

**6** *Parent-teacher conferences between Latino immigrant parents and their children's elementary school teacher revealed cross-cultural value conflict. Discourse analysis indicated that parents and the teacher often use different criteria to evaluate children's progress; that is, they have different goals for child development. The teacher's goals are usually more individualistic, whereas the parents' goals are often more collectivistic.*

## Cross-Cultural Conflict and Harmony in the Social Construction of the Child

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Adults in a culture symbolically construct an ideal child, and this ideal child is shaped by the culture's goals for child development. However, the nature of this ideal varies from culture to culture (Harkness and Super, 1996). Ethnic diversity therefore implies varying definitions of the ideal child. Many American schools are currently populated by children coming from immigrant families. Insofar as home culture differs from school culture, it is possible that parents and teachers may construct different images of the ideal child. Parent-teacher conferences furnish a uniquely rich and suitable locus for studying the social construction of the child and its variability within a

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context. The conference exemplifies social construction because both parents and teachers are not only evaluating the child but, much more important for our purposes, they are indicating their *criteria* of evaluation—what they think is important in child development.

The whole purpose of such conferences is for parent and teacher to cooperatively construct a symbolic child through the social process of linguistic communication. Sometimes, however, the process of cooperative social construction misfires: because of their differing expectations and goals regarding child development, parent and teacher do not symbolically construct the same child. Their constructions diverge, producing communication difficulties. Both the cooperative and the divergent modes of constructing a symbolic child are revealed through discourse processes. This is the methodological origin of our project.

The social origin of the project is quite different. In the course of starting our exploration of cultural diversity in elementary schools in Los Angeles, we began to hear complaints about lack of communication during parent-teacher conferences from immigrant Latino parents and from their children's teachers. Each group expressed frustration with the other. Neither seemed to understand the underlying causes of the problem.

Paradoxes abounded. For example, one teacher told us that parents were uninterested in their children's academic achievement and often changed the subject to their children's social behavior. Yet, Goldenberg and Gallimore (1995), after a review of the past decade of research, concluded that Latino immigrant families actually desire involvement in their children's education. Furthermore, Latino immigrant parents express a deep and abiding belief that formal education is the means to social and economic mobility (Goldenberg and Gallimore, 1995; Reese, Goldenberg, Loucky, and Gallimore, 1995). We wondered if the resolution of this paradox might lie in contrasting assumptions about the goals of child development (see Harkness and Super, 1996) and education brought to the conference by parents and teachers. We thought we might be able to uncover these contrasting assumptions by looking more carefully at the discourse processes of parent-teacher conferences.

Indeed, there was theoretical reason to believe that immigrant Latino parents and their children's teachers would bring different socialization values to the conference table. Our underlying theoretical rationale was that the range of variation in definitions of the ideal person—the desired endpoints of development—range from the individualistic to the collectivistic. In the former, the ideal is to achieve one's potential for the sake of self-fulfillment and engage in chosen relationships (see Chapter Four of this volume). In the individualistic ideology, one is free to think and act according to personal choice; relationships are ideally egalitarian, based on mutual consent and negotiation (Raef, 1997). In contrast, the collectivistic ideal is the interdependent person who strives to integrate into the group (most often, the family) by contributing personal abilities and achievements to the social whole. Part of the collectivistic ideal is the obligation to be socially responsive to the

group by being responsible for one's own ascribed roles in the group (Greenfield, 1994; Kagitçibasi, 1996; Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989; Miller, 1994). Although roles are differentiated, each is accorded equal value.

Institutions of the United States—including schools—exemplify an individualistic orientation (Raeff, 1997). In contrast, Latino immigrants bring the latter orientation with them from their homelands (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; García-Coll and Vásquez-García, 1995; Tapia-Urbe, LeVine, and LeVine, 1994; Parke and Buriel, 1998).

Empirically, these differing orientations are reflected in differing views of education and child development. For example, Latino immigrant parents from Mexico and Central America use the Spanish word *educación*, which differs in meaning from its English cognate "education" (Reese, Balzano, Gallimore, and Goldenberg, 1995; Goldenberg and Gallimore, 1995). Discussions of *educación* indicate that, for many Latino immigrants, being "educated" means behaving properly and respectfully, in addition to succeeding academically in school. Indeed, most Latino parents do not separate academic and moral goals for their children (Reese, Balzano, Gallimore, and Goldenberg, 1995).

A similar conception of education is found among Puerto Ricans in Puerto Rico and the United States (Harwood, Miller, and Lucca Irizarry, 1995). For them, the goal of formal education is to construct a "teachable student." In this cultural context *un niño educado* (a well-taught child) is *respetuoso* (respectful), *obediente* (obedient), *tranquilo* (quiet), and *amable* (amiable) (Harwood, Miller, and Lucca Irizarry, 1995).

These collectivistic values can be in conflict, pragmatically, with the goals of educational development in individualistic societies that require a "good student" to work independently, strive for excellent individual achievement, and to engage in skillful self-expression. Although there are individualistic forms of social relationships (see Chapter Four of this volume), parent-teacher conferences generally focus on individual achievement. For this reason they may constitute a setting that is particularly vulnerable to conflict between individualistic and collectivistic values.

Additionally, on the level of particular school activities, the skills that are valued from an individualistic perspective may actually undermine collectivistic developmental goals. For example, teaching logical-rational skills may generate conflict between Latino families and schoolteachers because the latter require children to voice and defend their own opinions. However, for Latino families, emphasis on one's own opinions, especially when they differ from one's parents' views, undermines respect for elders and their ascribed roles (Delgado-Gaitan, 1993, 1994).

Indeed, our earlier research documented that working-class immigrant parents who have come to Los Angeles from Mexico and Central America bring with them an ethnotheory of development that emphasizes collectivistic values (see Chapter Four of this volume). We found that this ethnotheory of development often comes into conflict with the more

individualistic views of their children's teachers. In contrast, we found that European American parents generally held to an individualistic ethnotheory of development. This ethnotheory of development was in harmony with that of their children's teachers.

In that research we explored cultural values through *hypothetical* responses to *imaginary* situations. Such responses yield a picture of cultural and individual *ideals* concerning human development. But ideal values are enacted and have their force on the level of everyday interactions. It is through such interactions that basic cultural values are both expressed and instilled. Parent-teacher conferences provide an interactive situation where basic cultural values may be displayed. They bring together parent and teacher ethnotheories of development in an interactive context. Where parents and teachers share common values, there is an opportunity for shared assumptions about the goals of child development. This underlying agreement leads to harmony in the social construction of the child. Where the participants do not share common values, misunderstanding is likely.

### Goals of the Study

The goals of this research are threefold: (1) to present a methodology for identifying cooperation or discord in the interactive construction of the child; (2) to describe the issues in child development that generate cooperative or discordant communication; and thereby (3) to provide a causal analysis of the frustrating communication experienced by Latino immigrant parents and their children's teachers.

**Participants and Procedure.** We videotaped a set of nine naturally occurring parent-teacher conferences between immigrant Latino parents and their children's European American elementary school teachers. All the children came from the same classroom, a third grade-fourth grade combination in a Los Angeles elementary school primarily serving a working-class immigrant Latino population. The teacher was therefore a constant across the nine conferences. Conferences were attended either by the mother, the father, or both parents, as well as the student; sometimes other siblings were present.

The children's parents (not all present at the conferences) had from five to twenty-six years of residence in the United States. Seven couples were born in Mexico, one in El Salvador, and one had a parent from each of the two countries. The educational level of the parents ranged from kindergarten through high school. The modal educational level was sixth grade; in Mexico, family financial hardships and the cost of educational materials often force children to abandon school after sixth grade. In addition, it is the highest level available at all in many rural areas.

**Analysis of the Conferences.** Discourse analysis focuses on the linguistic and paralinguistic *dynamics* and *relationship between speakers* in a conversation (in contrast to content analysis, which focuses on the meaning—*what is said*—as opposed to the interactional dynamics). Discourse

analysis was our methodological choice for two reasons: it focuses on interactional processes, and it enables the researcher to go beneath the surface of conversational content to examine more basic aspects of the communication process.

Our discourse analysis will focus, in turn, on two different types of dynamics occurring in parent-teacher conferences. In the first, there is implicit agreement on developmental goals. In the second, there is implicit disagreement on developmental goals. (Compare Gutierrez, Rymes, and Larson, 1995.)

Following the qualitative analysis of discourse processes, a quantitative analysis will be presented. The goal of the qualitative discourse analysis is to identify the dynamic interactional processes through which larger values are instantiated and enacted on the level of an important conversational event, the parent-teacher conference. The complementary goal of the quantitative analysis is to assess the prevalence of cooperative and noncooperative constructions of the child in the entire set of parent-teacher conferences.

### **Identifying Cooperative Social Construction: Examples of Implicit Agreement on Developmental Goals**

Cooperative construction of any topic is manifested in discourse when one party ratifies a topic, confirms a comment, or elaborates on a topic introduced by the other party. Any of these communicative moves indicates an uptake of the topic presupposed by the first speaker's conversational move (Ochs Keenan and Schieffelin, 1983). *Ratification of a topic or confirmation of a comment* can be verbal, nonverbal, or both; *elaboration* must have a verbal component.

We now present examples of such cooperative discourse processes used to interactively construct the child in one of our parent-teacher conferences. A few transcription conventions have been used in transcribing all of the examples in this chapter, as explained below. In addition, punctuation is used to indicate intonation and pausing rather than being used in strict accordance with the rules of grammar.

Symbol	Explanation
::	A double colon symbolizes lengthening of a syllable.
—	A dash indicates being cut off by the next speaker.
=	A pair of equal signs, one after an earlier utterance and one before a later utterance, indicates that the later followed the earlier with no discernible silence between them.
(( . . . ))	Material between double parentheses provides information about bodily movement.
[ . . . ]	When brackets are lined up vertically, the material in both sets
{ . . . }	of brackets was said simultaneously.

The parents in Examples 1 and 2 are the same couple. Both were born in Mexico; the father has been in the United States for twenty-three years, the mother for twenty years. Both were educated in Los Angeles. The father, who is self-employed in boat maintenance and construction, has an eleventh-grade education; the mother has gone through eighth grade.

**Example 1: Parents Confirm Teacher's Comment About Child**

Teacher, mother, father, and Betty (the subject of the conference) are seated at a table in the classroom (conference 9).

1. *Teacher*: ((Pointing to report card)) Takes pride in her work. Most of the time her work is neat, but I'd like her to work a li::ttle bit harder on trying to make sure that just—not perfect, bu[t a s ]=
2. *Father*: [Yeah.]
3. *Teacher*: =neat as possible
4. *Mother*: Yeah, a little bit—
5. *Teacher*: Yeah, a little neater.
6. *Mother*: Yeah, a little bit neater.
7. *Teacher*: ((Looking at Betty)) Yeah, work on your handwriting a little bit.
8. *Mother*: Yeah, she could improve it.
9. *Teacher*: Yeah, but it's not bad.

Note that in this example, the father first uses the affirmative “Yeah” (turn 2) to express agreement with the teacher; this is a verbal confirmation of a comment. The mother more specifically confirms the teacher's comment (child's work needs to be neater), first through attempting to restate the teacher's comment (turn 4), then through the device of repetition in turn 6, where she repeats almost word for word what the teacher has said in turn 5. The mother gives an even stronger reconfirmation in turn 8 (“Yeah, she could improve it”) by extending the teacher's prior comment to her daughter (“work on your handwriting a little bit”). Throughout, the dialogue presupposes an implicit and agreed-upon child development goal: the improvement of Betty's schoolwork.

In the preceding example, the parents confirm comments made by the teacher, mutually reinforcing a shared goal of child development. Harmony concerning shared goals can also be constructed through reversing roles. In the next example, the teacher takes up and elaborates on a topic introduced by the mother.

**Example 2: Teacher Elaborates on Topic Introduced by Mother**

Mother has been discussing Betty's difficulty in reading aloud (conference 9).

1. *Mother*: Uh, um, um, I wanted to, you know, if, (short pause) ask your opinion.
2. *Teacher*: Uh-huh.

3. *Mother*: Um, I've been hearing a lot about that "Hooked on Phonics."
4. *Teacher*: Oh, yeah, yeah.
5. *Mother*: And I was wondering you know, if you really know if it, if it works.
6. *Teacher*: Well, I'll tell you something. It depends on how she was taught to read when she was younger.
7. *Mother*: Uh-huh.

The teacher spends four turns elaborating on alternative methods of reading instruction, while the parents periodically agree with "yeah" (three turns).

15. *Teacher*: I think everything has to be done. I think that it's important to let the children have an easy time reading, but how can they read if they don't know the letters? So, I don't know how Betty was taught in the first and second grade *how* to read. But if she wasn't taught with phonics, that program would be very good.

In this example, it is the teacher who not only ratifies the mother's topic (the reading program "Hooked on Phonics") but further validates it through extensive elaboration. Looking at the transcript, we see that the topic of "Hooked on Phonics" is introduced by the mother in turn 3, ratified by the teacher in turn 4, then elaborated by the teacher into a general discussion of methods of reading instruction from turn 6 to turn 15. The point here is not only *what* the teacher says but also *how much* she says: that she thinks the topic is worth saying a lot about. Again, an implicit and agreed-upon child development goal emerges during the dialogue: the improvement of Betty's reading skills.

These two examples make yet another point about the social process of constructing the child in this particular parent-teacher conference: the process is a reciprocal one. Note that in Example 1 the *mother* takes up the *teacher's* topic by confirming her comment, whereas in Example 2 it is the *teacher* who ratifies and expands on a topic that the *mother* has introduced. It is the opportunity for both parties to suggest topics and have them taken up by the other that makes this constructional process not only cooperative but also socially symmetrical.

Before going on to a contrasting example of value *conflict* in the social construction of the child, it is interesting to note that these parents came to the United States from Mexico when they were very young; they were unique in our sample in having had all of their formal education in the United States. This conference, in fact, was the most harmonious of all nine in the cooperative construction of developmental goals. Thus, a common educational background between parents and teachers can be related to shared assumptions about child development.

However, educational background may not be the only reason for harmonious communication in these two examples. Another factor may be

that, in each example, discussion revolved around a shortcoming of the child rather than around a strength. It has been proposed that the collectivistic system is more comfortable dealing with deficits (in order to bring a person up to the level of the group) than praising achievements (which raises a person above the group). We will explore this hypothesis through quantitative analysis later in the chapter.

### **Identifying Noncooperative Discourse: Examples of Implicit Disagreement on Developmental Goals**

Noncooperative discourse is signaled when one party fails to ratify the other party's topic. Conversational noncooperation becomes conversational divergence when one partner not only fails to ratify but also changes the other partner's discourse topic. Divergence escalates to discord when the first partner refuses to give up his or her original topic or gives it up with difficulty. The following example illustrates such escalating noncooperation, divergence, and discord between parent and teacher. As will be seen, each party ignores the other party's symbolic construction of child development.

The father in Example 3 began his education in El Salvador, where he was born. He completed his education in Los Angeles, where he currently works as a furniture salesperson.

#### ***Example 3: Escalation of Communication Problems Between Parent and Teacher***

Teacher, father, Mira (the subject of the conference), and younger brother are seated at a table in the classroom (conference 6).

1. *Teacher*: She's doing great. She's doing beautifully in English and in reading. *And* in writing, *and* in speaking.
2. *Father*: ((looks down at lap))
3. *Teacher*: It's wonderful.
4. *Father*: ((turning to point to younger son)) The same, this guy, h[e]
5. *Teacher*: (interrupting, with shrill tone) [G]o::od! [He's doing too?]
6. *Father*: [He can] write—
7. *Teacher*: He can write in English?
8. *Father*: Well, his name.
9. *Boy*: ((turns away))
10. *Teacher*: He can write his name?
11. *Father*: Yeah.
12. *Teacher*: That's great!
13. *Boy*: ((turns away))
14. *Teacher*: How old is he?
15. *Father*: Four years old.



Further discussion of the younger brother occupies conversational turns 16–19.

20. *Teacher*: (to younger brother) That's great. (shrill, exaggerated tone) You know how to write your name already—that's wonderful! ((looking down at grades)) (returning to normal tone of voice, as she returns to original topic) Well, so she's doing beautifully.

Teacher goes on for a number of utterances about Mira's improvement in oral expression. Father says nothing, simply nodding politely and offering one affirmative "uh-huh."

In this example, the teacher initiates Mira as a topic (turn 1), commenting on her academic excellence. The father does not cooperate by ratifying this topic. Instead, using a pointing gesture in turn 4, he initiates a new topic, his younger son; this is a divergent conversational move. He continues the divergence by commenting on his son's skills in turns 4, 6, and 8. The teacher ratifies this new topic by confirming the father's comments in turns 5 and 7, but begrudgingly: her interruption (turns 5 and 7) and shrillness (turns 5 and 20) both bespeak her impatience and discomfort with the new topic. The conversational dynamics have escalated to discord. The discord continues when, at the end of turn 20, she, in a normal, much calmer voice, returns the topic to Mira, saying of her, "Well, so she's doing beautifully."

Just as concordant goals were implicit in Examples 1 and 2, so discordant goals are implicit in Example 3. Neither party seems comfortable with the goal of the other. The father shows discomfort when the teacher recognizes his daughter as outstanding, as she does in turn 1; he responds by looking down at his lap in turn 2. According to our analysis, her recognition may threaten the collectivistic goal of integrating each child as an equal contributing part of the family group. Hence, when the teacher symbolically constructs his daughter as an outstanding individual learner, the father implicitly *reconstructs* her as a normative part of the family group by equating her academic skills to those of her younger brother (turns 4, 6, and 8). Note also the lack of recognition of any communication problem throughout the conversation itself.

The father's goal of relating Mira to others in the family is confirmed by a similar switch of topic (after the transcribed segment in Example 3). After the teacher says of Mira, "She's doing very well," the father symbolically relates her to the family group once more, this time by talking of his older daughter and how she helps Mira with her reading homework.

The problem of misunderstanding is not merely a question of language. Both this conference and the conference illustrating shared understanding in the construction of the child (Examples 1 and 2) took place in English. Other parent-teacher conferences in our sample took place in Spanish or in a mixture of Spanish and English, some with the help of a native Spanish-speaking

aide as an interpreter. Most often and most fundamentally, the problems stem less from different languages and more from different value systems guiding child development. In conference 8, for instance, the use of Spanish did not prevent the sort of miscommunication illustrated in Example 3.

Conference 8 involved a mother who received a sixth-grade education in Mexico; she had been in the United States for seven years. In the course of this conference, after discussing book report assignments, the teacher asked the mother (in Spanish) if she had any questions. The mother answered, "*No, ninguna—sola que se portaba bien*" ("No, none—only that she was behaving well"). A divergent communication process ensued. The teacher answered the question with a dismissive "*Si, si,*" then changed the topic. Whereas the question was about correct behavior, the teacher commented in Spanish, "*En clase, ella participa. En esta clase, es importante que los alumnos participa oralmente*" (In class, she participates. In this class, it is important that the students participate orally). With her answer, the teacher transformed a question about proper behavior into one about verbal self-expression.

This Spanish-language conference exemplifies a major frustration described in the introduction: the teacher wants to talk about academics; the parent is more concerned about social behavior. However, it is more than a disagreement about priorities. The teacher is encouraging behavior—verbal self-expression—that is considered negative in the parents' cultural framework. Conference 6 (in English) was very revealing in this regard.

In conference 6, when the teacher asked if the father (the same father as in the escalating miscommunication of Example 3) had any questions toward the end of the conference, his reply was, "How is she doing? She don't talk too much?" Clearly, in requesting more talking from the child, the teacher elicited behavior that was considered positive in school but negative according to the community she was teaching. This can create a conflict for both parent and child, and this type of conflict has the potential to alienate children from their parents or from the school. Similarly, it could alienate parents from their children or from their children's school.

These misunderstandings indicate a significant problem in cross-cultural communication: the teacher assumes the importance of self-expression, in line with an individualistic conception of child development; the parent assumes the importance of socially responsible behavior, in line with a collectivistic conception of child development. These different assumptions about classroom behavior may then lead to frustrations with the communication process on both sides.

### Quantitative Analysis

We used eight of the nine videotaped conferences as the basis for the quantitative analysis. The ninth conference was essentially a conversation between the child and the teacher, with the mother, who was also a class-

room aide, looking on. Because it contained almost no parent-teacher interaction, we did not use it in the analyses. We based the quantitative categories on points of conflict that emerged from the qualitative analysis and from review of all nine tapes. The categories were

- Child's individual accomplishment
- Family accomplishment or contribution
- Praise for the child
- Criticism of the child
- Child's cognitive skills
- Child's social skills
- Child's oral expression
- Child's respect for authority
- Advice on parenting role
- Parents teaching their child at home

These categories are elaborated below in the descriptions of the quantitative results.

**Reliability.** Two researchers coded every tape. We based interrater reliability on a minute-by-minute analysis of initial agreements and disagreements between the raters. The two coders resolved disagreements by reviewing the tapes together and deciding on the best code. For agreement to be counted, coders had to agree on when the discourse was relevant (or irrelevant) to a particular category and whether reference to the category elicited cooperative (harmonious) or noncooperative (conflictual) discourse. Because there was no limit on how many categories could be coded in each unit of time, each category was independent of the others. Based on each minute as a unit, interrater reliability was high, ranging from 0.94 (for cognitive skill) to 1.00 (for individual accomplishment). These levels contrast sharply with the chance level of agreement of 0.33. Note, too, that these reliability figures include agreement on both the category and the response (cooperative or noncooperative).

**Results.** Cooperative social construction, or agreement on developmental goals, occurred less often than conflict and disagreement overall in this sample. Noncooperative discourse occurred in relation to all of the categories. There were 143 instances of noncooperative discourse in these categories and 53 instances of cooperative discourse. In other words, the ratio of noncooperative to cooperative discourse on these key topics was almost three to one. We now take up the individual categories, organized as pairs of conflicting values.

*Individual Versus Family Accomplishment.* We tested the frequency of the value conflict that emerged in Example 3—focus on individual achievement versus focus on family achievement or activity—in the eight parent-teacher conferences that were analyzed. We found that this type of conflict occurred nine times, in a total of five of the eight conferences. In all but one

case, the teacher's criterion for positive development was individual accomplishment; the parents' criterion was the accomplishment of the family as a whole or the child's contribution to family accomplishment.

*Praise Versus Criticism.* The harmony in Example 1 of the qualitative analysis occurred in response to a critical comment, whereas the discord in Example 3 occurred in response to praise. We therefore explored the hypothesis that the collectivistic system highlights the value of criticism as a feedback mechanism, whereas the individualistic system highlights the value of praise (Greenfield and Suzuki, 1998). Many collectivistic communities favor criticism to encourage normative behavior, while avoiding praise (Childs and Greenfield, 1980), which may single out a particular child (Markus and Kitayama, 1991).

The avoidance of praising has a particular cultural meaning (see, for example, Appadurai, 1990). U.S. schools are very concerned with maintaining the self-esteem of the child as a learner through maximizing positive (praise) and minimizing negative (critical) feedback. This is an individualistic position because it focuses on how individuals feel about themselves in relation to their own personal achievements. We therefore hypothesized that the teacher's critical comments concerning the child would lead to more cooperative conversation with parents than her positive comments would.

Indeed, criticism elicited more cooperative responses from the parents than did praise (eight cooperative responses to criticism, five cooperative responses to praise). Conversely, praise elicited more noncooperative responses than did criticism (twenty-seven noncooperative responses to praise, eighteen noncooperative responses to criticism). This trend follows the dynamics identified in the qualitative analysis. Even though the parents in conference 9 were educated in the United States, they followed the collectivistic pattern concerning praise and criticism.

Clearly, however, this relationship was a trend rather than an all-or-none pattern. Perhaps a stronger (and unexpected) pattern in these data is the overall tendency for noncooperative responses on the part of parents to evaluative comments (both positive and negative) about their children from the teacher. This pattern is probably based on the value of accepting rather than evaluating family members.

*Cognitive Versus Social Skills.* As illustrated in our earlier example from conference 8 and from our informal interviews with the teacher, parents were typically more interested in issues relevant to their children's social behavior, whereas the teacher was more interested in issues of cognitive development. From this we would predict noncooperative responses to the teacher's topic of cognitive skills. Indeed, noncooperative responses were more frequent (nineteen noncooperative versus fifteen cooperative) when the teacher discussed cognitive skills. It is important to mention here that eight out of the fifteen cooperative responses came from the same conference, the harmonious conference illustrated in Examples 1 and 2; recall that

these were the only parents in the sample to have received all of their education in the United States.

On the other hand, cooperative responses slightly predominated (five cooperative versus four noncooperative) when the teacher or parent introduced the topic of social skills. This result agrees with prior research findings that noncognitive aspects of intelligence seem to be more important than cognitive aspects for Mexican immigrant parents (Okagaki and Sternberg, 1993). Again, it is clearly a question of emphasis, not an all-or-none matter.

There was, for example, an unexpected level of noncooperative response on the part of parents when the teacher brought up social skills. The explanation seemed to be that many of these examples came from the behavior section of the report card and involved social behavior that would not be evaluated in the same way by the parents. For example, talking to other students in class was brought up as a form of negative social behavior by the teacher. However, it would not necessarily be seen as negative by the parents, who might, from a more collectivistic perspective, view this form of behavior as a way to strengthen social ties among the class members.

*Oral Expression Versus Respect for Authority.* This contrast is closely related to the prior one: oral expression is considered by the teacher to be a cognitive skill, whereas respect for authority is considered by many parents to be an important aspect of social behavior. In all eight parent-teacher conferences, there were instances when the teacher told the parents that she valued oral language skills or wanted the children to talk more in class. Twenty-six out of the twenty-eight parent responses were noncooperative.

Concerning respect for authority, in four cases a parent expressed worry about behavior that might be interpreted as disrespectful to the teacher, including fear that a child might be talking too much. This pattern indicates that the collectivistic goals of child development in the ancestral culture mandate that it is more appropriate for children to listen to authority figures than to display knowledge through talking in their presence.

*Parenting Role Versus Teaching Role.* Another source of cross-cultural conflict was that the teacher advocated teaching by the parents at home. Parents did not confirm such suggestions, responding with noncooperative conversational moves twenty-one out of twenty-two times. In fact, all the parents (except the parents in Examples 1 and 2) acted as if teaching cognitive skills is up to the teacher at school.

Although the parents did not want to teach at home, they did want to maintain their jurisdiction as socializing agents at home. In seven different conferences, parents responded one or more times with a noncooperative move when the teacher tried to give parents advice on parenting skills. Most parents seemed to believe that parenting is up to the parents at home.

Thus, there was disagreement between parents and teachers concerning the social construction of the actual child. Perhaps these Latino immigrant

parents prefer to socialize their children in their own way at home because of a sense that the teacher's suggestions undermine rather than support their ideal child. Perhaps they prefer not to engage in cognitive teaching at home because of their lack of direct experience with the U.S. educational system and limited schooling in their homelands. This latter is probably a major reason why Mexican immigrant parents rely more on older siblings to help their children with schoolwork than European American parents do (Azmitia and others, 1994).

### Conclusions

An important substantive finding of this study is that many differences between parents and teachers in their criteria for child development derive from differences between two implicit cultural models (Harkness and Super, 1996). The teacher's model is of the child as an independent, academic achiever with high self-esteem. The parents' model is of the child as a member of the family, sharing academic skills with others in the family, developing social responsibility, and displaying respectful behavior appropriate to the role of student.

The discord in the conferences also reflects different models of teaching and parenting. The teacher has a model of herself as teaching parents how to teach their children at home. She sees parents as auxiliary teachers, helping the child to succeed academically. The parents, in contrast, have a model of the teacher as their children's sole academic instructor and themselves as the authority on social development at home. Therefore, the teacher encounters resistance to her suggestions that parents teach at home. The parents, in turn, encounter resistance to their suggestions that each party has an exclusive domain of operation: teacher at school, parent at home.

However, discord between the parents and teacher was far from inevitable. Clearly, both communication and miscommunication have been accomplished by one and the same teacher in our study. This range of communicative fit between teacher and parents is a large one. Our hypothesis is that the range would be smaller, the average fit better, if all the pupils were children of parents who had grown up in the United States. If they were, there would be greater basic agreement that the goal of development (and the main point of the parent-teacher conference) is the growth of the child as an individual.

Herein lies our explanation regarding the complaints about communication that we have heard from Latino immigrant parents and from their children's teachers. For many immigrant Latino parents, the lack of understanding of the individualistic worldview impedes agreement on such educational goals. Similarly, teachers' lack of acknowledgment of collectivistic goals of development obstructs their communication with parents and the implicit goal of cooperatively constructing a child.

Given the multicultural environment in which we live, our research has definite social implications. The social policy goal of our research is to help parents and teachers negotiate cultural differences in a positive way, by mak-

ing them aware of the differing ethnotheory each party may bring to the literal table in cross-cultural parent-teacher conferences, in particular, and to the figurative table in multicultural schooling more generally.

Perhaps most practical as a remedy for cross-cultural miscommunication and the alienation it breeds would be for teachers to acknowledge the price of acculturation. This price, rarely if ever discussed at school or in society at large, is paid when valued goals of child development—such as respect for elders—must be given up in the name of academic achievement. In addition, increased awareness on the part of immigrant families of the basic value differences is needed. It may also be useful to move toward integrating aspects of individualism and collectivism so that both parents' and teachers' goals are valued in school settings.

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