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Assessing the Cultural Dimensions of the Los Niños Bien Educados Parenting Program

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Abstract

A focus group evaluation was conducted on the Los Niños Bien Educados parenting course to investigate how a cultural frame of reference used in parenting classes for Latinos affects the experiences of the parents who attend them. The findings suggested that a cultural frame of reference in parenting courses for Latinos results in increased motivation to continue attending the classes, stronger connection to the course and information, improved parent-child relationships, improvement in cultural adjustment to the U.S., and improved learning of parenting skills.

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Latinos, many of whom are immigrants, are the second largest panethnic group in the U.S., with Whites being the first (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Hence, designing and delivering culturally appropriate programs to Latinos are primary concerns of Extension educators (Schauber & Castania, 2001).

Acculturative stress is a primary contributor to family violence among Latinos immigrants (Pappas, 1998). One way of helping Latino immigrant families adjust to the U.S. and decreasing child abuse is through culturally sensitive parenting education. Extension professionals need appropriate parenting curriculums that enhance Latinos' lives (DeBord, & Matta, 2002).

Latino Cultural Values

Although Latino groups vary enormously, they also share a general cultural heritage (Chilman, 1999). Traditional Latino families are considered hierarchical, with special authority given to elderly, parents, males, older siblings, and authority figures (e.g., teachers) (Perilla, 1999). Sex roles are clearly delineated in most Latino families. Men are expected to be strong, dominant, and the provider, whereas women are expected to be nurturing, submissive to the male, and self-sacrificing.

Respeto (respect) in Latino parent-child relations refers to the deference given to parents because of their important hierarchical position. Hence, obedience is expected from children. *Bien educado* (i.e., "well-socialized" or "well-mannered") is used to describe a child who is respectful and obedient (Hildebrand, Phenice, Gray, & Hines, 2000).

In general, Latinos place a high value on family tradition, unity, and loyalty (Lee, 1999). Hence, it is important to develop and maintain interpersonal relationships within a large network of family and friends (i.e., *familismo*).

These values and traditions are so integral to Latino lifestyle that it is generally believed that by acknowledging and utilizing these values and beliefs, family life education programs are far more

marketable and applicable to Latinos.

Overview of the LNBE Program

According to Gorman and Balter (1997), parenting programs should be modified according to the target population. Some widely implemented parenting programs are offered in Spanish versions, yet these versions are essentially the same eurocentrically based programs. The *Los Niños Bien Educados (LNBE) Program*, created by the Center for the Improvement of Child Caring, is a culturally adapted version of *Confident Parenting* (Alvy, 1994).

LNBE focuses on respecting unique traditions and customs of Latino families and exploring the effects of acculturation on parent-child relationships. LNBE was based on the traditional Latino value of raising children to be *bien educados* ("well-socialized" or "well-mannered") (Tannatt & Alvy, 1989). From this cultural framework, parents are taught methods for reinforcing behaviors that are considered *bien educados* and reducing behaviors that reflect *mal educados*. LNBE utilizes *dichos* (Latino proverbs) to orient parents to the skills being taught.

LNBE is usually taught as a 3-hour, 12-week course (in either Spanish or English) and is geared toward poverty-level Latino parents, especially immigrant parents. Recently, a 1-day version of LNBE was created that can be taught to large numbers of parents whose lives do not allow for multiple-session class commitments.

Numerous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of the multi-session and 1-day seminar formats (Alvy, 1994; Alvy et al., 2003). Analyses of qualitative and quantitative data have shown significant gains in positive parenting practices (e.g., praise, encouragement, patience) and decreases in negative or abusive parenting practices (e.g., hitting, yelling, unrealistic expectations).

Additional information about the development, components, and evaluation of LNBE can be found at <http://www.ciccparenting.org/cicc_inbe_1113.asp>.

Evaluation of the Cultural Attributes of LNBE

Although LNBE has been around for over 30 years, no evaluation has been conducted on the cultural focus of LNBE. Hence, a focus group was conducted to examine how the cultural attributes of LNBE affect Latino parent participants. Understanding this impact is seen as a significant step in the growing shift toward culturally sensitive parenting education.

The LNBE course was provided in a classroom at a middle school and was taught in Spanish by a Mexican-born, Latina parenting instructor. In the last week of the course, 10 volunteers were chosen to participate based on attendance and a random drawing. Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the sample.

Table 1.
Demographic Characteristics of the Participants ($n = 10$)

Age	Country of Origin	Education Level	Marital Status	Miscellaneous
Range 28-41	70% Mexico	10% grade school	60% married	90% spoke mostly Spanish at home
Mean 31.88	10% El Salvador	40% high school	10% divorced	100% had at least one child 5 or younger
	20% Unknown	20% college degree	10% widowed	
		10% graduate degree	20% unknown	
		20% unknown		

Two Spanish-speaking doctoral students (neither of whom were affiliated with CICC) conducted the focus group (in Spanish). The two students followed a focus group protocol that was developed for

this study. The participants were each given \$10 for their participation, explained their rights as participants, given consent forms, and debriefed.

Table 2 summarizes the themes identified in the analyses of the videotaped focus group data. In addition, implications for Extension professionals that correspond to each theme are presented.

Table 2.
Focus Group Themes by Participants and Implications for Extension Professionals

Themes	Implications
Participants reported: shifting from "isolation" toward acceptance and respect for multiculturalism and feeling empowered by discussions of Latino and U.S. cultures and of cultural adjustment to this country.	Teach Latino parents about cultural adjustment and types of acculturation because it helps empower Latino parents: to learn more about their cultural strengths, to learn U.S. laws, and to make informed decisions on how they acculturate their families to the U.S.
Participants felt validated in maintaining their cultural parenting methods, yet appreciated learning U.S. parenting methods to enhance their communication with their "Americanizing" children (e.g., moving from hierarchically based, one-way communication to listening to their children and engaging in discussions).	Focus on parent-child relations from both traditional Latino and U.S. perspectives.
Participants modified their views on traditional gender roles (e.g., allowing boys to play with dolls, develop interests in cooking, and clean after themselves without fear it would make them homosexual.)	Help Latino parents understand and respond more appropriately and effectively to their children's developing roles in U.S. society.
Using <i>dichos</i> put participants "on the same channel because we're talking about something that is well-known to us."	Use <i>dichos</i> when teaching classes to Latinos.
Participants expressed great confidence in their instructor's understanding of their culture since she was Latina.	Use culturally similar instructors for parenting Latinos when possible.
The instructor was described as someone who "takes off her shoes and puts herself in your place," especially given her shared heritage and egalitarian style.	Use an egalitarian style with Latino parents to maximize learning and motivation.
Participants felt they could expose parenting issues without fear of reprisal or judgment. Early in the class, participants were concerned about being "reported" by the instructor to the government. Although this concern is rarely mentioned in the literature, it appeared tremendously important to these parents.	Use a non-judgmental approach and have forthright discussions about reporting concerns and mandated reporting laws when working with immigrant Latinos.

Participants appreciated sharing their experiences and were motivated by hearing other Latino parents' experiences. Participants believed the supportive atmosphere motivated them to continue attending the class and improved their parent-child relationships, cultural adjustment, and parenting skills.

Establish a support group environment and encourage active group sharing. These are highly effective means for parent training with Latinos.

Conclusion

While there are limitations of the study (e.g., small sample, geographic), this study is presented in order to support Extension professionals in stepping closer toward providing parent training for Latinos. Specifically, the participants in the focus group conveyed that this parenting course was attuned to them culturally. This study also indicated that Latino parents believe a culturally adapted parenting program (e.g., *Los Niños Bien Educados*) is effective in helping them understand the ramifications of acculturation while teaching basic parenting skills. These findings are consistent with previous studies that found that minority and Latino parents respond positively to culturally adapted programs (Debord & Reguero de Atilés, 1999; Norwood & Atkinson, 1997).

The results of this focus group evaluation, along with prior evaluations of the *Los Niños Bien Educados* parenting program, provide strong evidence of the effectiveness of LNBE in promoting effective parenting behaviors and attitudes of Latino American parents.

It is suggested that Extension professionals engage in evaluation of the cultural components of other culturally specific programs in an effort to identify how these components impact the participants. This information can help in the design of future family life education programs targeting parents in specific cultural groups.

And finally, it is recommended that focus groups be considered when collecting data from Latinos about Extension services received. Specifically, focus groups tap into Latinos' social orientation, strong oral traditions, helping behaviors, *compadrazo* (a supportive community system, which includes reciprocity among its members), and *simpatía* (communicating and empathizing feelings with others). Further, this method acknowledges that people often need to listen to other people's articulated opinions and understandings in order to form their own (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

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