

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Spanish-speaking Parents' Beliefs about Their Young Children's Learning and Language Development

Jeannette Mancilla-Martinez

University of California, Irvine

Nonie K. Lesaux

Harvard Graduate School of Education

In recognition of the increasing cultural, linguistic, and economic diversity among the early childhood population, knowledge about parents' beliefs concerning the way in which children learn has the potential to directly inform early childhood programs charged with the task of developing young children's language. This study investigates Latino, Spanish-speaking parents' (n = 200) beliefs about their 24- to 48-month-old children's learning and (dual) language development; all children attended Early Head Start/Head Start. Given that patterns of Spanish language use can vary along a continuum of mostly Spanish to mostly English, we also examine potential differences in beliefs by patterns of reported home language use. Results of this study, using Principal Components Analysis, reveal that Spanish-speaking parents' beliefs about the way in which young children learn and develop language vary widely. We discuss ways in which early childhood programs can build on parents' existing knowledge base to maximize students' learning opportunities.

Supporting language development is a primary goal in early childhood education programs given the link between children's early linguistic environment and overall educational achievement, extending into adulthood (e.g., Dickinson & Freiberg, 2009; Hohm, Jennen-Steinmetz, Schmidt, & Laucht, 2007; Storch & Whitehurst, 2002; Taanila, Murray, Jokelainen, Isohanni, & Rantakallio, 2005). With the recognition that learning begins in the home, a major principle of effective teaching is to build on what children already know (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). This implies that to provide an optimal learning environment classroom language practices should be aligned with what is familiar to young children. Yet, discrepancies between what is taught at home and what is expected at school have long been documented for children from culturally, linguistically and economically diverse homes as compared to the mainstream in the United States (e.g., Adair & Tobin, 2008; Cazden, 1988; Heath, 1981; Lewis, 2001; Rodriguez & Olswang, 2003; Valdés, 1996). For instance, Heath's seminal work on language socialization underscores ways in which mainstream schooling practices can disadvantage

children from diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. In a similar vein, in contrast to native-born, English-speaking parents, Valdés reports that Latino, Spanish-speaking immigrant parents consider teachers to be the experts and thus as the ones who can best support their children's academic development. More recently, Adair and Tobin report that immigrant parents tend to hold ideas about early childhood education that differ from those of the early childhood educators and organizations, resulting in a mismatch between the ideals of the early childhood programs and the communities they aim to serve. In recognition of the increasing cultural, linguistic, and economic diversity among the early childhood population, knowledge about parents' beliefs concerning the way in which children learn has the potential to directly inform early childhood programs charged with the task of developing young children's language.

This is an especially pressing need for the early childhood population of children from Latino, Spanish-speaking, low-income homes; Latinos are the nation's largest minority group and Latino children under the age of 6 represent one of the fastest growing segments of the population (Fortuny et al., 2009; Passel, Cohn, & Lopez, 2011), but overwhelmingly live in poverty. The determinants of academic outcomes are many and complex, but the role of poverty is well documented (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Conger & Donnellan, 2007; Farah et al., 2006), with its negative effects being even greater for very young children than for children in middle- and later-childhood and adolescence (Duncan, Ziol-Guest, & Kalil, 2010; Hernandez, 2004). And while, historically, Latino children have been the least likely group to attend early childhood programs, there has been a recent shift in this trend; for example, over one-third of the total Head Start enrollments are Latino children (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Head Start Bureau, 2011). Therefore, if we are to effectively serve this growing and academically vulnerable population, there is reason to empirically describe parents' beliefs about the way in which children learn and develop language prior to children's formal school entry.

This study investigates Latino, Spanish-speaking parents' beliefs about their 24- to 48-month-old children's learning and language development; all children attended Early Head Start/Head Start. Given that patterns of Spanish language use can vary along a continuum of mostly Spanish to mostly English, we also examine potential differences in beliefs by patterns of reported home language use. The results of this study have the potential to inform efforts aimed at facilitating learning, in general, and language development, in particular, for young children from Spanish-speaking homes attending early childhood programs.

Children's Learning and Language Development: Parent Beliefs

Two Canadian studies shed light on the extent to which parent beliefs concerning young children's learning varies by cultural background. Specifically, each study investigated minority and majority preschool parents' language and learning beliefs (Johnston & Wong, 2002; Simmons & Johnston, 2007). Johnston and Wong found that Chinese Canadian mothers were less likely than mainstream Canadian mothers to treat their children as equal conversational partners, meaning that they tended to refrain from engaging in extended conversations and tended to discourage conversations with adults who were not familiar to the child. However, compared to mainstream Canadian mothers, Chinese Canadian mothers tended to use picture books and flash cards to a greater extent, thus adhering to a belief that instruction, rather than exploration, is needed for learning. Additionally, Chinese Canadian mothers reported reading to

their children much less often. In a very similar study, Simmons and Johnston focused on Indian Canadian and mainstream Canadian mothers' language and learning beliefs. The authors found that, compared to the mainstream Canadian mothers, Indian Canadian mothers of preschoolers rated family as being centrally important for young children to learn about. Additionally, Indian Canadian mothers were more likely to correct errors in their children's speech and ask their children to repeat utterances after them, reflecting a more adult-centered than child-centered method of language teaching. In contrast, mainstream Canadian mothers were more likely than Indian Canadian mothers to expect their children to engage in conversations with non-family adults in social settings, to use parallel talk, to ask their children to relate personal narratives, and to read to their children.

In the U.S. context, an emerging line of research conducted with Latino families focuses on parent beliefs about their children's learning, language practices, and development. For example, Rodriguez and Olswang (2003) investigated parents' beliefs and values about child-rearing, education, and language impairment. Mexican-American and Anglo-American mothers of early elementary-age children with language impairments completed questionnaires and a subsample participated in an interview. The authors found that Mexican-American mothers held beliefs and values that were more traditional, authoritarian, and conforming compared to the Anglo-American mothers. For example, the Mexican-American mothers believed they should not be active participants in their children's school as schools held the primary responsibility for educating their children.

Similarly, as part of a larger, five-country study focused on comparing early childhood educators' and immigrant parents' ideas about preschool, Adair and Tobin (2008) report findings from their work in the United States with Mexican immigrants living in Arizona. This ethnographic study revealed that Mexican immigrant parents believed schools should focus on promoting their children's academic and social readiness and on teaching English, while they (the parents) should focus on maintaining the home language (Spanish, in this case) and culture (Mexican). The authors qualify this finding by noting that, in Arizona, children would soon be transitioning to English-only kindergarten environments from bilingual preschool settings, potentially contributing to this orientation by parents.

Hammer and colleagues (2007) also investigated parent beliefs about children's education with a group of mothers of Puerto Rican descent living in the U.S., each with children attending Head Start programs. The authors compared the beliefs of mothers who exposed their children to Spanish and English since birth and mothers who exposed their children only to Spanish through age 3, at which time they enrolled in Head Start and thus became exposed to English. The findings revealed that, in line with Rodriguez and Olswang's (2003) results, most mothers believed schools have the primary responsibility for educating children. However, they also believed they play a role in supporting their children's learning at home. Thus, the authors conclude that the mothers held both traditional and progressive beliefs. Specifically, mothers placed a high value on social skills, including respectful interactions, and they also valued conformity and self-direction. Somewhat surprisingly, mothers who did not expose their children to English until Head Start entry placed more emphasis on self-direction and less on conformity compared to mothers who exposed their children to both languages since birth, which the authors attribute to a desire to incorporate mainstream cultural values given their desire to move to the mainland U.S. As expected, however, mothers who exposed their children to both languages since birth reported teaching their children early literacy-related skills, including book reading, more frequently than mothers who did not expose their children to English until Head

Start entry, presumably because of their greater knowledge of the skills with which children are expected to enter U.S. classrooms.

As Hammer and colleagues' (2007) study reveals, Latino children in the U.S. are often exposed to both Spanish and English. Yet, we know little about the way in which Latino, Spanish-speaking parents think about their young children's Spanish and English development. In one of the few studies on Latino parents' attitudes regarding bilingualism and their personal decisions about home language use, Schecter, Sharken-Taboada, and Bayley (1996) focused exclusively on 10 families in the U.S. who decided to maintain Spanish in the home. Via interviews, parents noted academic benefits, geographic relocation adaptability, and job-market competitiveness as key reasons for Spanish maintenance. Similarly, although focused on Latino Spanish-speaking and Anglo English-speaking parents' rationale for enrolling their children in a Spanish-English dual-language immersion program at the elementary school level, Craig's (1996) study offers relevant insight into parents' beliefs about bilingualism. Using a survey, Craig found that while both sets of parents generally expressed similar beliefs towards all aspects of bilingualism (e.g., *developing English fluency is essential, bilingual children have increased employment opportunities*), Latino parents differed from Anglo parents in that they were more concerned with ensuring that their children maintained the minority language (Spanish, in this case). Furthermore, a qualitative analysis of an open-ended question that probed parents' reasons for enrolling their children in the dual-language immersion program revealed important differences. Specifically, Anglo parents cited positive exposure to cultural diversity, early second language acquisition, and enhanced career opportunities as the major reasons for their enrollment decisions. In contrast, Latino parents cited Spanish language and cultural maintenance as the primary reasons for their enrollment decisions.

Given that young Latino children represent the largest and fastest growing segment of the U.S. population, account for a growing share of the population of children enrolled in early childhood programs, and evidence persistently low academic achievement, insight into their parents' beliefs about children's language and learning is needed. Unlike most other studies that have focused on contrasting the beliefs of minority and majority parents, we focus exclusively on Spanish-speaking parents who enrolled their children in Head Start/Early Head Start. Specifically, the present study aims to contribute to the research base by describing Spanish-speaking parents' beliefs about their 24- to 48-month-old children's learning and (dual) language development, and by examining the extent to which differences in beliefs emerge as a function of their reported patterns of home language use.

METHOD

Participants

The sample, drawn from a larger study focused on young children's vocabulary development, consisted of 200 Spanish-English bilingual child-caregiver dyads recruited from Early Head Start (EHS) and Head Start (HS) collaborating programs in the Northeast U.S. In these programs, English was the primary language used in the classroom.

Child characteristics. Children were between 24 and 48 months of age, with an even split by gender (99 females; 101 males). According to parental report, all children, except 6,

were Latino. Among this small group these children, 1 was identified as Black and 5 were identified as "Other." The majority of the children were born in the mainland U.S. (92%) and the remaining in the U.S. territory of Puerto Rico (8%). Within their families, 30% of the children were first-borns, 51% were second- or third-born children, and the rest had between 3 and 9 older siblings.

Parent and household characteristics. In contrast to the children, the majority of the mothers (79%) were foreign-born. Thirty-one percent of foreign-born mothers reported the U.S. territory of Puerto Rico as their country of birth, followed by Guatemala (21%), the Dominican Republic (17%), and Mexico (9%); the remaining 1% was born in other Latin American countries. Of the fathers for whom we had data ($n=155$ or 78%), most were also foreign-born (77%). Of these, 30% were born in the U.S. territory of Puerto Rico, followed by Guatemala (21%), Dominican Republic (13%), Mexico (12%), and Ecuador (1%). Over half of mothers reported having no employment (55%), while the remainder reported either full-time (33%) or part-time (12%) employment. In contrast, the majority of fathers (63%) were employed full-time, with the remaining either reporting having no employment (24%) or being employed part-time (13%). The average total numbers of years of education for mothers was 9.9 years ($SD = 4.4$) and for father it was 9.8 years ($SD = 3.8$). The families overwhelmingly reported being in income brackets below the federal poverty guideline for a family of four (Federal Register, 2011). That is, 67% of families reported an income of up to \$20,000 with the remaining families reporting an income above this amount (14% = \$20,000 to \$40,000 income bracket; 8% = \$40,000 to \$80,000 income bracket). Additionally, 8% reported "I don't know" and 3% did not report their income level.

Measures

A two-part parent interview was conducted with all participating families. The first part focused on information about family demographics (as previously described) and home language use while the second part focused on parent beliefs about learning and language development. The interview was prepared in both English and Spanish and two rounds of back translation were undertaken to assure comparability of the two versions.

Home language use. Parents were first asked about the language(s) they hoped their child would speak as adults and they were then asked a series of questions related to their actual home language use practices. Specifically, four home language input questions referenced talk directed *to the child* by the mothers, fathers, other adults in the home, and other children in the home while four home language output questions referenced the talk directed *by the child* to the mother, father, other adults in the home, and other children in the home. The responses to these questions are on a 5-point scale where 5 = only English, 4 = mostly English, 3 = equal amounts of English and Spanish, 2 = mostly Spanish, and 1 = only Spanish. Thus, low values on this 5-point scale indicate a preference for Spanish, middle values indicate roughly equal preference for both languages, and high values indicate a preference for English.

Parent beliefs. The second part of the parent interview focused on parent beliefs about young children's learning and language development. This portion of the interview was adapted

from questions from Johnston and Wong's (2002) survey of childrearing beliefs. However, we developed an additional set of questions about parental beliefs and values related to children learning two languages. Parents were asked to rate their level of agreement with statements related to three overarching categories as follows a) children's learning (10 items), b) children's language learning (10 items), and children's dual language learning (9 items). Each statement was on a 5-point scale as follows: 1) Strongly Disagree, 2) Somewhat Disagree, 3) Not Sure, 4) Somewhat Agree, and 5) Strongly Agree. All of the survey items appear in the Appendix.

Procedure

The interview was administered to each individual parent participant by trained Research Assistants, and took place at the child's home or school. The interviews were conducted in either Spanish (63%) or English (37%), per parent preference. Ninety-four percent of the interviews were conducted with the mother, with the remaining 6% conducted with fathers, grandmothers, aunts or, in only one case, with a person identified as "Other." The interviews lasted approximately 20 minutes.

RESULTS

Home Language Use

When parents were asked about the language(s) they wanted their child to speak when s/he was older, nearly all (97%) reported hoping that their child would grow up to be a Spanish-English bilingual. Three parents said they hoped their child would speak only Spanish and three said they hoped their child would speak Spanish, English, and other languages; none said they hoped their child would grow up to speak only English. The most common reasons for wanting their children to be bilingual were so that they could maintain contact with their Spanish-speaking family members and because they believed bilingualism would afford their children more job opportunities.

Considering that bilinguals rarely hear both (or multiple) languages equally nor develop equal fluency in both (or multiple) languages (De Houwer, 2007; Oller & Eilers, 2002; Pearson, Fernandez, Lewedeg, & Oller, 1997), we first examined descriptive statistics of children's reported language input and output at home. As shown in Table 1, children in this sample were mostly spoken to in Spanish by their mothers and other adults in the home while fathers and other children in the home were closer to providing children with approximately equal amounts of English and Spanish language input. Children in this sample also spoke mostly Spanish to their mothers and other adults in the home and also used approximately equal amounts of English and Spanish when speaking to their fathers and to other children in the home.

TABLE 1.
Child's Language Input, Output, and Combined Home Language Use

Child Language Input	Mean	SD	n
<i>Language spoken to the child by the mother</i>	2.82	1.33	200
<i>Language spoken to the child by the father</i>	3.38	1.77	176
<i>Language spoken to the child by other adults</i>	2.68	1.53	198
<i>Language spoken to the child by other children</i>	3.28	1.46	199
Input Total Mean	2.92	1.17	
Child Language Output	Mean	SD	n
<i>Language child speaks to mother</i>	2.13	1.17	199
<i>Language child speaks to father</i>	2.94	1.88	177
<i>Language child speaks to other adults</i>	2.16	1.41	200
<i>Language child speaks to other children</i>	3.51	1.45	200
Output Total Mean	2.61	0.93	

Note: The home language questions were on a 5-point scale where low values indicate a greater preference for Spanish, middle values indicate a preference for both Spanish and English, and high values indicate a greater preference for English.

Because the home language questions were on the same scale (as described above), a home language score was calculated for each child using the 8 questions that referenced the mother's, father's, other adults and other children's language directed to the child at home ($n = 4$) and the child's language directed to mothers, fathers, other adults and other children in the home ($n = 4$). An average was calculated for each child using the number of items responded to as the denominator. An acceptable response to each question included "Not Applicable"; the denominator was adjusted for each case when calculating the average home language exposure score. Each child first received an average input (sample grand mean = 2.61; $SD = 0.93$) and an average output score (sample grand mean = 2.92; $SD = 1.17$) and Pearson correlations revealed a significant, positive, and strong correlation between the averaged language input and output scores ($r = .76$, $p < 0.001$, $n = 200$). The positive relation between the average input and average output language scores (i.e., language directed to the child and language used by the child) suggests that as children's input contained more English, their output tended to also contain more English. Thus, for the purposes of subsequent analyses, combining the input and output scores to arrive at an overall home language use score was warranted. The overall home language use variable was used to examine potential differences in parents' beliefs about children's learning and language development.

DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSES

Table 2 displays the sample means for each of the parent beliefs items by category, with the sample standard deviations in parentheses. As previously described, items for the three categories were on a 5-point scale as follows: 1) Strongly Disagree, 2) Somewhat Disagree, 3) Not Sure, 4) Somewhat Agree, and 5) Strongly Agree. For ease of interpretation, the last column

on the table also displays the percentage of parents who somewhat or mostly agreed with each statement.

TABLE 2.

Sample means and standard deviations by category, including the percentage of parents who somewhat or strongly agree with each statement, by category

	N	Mean (SD)	Percent
Category 1: Children's Learning			
Children who spend time quietly observing tend to be smart (Learning 1)	197	3.81 (1.06)	64
It is important to find out what kids are thinking (Learning 2)	197	4.46 (0.70)	93
Parents should let children experiment, even if they might make mistakes (Learning 3)	197	4.40 (0.91)	89
Parents should wait until young children ask before giving help (Learning 4)	196	3.23 (1.44)	52
Three-year-olds are too young to help with household chores (Learning 5)	197	2.83 (1.55)	38
Young children learn best when they are given instructions (Learning 6)	200	4.40 (0.75)	91
Young children learn important things while playing (Learning 7)	200	4.51 (0.66)	95
Young children should be given choices instead of being told what to do (Learning 8)	200	3.82 (1.17)	70
Young children generally like the same things as their parents (Learning 9)	199	3.33 (1.33)	52
Grandparents or older family members give good advice about the way that young children grow up (Learning 10)	200	4.15 (0.86)	79
Category 2: Children's Language Learning			
Parents should ask young children to repeat new words in order to help them learn to talk (Language 1)	197	4.65 (0.59)	96
Speech is especially important because it helps young children to make friends (Language 2)	197	4.49 (0.77)	93
Children understand some words even before they can speak (Language 3)	197	4.50 (0.71)	93
The proper titles for people ("Aunt" Sally) are more important to learn than the names of objects (Language 4)	196	3.28 (1.26)	47
It is more important for young children to speak clearly than to speak politely (Language 5)	197	3.54 (1.27)	55
If parents use "baby talk" (like "wawa" for water, or "jamies" for pajamas) their child won't learn to speak well (Language 6)	197	3.88 (1.33)	74
Young children should always be encouraged to communicate with words rather than gestures (Language 7)	200	4.40 (0.80)	91
When babies, they are trying to communicate something (Language 8)	200	4.37 (0.81)	87
Children will learn to talk on their own, as long as they are spoken to (Language 9)	200	4.36 (0.87)	90
Young children should be allowed to take a turn in conversations that include adults who are not family members (Language 10)	200	3.10 (1.39)	44

Category 3 Children's Dual Language Learning			
Young children who are exposed to two languages will naturally learn both well (Dual Language 1)	200	4.17 (1.04)	83
If possible, families should use the school language at home with young children (Dual Language 2)	200	3.39 (1.39)	58
Adults in the family should use mostly the home language at home in talking with young children (Dual Language 3)	200	3.95 (1.16)	74
Young children can easily keep two languages separate and know which one to use in different situations (Dual Language 4)	200	3.98 (1.08)	72
Adults should avoid mixing two languages in conversation with young children (Dual Language 5)	199	3.35 (4.40)	52
Children should be corrected when they mix two languages in the same sentence (Dual Language 6)	200	3.40 (1.37)	59
Children learn the language of school from siblings and peers rather than from their parents (Dual Language 7)	200	3.58 (1.30)	63
It is more important that children are able to understand the home language than to speak it (Dual Language 8)	200	3.28 (1.28)	49
Parents should correct children if their pronunciation in the home language sounds 'foreign' (Dual Language 9)	200	3.47 (1.44)	58

The category 1 items reflect parent beliefs about children's learning, with each of the 10 items under this category labeled Learning 1, Learning 2, and so on. As the sample means and standard deviations show, there was considerable variation in parents' average levels of agreement with these statements. In fact, 3 items yielded an average response of "not sure" and also showed the most variation. Specifically, as shown in the last column, only half of the parents (52%) somewhat or mostly agreed that parents should wait until young children ask before giving help (Learning 4) and that young children generally like the same things as their parents (Learning 9), and only 38% somewhat or mostly agreed that three-year-olds are too young to help with household chores (Learning 5).

The category 2 items reflect parent beliefs about children's language learning, with each of the 10 items under this category labeled Language 1, Language 2, and so on. As with category 1 items, on average, the sample means and standard deviations show considerable variation in parents' average levels of agreement with these statements, with 3 items yielding an average response of "not sure" and also showing the most variation. Just over half of parents (55%) somewhat or mostly agreed that it is more important for children to speak clearly than to speak politely (Language 5), and under half of parents that the proper titles for people ("Aunt Sally") are more important to learn than the names of objects (47%; Language 4) and that young children should be allowed to take a turn in conversations that include adults who are not family members (44%; Language 10).

Finally, the category 3 items reflect parent beliefs about children's dual language learning, with each of the 9 items under this category labeled Dual Language 1, Dual Language 2, and so on. To an even greater extent than was the case with the first 2 categories, there was wider variation regarding the extent to which parents somewhat or strongly agreed with these statements. That is, of the 9 items, 5 yielding an average response of "not sure" and also showed the most variation. Fifty-nine percent of parents somewhat or mostly agreed that children should be corrected when they mix two languages in the same sentence (Dual Language 6), 58% that parents should correct children if their pronunciation in the home language sounds 'foreign'

(Dual Language 9) and that if possible, families should use the school language at home with young children (Dual Language 2), 52% that parents should avoid mixing two languages in conversation with young children (Dual Language 5), and 49% that it is more important that children are able to understand the home language than to speak it (Dual Language 8).

Characterizing Parental Beliefs

Like previous studies that have investigated parent learning and language beliefs, as previously described, we utilized a questionnaire comprised of numerous statements for parents to rate their levels of agreement. To capture the variability within each category in as few factors as possible, we conducted a Principal Components Analysis (PCA) for each of the 3 categories investigated (children's learning; language learning; dual language learning). This, in turn, resulted in a more meaningful interpretation of Spanish-speaking parents' underlying beliefs and allowed us to explore potential differences by patterns of home language use. Factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 were extracted. Because nearly all correlations in each of the four factor correlation matrices fell below the .32 threshold, an orthogonal varimax rotation was used (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). In interpreting the rotated factor pattern, an item was said to load on a given component if the factor loading was .40 or greater for that component. As previously described, we also explored the extent to which the generated factors in each of the three categories related to reported home language use (i.e., the overall home language use variable, with low values indicative of a preference for more Spanish use and high values indicative of a preference for more English use).

Beliefs about children's learning. A three-factor solution was found, which explained cumulatively 50% of the total variance (see Table 3). Five items were found to load on Factor 1, which was interpreted to represent *dependence*. Four items were found to load on Factor 2, which was interpreted to represent *exploration*. Finally, three items were found to load on Factor 3, which was interpreted to represent *independence*. Note that two statements (Learning 2 and Learning 8) can be considered complex variables given that they each loaded on two factors (Thurstone, 1947). Most importantly, however, interpretation of these factors remained unchanged. Finally, investigation of differences by reported home language use revealed that parents who reported using more Spanish than English in the home were more likely to agree with Factor 1, the *dependence* factor ($r = -0.38, p < .001$); no significant differences were found for Factor 2 (*exploration*) and Factor 3 (*independence*) by home language use status.

TABLE 3.
Beliefs about children's learning (n = 195)

	Factor 1: Dependence	Factor 2: Exploration	Factor 3: Independence
Children who spend time quietly observing tend to be smart (Learning 1)	0.48	0.04	0.37
It is important to find out what kids are thinking (Learning 2)	0.47	0.58	-0.26
Parents should let children experiment, even if they might make mistakes (Learning 3)	-0.07	0.66	0.06
Parents should wait until young children ask before giving help (Learning 4)	0.01	0.02	0.81
Three-year-olds are too young to help with household chores (Learning 5)	0.69	-0.15	0.14
Young children learn best when they are given instructions (Learning 6)	0.62	0.30	-0.02
Young children learn important things while playing (Learning 7)	0.14	0.75	0.09
Young children should be given choices instead of being told what to do (Learning 8)	0.04	0.45	0.46
Young children generally like the same things as their parents (Learning 9)	0.25	0.03	0.60
Grandparents or older family members give good advice about the way that young children grow up (Learning 10)	0.69	0.10	0.13
Eigenvalues	2.49	1.37	1.16
Total Variance Explained		50%	

Beliefs about children's language learning. A three-factor solution was also found, which explained cumulatively 55% of the total variance (see Table 4). Five items were found to load on Factor 1, was interpreted to represent *active language use*. Three items were found to load on Factor 2, which was interpreted to represent *social norms*. Finally, two items were found to load on Factor 3, which was interpreted to represent *sophisticated language use*. Finally, investigation of differences by reported home language use revealed that parents who reported using more Spanish than English were more likely to agree with Factor 2, the *social norms* factor ($r = -0.29$, $p < .001$); no significant differences were found for Factor 1 (*active language use*) and Factor 3 (*sophisticated language use*) by home language use status.

TABLE 4.
Beliefs about children's language learning (n = 196)

	Factor 1: Active Use	Factor 2: Social Norms	Factor 3: Sophisticated Talk
Parents should ask young children to repeat new words in order to help them learn to talk (Language 1)	0.79	-0.05	-0.02
Speech is especially important because it helps young children to make friends (Language 2)	0.64	0.22	0.16
Children understand some words even before they can speak (Language 3)	0.75	-0.13	-0.06
The proper titles for people ("Aunt" Sally) are more important to learn than the names of objects (Language 4)	-0.01	0.78	-0.07
It is more important for young children to speak clearly than to speak politely (Language 5)	0.05	0.77	-0.07
If parents use "baby talk" (like "wawa" for water, or "jamies" for pajamas) their child won't learn to speak well (Language 6)	0.24	-0.17	0.46
Young children should always be encouraged to communicate with words rather than gestures (Language 7)	0.65	0.12	0.20
When babies, they are trying to communicate something (Language 8)	0.67	0.12	0.09
Children will learn to talk on their own, as long as they are spoken to (Language 9)	0.34	0.50	0.39
Young children should be allowed to take a turn in conversations that include adults who are not family members (Language 10)	-0.09	0.04	0.88
Eigenvalues	2.85	1.50	1.12
Total Variance Explained		55%	

Beliefs about children's dual language learning. A two-factor solution was found, which explained cumulatively 45% of the total variance (see Table 5). Six items were found to load on Factor 1, which was interpreted to represent *no language mixing* and three items were found to load on Factor 2, which was interpreted to represent *bilingual facility*. Note that one variable (Dual Language 3) loaded onto both factors and is thus considered a complex variable (Thurstone, 1947); however, interpretation of these factors remained unchanged. Additionally, one variable (Dual Language 2) did not load onto either factor using the aforementioned .40 criterion. However, this variable trended toward Factor 1 and can be meaningfully interpreted there. Finally, investigation of differences by reported home language use revealed that parents who reported using more Spanish than English in the home were more likely to agree with both the *Spanish use, mixing* factor ($r = -0.24, p < .001$) as well as with the *bilingual facility* factor ($r = -0.31, p < .001$).

TABLE 5.
Beliefs about children's dual language learning (n = 199)

	Factor 1: No Language Mixing	Factor 2: Bilingual Facility
Young children who are exposed to two languages will naturally learn both well (Dual Language 1)	-0.02	0.78
If possible, families should use the school language at home with young children (Dual Language 2)	0.38	-0.01
Adults in the family should use mostly the home language at home in talking with young children (Dual Language 3)	0.46	0.57
Young children can easily keep two languages separate and know which one to use in different situations (Dual Language 4)	0.06	0.80
Adults should avoid mixing two languages in conversation with young children (Dual Language 5)	0.54	0.20
Children should be corrected when they mix two languages in the same sentence (Dual Language 6)	0.67	0.11
Children learn the language of school from siblings and peers rather than from their parents (Dual Language 7)	0.66	0.09
It is more important that children are able to understand the home language than to speak it (Dual Language 8)	0.67	-0.06
Parents should correct children if their pronunciation in the home language sounds 'foreign' (Dual Language 9)	0.62	0.16
Eigenvalues	2.70	1.34
Total Variance Explained	45%	

DISCUSSION

Early childhood programs strive to optimize young children's development, including their language skills. Gaining insight into parents' beliefs about learning, in general, and language development, in particular, can help bridge children's home and classroom experiences so that children's learning opportunities are maximized. This is especially important for children who come from linguistically, culturally, and economically diverse homes; often, there is a difference between children's learning experiences and opportunities at the home and in the classroom, and, indeed, understandings about how learning unfolds and how language develops.

Therefore, this study investigated Spanish-speaking parents' beliefs about their children's learning and language development, while also examining the extent to which differences in beliefs emerged depending on parents' reported home language use. The results revealed that, within each of the three aspects of children's language and learning studied (i.e., *Beliefs about*

Children's Learning; Beliefs about Children's Language Learning, and Beliefs about Children's Dual Language Learning), there was substantial variation among parents' beliefs. In other words, discussed in more depth below, the Spanish-speaking parents in the sample cannot be characterized as adhering to a common orientation about the way in which young children learn and develop language—there was not a general level of consensus among the sample studied. This is an important point to underscore because early childhood programs may erroneously assume that parents who share the same cultural, linguistic, and economic background—in this case, Latino, Spanish-speaking parents from low-income homes—tend to share similar beliefs about children's learning and language development. Furthermore, we identified a relationship between parents' beliefs and their reported home language use, such that parents who reported more Spanish than English use at home tended to be in greater agreement with many of the questions asked. We discuss our three specific findings below, with attention to the implications for early childhood programs, such as Early Head Start/Head Start.

Beliefs about Children's Learning

When we looked specifically at parents' responses to questionnaire items focused on beliefs about *Children's Learning*, three distinct factors emerged: *dependence*, *exploration*, and *independence*. Given past research documenting Latino parents' strong sense of interdependence (e.g., Rivera & Rogers-Adkinson, 1997), the *dependence* factor was not surprising. This factor included items such as 'three-year-olds are too young to help with household chores' and 'young children learn best when they are given instructions.' As has been described previously, all parents in the study were Spanish-speaking, but parents who reported more use of Spanish compared to English at home were more likely to be represented by this factor. Some work suggests that Latino, Spanish-speaking parents may be hesitant to enroll their children in early childhood programs because they perceive them as too didactic and prefer more family-oriented, informal child care arrangements (Hashima & Amato, 1994; Holloway, Fuller, Rambaud, & Eggers-Pierola, 1997; Phillips, Voran, Kisker, Howes, & Anglobook, 1994). While results of our study do not speak directly to this issue, the fact that parents who reported more Spanish than English use tended to be in greater agreement with the *dependence* factor suggests that early childhood programs should attend to the extent to which the preschool is warm and inviting for parents and children.

At the same time, parents' reported home language use was not associated with the other two factors, *exploration* and *independence*, suggested that the parents in this study tended to view children as inquisitive when it comes to learning. For example, items captured by this factor included 'parents should let children experiment, even if they might make mistakes' and 'young children should be given choices instead of being told what to do.' However, parents generally valued independence as a goal for learning. For instance, an item captured by this factor included 'parents should wait until young children ask before giving help'. Though seemingly contradictory, the fact that differences did not emerge among the participating parents as a function of patterns of home language use on the *exploration* and *independence* factors is in line with Hammer and colleagues' (2007) findings that Spanish-speaking parents tend to incorporate beliefs and values of the mainstream culture (e.g., exploration) while maintaining some from their own culture (e.g., independence).

Beliefs about Children's Language Learning

An examination of parents' responses to the questions focused on beliefs about *Children's Language Learning* revealed three factors: *active use*, *social norms*, and *sophisticated talk*. Parents tended to value the *active use* of language. For example, items captured by this factor included 'parents should ask young children to repeat new words in order to help them learn to talk' and 'young children should always be encouraged to communicate with words rather than gestures.' Parents also adhered to an orientation that they should encourage their children to use adult-like language (i.e., *sophisticated talk*); they believed that 'if parents use "baby talk" (like "wawa" for water or "jamies" for pajamas) their child won't learn to speak well'.

Additionally, while the value of *social norms* emerged as important for all participating parents, those who reported more Spanish than English use at home tended to be in even greater agreement with this factor. As with the *dependence* factor finding, this finding was also not unexpected given that the concept of respect has been found to be prevalent among Latino, Spanish-speaking families (e.g., García Coll & Pachter, 2002; Halgunseth, Ispa, & Rudy, 2006; Valdés, 1996). For instance, one of the statements captured by this factor included the greater importance of proper titles (e.g., "Aunt" Sally) compared to the names of objects. Indeed, to be respectful means deferring to those in positions of authority, which includes school personnel (e.g., teachers and administrators). Early childhood programs may lack knowledge of parents' values related to social norms and may inadvertently perpetuate a sense of a hierarchical relationship wherein the preschool staff is in a position of power compared to the families they serve. A simple strategy of encouraging parents to refer to the preschool staff by first name or, alternately, by referring to parents in the same formal manner, may potentially foster an increased sense of shared values and respect with Spanish-speaking parents, ultimately promoting a sense of community and improving students' educational outcomes (Nieto, 1999; Bloom, Katz, Slosken, Willet, & Wilson-Keenan, 2000).

Additionally, it is worth noting that, as group, the Spanish-speaking parents in the sample overwhelmingly agreed that words should be encouraged over gestures. Yet it is worth noting that gestures can facilitate language development (Goldin-Meadow & Alabali, 2013) and for children who are learning English, gestures may in fact play an even more important role, particularly during the early childhood years. The field might recommend, then, that early childhood programs inform parents about the value of gesturing for promoting children's language development and communication skills.

Beliefs about Children's Dual Language Learning

Finally, and arguably the most unique contribution of this study, we probed parents' beliefs about *Children's Dual Language Learning*, identifying two factors: *no language mixing*, and *bilingual facility*. As noted earlier, there was greater variability in beliefs regarding *Children's Dual Language Learning* than in beliefs about the first two components (*Children's Learning* and *Children's Language Learning*).

The *no language mixing* factor—as the label implies—represented a view that use of Spanish and English should not be mixed. Items captured by this factor included 'adults in the home should use mostly the home language at home in talking with young children' and 'adults

should avoid mixing two languages in conversation with young children'. In contrast, the *bilingual facility* factor represented a view that there is relative ease in simultaneously acquiring and using two languages. Specifically, aside from the complex variable that loaded onto both factors (i.e., 'if possible, families should use the school language at home with young children'), two items were captured by this factor: 'young children who are exposed to two languages will naturally learn both well' and 'young children can easily keep two languages separate and know which one to use in different situations'.

Parents who reported using more Spanish than English at home tended to be in greater agreement with both factors, *no language mixing* and *bilingual facility*. One might expect that parents who reported more English than Spanish use could also be in strong agreement with the *no language mixing* factor, but an examination of the items captured by this factor reveal a general preference toward Spanish use by parents. For instance, one of the items stated 'parents should correct children if their pronunciation in the home language sounds 'foreign' and another that 'children learn the language of school from siblings and peers rather than from their parents'. Thus, these items seem to reflect a value for correct Spanish pronunciation and a belief that parents provide the primary Spanish language modeling.

Regarding the *bilingual facility* factor, it was not surprising that parents who reported more Spanish than English use at home tended to be in greater agreement with the items captured by this factor. As these parents use more Spanish at home and, we hypothesize, view the acquisition of English (at school, for instance) as not interfering with the acquisition of Spanish, and vice versa. On the other hand, it may be that parents who use more English than Spanish at home might do so because they are concerned that the use of Spanish might negatively interfere with their young children's English acquisition.

Together, these findings offer important insights for early childhood programs serving children from dual language learning homes, in this case English and Spanish speakers, underscoring in particular the variability in parents' beliefs about young children's dual language learning. On the one hand, some parents believed it was not acceptable to mix both languages. But, on the other hand, some parents believed children could easily negotiate two languages simultaneously. Although the research base is quite clear that bilingualism in itself is not a risk factor for low academic achievement (De Houwer, 1999; Snow, 1992), it is clear that misconceptions about the process of dual language learning remain among the public (Espinosa, 2008; McLaughlin, 1992). We agree with Lopez, Barrueco, Feinauer, and Miles (2007) that Latino, Spanish-speaking parents, such as those in our study, might benefit from knowledge about bilingual language development given the often confusing and unclear messages to which they are often exposed. Furthermore, early childhood educators might themselves benefit professional development on the topic because they generally do not have much training and/or coursework related to working with dual language learners (Alliance for a Better Community, 2012).

Directions for Future Research

Results of our study underscore the heterogeneity that exists among a given sample of Spanish-speaking parents with respect to their beliefs about their young children's learning and language development. We note that the parents studied were from low-income households and thus that

results must be restricted to this specific subset of the population. Moreover, as with previous work documenting parent beliefs about children's learning, we used a questionnaire. While the utility of a low-cost, easy-to-administer questionnaire cannot be underestimated as it can, at minimum, give early childhood programs serving large numbers of dual language learning families a snapshot of parent beliefs, in fact naturalistic observations of parents' behaviors and interactions with their young children represent an important next step. This is particularly the case in order to minimize concerns about social desirability response bias, while simultaneously providing important data to inform the validity of utilizing questionnaires to tap into parents' beliefs about learning and language development. Furthermore, interviews would help shed further light on parents' rationale for their responses (i.e., agreeing, disagreeing or being unsure about the statements). This is especially important for survey items that generated a wide range of responses, such as the *Children's Dual Language Learning* component.

Even though the Office of Head Start, for instance, mandates that programs support and strengthen children's native languages (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2008), it is essential to reiterate that staff who speak the families' native language(s) continue to be sorely needed (Garcia & Frede, 2010; Garcia & Jensen, 2009; National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics, 2007). Finally, although differences in parents' and early childhood educators' beliefs have been reported (Adair & Tobi, 2008), there is a need to further explore teachers' beliefs related to learning and language development, especially for dual language learners.

Summary

Given the achievement gaps documented between Latino, Spanish-speaking children and their peers prior to formal school entry, this study brings insight into the learning and language beliefs of these children's parents insight that should be capitalized on by early childhood programs committed to advancing this population's overall achievement beginning in the preschool years. Results of this study reveal that, within a sample of Spanish-speaking parents, beliefs about the way in which young children learn and develop one or two languages vary widely.

REFERENCES

- Adair, J., & Tobin, J. (2008). Listening to the voices of immigrant parents. In C. Genishi & A.L. Alliance for a Better Community (2012). Dual language learner teacher competencies (DLLTC) report. Retrieved from <http://www.afabc.org/What-we-do/Education/Early-Care-Education/Dual-Language-Learners.aspx>
- Bransford, J. D., Brown, A. L., & Cocking, R. R. (2000). *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School: Expanded Edition*. Washington, D. C.: National Academy Press.
- Bloom, D., Katz, L. Solsken, J. Willet, J., & Wilson-Keenan, J. (2000). Interpellations of family and classroom literacy practices. *Journal of Educational Research*, 93, 155-163.
- Brooks-Gunn, J., & Duncan, G. (1997). The effects of poverty on children and youth. *The Future of Children*, 7, 55- 71.
- Cazden, C.B. (1988). *Classroom discourse: The language of teaching and learning*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Conger, R. D., & Donnellan, M. B. (2007). An Interactionist perspective on the socioeconomic context of human development. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 58, 175-99.

- Craig, B.A. (1996). Parental attitudes toward bilingualism in a local two-way immersion program. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 20, 383-410.
- De Houwer, A. (1999). Two or more languages in early childhood: Some general points and practical recommendations. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics. Retrieved from www.cal.org/resources/digest/earlychild.html
- De Houwer, A. (2007). Parental Language Input Patterns and Children's Bilingual Use. *Applied Psycholinguistics* 28, 411-424.
- Dickinson D. & Freiburg, (2009). *Preschool language development and later academic success*. Paper presented at the Workshop on the Role of Language in School Learning: Implications for Closing the Achievement Gap, National Academy of Sciences, Menlo Park, CA.
- Duncan, G.J., Ziol-Guest, K.M., & Kalil, A. (2010). Early-childhood poverty and adult attainment, behavior, and health. *Child Development*, 81, 306-325.
- Espinosa, L. (2008). *Challenging Common Myths About Young English Language Learners*. Foundation for Child Development Policy Brief No. 8. Retrieved from <http://www.fcd-us.org/sites/default/files/MythsOfTeachingELLsEspinosa.pdf>
- Farah, M. J., Shera, D. M., Savage, J. H., Betancourt, L., Giannetta, J. M., Brodsky, N. L., Hurt, H. (2006). Childhood poverty: Specific associations with neurocognitive development. *Brain Research*, 1110(1), 166-174.
- Fortuny, K., Capps, R., Simms, M., & Chaudry, A. (2009). *Children of immigrants: National and state characteristics*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press.
- García, E. E., & Frede, E. C. (Eds.) (2010). *Young English language learners: Current research and emerging directions for practice and policy*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- García, E., & Jensen, B. (2009). Early educational opportunities for children of Hispanic origins. *Social Policy Report*, 23(2), 1-20.
- García Coll, C.T. & Pachter, L. (2002). Ethnic and Minority Parenting. In M. H. Bornstein, (Ed.), *Handbook of Parenting, Volume 4: Social Conditions and Applied Parenting*, (2nd ed). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Publishers.
- Goldin-Meadow, S., & Alibali, M.W. (2013). Gestures role in speaking, learning, and creating language. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 123, 448-453.
- Halgunseth, L. C., Ispa, J. M., & Rudy, D. (2006). Parental control in Latino families: An integrated review in the literature. *Child Development*, 77 (5), 1282-1297.
- Hammer, C.S., Rodriguez, B.L., Lawrence, F.R., & Miccio, A.W. (2007). Puerto Rican mothers' beliefs and home literacy practices. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in School*, 38, 216-224.
- Hashima, P. Y., & Amato, P. R. (1994). Poverty, social support, and parental behavior. *Child Development*, 65, 394-404.
- Heath, S.B. (1982). Oral and literate traditions-endless linkages. In A. Humes (Ed.), *Moving between practice and research in writing* (pp. 21-34). Los Alamitos: Southwest Regional Laboratory (SWRL) Educational Research and Development.
- Hernandez, D. J. (2004). Demographic change and the life circumstances of immigrant families. *The Future of Children*, 14, 16-47.
- Hohm, E., Jennen-Steinmetz, C., Schmidt, M.H., & Laucht, M. (2007). Language development at ten months. Predictive of language outcome and school achievement ten years later? *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 16(3), 149-156.
- Holloway, S. D., Fuller, B., Rambaud, M. F., & Eggers-Pierola, C. (1997). *Through my own eyes: Single mothers and the cultures of poverty*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. (Second printing, 2001).
- Johnston, J.R., & Wong, M.-Y. A. (2002). Cultural differences in beliefs and practices concerning talk to children. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 45, 916-926.
- Lewis, C. (2001). *Literacy practices as social acts*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Lopez, M. L., Barrueco, S., Feinauer, E., Miles, J. C. (2007). Young Latino infants and families: Parental involvement implications from a recent national study. Retrieved September 27, 2012 from <http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/young-latino-infants-and-families-parental-involvement-implications-from-a-recent-national-study>
- McLaughlin, B. (1992). *Myths and misconceptions about second language learning: What every teacher needs to unlearn*. Santa Cruz, CA: National Center for Research on Cultural Diversity and Second Language Learning.

- National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics (2007). *Para nuestros niños: Expanding and improving early education for Hispanics—Main report*. Tempe, AZ: National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics. Retrieved from http://www.ecehispanic.org/work/expand_MainReport.pdf
- Nieto, S. (1999). *The light in their eyes: Creating multicultural learning communities*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Oller, D.K. and Eilers, R. E. (Eds.) (2002). *Language and literacy in bilingual children*, Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Passel, J., Cohn, D., & Lopez, M. H. (2011). *Hispanics account for more than half of nation's growth in past decade*. Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center. <http://pewhispanic.org/reports/report.php?ReportID=140>
- Pearson, B.Z., Fernández, S.C., Lewedeg, V., & Oller, D.K. (1997). The relation of input factors to lexical learning by bilingual infants. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 18, 41-58.
- Phillips, D., Voran, M., Kisker, E., Howes, C., & Anglobook, M. (1994). Child care for children in poverty: Opportunity or inequality? *Child Development*, 65, 472-492.
- Rivera, B. D., & Rogers-Adkinson, D. (1997). Culturally sensitive interventions: Social skills training with children and parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 33(2), 75-80.
- Rodriguez, B.L., & Olswang, L. (2003). Mexican-American and Anglo-American mothers' beliefs about child rearing, education, and language impairment. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 12, 452-462.
- Schechter, S. R., Sharken-Taboada, D., & Bayley, R. (1996). Bilingual by choice: Latino parents' rationales and strategies for raising children with two languages. *Bilingual Research Journal* 20(2), 261-281.
- Simmons, N. & Johnston, J. (2007). Cross-cultural differences in beliefs and practices that affect the language spoken to children: mothers with Indian and Western heritage. *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders*, 42(4), 445-465.
- Snow, C. (1992). Perspectives on second-language development: Implications for bilingual education. *Educational Researcher*, 21(2), 16-19.
- Storch, S. A., & Whitehurst, G. J. (2002). Oral language and code-related precursors to reading: Evidence from a longitudinal structural model. *Developmental Psychology*, 38, 934-947.
- Taanila, A., Murray, G.K., Jokelainen, J., Isohanni, M., & Rantakallio, P. (2005). Infant developmental milestones: a 31-year follow-up. *Developmental medicine and child neurology*, 47(9), 581-586.
- Tabachnick, B. G., & Fidell, L. S. (2007). *Using multivariate statistics* (5th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Allyn & Bacon.
- Thurstone, L. L. (1947). *Multiple factor analysis: A development and expansion of vectors of the mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago.
- U. S. Department of Health and Human Services (2008). *Dual language learning: What does it take? Head Start dual language report*. Washington, DC: Author.
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Head Start Bureau. *Head Start Program Fact Sheet, Fiscal Year 2011*. Retrieved from <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/mr/factsheets/2011-hs-program-factsheet.html>
- Valdés, G. (1996). *Con respeto: Bridging distances between culturally diverse families and schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.