

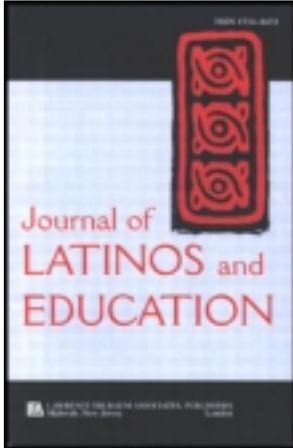
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### Family Lessons and Funds of Knowledge: College-Going Paths in Mexican American Families

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# Family Lessons and Funds of Knowledge: College-Going Paths in Mexican American Families

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Families are crucial in the development of a college-going culture in the home. This qualitative study illustrates that Mexican American families are no exception. Using a multiple case study design, this study explored the funds of knowledge present in Mexican American families. Findings from this study reveal how daily educational practices, extended family networks, and preexisting college knowledge contribute to the development of positive college ideologies. Findings suggest that a shift in how researchers and practitioners understand and incorporate families in educational programming must take into consideration the fact that families have knowledge both about education in general and about college specifically.

**Key words:** funds of knowledge, Mexican American families, college-going culture, college access

The role of families, their values in terms of education, and their involvement in education process contribute to whether students experience a college-going culture. Likewise, there is a consistent message in the literature on increasing college access: Incorporating families into the educational process is fundamental to the success of their children. Parental involvement in K–12 education has long been considered a positive factor in students' educational performance and academic success (Jun & Colyar, 2002; Tierney, 2002; Zarate, 2007). Yet we as researchers

and practitioners seldom consider the role of the entire family in shaping a student's college-going path. If we are to understand students' experiences in college, we must first understand how they came to be there.

A range of research also illustrates the importance of parental involvement in outreach programs (Auerbach, 2004; Jun & Colyar, 2002; Tierney, 2002). Incorporating parents into outreach programs can be done in a variety of ways: through personalized information focusing on steps in the pathway to college; expansion of families' social networks related to college options to include educators, alumni, and families like themselves; reinforcement of parents' sense of self-efficacy; and gathering with other families for support and fellowship (Tierney & Auerbach, 2004). Most important, researchers recommend maintaining a level of cultural integrity, which includes viewing education not simply as a process of passing information to parents without regard to their cultural realities but rather as an interactive process of identity and community development that respects the culture and knowledge of the family (Tierney & Jun, 2001). Each of these recommendations is important, but the "how" question remains: How does one put these recommendations into practice when working with families—specifically Mexican American families? One model used to incorporate families into K–12 education is that of funds of knowledge.

Funds of knowledge, or the knowledge, skills, and resources present in homes, have been utilized to incorporate students' and families' experiences into the classroom (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). Although the conceptual model of funds of knowledge has a rich presence in the K–12 literature, there are limited examples of the use of a funds of knowledge approach within higher education, outreach programs, or any setting beyond a K–12 classroom. This is of particular importance for the present study, as the outreach literature indicates that the earlier the outreach begins, the better. Outreach should begin no later than the upper elementary grades, because students begin forming college-going aspirations at early ages (Auerbach, 2004; Tierney, Colyar, & Corwin, 2003). Thus, findings and implications from the current study are significant as they address the need to incorporate families into outreach initiatives from a culturally relevant perspective, to begin outreach initiatives no later than elementary grades, and to extend the funds of knowledge approach beyond K–12 classrooms.

The purpose of this study was to explore the funds of knowledge present in Mexican American<sup>1</sup> families. The families in this study were participants in a uni-

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<sup>1</sup>Families in this study identified as Mexican American. One mother identified as African American. I chose to use this family's case for this study because her children were biracial (African American and Mexican American) and identified with the Mexican American community and culture. I refer to the participants as *Mexican American* in order to be consistent with the identities that they have claimed. However, when referencing the literature I use both *Hispanic* and *Latino* interchangeably to describe a more general Latin American population. In an effort to maintain the integrity of the literature being referenced I have not substituted those terms for any other descriptor.

versity outreach program. Using a multiple case study design, this study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What funds of knowledge are present in and utilized by Mexican American families?
2. How do families' funds of knowledge contribute to a college-going culture in the home?

This article begins with a review of the framework of funds of knowledge and the key concepts relevant to the theory. Next a review of funds of knowledge in the literature is presented. This section includes specific examples of the use of funds of knowledge in K–12 classrooms. An overview of the study design and methodology is presented next and includes a table detailing the families that participated in this study. The findings are organized into three primary sections: daily educational practices within the household, extended family and social networks, and preexisting family college knowledge. The article ends with a discussion and implications for research and practice.

## RELEVANT LITERATURE

### Funds of Knowledge

The primary theoretical framework utilized for this study is funds of knowledge. *Funds of knowledge* refers to the “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (Moll et al., 1992, p. 133). It broadly encompasses language practices, social practices, and various other bodies of knowledge found within home cultures and influenced by life experiences (McIntyre, Rosebery, & Gonzalez, 2001).

The term originated as Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg (1992) documented the nonmarket exchanges among binational families across Mexico and the United States. These exchanges were influenced by political and economic forces and evolved into general knowledge, cultural exchange among households, and transformations of cultural and behavioral practices termed *funds of knowledge* (Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 2005). Funds of knowledge can be described as the “cultural glue” (p. 54) that sustains relations between cluster households (extensions of families beyond the nuclear household) and is understood by the family rituals, exchange relations, and kinship networks that assist someone in gaining access to resources and developing social networks (Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 2005).

In the transmission of funds of knowledge from one household cluster member to the next, children often control the ways in which they learn and how they experiment with learning. Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti (2005) described funds of knowledge as families' defining pedagogical characteristic and argued that the educational process can be greatly enhanced when teachers learn about and understand the everyday lives of their students. Funds of knowledge and the process of transmission and learning can facilitate a powerful and culturally relevant way to tap into communities' resources in the classroom (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). When funds of knowledge are incorporated into classroom teaching, it provides an opportunity for a child to learn from multiple spheres of activity with family relationships, social worlds, and community resources rather than a single-stranded relationship between the student and the teacher (Moll et al., 1992). This view of families works from a nondeficit approach and recognizes and validates the assets and cultural and cognitive resources found within families and communities.

### Funds of Knowledge in the Literature

Households that are socially linked to the community and extended family provide children with many opportunities to be exposed to funds of knowledge. During daily household tasks, children have the opportunity to ask questions, emulate adult behavior, and experiment with new skills (Vélez-Ibáñez, 1996; Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992). Everyday reading materials such as magazines, self-help books, and newspapers create an atmosphere in which literacy is appreciated and in which adults model positive literacy behaviors (Tapia, 2000). The following are examples of funds of knowledge documented in households and utilized in the classroom.

Literacy practices, both in English and in Spanish, allow for transference between the two languages. When families set up opportunities to read in Spanish, it builds opportunities for enhanced literacy development in English (Rubinstein-Ávila, 2004). Likewise, simple activities like using a calculator to figure out which product is cheaper allow for enhanced mathematical skills to develop (Rubinstein-Ávila, 2004). Funds of knowledge transmission occurs both in household activities that may be more clearly linked to academic subjects and in activities such as masonry, gardening, ranching, and auto repair, which provide children with opportunities to learn about agriculture and material and scientific knowledge (Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992). For example, Knobel (2001) described one young man who observed his father ordering machine parts and balancing accounts for his business. This allowed the young man to experiment with creating his own lawn mowing service, in which he used mathematical and marketing skills in the development of a marketing flyer. As Vélez-Ibáñez (1996) stated, experimenting

with newly acquired skills is an important step in children developing the confidence to use these skills outside of the home.

Utilizing a funds of knowledge framework in the classroom is dependent upon the instructor not viewing himself or herself as having “an agenda to cover” (González, Moll, Tenery, et al., 2005, p. 103). Rather, it allows for the resources of the families to inform teaching practices and to aid in developing creative techniques for covering academic subject matter. An example of this is an instructor who, after visiting with many of her students’ families, realized that much of the class had substantial knowledge relating to horses (Amanti, 2005). She created a learning module on this topic and invited guest speakers, including her students’ family members, to come and share their knowledge with the class. In another example, Dworin (2006) described the Family Studies Project, an assignment in which fourth-grade Latino students in a biliteracy class were asked to write a collection of family stories. Students were asked to write both an English and a Spanish version, create illustrations, work collaboratively on the assignment, provide one another with feedback, and incorporate their families’ edits and revisions. This example is particularly unique because the students (as opposed to the researchers or teachers) were empowered through the project to research and document their families’ resources, *cuentos* (stories), and history (Dworin, 2006). These examples illustrate a process that acknowledged and incorporated the resources, interests, and values of families and that used the funds of knowledge framework to create a meaningful learning environment.

Although much of the research on funds of knowledge has focused on Latino families, there are examples of the effectiveness of this approach within other cultures as well. Ginsberg (2007) described household visits by teachers that highlighted the funds of knowledge in Somali and Russian immigrant families. Funds of knowledge in the areas of family unity and cooperation, religion, household management, multilingualism, and fabric design were documented and math units were created based on families’ life situations (Ginsberg, 2007). Similarly, Maher, Epaloose, and Tharp (2001) described a teacher who incorporated her students’ Zuni cultural background into a learning unit on comparative traditions. By incorporating instructional conversations, the teacher made students the primary resource for contextualizing and creating the learning unit. Funds of knowledge quickly emerged about Zuni holidays, art, music, food and drink, clothing, jewelry, and recreation, and students were able to compare these cultural traditions with those of the Jewish culture (Maher et al., 2001).

Funds of knowledge are becoming a practiced pedagogical tool in some K–12 classrooms. Yet this specific culturally relevant pedagogy is not generally found in postsecondary education or outreach initiatives. However, two important examples of funds of knowledge research extending beyond K–12 literature are worth noting. The work of Bensimon (2007) represents the first research on funds of knowledge in a higher education setting. This research is unique not only because

of its focus on higher education but because it highlights practitioners' (rather than students') funds of knowledge and how those funds of knowledge might influence educational opportunities for students. One additional study has provided evidence of the importance of studying Latino students' transition into college from a funds of knowledge framework. Specifically, Rios-Aguilar and Kiyama (in press) provided examples of how this framework would be useful in understanding the process of college preparation, college access, and the development of career aspirations for Latino students.

One goal of the present article is to demonstrate the funds of knowledge present in families participating in a university outreach program with the hope that such funds of knowledge might be utilized to enhance outreach initiatives in the future. Another goal of this article is to extend the literature that presents Mexican American families from a nondeficit perspective. This continuing discussion is critical given that many educational environments do not value the capital representative of families' significant resources (Nora, 2004). Findings in this article will challenge preexisting notions of how college knowledge and educational values are constructed and taught within Mexican American families.

## METHODOLOGY

This article is based on a larger study examining the funds of knowledge, educational ideologies, and parental involvement of Mexican American families within a university outreach program. A qualitative multiple case study approach was utilized, and data were collected primarily through semistructured pre- and post-program interviews and oral history interviews. Participants in both the larger study and the present study described in this article are represented by the terms *families* or *household clusters*.

### Site and Participants

Families were recruited for this study based on their participation in the Parent Outreach Program.<sup>2</sup> The Parent Outreach Program is coordinated out of the University Outreach Office at a large Research I university located in the southwest region of the country. The city in which the university is located is just 1 hour from the U.S./Mexico border; nearly 36% of the metropolitan area's population is Hispanic/Latino. As a relatively open access land grant institution, the university has departments that work to recruit and provide outreach to the student population of the state. This particular outreach program was the product of a partnership between the University Outreach Office and elementary schools in one school dis-

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<sup>2</sup>Both the Parent Outreach Program and the University Outreach Office are pseudonyms.

tract of the city. The school district is located on the south side of the city and consists primarily of Mexican, lower working-class, and lower middle-class families. The partnering school district reports that on average about 87% of students are Hispanic/Latino, almost 85% of students are on free and reduced lunch programs, and about 13% of students graduating from high school enroll directly in a 4-year college or university.

The Parent Outreach Program was created for parents of elementary school students from kindergarten to the fifth-grade level to help parents understand current and future academic expectations, improve communication with schools, increase their involvement, and prepare students for a college education. The program consists of weekly 2-hour workshops held over a 10-week period; workshops are presented both in English and in Spanish.

About 85 families participate each year in the Parent Outreach Program. The majority of families that the Parent Outreach Program serves each year are Spanish speaking (approximately 60%) and identify as Hispanic (specifically, Mexican; approximately 85%). The six families that participated in the present study were Mexican, lower to lower middle class, and English speaking, with the majority having not completed a 2- or 4-year college degree.

Families in this study included parents(s) or guardian(s) and children participating in the Parent Outreach Program and siblings, extended families, and/or friends that either lived in the same household or frequently visited. I also attempted to include parents with various levels of education and income. Finally, I worked to ensure that families represented the diversity of families participating in the Parent Outreach Program. Within the sample I included a family with adopted children, a biracial family, a family that was not originally from the local area, as well as families that had been in the local area for multiple generations. Although I observed the entire household cluster and sometimes spoke briefly with other members of the family, the interviews were conducted primarily with parents. In all but one case, interviews were with individual parents. And in all but two cases, interviews were conducted with the mothers.

Supplementing the stories of these six families were interviews with 27 English-speaking parents. These additional interviews were conducted during the pilot year of the Parent Outreach Program and provided a foundation from which to build a more in-depth oral history interview protocol. Although some of their experiences are highlighted in this article, extensive background information on the families was not collected, and therefore the families do not appear in Table 1.

As is the case with qualitative work, the intent of sharing these families' experiences is not to generalize to the larger Mexican American family experience. The experiences represented here do not even capture those of all of the Parent Outreach Program participants, particularly the Spanish-speaking families. What I present here is an intentional process meant to capture the life events of these participants (Yin, 2003).

TABLE 1  
Household Clusters

<i>Family</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Relationship</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Level of Education</i>
Borquez	34	Father	College student, self-employed, veteran	Current community college and university student
Will	11	Daughter		5th grade (Los Nidos Elementary)
Veronica	9	Daughter		3rd grade (Los Nidos Elementary)
Jennifer	30	Friend	Does administrative work in hospital emergency room, veteran	Unknown
Rodrigo Gamez	20	Girlfriend of friend	Does administrative work (part-time) in doctor's office	Unknown
Aracely Michaels				
Johnson				
Danielle	27	Mother	Corrections officer	High school
Ricardo	28	Father	Community college student	Some community college
John	7	Son		1st grade (San Clemente Elementary)
Yvette	6	Daughter		Kindergarten (San Clemente Elementary)
Lopez	29			
Janice	39	Mother	Insurance biller	High school
Isaiah	12	Father	Painter, deejay	Trade school (welding certificate)
Virginia	5	Daughter		7th grade (Champion Middle School)
Veronica		Daughter		1st grade (San Clemente Elementary)
-----	14	Daughter (lives with biological father)		High school freshman
Vanessa				
Murrieta				
Tanya	30	Mother	Obstetrics technician, community college student	Community college student
Sal	11	Son		5th grade (Lauer Middle School)
Selena	9	Daughter		3rd grade (Sage View Elementary)
Alex	6	Son		Kindergarten (Sage View Elementary)
Laura	20	Aunt	Administrative assistant	High school
Beatrice	2	Female cousin		
Ernestina	52	Grandmother	Housekeeper	Completed 3rd grade
Antonio	50s	Boyfriend of grandmother	Janitor	Unknown
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Maria	27	Aunt	Manager	
Robert	7	Male cousin		
Gustavo	6	Male cousin		
Julia	2	Female cousin		
Carlos	29	Uncle	Stereo installer	
Amelia	10	Female cousin		
Bianca	6	Female cousin		
Baby	6 months	Baby cousin		
Rodriguez				
Linda	50	Mother	Administrative assistant	High school
Pedro	77	Grandfather	Retired head custodian at middle school	Completed 6th grade
Olivia	69	Grandmother	Retired factory worker	Completed 9th grade
Dora	15	Adopted daughter		Freshman (Desert Voices High School)
Laura	13	Adopted daughter		7th grade (safe home through school district)
Daniela	11	Adopted daughter		6th grade (Lauer Middle School)
Keith	10	Adopted son		5th grade (Los Rios Elementary)
Berenice	8	Adopted daughter		3rd grade (Los Rios Elementary)
Tania	6	Adopted daughter		1st grade (Santa Catalina Catholic School)
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Sylvia	29	Daughter	Does administrative work with Child Protective Services	Community college student
Elisa	26	Head teacher at the YMCA		Junior credits at university
Baby boy	3 months	Baby cousin		
Tabers				
Valerie	25	Mother	Accounts receivable representative	Trade school
Aracely	7	Daughter		1st grade (Los Rios Elementary)
Francisco	50	Grandfather	Customer service representative	Some community college
Alexis	48	Grandmother	Customer service representative	Some community college
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Veronica	28	Aunt	Customer service representative	Some university
Josiah	7	Male cousin		1st grade (Los Rios Elementary)
Josephine	6	Female cousin		Kindergarten (Los Rios Elementary)

*Note.* Dashed lines in between members of a family denote separate households but indicate a significant relationship in household clusters.

## Data Collection and Analysis

Two data sources informed this study. The first was a set of 27 interviews with parents from the pilot year (2004) of the Parent Outreach Program. This preexisting data set provided information about families' experiences in the program from the lens of social capital (Bourdieu, 1973) and cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). These interviews informed the more detailed oral history interviews discussed next.

The second data set, a multiple case study, was conducted with six Parent Outreach Program families during the spring of 2007. Case studies are utilized when one is attempting to understand the "meaningful characteristics" of events within real-life contexts (Yin, 2003, p. 2). In this particular study, a multiple case study approach was utilized, implying that more than one case of analysis is represented (Yin, 2003)—families represent the unit of analysis. Use of a multiple case study allows for the inclusion of a comparative element. Although this allows for a comparison between the multiple units of analysis, it does not allow for comparison with other outreach programs or institutions. Thus, findings and implications cannot be applied to all institutions.

Data collected for case studies should come from various sources (Yin, 2003). **Twelve semistructured pre- and post-program interviews and 20 open-ended oral history interviews with six families were combined with detailed observations of the families' homes, communities, and neighborhoods.** Interviews were the primary data collection technique for this study and allowed participants to share their lived experiences and make meaning of those experiences (Seidman, 2006). This approach allowed for a more inclusive understanding of the funds of knowledge found within the household clusters. It also provided important context for where families lived and how their sense of belonging was constructed within their communities and neighborhoods.

Participants' homes, neighborhood libraries, parks, and restaurants provided the locations for the oral history interviews. These interviews were conducted approximately three to four times with each family with the goal of encouraging participants to provide rich, personal reflections (Creswell, 2007) of their past while understanding its influence on the present (Mertens, 1998). Oral history interviews were modeled after the original funds of knowledge research conducted by Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti (2005) and included questions about family history, labor history, routine household practices, family schedules and routines, and child-rearing philosophies.

Both deductive and inductive codes were established. I utilized the funds of knowledge framework to create an initial list of deductive codes. After first reading through the transcripts I created an informal list of preliminary inductive coding. Findings were organized around funds of knowledge specifically related to education and not previously mentioned in the literature. I began coding for each

time examples of nontraditional educational practices were addressed; specifically, the codes centered on educational practices that were not encouraged or recognized by the school systems. I also coded for social networks that connected families to the schools or school resources. And finally, I coded for college knowledge—this included knowledge of various institutions, the college-going process, and college experiences.

### Validity

Multiple efforts were made to establish a high level of trustworthiness. These included prolonged engagement with participants allowing for the building of trust and rapport; member-checking through reviews of transcripts, which allowed for participants to make corrections, add information, and critique transcripts; peer debriefing with colleagues and professors involved with a similar study; and finally, clarification of researcher bias through the examination of my own positionality as a working-class Mexican American researcher (Creswell, 2007).

## FINDINGS

Funds of knowledge have been part of Mexican families long before researchers began recognizing and documenting the survival processes of these families. Funds of knowledge were found in numerous areas in this study. Funds of knowledge included information transfer about education and life lessons, household repair, examples of reciprocity in services such as deejaying and car maintenance, and learning of financial responsibility through the family business. For the purposes of this article, I expand upon three key areas of funds of knowledge that focus primarily on educational practices and access to educational resources: daily educational practices within the household, extended family and social networks, and preexisting family college knowledge.

I begin with a quote that demonstrates the sacrifices parents made in order to participate in the Parent Outreach Program. Despite the juggling of multiple responsibilities, managing multiple jobs, and attending multiple events, parents never questioned the importance of education:

My daughter, why I'm signed up for this program, she's like, "You *have* to go to this program. Because this program is going to pay for my college. You have to go." Oh my gosh, I told her I wasn't going to be able to go and it just broke her heart. She was crying and crying. So I told her, "You know what, I'll make it. I'll be late, tell them I'll be there." And that was like the very first time when we first signed up. And I remember I walked in like half an hour late, I was so embarrassed.

It was like, I'm here. Sign me up. (Julia,<sup>3</sup> administrative assistant to attorney, children ages 14, 12, 10, 8, 3; 2004)

The conversation with Julia was one example of the many sacrifices families made in order to be active and present in the Parent Outreach Program. Yet these sacrifices are only a glimpse of the regular practices established within families' homes when it came to incorporating a value of education and establishing a college-going culture. I turn now to the three primary themes of the article to illustrate this point.

### Daily Educational Practices Within the Household

Families show their value for education in various nondominant forms, from *consejos* (advice-giving narratives; Valdés, 1996; Valencia & Black, 2002) to the use of funds of knowledge (Valencia & Black, 2002; Vélez-Ibáñez, 1996). Mexican families exhibit traditional practices of helping students further their education and, as noted previously, alternative ways of demonstrating their commitment to education. Unfortunately, educational institutions often do not recognize the non-traditional educational practices of underrepresented<sup>4</sup> families. Likewise, the families themselves may have difficulty connecting their daily practices to educational goals and outcomes. Families in this study often talked about how much they did not know with regard to education and the college process. Throughout the course of this study I observed and heard many stories about a number of different educational practices present in the households, yet when I asked how families worked with their children outside of daily homework I received the following answer:

At home every now and then she is actually on the computer playing the Curious George game that we have which has like math in it, has reading in it, has writing in it. It is like a whole phonics type thing on this game. She does that. She reads. We play a lot of board games. I know we generally play War a lot, too. I mean I don't know if that is part of schoolwork, but we play a lot of board games and a lot of fun games. (Valerie, accounts receivable specialist, daughter age 7; 2007)

Although this mother did mention a number of key educational practices, she was unsure as to whether they officially counted as helping with schoolwork. There may have been transmission of important knowledge, but there was not the recognition that computer games, board games, and card games were teach-

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<sup>3</sup>In order to maintain anonymity, the names of all participants, family members, and any local identifiers such as schools, school districts, libraries, churches, and/or restaurants have been assigned a pseudonym.

<sup>4</sup>I use the term *underrepresented* to broadly describe students from first-generation, lower income, and/or nondominant groups, particularly in the areas of race/ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation.

ing her **daughter important logic, strategy, and computer skills**. The same mother provided another example of her daughter learning how to type on a keyboard:

- Valerie: She actually goes on Word and pretends to type ... because she sees me typing with all my 10 fingers, and you will see her sitting there like this [demonstrates fingers on a keyboard].
- Researcher: I bet she can learn pretty fast.
- Aracely: I just go dee-dee-dee.
- Valerie: Of course it is just mumbo-jumbo but hopefully soon she will put in words.

This example is critical because Aracely is **experimenting with new educational practices on the keyboard**. This practice is generating confidence and knowledge in Aracely and will be useful when she begins learning how to type at school.

When asked the same question, how the family worked with children outside of daily homework, another mother, Danielle, gave the following response: “Just homework, that’s it. That’s all I know so that is what I go over.” Yet during another portion of the conversation she explained in detail how she created spelling quizzes for her son each week:

Like for his spelling test. I am not home the night before his test—usually they are on Fridays—so I am always calling in the mornings and have a little quiz for him so he makes his grades. (Danielle, corrections officer, children ages 7, 6; 2007)

Finally, one mother expressed frustration at not being able to see her daughter’s textbook. She felt **limited** because she felt as though her own knowledge about the subject matter was wrong and hindering her daughter:

I went to parent–teacher conference and they don’t let kids take school books home. She [the teacher] gave me all the curriculum books because I made her [daughter] get an F in her first like homework packet because I helped her do graphs, and I helped her do them wrong. So I was showing her how I remembered it being done. So when I went to Ms. Campo I said, “I don’t have your textbook to refer to how you want me to teach my daughter.” (Janice, insurance biller, daughters ages 14, 12, 5; 2007)

It is evident that the families’ definition of working with the children at home meant working through homework problems associated with the textbook, and Janice felt very frustrated when her own knowledge limited the way in which she was able to help her daughter. Fortunately, this mother felt comfortable enough sharing those concerns with her daughter’s teacher. However, it was clear that this family also engaged in a number of other educational practices beyond the

textbook homework problems. Janice later shared with me that her family had an annual pass to the zoo and that they enjoyed going to outdoor museums. She also shared that her daughters would often go to the Disney channel website to practice math games and that both daughters had older computers in their rooms. Clearly, funds of knowledge demonstrating numerous educational practices were present in this household. Not only were the children learning about computers, they were learning about the climate, the landscape, animals, and the history of the city.

In order for families to begin realizing that these common everyday practices are linked with educational outcomes that have value for their children, it is important that experts begin not just to recognize and validate them but also to convert and activate them into practices for academic advancement (Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, Moll, & Gravitt, 2010). School initiatives both inside and outside of the classroom (e.g., outreach programs) have the opportunity to formally integrate discussions on these types of educational practices. Advice on how to create new educational practices in the home should go beyond just helping children with their homework. In fact, during a short break at one of the weekly outreach program sessions, one mother took the following advice from another parent:

I know the other parents that were in the classes gave me ideas, like one of them had stated to basically give her her own little corner with a desk and just have an hour playing school instead of just letting her lay in her room or doing certain little things. They had that. Then another mom had mentioned that they set aside at least 2 hours every day for just family time where they do whatever they want to do—play games, read books, and I thought of that—doing little things like that with her. (Valerie, accounts receivable specialist, daughter age 7; 2007)

These conversations were the result of the new friendships and social networks developed during the program. Ideally, through these sharing opportunities educational practices will be linked to topics studied at school, future courses children might enroll in during high school and college, and, ultimately, future career paths. I end this section with one final example:

Karen: I liked it. It was really neat because you know like I said they gave us a lot of information, even if I didn't go on the tour and stuff, they still gave us maps of the [university]. And I still made her go, we went on little field trips just me and her and we found like the music—[hall] or whatever and we got to see a band play there and then we went to see the ballet.

Researcher: So you guys did this all on your own then?

Karen: Mhmm. With the map that they gave us. So we, I said, "Okay, we need to go here and there." (Karen, teacher's aid, daughter age 10; 2004)

## Extended Family and Social Networks

Extended family and social networks played critical roles in each of the families participating in this study. Families invest significant time and energy in social networks, utilizing them as ways of passing on knowledge and coping with complex situations (Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992). This practice is done through family rituals and informal household visits (Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992). Thus, the roles of the family and rituals surrounding the family serve as a central value and means for increasing life chances (Valdés, 1996).

The networks highlighted by the current families were deeply integrated into educational settings and experiences. A grandmother in the study shared how for generations her family had been tied to the local school district:

Well my children and myself and my husband have all been in the Southside school district. We're all Southside graduates. We're kind of picking it up by experience, and then my sister works there and my mother volunteers there. We kind of know the schools and we know the principals, we kind of know what we're looking for ... That's normally how we base our decisions, what we hear, what we see, talking to one another. As far as friends we have that work in the schools—how good the schools are, how under control the principal has the school, that's very important to me. (Perla, occupation unknown, grandchildren ages 11, 9, 8; 2004)

Perla's family's primary source of educational information is family and friends who work within the school district. They are part of an extensive social network with first-hand knowledge about how the school district functions. However, although this family has knowledge and networks at the middle school and high school level, it has not yet translated this into college-going opportunities. Another mother mentioned that she kept on top of important school information by checking in with her neighbors:

My neighbor yeah, her daughter is in the same class that Antonio is. So basically we get notes and we'll call each other and say, "Okay, did you get this note? And what do you think?" So we touch base. And when I was picking him [up] after school before I drove in, the moms all waited under the tree and compared notes and checked in and see what we thought. (Ana, occupation unknown, son age 9; 2004)

Finally, Tanya, an obstetrics technician with three children, shared an example of how family networks provide elements of **reciprocity**. This is illustrated not only in getting educational information from extended networks but also in providing expertise and information. Tanya shared a story about her sister: "But she's really, really good. Like, my sister right now she goes on the weekends sometimes to my other sister's and tutors her little boy because he can't read."

Social networks are considered the means by which information is transferred or channeled from one member to another. Although sometimes these social relations are maintained for other purposes, they provide a means for new information to be acquired and action to be performed (Coleman, 1988). Important within these families is that extended family and social networks already exist. Processes like dropping by allow for families to tap into those networks for educational information. These same networks can link families to other networks, thus enhancing and expanding their educational information, their social networks, and their social capital beyond high school. The same skills that families are tapping into to navigate middle and high school can be used utilized to navigate a college setting as well. In fact, one father addressed the idea of social networks with the following:

Teach them [parents] how to be a people person, not just towards students and peers and instructors, but the whole administration. Know who your dean is. Know who to go to if your instructor can't help you. Who do you go to next? (Will, Army veteran and student, daughters ages 9, 11; 2007)

In essence, he was recommending that families learn how to activate their own social capital and networks in a college setting.

### Preexisting Family College Knowledge

Families in this study shared numerous examples of preexisting college knowledge. This knowledge came from first-hand experiences as well as the experiences of extended family members. Unfortunately, these same types of families are often perceived by school administrators and teachers as uncommitted and detached from their children's school processes or as lacking college knowledge (Auerbach, 2004; Downs et al., 2008). The following examples illustrate how one form of funds of knowledge was preexisting college knowledge.

**Karen explained the importance of modeling college behavior for her daughter.** This example demonstrates beliefs about what college behavior should look like, a learned behavior from Karen's own experience at the local community college:

I'm probably going to get it done and keep going because I like the deal what we're doing right now. Because I'm doing my homework and she's doing her homework and I like that time. And if I stop my homework and then I don't want to be like that teacher walking around, I want her to have that motivation so I'm probably gonna still keep taking classes so she can see oh she's taking classes and that's our talk time too. (Karen, teacher's aid, daughter age 10; 2004)

Another parent had been enrolled at numerous community colleges in different states and was dually enrolled in the local community college and university. He

was well versed in educational terminology, navigating the process of registering for classes, placement tests, and advising. He offered useful insight on his own college-going process and explained that he had offered advice to other parents during program session breaks:

Parents themselves are already stressing. He (another father) was asking me a lot of questions. How much does it cost to go to school? And I tell him, well, this much but every subject—you don't know how much the books are gonna cost. You don't know what materials you're gonna need. You don't know until that first day and they give you the paper and say ... Geology 101 ... You need geology book, plus you need the lab book, plus you need these materials. Give them an idea of each subject how much it's gonna be. (Will, student and Army veteran, daughters ages 11, 9; 2007)

His insight into the costs of each course is significant because often parents are given current estimates of college tuition without knowledge of additional costs for each course—books, lab fees, and supplies. Although it is difficult to provide the accurate costs of each individual course, integrating some of this information into program sessions could easily be accomplished. For instance, an important strategy would be to teach parents how to read course syllabi and navigate college bookstore websites to determine which supplies might be needed for certain types of courses. Incorporating this strategy from a funds of knowledge framework might also mean that parents with this preexisting knowledge are sharing with and teaching other parents. The same father also offered college advice to his own mother, as illustrated in the following quote:

My mom called and she goes, “I want to go to school.” I said, “Mom, you know you gotta take a placement test.” She goes, “How come you didn't tell me before?” It's not fair for a parent to show up—hey, I want to register. Okay. Right away they say, well, get your information, go upstairs, go take a test. (Will, student and Army veteran, daughters ages 11, 9; 2007)

Will's example highlights another barrier families sometimes face. Although family members may have the encouragement and motivation to enroll in college, an incomplete understanding of the necessary admissions requirements (such as placement tests) may exist. Families in the study typically knew that an SAT or ACT score was required, but they did not know about specific enrollment tests or admissions requirements.

Parents enrolled in the Parent Outreach Program to find out more information about sending their own children to college; however, the college process was not entirely foreign to them. Of the six families that completed extensive oral history interviews, each family had at least one person who had enrolled in college classes. In some cases enrollment was at the local community college, in other cases many

had started at a university but did not complete (or had not yet completed) a degree. In speaking with these families I was able to learn about the financial aid process, the California State system, interesting places on the university campus that one would not typically see during college tours, costs of college classes, the role of academic advisors, and the list continues. Important college information does not need to come from the top down only. These families had first-hand knowledge and often insider tips on how to navigate the process.

The funds of knowledge represented in these families extended beyond examples of reciprocity, children experimenting with learning the skills demonstrated by their families, and lessons learned from daily activities. Daily educational practices were illustrated in the households that connected directly to children's academic experiences, family and social networks provided key educational and college information, and many of these families demonstrated extensive preexisting college knowledge. The educational information that families have along with their daily educational practices cannot be discounted. On the contrary, these funds of knowledge should be validated and encouraged.

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study provided families the opportunity to share their perspectives about education while highlighting the rich educational values already present in their households. The voices of parents, siblings, extended family members, and children, particularly those from underrepresented groups, are rarely tapped as resources in school settings. Lareau (2003) noted that society does not equally legitimize the rituals found within these families and that "differences in the cultural logic of child rearing are attached to unequal currency in the broader society" (p. 244). The rich voices and stories that I have presented in this article offer insight into the college-going beliefs and practices of Mexican American families.

I offer this article to provide a more inclusive understanding of how families encourage, teach, and create a culture of education, particularly for postsecondary education. Families had preexisting information about college processes but were often assumed to have none, demonstrating that the educational information that families possess along with their daily educational practices must not be overlooked. In fact, these educational practices supplement extensive funds of knowledge already documented within these households.

Thus, a deeper level of understanding of what shapes Mexican American students' experiences can be achieved. The funds of knowledge literature will be expanded past the K-12 experience and into higher education. These findings represent an opportunity for practitioners in outreach programs to extend the work they are already doing by tapping into the college knowledge present in families, allowing families to share their experiences around key college-going processes. Like-

wise, programs should include opportunities for families to share their tips and strategies for educational practices. Finally, practitioners can begin to understand the multiple-part relationship between the student, the family, the community, and various institutional entities as students move through the experience of pre-college to college and beyond. Future research should examine this multiple-part relationship within a multiple-system perspective. Finally, findings from this study will aid practitioners in understanding how to tap into students' and families' funds of knowledge throughout their educational experiences.

It is not enough to expect that students and families be proficient in navigating school systems and cultures. It is also not enough to recognize and value students' funds of knowledge. These assets and resources must be incorporated into educational systems with the intent of changing the current educational framework—a framework that continues to privilege certain types of assets and resources. By incorporating students' and families' funds of knowledge into that system experts can begin to create small shifts in a much larger change.

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