

Family engagement during preschool:

A multidimensional look across diverse measures, cultural groups, & Head Start sites

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Parenting and family engagement in Head Start families

- Earlier work on parenting and family involvement practices:
 - Home-based involvement (compared with school-based involvement) had the strongest relationships to children's social and cognitive outcomes in a sample of African American Head Start parents (Fantuzzo, McWayne, Perry, & Childs, 2004).
 - School-based involvement (compared with home-based involvement) had the strongest relationships to children's social and cognitive outcomes in multiple samples of Latino Head Start families, but Rasch analysis showed differential construct validity of these dimensions for this pan-ethnic group (McWayne, Manz, & Ginsburg-Block, 2007).
 - Parenting practices indicative of traditional parenting typology (e.g., Baumrind, 1971) failed to relate to Head Start children's social-emotional competencies across multiple samples despite strong evidence for construct validity of the measure (McWayne, Owsianik, & Green, 2008).

TAKE AWAY MESSAGE #1



We need to know much more than we do about how these constructs operate within and across diverse cultural groups.

Mother and father involvement among culturally diverse Head Start families



- Need for more research on fathers' engagement with their preschool children's education
- Substantial need for research to understand engagement of immigrant families with their young children's education
 - 1 in 5 children are foreign-born or first generation.
 - Head Start is an important point of entry into the formal education system in the U.S. for these children and their families.
 - Traditional expectations for FI activities may be inappropriate for a variety of reasons.

Purpose of Study

(McWayne, Campos, & Owsianik, 2008)

Examine relations between demographic factors and level of satisfaction as possible determinants of family involvement behaviors for culturally diverse mothers and fathers participating in Head Start.

Sample Demographics

171 Head Start parents

108 mothers, 63 fathers

20% unmarried, 80% married

Ethnicity:

- Latino 65/50%
- Polish 31/48%
- Other 2/0%

Primary Language:

- English 26/22%
- Spanish 27/30%
- Polish 23/35%
- Bilingual 23/13%

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

(Fantuzzo, Tighe, & Childs, 2000)

Three composites of family involvement:

Home-Based Involvement ($\alpha=.89$)

School-Based Involvement ($\alpha=.86$)

Home-School Conferencing ($\alpha=.90$)

Do demographic factors and level of satisfaction with school contact explain *mothers'* self-reported involvement in their children's education?

Explanatory Variable	Home-Based Involvement ($p > .10$)	School-Based Involvement ($p < .001$)	Home-School Conferencing ($p < .01$)
Child sex (males)		.03	.09
Less high school		-.05	-.25*
Greater high school		-.07	-.18
Full time employment		-.06	-.06
Part time employment		-.04	-.07
Spanish (primary)		.05	-.12
Polish (primary)		.07	-.02
Bilingual		.16	-.01
Satisfaction with contact		.52****	.41****
R2		30%	25%

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, **** $p < .0001$.

N=108.

Do demographic factors and level of satisfaction with school contact explain *fathers'* self-reported involvement in their children's education?

Explanatory Variable ($p < .0001$)	Home-Based Involvement ($p > .10$)	School-Based Involvement ($p < .01$)	Home-School Conferencing
Child sex (males)		.09	.25*
Less high school		.06	-.10
Greater high school		.01	-.14
Full time employment		.11	-.05
Spanish (primary)		-.29	-.26
Polish (primary)		-.35*	-.56***
Bilingual		.10	-.10
Satisfaction with contact		.35**	.38**
R2		38%	58%
<i>R2 for mothers</i>		30%	25%

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, **** $p < .0001$.

N=63.

Research Question: Are demographic characteristics and level of satisfaction with contact associated with family involvement?

Fixed Effects	Home-Based Involvement	School-Based Involvement	Home-School Conferencing
<i>Level 1 Predictors</i>			
Parent sex (fathers)	-.33***	-.40***	.70***
Education			
< high school	-.14	-.04	-.24
> high school	-.05	-.19	-.02
<i>Level 2 Predictors</i>			
Child sex (boys)	.26†	.04	.27*
Employment	-.11	-.21	-.14
Marital status (married)	.42*	.33†	.34†
Primary language			
Spanish (primary)	-.26	-.13	-.35
Polish (primary)	-.40†	-.02	-.53**
Bilingual	-.12	-.13	-.17
Satisfaction with contact	.22	.79***	.71***

N = 110 individuals; 55 dyads. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

TAKE AWAY MESSAGE #2



With respect to school-based programming, Head Start should seek to understand more about the unique determinants of father engagement as well as the influence of the shared family context.

What do we know?

- Broader parenting literature has suggested that cultural values influence the goals parents have for their children's behavior and education (see work by Cynthia Garcia Coll and Ruth Chao).
- Family involvement in children's education (an important part of parenting) has been identified as a protective factor against school failure for ethnic minority children and youth (Dearing et al., 2004; Jeynes, 2003).
- Despite contributions to our current understandings, research on family engagement has several shortcomings:
 - Unidimensional measures
 - Lack of culturally grounded measures
 - Lack of research inclusive of diverse cultural groups
 - Lack of research with fathers
 - Failure to capture complex interactions within the family

Parent Engagement among Latino Families

- **Large-scale studies with low-income ethnic minority families:**
 - often disregard the diversity and variation within the Latino population, aggregating all, into one “Hispanic” or “Latino” group, typically for comparison with other populations.
 - cross-group comparisons do not appreciate how constructs might emerge differently or become operationalized differently across diverse Latino groups.
- **Small-scale ethnographic studies offer rich portrayals of the unique cultural assets and obstacles to family involvement experienced by specific Latino communities, however:**
 - the numbers of participants in these studies are often too small to represent adequately the diverse cultural practices across Latino communities, thus,
 - precluding researchers from characterizing the construct of family involvement within the wider Latino population, as well as across various subgroups.
- **More recent research:**
 - has raised the issue of differential relationships to child outcomes for Latino families, as well as the appropriateness of current conceptualizations of family involvement when applied with Latino families, and
 - has shown that preschool years are especially critical for Latino children’s development.

Study Objectives

- **Objective 1:** To understand English- and Spanish-speaking Latino parents' conceptualizations of family involvement in their children's early educational experiences, taking into account the diversity of the Latino population within a large, Northeastern urban center.
- **Objective 2:** To develop a culturally relevant, multi-dimensional measure of family involvement via an emic approach.
- **Objective 3:** To validate this measure of family involvement by examining associations with teacher reports of family involvement and dimensions of children's school readiness.

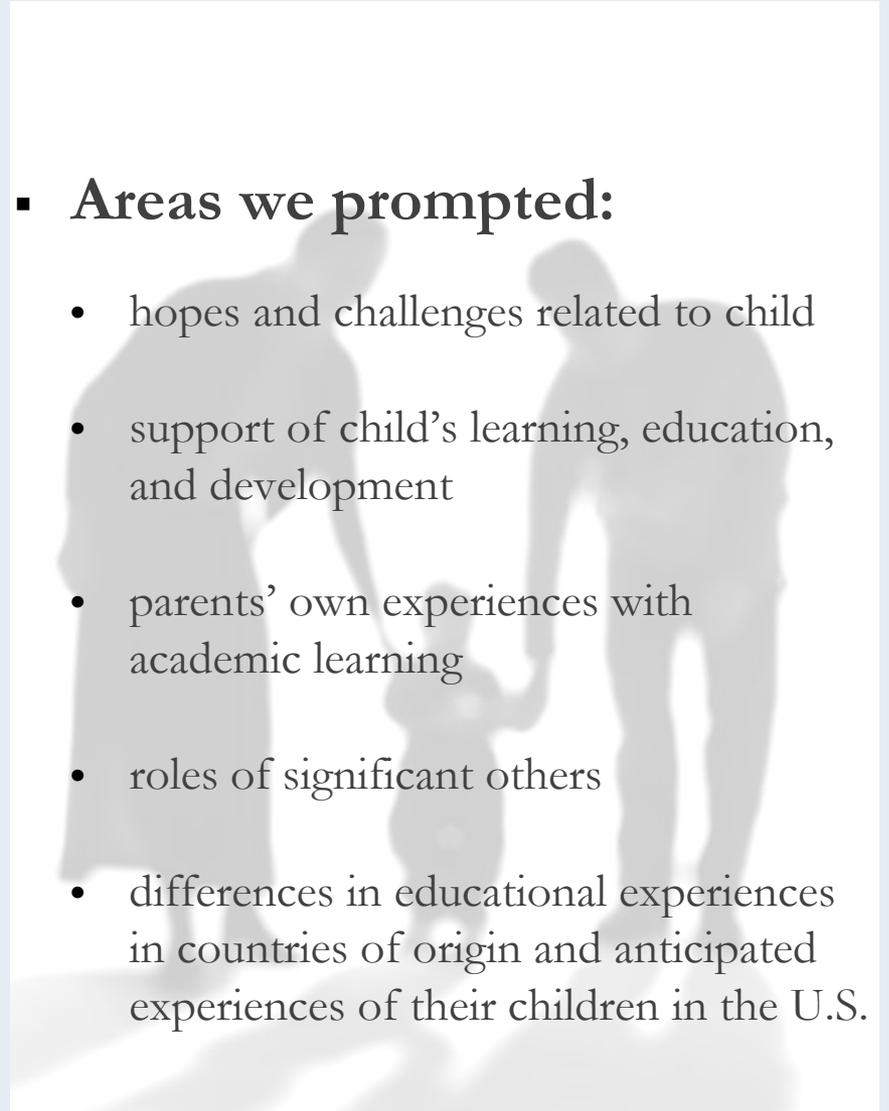
An **emic** approach seeks to describe behavior and beliefs in terms meaningful to the actor. An emic account is culture-specific. Whereas, an **etic** approach is based on a description of behavior or belief by an observer (“culturally neutral”).

Qualitative Sample & Procedures

- 17 Focus Groups
(9 Spanish, $M = 8.22$ people;
8 English, $M = 4.75$ people)
- In 14 NYC Head Start
programs (Brooklyn, Bronx, &
Manhattan)
- Total $N = 112$
(75 Spanish, 37 English)

▪ Areas we prompted:

- hopes and challenges related to child
- support of child's learning, education, and development
- parents' own experiences with academic learning
- roles of significant others
- differences in educational experiences in countries of origin and anticipated experiences of their children in the U.S.



Procedures

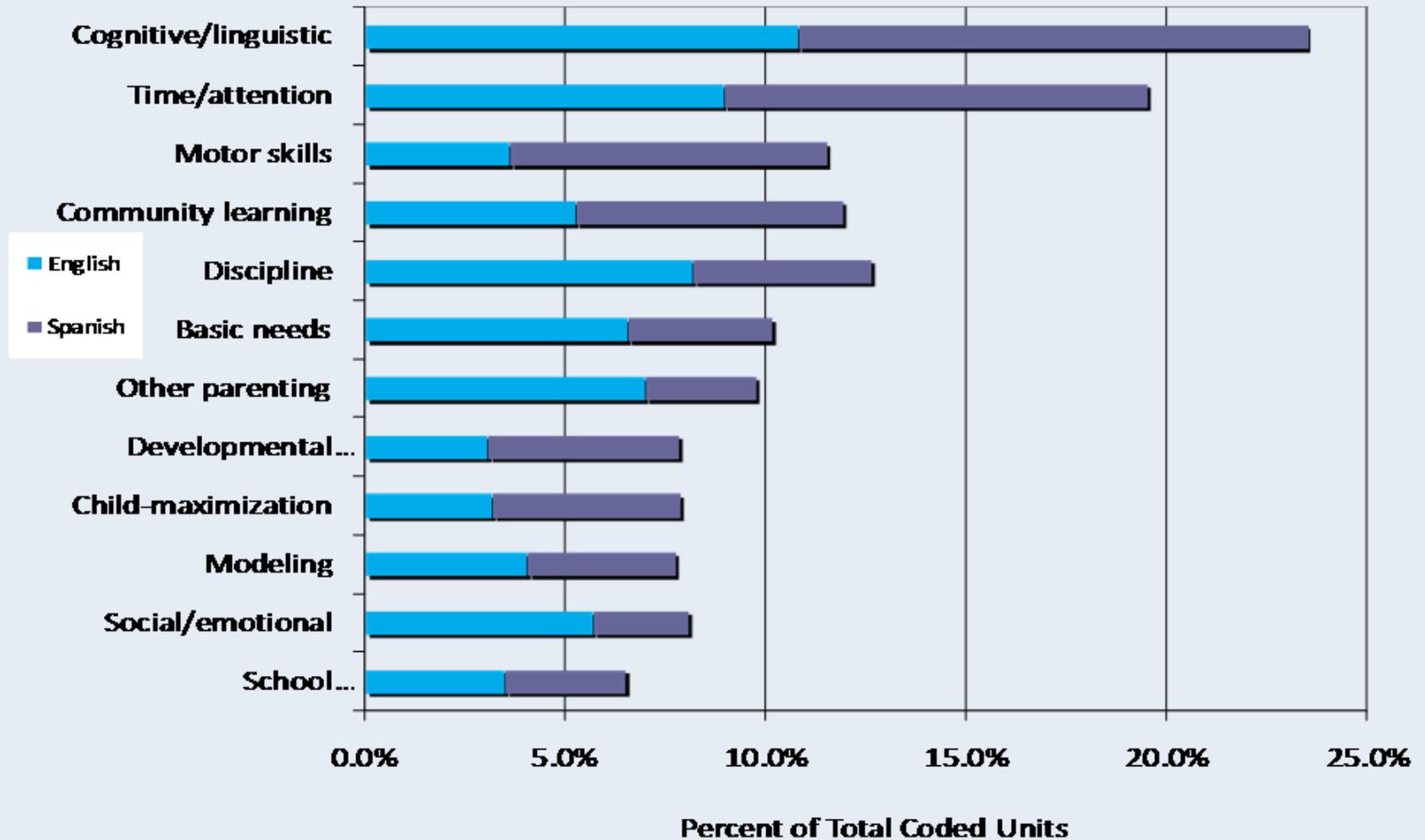
- Conversations were transcribed and verified by bilingual research assistants.
- Coding and analysis were performed in the language spoken during the focus group.
- Analyses were guided by Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) using inductive, open-coding procedures.

What do parents and families do to support, directly and indirectly, their children's education, development and learning?

- Using Atlas.ti 5.0, transcripts were “chunked” for coding into the smallest meaningful units that answered the research question.
- Each chunk was then coded using an iterative process:
 - PIs generated initial coding manual after “practice runs” generated an extensive list of potential codes.
 - The initial coding manual was modified by group consensus.
 - Modification of the coding manual continued until saturation was reached (approx ½ of transcripts).
 - Each transcript was recoded after a final manual was developed.
- Reliability was established within and across languages, using percentage of agreement.
 - Initially, three coders coded two transcripts in each language, meeting between transcripts to resolve disagreements and to modify the coding manual.
 - A bilingual doctoral student coded in both English and Spanish, overlapping on 24% of the transcripts.
 - For final coding, agreement was defined as two coders assigning the same code to a given chunk (range from 80% to 100%, $M = 87.2\%$).

Focus Group Topics

- 68% of coded units were captured by 12 codes



Focus Group Topics

- ▣ Other salient but less frequent topics included

Child Skills

Parent Behaviors

Art/Music

Conversation

Cultural heritage

Environmental Structuring

Future Goals

Homework

Manners/Respect

Learning & using the system

Moral

Other family

Pragmatic

Rewards/praise

Responsibility

School communication

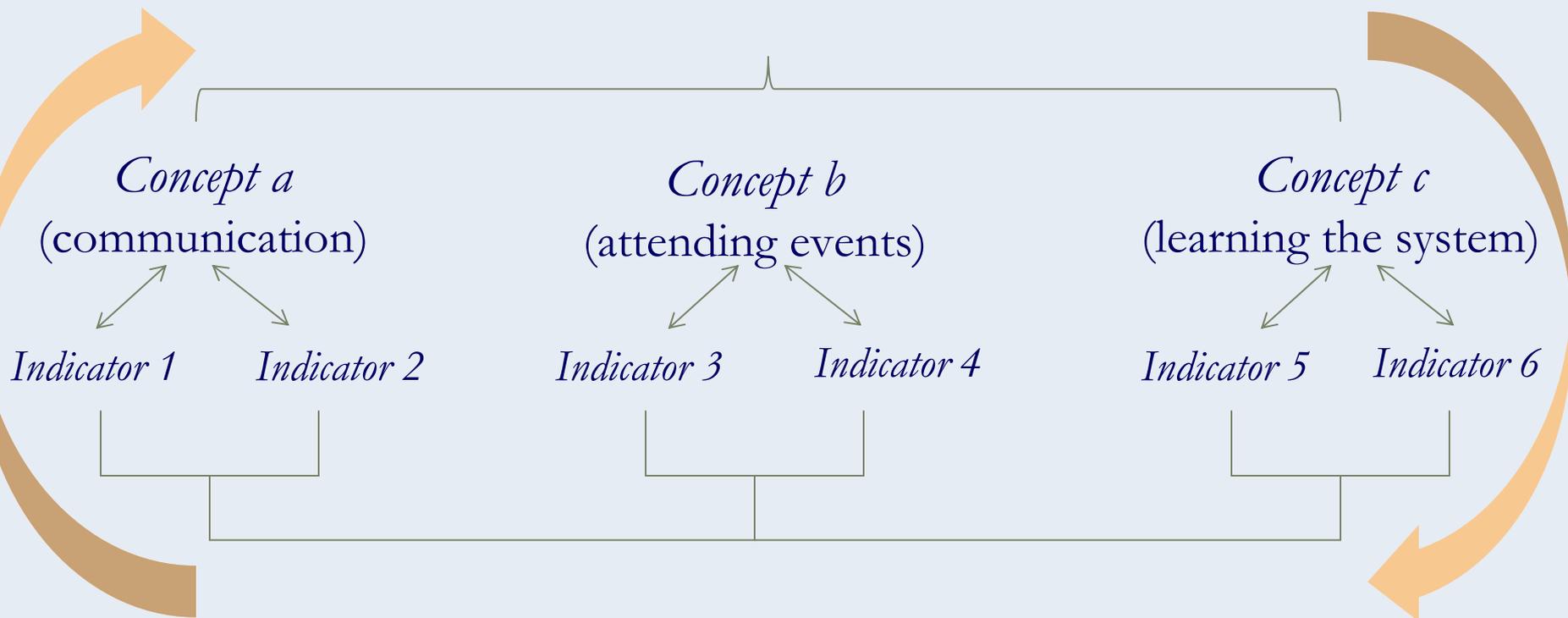
Self-Improvement

Variable-Concept-Indicator Model

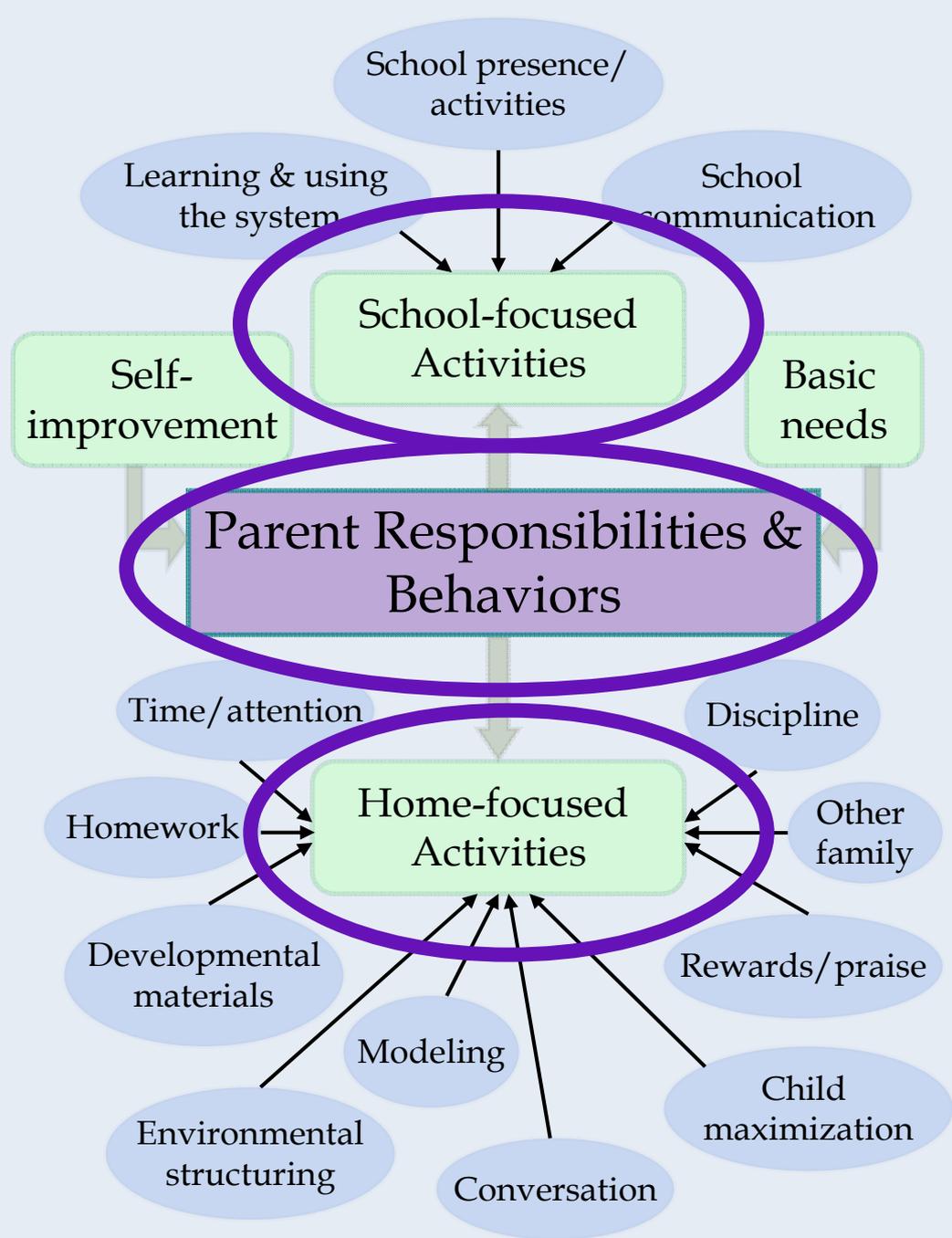
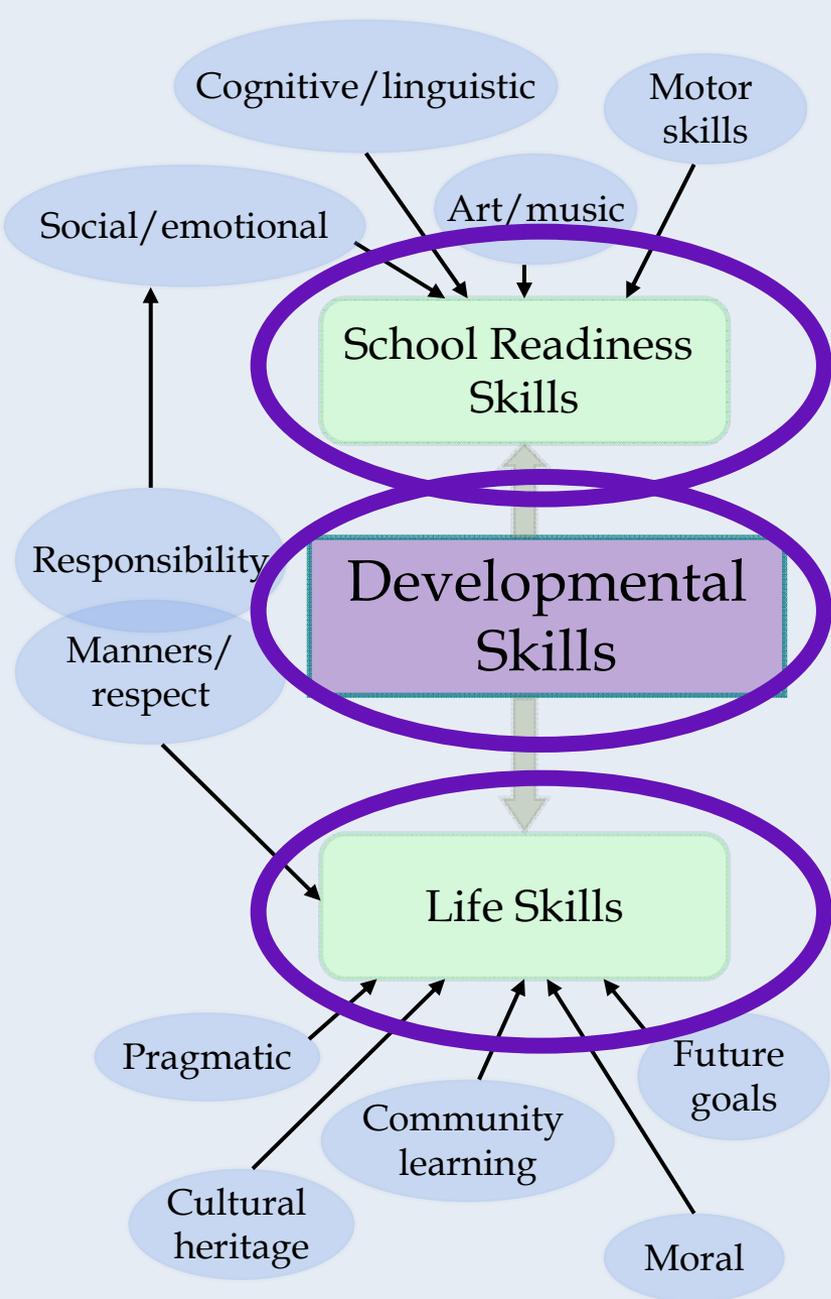
(LaRossa, 2005, *Journal of Marriage and Family*)

Guiding Research Question: What do parents and families do to support, directly and indirectly, their children's education, development, and learning?

Variable A (e.g., School-Focused Activities)



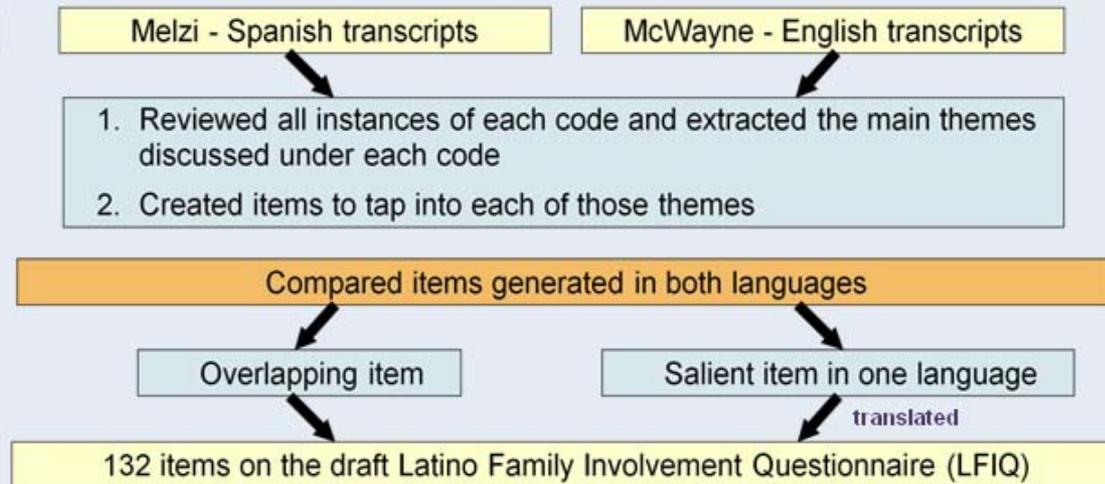
CONCEPTUAL MAP



Measure Generation Process

GOAL: Creation of equivalent English- and Spanish-language measures of the activities Latino parents engage in to support their children's learning

PROCESS:



EXTERNAL REVIEW: Each item was assessed for content appropriateness, content representativeness, and variability in two ways:

- Member-Checking Groups
- 3 groups of parents ($N = 18$) who had not participated in the original focus groups performed a Q-sort on each item
 - Group demographics were similar to original groups
 - Items rated low by both parents and experts were eliminated

- Expert Review
- 3 experts in the field who work with Spanish-speaking immigrant populations, two of whom are native Spanish-speakers
 - Items rated low by parents but high by experts were modified according to suggestions

Results

- The Latino Family Involvement Questionnaire (McWayne & Melzi, 2011):
 - **Foundational Education** was comprised of 17 items reflecting parents' efforts to teach their children the basics concerning appropriate social interaction, academic knowledge, their family's culture, and included their efforts to spend time with their child and create a positive learning environment at home.
 - **Supplemental Education** was comprised of 10 items representing parents' efforts to provide stimulating experiences beyond the basics, including encouraging the involvement of other family members, enrolling their children in classes outside of Head Start, and taking them to places in the community to learn.
 - **School Participation** was comprised of 8 items and reflected parents' active participation in school-based activities including attending workshops, donating time and skills to the Head Start program, serving in leadership and coordination roles, and advocating for their children at school.
 - **Future Orientation** was comprised of 3 items representing parents' efforts to socialize children around a positive life and the importance of education.
- These dimensions were positively associated with teachers' assessments of family involvement in the Head Start program (both global ratings and specific activity logs) and children's positive peer play interactions as well as their language development (the latter for Spanish dominant children only).

Results cont'd. . .

(N = 650 Latino Head Start parents)

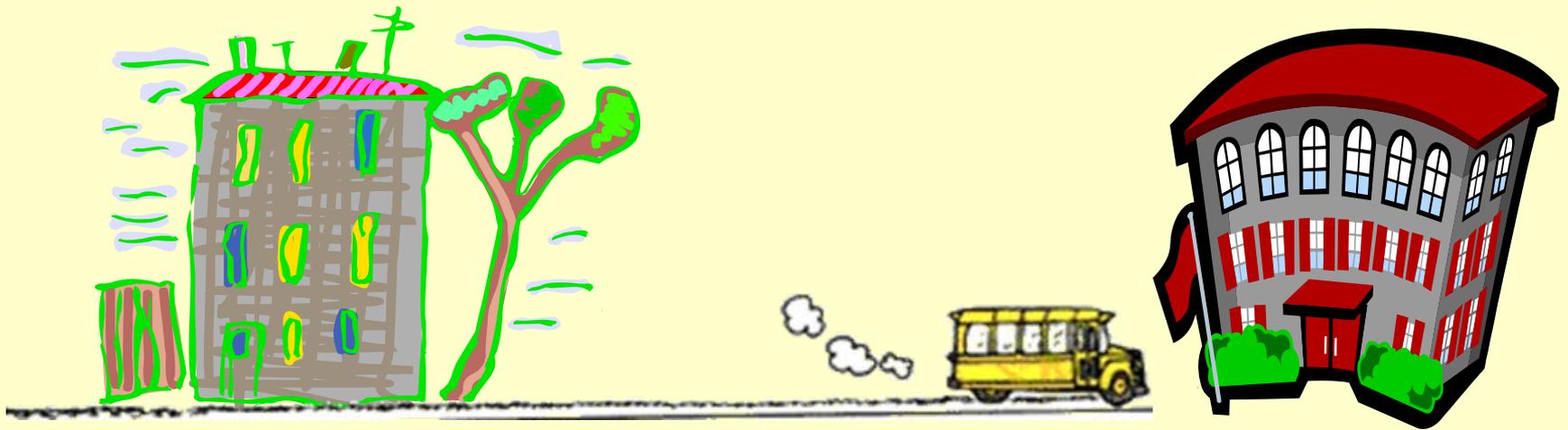
4-FACTOR VARIMAX SOLUTION, 43 ITEMS RETAINED AFTER INITIAL ITEM ANALYSIS

- 38 items \geq .35

Factor	Foundational Education	Supplemental Education	School Participation	Future Oriented Teaching
Foundational Education	.73			
Supplemental Education	.52	.77		
School Participation	.23	.42	.77	
Future Oriented Teaching	.39	.40	.27	.63

- Cronbach alphas in diagonal
- Coefficients of congruence revealed:
 - Like values were consistently higher than unlike values.
 - There is evidence that a slightly different factor structure may be applicable for the English-speaking and U.S.-born Latino parents.

CONCLUSIONS



- Our Latino parent participants characterized family involvement as multidimensional:
 - Involving child developmental skills and parental responsibilities/ behaviors that support the development of those skills.
 - Contributing to children's school readiness *and* general life skills.
 - Including a wide range of parenting behaviors in the home, including supporting children's basic needs and engaging in school-based activities.

- These findings are consistent with ethnographic literature on Latino families showing an emphasis on a broader more inclusive definition of education as embodied in the definition of *educación* (e.g., Reese et al., 1995).

- The dimensions of family involvement identified from focus groups with Latino Head Start parents provide for a more comprehensive operationalization of this construct for future measurement and, perhaps, program development.

**TAKE AWAY
MESSAGE #3**



Systematically asking families what they actually do with their children is a useful way of identifying more nuanced and reliable dimensions of family engagement with relevance for future HS programming.

Thank you!



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