roles emphasizes the health and well-being of children and family members as the primary responsibility of the mother. Marianismo is sometimes viewed as women lacking power and being submissive to men. Women may have great influence in their family, although it may be exercised indirectly. Equity among men and women may not be obvious to an outside observer but is often present among Latino couples. The man's influence lies on making decisions that are pleasing to the woman and a woman's influence is based on her desire to show commitment to her husband and family (Gil & Vazquez, 1996; HHMI, n.d.-a).

Religion

Religion is an important component of Latino culture (Garzon & Tan, 1992). According to a recent Pew Hispanic Center (2007) survey, 68% of Latinos are Catholic, 15% are born-again or evangelical Protestants, 5% are mainline Protestants, 3% are identified as "other Christian," and 8% are secular. Because the majority of Latinos are Catholic, it would serve any family life educator working with this population to have an understanding of Catholic theology and doctrine. It is also important to understand that the Roman Catholic Church in many Latin American countries has traditions and customs that are unique to Latin America but that are very influential to family functioning and decision making.

One example of how religiosity may impact family dynamics is divorce. Divorce rates among Latinos are approximately 30% lower than for the general U.S. population (National Healthy Marriage Resource Center, n.d.). Many Latinas may be less likely to leave their husbands because of religious influences. Religious beliefs, combined with cultural factors of familismo, may strongly affect decisions made by family members in family life education programming. "When seen in this light of cultural reinforcement combined with the Catholic prohibition against divorce, one may better understand why the Hispanic woman may remain with a severely abusive husband for an extraordinary amount of time" (Garzon & Tan, 1992, p. 384).

FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION PRACTICES

Current State of Family Life Education

The field of family life education among Latino populations is relatively young; however, educators in the United States have been working with Spanish-speaking families in many capacities for decades. Promotoras de salud, or community health

workers, have been working with migrant and farmworker families in the United States for over 70 years starting in the 1940s with the influx of migrant labor that occurred with the Bracero Program (May & Contreras, 2007). This program employed more than 4 million Mexican farm laborers during the 1940s and 1950s. The braceros (meaning “manual laborers” but literally meaning “one who works with his arms”) came to work the fields of this nation during a period of relatively “open borders” and helped to convert the agricultural fields of the United States into some of the most productive on the planet (Massey & Durand, 2005). Much can be learned from the work of promotoras, who have sought to meet the needs of Spanish-speaking populations in the United States (May & Contreras, 2007).

Current trends have moved family life education as a field to be more mindful of the need for culturally competent education and resource delivery. For example, the National Alliance for Hispanic Families (2011) has encouraged a focus on programs that provide culturally relevant and community-based services to Latino children and families. They also advocate for programs that address challenges within the Latino community that focus on promoting stronger families and teaching problem-solving skills, communication skills, and conflict management skills. We have observed a heightened awareness for culturally competent programming that has led to numerous new parent education and family life education programs specifically targeting Spanish-speaking audiences. Historically, many programs were simply translations of evidence-based programs that were created for English-speaking audiences. However, over the past decade, a number of programs have been either completely reworked to be effective with Latino immigrant audiences or created from scratch with Spanish speakers in mind. This trend toward cultural adaptations rather than simply translations of English programs has allowed family life educators to more effectively serve wider Spanish-speaking audiences. Such trends have also led to more bilingual/bicultural trainers and educators working in the field of family life education.

General Needs of this Population and Rationale for Family Life Education

Research conducted with promotoras and other Spanish-speaking professionals has demonstrated five key concerns among immigrant Latino families in the United States (Aguinago et al., 2001; Behnke, 2008). These five major concerns are:

1. *Navigation through the U.S. legal and social systems (health care, immigration, driver’s licenses, schools, courts, etc.).* Knowledge about available services and communication with service providers are common difficulties for newly immigrated Latinos.

2. *Educational success for their children.* For many families, improved educational opportunities for their children was the top reason why they chose to immigrate to the United States. These families often report that they are worried about their children's academics, and many are at a loss on how to help their children succeed in school.
3. *Language barriers.* Many families seek effective English as a second language (ESL) classes that meet the needs and busy schedules they face. Such educational opportunities help improve communication between parents and youth, increase access to community resources, and improve job prospects.
4. *Transportation issues.* In most states, immigrant Latinos have difficulties obtaining a driver's license because of policies requiring specific documents that not all Latinos possess. This is also hampered by a lack of public transportation in most suburban and rural areas where new immigrants are moving.
5. *Financial support is another area in which families would like help.* One reason for this is that they are often the first to be let go in hard economic times, due to language or documentation status. Many families seek ways to better manage the economic needs of their families and educational opportunities to help them secure better employment. Many Latinos are not eligible to receive most public services, like food stamps, Medicaid, unemployment benefits, or other services typically offered to families facing unemployment (Cohen, 2009).

All of these factors point to opportunities for family life educators to intervene and have a significant impact in the lives of Latino families.

Marketing/Recruitment

Marketing to Latino audiences should begin with needs and asset assessments at community, county, and state levels. Asset assessments help family life educators to identify and utilize available community resources and discover how best to implement resources. Needs assessments involve using existing data about a community and data collected directly from members of that community to assess perceived needs (Batsche, Hernandez, & Montenegro, 1999). Through conducting asset and needs assessments, family life educators can maximize their resources to provide services that are in greatest need. For example, you may find that Spanish-speaking Peruvian women ages 20 to 35 have issues with feeling isolated and are experiencing higher levels of anxiety. Subsequently, a program can be created to directly meet the needs of this population.

According to Valdés (2002), it is essential to build a “share of mind” or consumer awareness about the services you provide. For example, when Latinos think

of needing services or programs they should think of you or your agency among those they would think of first. To do this, test materials with target segments, advertise in Spanish, and build familiarity through Latino community organizations and churches. It is also very important to consider cultural sensitivity in delivering your educational product. According to the National Latino Alliance for the Elimination of Domestic Violence, lack of cultural sensitivity and knowledge among service providers about the cultural dynamics of the women and families they serve results in discrimination and exclusion from services, thereby alienating and revictimizing the very people they intend to assist and support. They further explain that services that are based on European American values and life experiences often act as a barrier to access even in the absence of direct exclusion of discrimination (Low & Organista, 2000).

Other useful strategies include the use of Spanish radio advertisements to publicize the family life education program. For example, a program in North Carolina has developed relationships with the local radio, TV stations, and Spanish media producers. Subsequently, media blitzes, including radio and TV public service announcements, are utilized to reach many families who otherwise would not be aware of the family life education services. In most states, there is now United Way 211 or information service to provide a phone listing of resources where community members can find out about programs. The majority of Latino families (77%) have mobile phones and text messaging, which is a useful method of contact (Nielsen Company, 2010).

The digital divide of a few years ago is narrowing quickly. Regular Internet use is almost as common among Latinos (64%) as it is in the general population (72%) (Livingston, 2010). Web-based and multimedia sources of information are growing in popularity among Latino users, though families with lower literacy are still less likely to seek out information online. Internet use is much more common among native-born and younger Latinos, so other methods of contact may be more effective with foreign-born and older populations.

According to the Nielsen Company (2010), 66% of Latinos watch some Spanish language TV, and 86% watch some English language TV. Overall, 47% spend some time each day on the Spanish language Internet, defined as using e-mail, watching video, or listening to music in Spanish. Sixty percent listen to Spanish language radio, while 73% listen to English language radio. Utilizing these types of media can be a very effective tool in recruiting, but providing advertising in both English and Spanish is most effective.

Motivating families to take advantage of family life education services can be challenging. There are two common approaches: “incentivizing” participation and required participation. Some effective incentives commonly used include (1) focusing on the children (e.g., children’s talent nights, youth programs); (2) providing meals; (3) providing incentives (e.g., door prizes, raffles, gift cards); (4) providing

ESL classes using the topic you're teaching; and (5) providing music, fun, and new opportunities to learn and interact with other people. Many immigrant Latinos come to the United States with a hope that their children will have increased opportunities for educational and occupational success. Therefore, when reaching out to Latino immigrant families and designing programs to address their needs, family life educators would do well to focus first on the children rather than the parents. Placing emphasis on engaging children will often help you engage the whole family and get more dedicated participation. Successful family life education programs should be dynamic, active, and family-focused. It is helpful to appeal to mothers and children to recruit fathers and to reach out to fathers individually by asking them to do something related to the program.

Other families are asked to participate in family life education programs to help them out of difficult situations. Some of the programs that require participation include (1) court-referred programs, (2) programs required by a school or state government entity, and (3) additional services being dependent on program participation. Our experience has shown that programs that require or mandate participation can be more difficult at first to engage participants; however, over time effective family life educators who validate and support the participants often see their clients choosing to engage in the program and voluntarily offering their experiences and ideas.

To enhance the success of any program serving Latino families, collaboration among program providers and participants is essential (Behnke, 2008). The effectiveness of programming and services depends on effectively involving partners with other institutions serving Latino populations, such as local churches with largely Latino congregants. For example, the *Creciendo Unidos* organization in Phoenix, Arizona, has a significant partnership with a local Catholic church that facilitates recruiting and offers a physical environment to hold classes and meetings (*Creciendo Unidos*, 2010). Another way to get connected with such groups is by volunteering or serving on advisory committees for other organizations with similar missions serving Latino clientele. It is also possible that you may need to organize a community committee to coordinate and serve Latino needs.

In our experience, when recruiting Latinos, personal invitations through visits or phone calls are most effective. We find that this recruitment by "word of mouth" incorporates the notion of "personalismo" and is much more effective than just sending home flyers. Often the families we most want to reach are those who are most burdened economically and least likely to just show up. Thus face-to-face visits, where the educator takes time to get to know the needs of the families and makes accommodations to meet those needs will often work best. We have also found that making short presentations to religious groups, school groups, and other community organizations can build trust and lead to effective results. During these meetings, introduce your organization's mission and goals and how they will benefit families.

It is also helpful to have culturally appropriate food and music as a way to create a welcoming atmosphere.

Fostering warm and trusting relationships will go a long way in enhancing recruitment and retention in family life education programming. Utilizing Spanish language materials is also very important. Keep the information clear by using generic terms that are not country-specific, unless targeting such groups. To retain families in a multiweek program, it is best to involve the entire family (possibly providing child care) and provide meals and transportation if possible. Make reminder phone calls prior to each session. A useful strategy to increase father involvement is to use “stealth education” by marketing your services as an activity that you (i.e., the parent) are doing for your children (Mulloney, 2009). By making programs child-focused or family-focused, many of the stigmas and barriers to father involvement are likely to be eliminated. It is valuable to recruit Latinos as advocates, mentors, recruiters, and volunteers. Involve parents in committees and advisory councils by reaching out personally to them. Be mindful of the time it takes to build trust; this trust with a known agency is crucial in developing a rapport with Latino families. By developing personal connections with Latino community leaders and directors, family life educators will be welcomed and more effective in their activities. As you continue to build trust and relationships with your target audience, look for ways to involve participants in the planning as this develops a sense of connection and investment in the program.

Barriers to Participation

Child care, transportation, language issues, and legal resident status may be significant barriers to participation in programs. Because Latino families often bring their children with them to events, it is important to consider the ages of all of the children. There may be a large age range present—from infants to teenagers. Obviously, different types of care and entertainment may be needed. If parents anticipate that their children will enjoy the event, the family is more likely to attend (Olsen & Skogrand, 2009). Additionally, if children enjoy coming to the program, it is more likely the parents will continue coming.

When targeting low-income populations, transportation may be a significant problem for families (Fidalgo & Chapman-Novakofski, 2001). You can plan programs in convenient locations and near public transportation systems. However, being able to provide transportation could help reduce some barriers to participation.

Translating materials from English into Spanish must be done with caution, and consideration of cultural differences should be recognized. All Spanish is not the same. Be wary of using slang, and attempt to learn the idioms and other idiosyncrasies of the different dialects of the Spanish language. Know what is acceptable and unacceptable to avoid offending individuals. Keep in mind that the English

language can differ significantly as well depending on what part of the United States you are in (e.g., New York City versus South Carolina). Careful consideration to the differences within the Spanish language can prevent information from getting “lost in translation.”

There are an estimated 11.1 million unauthorized immigrants residing in the United States (Pascal & Cohn, 2010). Our experience is that many people lacking legal documentation to reside in the United States will avoid attending family life education activities out of fear of being reported to legal authorities. Creating trust and confidence with people is critical in overcoming this barrier. Some of the ethical issues related to this barrier are discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Environmental Considerations

Where and how to deliver family life education are important considerations in planning such activities. Holding family life education activities in places and environments that are familiar and comfortable to your audience is most effective. Such places may be a trusted agency setting, such as a Head Start or a school. Additionally, in-home visits tend to be very effective (Delgado Gaitan, 1994). Given the importance of trust and possible concerns over immigration status, it is critical that services be provided in a location where people will feel safe and comfortable. Relationships develop more quickly when introduced by an already respected community member or agency (Escott, Mincemoyer, Nauman, Rodgers, & Sigman-Grant, 1996). Two examples include marriage education being provided at a local Head Start agency. Participants in the class trust the local agency in that they have a connection with the Head Start through their children. Also, the location of the class is often convenient and located in the neighborhood where the participants live. Many family literacy programs take advantage of in-home visits and offer parenting education and family literacy mentoring. The entire family is able to participate in these visits, and participants feel safe and secure in their own home. Some other factors to consider include holding events at a house of worship or community center. For example, holding a class or workshop in a neighborhood that is not familiar to your audience will likely yield little involvement. It is important to consider locations where the entire family will feel welcome and safe.

Latino labor force participation rates are higher than other ethnic groups in the United States. Even while working more, Latino household income has actually dropped since 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). Considering that work schedules for family members will vary, programs should be somewhat flexible. For example, in one community where we have worked, families often work evening shifts due to the factory in town and the best time for classes were Sunday afternoons. Evening and weekend times may be best for classes targeting working families; for others, like new moms or parent involvement classes, sometimes mornings are best.

Modes of Learning

Delgado Gaitan (1994) showed that using small groups and less formal means of teaching are most effective. Classes should be interactive with fun activities, role-plays, music, videos, use of personal history, culturally relevant materials, and humor. It is valuable to allow for multiple face-to-face meetings to establish rapport with families. Another effective mode for family life education includes using ESL classes as the basis to facilitate deeper “stealth education”—where the family life educator teaches English vocabulary while also teaching topics like relationship education, money management, or parenting. This ESL approach is a good way to attract eager learners, while at the same time providing resources and opportunities for growth and beginning to establish personal relationships with members of the community. Without addressing the language barrier, relationships, access, and partnerships will continue to be slow and scattered. With this in mind, family life educators need to understand what types of programs and services Spanish-speaking clientele want, and create programs or have their programs culturally adapted and translated to use with these underserved audiences.

In addition to language, there are communication patterns common among Latino cultures that are important to understand when working with this target audience. Commonly, *respeto*, or respect, is shown by listening when a person is talking and by following his or her advice. Respect is shown for authority and to the elderly. Affection is used commonly. A hug, kiss on the cheek, or tap on the shoulder is usual. Individuals may not give you a direct or straight answer at times and tend to elaborate a lot in responses to questions. Given the cultural emphasis on being respectful, it is common to avoid confrontation and some find it hard to say “no.” Understanding these cultural dynamics can shape the way family life education is presented to your audience.

Educator Characteristics

A challenge in providing effective family life education services is to identify bilingual/bicultural staff with the necessary experience to effectively provide family life education services (Uttal, 2006). When working with older or first-generation immigrants, educators may need to deliver their programs in Spanish and tailor them to slightly more traditional views on family and gender roles. Spanish-language educators must be willing to open themselves up to families and really give families the time and attention they need to build rapport and create a bond of trust. Often times Latino audiences may prefer certain educator characteristics. Lopez, Lopez, and Fong (1991) found that there was a preference for an ethnically similar counselor over an ethnically dissimilar counselor but that other characteristics such as individuals who were older and who had higher levels of education

were preferred over ethnicity. This information is useful in placing staff within programs. Educators can do some preliminary research to determine what a specific group (25- to 30-year-old Cuban males, for example) look for and give credibility to in an educator.

In some communities, it may seem difficult to find qualified bilingual/bicultural educators. One strategy to bridge this leadership gap is to start “fishing schools” or “escuelas de pesca.” Rather than simply teaching one parent how to fish, as the old saying goes, this approach helps parents become leaders and share with other groups of parents who in turn train and work with others. We find it easier to help Spanish speakers gain the necessary skills to be effective family life educators rather than teaching monolingual educators to speak Spanish. During the course of a Spanish language class or workshop, you might notice individuals who are very engaged in the topics. These individuals often make the best trainers/educators via “shadowing” or mentoring with another qualified family life educator. Many times Spanish-speaking individuals were just not aware of the monetary and social value of their skills to help their community. In our experience, hiring the right person or people is the most important and essential part of assuring program success with Spanish-speaking audiences.

An educator working with diverse populations should take time to self-reflect. In doing so, he or she can identify personal values and possibly biases. Knowing one’s own degree of acculturation may help to identify with the targeted audience as well. “Culturally competent service providers need to understand their own level of acculturation and the extent to which they subscribe to traditional versus modern-Western values and behaviors” (Organista & Dwyer, 1996, p. 127).

Ethical Considerations

A major ethical issue to consider when providing family life education services to Latino populations is the possibility that some participants will lack legal documentation to reside in the United States. There are an estimated 11.1 million unauthorized immigrants residing in the United States (Pascal & Cohn, 2010). Reporting of undocumented immigrant status has been a major political and legal issue in the United States. Laws vary by state and local jurisdictions, which may or may not require the reporting of undocumented immigrants. In many cases, family life educators are not required to ask about documentation status and thus may not be required to report to local authorities regarding the potential immigrant status of a program participant. However, depending on funding and local policies, in some areas reporting may be required. Family life educators should carefully investigate guidelines regarding this matter as they plan and implement programming. Working out these details beforehand can help educators to avoid the possible

implications and build trust in the agency providing services. If there is a perception among participants that program administrators will be reporting immigrant status to authorities, recruitment and retention to programs will be impacted.

Most children of unauthorized immigrants (73%) are U.S. citizens by birth as stipulated by the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. The number of children born in the United States in mixed-status families (unauthorized immigrant parents and citizen children) has expanded to 4 million children in 2008, up from 2.7 million in 2003 (Pascal & Cohn, 2010). As U.S. citizens, children from mixed-status families qualify for and are entitled to all programs and services provided to a U.S. citizen, which may include family life education services. Quite often, children are brought to the United States by their parents as legal minors and thus have little to no influence on their immigrant status. Subsequently, they may lack the legal documentation to attend some colleges and universities, enlist in the U.S. military, or perform other activities requiring legal resident status. In response to this issue, the Development, Relief, and Education of Alien Minors Act (i.e., DREAM Act) has been debated in the U.S. Congress. The purpose of the DREAM Act was to help those individuals who meet certain requirements to have an opportunity to enlist in the military or go to college and have a path to citizenship, which they otherwise would not have without this legislation. In order to qualify for this legislation, the child would have to have entered the United States before the age of 16, lived in the United States for 5 consecutive years, graduated from a U.S. high school, been accepted into a U.S. institution of higher education, and be of “good” moral character (DREAMActInfo, n.d.). While this legislation did not pass Congress at the time of publication of this article, it illustrates the ethical issues many mixed-status families and children face.

Best Practices in Family Life Education Programming

In the following section, we introduce a few successful programs used with Latino families. The FLAME family literacy program, serving Latino families in Chicago, based their program on the central role the family plays within the Latino culture. This cultural strength of close family relationships was used as a basis to increase daily parent–child literacy activities and reduce punitive parenting practices (Saracho, 2007). A key component of the success of this program is the focus on fostering a supportive home environment by regular home visits to mentor parents so they can provide children with literacy opportunities, act as literacy models for their children, and improve their relationships with their children’s schools. Parents learn to select appropriate books and magazines for their children and how to use a library. Results show that parents do have a positive effect on their children’s learning. Parents who are confident and successful learners are the

most effective teachers of their children. Literacy is the subject most likely to be influenced by the social and cultural contexts of family.

A program serving the parents of Head Start children in Ogden, Utah, follows a similar model but focuses more on younger children and fostering healthy family dynamics (Schvaneveldt, 2008). The Weber State University Family Literacy Program serves primarily lower-income Latino families who have a child enrolled in Head Start. Trained family literacy facilitators who are fluent in Spanish and part of the Latino culture make frequent in-home visits to parents. An individualized educational approach is used that addresses the individual needs of each family. The trained family literacy facilitators first identify the current level of parental involvement in literacy activities and family interaction styles. Individualized lesson plans are then modified to meet the needs of the families. An in-home visit is made with the families approximately every 3 weeks to share information, model literacy involvement, create goals, and reinforce information. Major improvements are identified in the parents' daily literacy activities with their children, such as engaging with children in dialogic reading strategies, story telling, rhyming activities, letter and word identification, and many other literacy activities. Correspondingly, significant improvements are identified in the child's literacy activities, including reading a story with a parent and independent reading. Parenting behaviors are also positively impacted in the establishment of routines, contributing to family work, appropriate discipline, and most importantly creating a special time for reading each day (Schvaneveldt, 2008).

The *Juntos Para Una Mejor Educación* (Together for a Better Education) Program is a family program that brings together 8th through 12th grade youth, their parents, college-age mentors, and school staff to gain the knowledge and skills needed to help youth stay in school and bridge the gap from high school to college (Behnke & Kelly, 2011). This experiential program is taught in Spanish and meets for 2.5 hours once a week for 6 weeks in the evenings. *Juntos* also uses success coaches and college-age mentors to provide weekly afterschool clubs and activities with the target students before and after the 6-week program. The program brings together partners from Cooperative Extension, high schools and local community colleges, and college-age mentors to help youth acquire the skills to succeed in high school, to discover the benefits of higher education, and to attain a college education. A focus is on helping Latino families and community members come together as a support group to help each other realize their desires to get a higher education. The program has been carried out in 30 locations throughout the United States and program evaluation has shown a promising impact on the lives of Latino youth (Behnke & Kelly, 2011).

Similarly, a number of parenting education curricula have been designed and/or culturally adapted for Latino audiences. One well-known program is the Los Niños Bien Educados (LNBE) curriculum (Center for Improvement of Child Caring [CICC], n.d.). This 12-week parenting education curriculum was developed for parents of 2- to 12-year-olds and has been culturally adapted to address issues of acculturation, language, childrearing customs and traditions, parenting roles, effective discipline, preventing abuse, and parenting involvement. Assessment of this program has found it to be culturally relevant and effective in promoting healthier and more positive parenting practices among Latino populations (CICC, n.d.). Other great parent education programs that have been culturally adapted for use with Spanish-speaking audiences include Parents as Teachers, The Incredible Years, Crianza con Cariño (Nurturing Parenting), Circulo de Padres (Circle of Parents) Program, and Parenting Wisely.

The Administration for Children and Families arm of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) initiated the Hispanic Healthy Marriage Initiative (HHMI) in 2005 (HHMI, n.d.-b). The purpose of the HHMI is to provide culturally competent marriage and relationship education materials with the goal of improving child well-being through creating a healthier couple and family system. A major challenge for those providing marriage and relationship education services is finding culturally competent marriage education materials. In response to this challenge, the HHMI has produced a supplemental marriage education curriculum. The curriculum is not a comprehensive program but is designed to be used as a supplement to help facilitators and couples explore unique characteristics of the Hispanic culture on marriage and relationships. Topics include gender roles, acculturation and biculturalism, and communication with a Latino cultural focus (HHMI, n.d.-b).

An effective and culturally competent sexuality education program is ¡Cuídate!, a Latino youth health promotion program (Villarruel, Jemmott, & Jemmott, 2006). The goal of this program is to reduce HIV risk by teaching young people about STDs and choices. The program emphasizes the influence of family and gender role expectations on sexual behaviors. The course is taught by bilingual facilitators and teaches both abstinence and condom use as culturally acceptable. An evaluation of this program shows a reduction in the frequency of sexual intercourse, a reduced number of sexual partners, increased condom use, and a reduction in the incidence of unprotected sex (Villarruel et al., 2006).

Creciendo Unidos (growing together) provides family life education to a large Latino community. The mission of Creciendo Unidos is to build strong communities by empowering people to care for each other, develop leaders, and take responsibility for creating a healthy community that is worthy of their children. This vision is met by focusing on the family unit (Creciendo Unidos, 2010) and by providing family life education to the Latino community through a wide range of workshops, classes, and

other learning activities. Programs are presented at a neighborhood Catholic school and church, and all materials are presented in Spanish. The program relies heavily on community volunteers for recruitment and operating the program. All presenters and facilitators are Latino and fluent in Spanish. Family life education programs, specifically designed to be culturally sensitive, include marriage education, family relationships, teens, foster care and adoption education, and men's groups. Program organizers are careful to clarify that the information presented in the programs is not therapy but instead is family life education. Each year, the *Creciendo Unidos* program serves thousands of Latino families in the Phoenix area.

A specific program offered by *Creciendo Unidos* is the Family Program (*Todo es Posible*), designed to help families develop close relationships (*Creciendo Unidos*, 2010). The program consists of three workshops and is followed by 18 weekly meetings, including community service projects and recreational activities. The training course requires a family commitment of 2 hours per week throughout the entire course. Topics focus on training parents to communicate and build relationships with their children. They also learn to strengthen their marital relationships. Adolescents learn to understand and improve relationships with their parents and siblings and also learn to practice the concept of responsibility. Younger children learn how to resist peer pressures.

Another program offered by *Creciendo Unidos* focuses on teens (*Sin Límites*) and attempts to strengthen cultural values, foster leadership skills, and to create positive future-oriented behaviors. The curriculum includes recreational, educational, and competitive activities. A marriage class (*Curso De Relaciones Exitosas*) attempts to help couples achieve healthier relationships. The course is a 16-hour retreat where participants learn about respect, love, unity, identity, and communication. Other topics include cultural integration, understanding generational gaps, communication, and leadership.

Finally, the FACE course focuses on foster care and adoption issues in families. The course was designed to address barriers that have typically prevented Hispanic families from embracing adoption and foster care. Families learn how to bring adoption and foster care issues to the forefront of the Latino community's consciousness by establishing partnerships with churches, schools, and other community resources (*Creciendo Unidos*, 2010).

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Family life education with Latino populations is likely to include the continued development of programs from within the culture as opposed to simply using programs created for the majority culture. For example, a popular marriage education

curriculum has simply been translated into Spanish from English as opposed to developing a marriage education curriculum specifically developed with a Latino cultural perspective. Though this approach attempts to serve this important audience, it may miss the mark in terms of actually meeting these families' needs. As we have said, the National Alliance for Hispanic Families (2011) encourages programming to be culturally relevant and community-based.

Another future direction will be greater recognition of the diversity within the Latino culture. For example, individuals from Mexico have unique cultural traditions and histories than do, for example, individuals from Puerto Rico or Ecuador. Also, there exists great diversity of educational experiences and income levels within the different Latino populations. Subsequently, family life educators need to recognize that not all Latino populations are homogeneous and that programming should be tailored to the cultural and social class characteristics of the population being served. Tailoring educational programs for differing populations and subpopulations will continue to be an area of growth. Indeed, increased training will be required for native speakers from diverse backgrounds to help them in gaining the skills and training to be effective family life educators. This will also require an expansion of research exploring cultural traditions from within the country of origin and then an examination of the acculturation processes impacting Latino families and their well-being.

Finally, there is a great need for the evaluation of effective programming and an analysis of the cost versus benefit of such programs in promoting healthy family dynamics and youth development. Specifically, family life educators need to identify which programs and practices are most effective in promoting strong and resilient families and youth. An analysis of the benefits and long-term savings of such programs relative to the initial costs is needed. For example, is the cost of providing for marital education programming recouped with subsequent savings in lowered divorced rates and the prevention of other family problems? Such cost-benefit analyses are essential in providing evidence to policy makers and agencies that provide funding for family life education services.

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