

Book Review of *Bicultural Parent Engagement: Advocacy and Empowerment*

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Bicultural Parent Engagement: Advocacy and Empowerment makes a significant contribution to understanding how culturally and linguistically diverse parents engage in their schools and communities. The three editors of *Bicultural Parent Engagement*, Edward M. Olivos, Alberto M. Ochoa, and Oscar Jimenez-Castellanos, have a substantial trajectory in the area of bicultural parent engagement and have compiled a volume of chapters that examine the role and contribution of bicultural parents in school communities. The book addresses important issues about bicultural parents through a myriad of perspectives. Darder (1991) defines the term bicultural as a process wherein individuals learn to function in two distinct sociocultural environments which include their primary culture and that of the dominant mainstream culture of the society in which they live. The editors make it clear in the opening chapter that in this book, bicultural refers to Latino parents in the United States. In most of the chapters, the terms bicultural and Latino are used interchangeably. The Latino parents represented in this book possess distinct backgrounds, ranging from Mexican American to Central American and from immigrant and non-immigrant backgrounds. Consequently, multiple chapters illustrate a unique process Latino parents use to engage in their school community. The

book unveils practices in schools and communities that have historically marginalized bicultural parents and presents critical perspectives and research studies that describe bicultural parents as active members of school communities. Specifically, the book provides practices and ideas that can be utilized by teachers, administrators, and community members to overcome sociocultural and systemic barriers in schools, thus supporting parents in becoming leaders and advocates for student progress.

Many school districts are witnessing a major demographic shift in population. According to the PEW Hispanic Center (2008), more culturally and linguistically diverse families are residing in urban school districts, and in 2008, Latino students in U.S. public schools constituted 19.8% of the student population (Fry & Gonzales, 2008). The need to examine the current realities of bicultural parents is of great importance, since much of the literature on bicultural parents has traditionally undermined their role in schools (Olivos, 2006). As Olivos and his colleagues point out, "Existing parent and family involvement paradigms tend to exclude the valuable and legitimate interaction patterns of many bicultural families" (2011, p. 7). *Bicultural Parent Engagement* describes the multiple dimensionalities of bicultural parents and their active participation in schools and communities in the United States. *Bicultural Parent Engagement* is a timely book.

The editors have selected highly qualified scholars and researchers who have dedicated their careers to understanding bicultural parents, specifically, Latino parents. The authors, all leading experts in their particular fields, present a critique of traditional parent involvement models to formulate a democratic parent engagement process for historically disenfranchised parents, thus illustrating bicultural parents' contribution to the success of their children, schools, and communities.

This well-organized 232-page book is divided into three sections. Part One includes three chapters that focus on the role of parents' culture and knowledge in the success of students. Part Two has three chapters that present a critical analysis of how power and democracy influence bicultural parents in schools. Part Three includes four chapters that illustrate the manner in which parents and researchers can operationalize transformative parent engagement in schools and communities.

The writing, readability, and an organization of this book merit exceptionally high marks. The authors provide well-articulated introductions to each chapter's readings, in addition to discussion questions and suggested readings at the end of the book.

Part One: Introduction and Multicultural Perspectives

Chapter 1, written by the editors of the book, Olivos, Ochoa, and Jiménez-Castellanos, sets the context for the book and provides the framework that serves as the lens for examining issues within the field of parental engagement in the remaining chapters. The authors provide a thorough review of the parental engagement literature and reasons why it is important to focus on parental engagement if we truly want to address the current gap in student academic achievement. The authors also discuss how terms often used interchangeably to describe the concept of involving students' families in school—such as parent involvement, home-school collaborations, parent engagement, parent participation, and parent-school partnerships—each carry implications and assumptions about how the roles of parents and schools are defined. In this opening chapter, the authors also state that as editors of the book, they recognize the prominence of the Latino experience described in the following chapters and assert that this prominence is not meant to minimize the experiences of other groups. They point out that the salient concepts presented in the remaining chapters have implications for other ethnic communities in our society. The editors take into consideration that Latino parents are influenced by factors such as socioeconomic status, childcare availability, and limited English proficiency. Further, they contend that parent involvement practices in schools do not acknowledge sociocultural factors and, consequently, perpetuate asymmetrical power relationships with Latino parents.

Part One, "Multicultural Perspectives," contains three other chapters. Chapter 2 by Moreno, Lewis-Menchaca, and Rodriguez, focuses on schools' conceptions of parental involvement and presents strategies for building better relations between bicultural families and schools. The authors do an excellent job of addressing the complexities of parent involvement at home through their own studies of Latina mothers teaching their children the alphabet. In Chapter 3, Lindsey and Lindsey examine "cultural competency and culturally proficient schools and practices" (p. 6). Included are a useful series of steps for planning and implementing a culturally proficient parent involvement component and a rubric that the authors present as a "template for action." In Chapter 4, Wlazinski and Cummins describe the Family Narrative Project within a preservice teacher education course and explore how collaborative scripting can shed light on the issue of coercive power relations in marginalized communities. Especially powerful are the preservice students' voices describing the mutual benefits for themselves and the parents with whom they coauthored family stories.

Part Two: Critical Perspectives

In Chapter 5, author Shannon describes the unequal political and social relations that exist within a single school and the complexities of parent engagement. This is one of the strongest chapters in the book and may become a seminal piece in the field of parent engagement. The parallels drawn between a Dual Language Program in the United States and a Dual Language Program (DLP) in Israel were thought provoking, and the concrete examples of converging and diverging interests in a specific DLP were enlightening. Chapter 6 presents a case for democratic schooling for bicultural parents. The author, Pearl, draws from seven democratic schooling principles to articulate the need for democratic practices for bicultural students, parents, and communities. Each democratic principle challenges existing problems in schools and communities that have historically impacted bicultural parents. The author makes an excellent argument for democracy in schools by citing flaws in the educational system and linking them with contemporary issues hurting culturally diverse students and parents in schools. This chapter echoes the overall thesis of the book. Chapter 7 proposes an alternative parent engagement model. Specifically, Grant and Potter discuss constructive pluralism as a starting point for developing parents' engagement practices. Constructive pluralism is discussed as a way to unite diverse groups in schools and communities for the well being of all. The authors argue that constructive pluralism advocates for the civic engagement of ethnically diverse parents and the school in order to bring about a more democratic and socially just education. The authors posit that a parent involvement model's main emphasis should be to reflect a global society, and they remind the reader that parent engagement in schools has global implications.

Part Three: Operationalizing Transformative Parent Engagement

The application of transformative parent engagement practices in schools is introduced in Chapter 8. Johnson provides a rationale for modifying Epstein's (2001) model of parent involvement by describing issues of inequality that have impacted parents of color in urban communities. The author recounts the success of two action research projects and describes seven types of action-based approaches needed for urban school parents, including: access to information and data collection, parents in decision-making roles, parents as student advocates, parents as leaders at home and in the school community,

effective two-way communication, acquiring district level support, and creating a friendly school atmosphere. The strength of this chapter lies in the fact that parents in urban communities led the action research projects, thus reaffirming the focus of the book. Latino immigrant parents' engagement through action research is also the focus of Chapter 9. The author, Montero-Sieburth, like previous authors in this book, adds to Epstein's six-type model of parental engagement by advocating for Latino immigrant parents in leadership positions in schools and communities. The author chronicles four action research projects from 1999–2006 that highlight Latino immigrant parents as researchers. The action research projects describe the role of diverse groups of Latino immigrants offering insightful perspectives often ignored in the research literature on parent involvement. The data resulting from the action research projects evoke more discussion on the potential of action research in bicultural communities.

Chapter 10 examines the role of public schools in the civic engagement of immigrant parents. Terriquez and Rogers draw from empirical data to illustrate that, despite barriers to parental school participation, Latino immigrant parents actively participate in school-based civic activities. The authors argue that the desire Latino immigrant parents feel to create a better life for their children prompts them to become civic agents. This chapter, like the previous chapters, affirms the book's focus, which is the need for bicultural parents to become leaders. The final chapter reviews and re-emphasizes the significance of transformative parent engagement. Specifically, Ochoa, Olivos, and Castellanos- Jiménez draw from previous chapters to reiterate the need to understand the process by which transformative parent engagement practices are enacted in schools and communities. The editors present a Transformational Parent Engagement Model to describe the process of how parents can be sociopolitically active in their children's school. The authors propose five levels of engagement in actualizing the Transformational Parent Engagement Model: Level I, Connectedness; Level II, Inclusion; Level III, Decision-Making; Level IV, Participatory Action Research; and, finally, Level V, Macro Civic Engagement. The final chapter calls for schools and communities to seek equal opportunity and social justice, thus magnifying the need for bicultural parent engagement in education.

Conclusion

The editors state in Chapter 1 that one of the goals of the book is “to raise critical questions that will problematize how the current conceptualizations about parent involvement in public schools serve to replicate the status quo”

(p. 4). They have succeeded in meeting that goal. One of the strengths of the book is that each chapter raises common critical questions as well as unique questions posed by the various authors. Indeed, a powerful aspect of the book is that each chapter can stand on its own, although greater impact will be made when readers are presented with the myriad of issues within bicultural parent engagement presented in this compilation. The major weakness of the book, as the editors advised in Chapter 1, is the prominence of the Latino experience and very limited explicit discussion of other ethnic groups. A comparative study between Latino parents and other ethnic minority parents would have been useful in examining other factors that might influence parent involvement in bicultural contexts. This is not to say, however, that the ideas presented are not applicable to other ethnic groups; rather, these ideas could easily lead to powerful discussions with implications for all schools regardless of the populations they serve.

As stakeholders in the education experiences of an increasing population of culturally and linguistically diverse students realize that broader social changes through civic engagement are needed to improve outcomes for these students and their families, books such as this one can provide the impetus for dialogue followed by action. Parents engaged in learning communities within schools or through their parent-teacher organizations can use several of the chapters as part of their discussions. It would be ideal to have the chapters translated in order to make the content accessible in parents' native languages. Professional learning communities composed of teachers and/or administrators could also use this book as a whole or choose individual chapters to stimulate rich dialogue that would hopefully lead to action tailored to their individual schools. Several of the chapters provide steps and rubrics as well as specific ideas and strategies for improving parental engagement within schools and communities that parents, teachers, and administrators will find practical and helpful, though not simple to implement due to the complexity of underlying issues within any school willing to authentically engage bicultural families.

This book is especially valuable as either a stand alone text for a course on family engagement or for selecting specific chapters to enhance any course that addresses issues of family engagement. The rich use of cited research studies also makes it an ideal resource for undergraduate and graduate courses exploring issues of cultural diversity and family engagement. Editors Olivos, Ochoa, and Jiménez-Castellanos have made a valuable contribution to the education field and specifically to the conversation about bicultural parent engagement. *Bicultural Parent Engagement* should be read by all who are interested in meeting the needs of each and every student who sits in our classrooms, as each deserves to be valued, respected, and provided a quality education.

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