Title
Review: The Power of Parents: A Critical Perspective of Bicultural Parent Involvement in Public Schools by Edward M. Olivos

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The Power of Parents: A Critical Perspective of Bicultural Parent Involvement in Public Schools by Edward M. Olivos; foreword by Antonia Darder. Counterpoints Vol. 290. New York: Peter Lang, 2006. 133 pp. ISBN 0-8204-7478-9.

Edward Olivos' critical examination of parent involvement as it pertains to bicultural parents is refreshing and necessary—a must-read for educational researchers and practicing and aspiring educators throughout the country. Literature examining parent involvement documents the power of the parent in improving student academic achievement (Chavkin, 1993; Epstein, 1995; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). There is, however, a lack of studies that examine families of color. Parent involvement has been discussed from the Eurocentric, middle-class perspective of schools (Ramirez, 2002). Similar to most other school policies and practices, the involvement of minority parents is most often viewed through a deficit lens. *The Power of Parents* highlights the important roles parents can assume to disrupt the oppressive practices employed by schools in perpetuating the marginalization of students of color. Those wishing to engage in reform leading to equitable schools for all students can look to parents as allies in realizing these conditions.

Antonia Darder begins the book with a dynamic, brilliant foreword. With a grounding introductory Freirean quote— "it is impossible to democratize schools without opening them to the real participation of parents and the community in determining the school's destiny" —Darder sets the tone of the project and discusses the implications of parent involvement and disengagement as they relate to hegemonic facets of public schooling.

Critical incidents and questions for reflection offered at the end of each chapter are invaluable as they further engage readers with the material presented. Critical reflection examines the practice within moral, political, and ethical contexts of education and pertains to equity, access, and social justice (Calderhead, 1989; Gore, 1987). Providing readers hypothetical situations that can be recognized as either familiar or highly probable in schools creates a practicable work that allows for the type of critical reflection that leads to improved praxis (Howard, 2003). This unique format also facilitates learning and critical reflection, making this book a natural tool for immediate use within any teacher education program. So often researchers write to one another and the message of their work is limited to a small, elite audience of readers who most likely will not find themselves in the field, working daily in schools with parents and students. By including reflection questions and real life situations, Olivos takes the theoretical work presented in the chapter to direct application. As a parent first and educator second, I appreciated his perspective on parents as he deconstructed their roles in schools through various theoretical frameworks, macroeconomic

policies, and social structures. Parents could also look to this book as a road map of sorts, a guideline to be used as they structure their own engagement on behalf of their children. The summary at the end of each chapter tidied the material in a coherent and concise manner.

Though Olivos recognizes the fact that scaffolding, or building precept upon precept to increase levels of understanding, is necessary if readers are to understand his concepts and their applications and liberally uses this technique throughout the entire book, he does not properly apply it with his diagrams. While the figures look creative and thoroughly developed, the power of the message in the diagrams is diminished because they are not purposefully attended to within the text; he could have made these important visuals more accessible by foreshadowing and summarizing them.

This work illuminates the multidimensional, multifaceted, interactional nature of parent-school relationships, particularly those experienced by Latino parents. Though Olivos defines bicultural as "individuals or social groups who live and function in two or more distinct sociocultural environments: their primary culture, and that of the dominant mainstream culture of the society in which they live" (p. 14), he specifically refers to work he conducted as a bilingual education teacher with parents in a predominantly Latino San Diegan community. And while the definition offered is relevant for people of color living in any society with an established dominant culture, within this work, it is assumed that the author uses the term bicultural synonymously with Latino and poor or working class. In an effort to dispel disparaging, deficit views of Latino families held by school officials, Olivos cites several important studies that show the numerous ways in which learning and literacy occur in Latino homes. These views persist despite vast literature which contradicts the depiction of these families as apathetic and uncaring when it comes to education. Olivos posits that the views continue because of this country's deeply embedded racist beliefs about marginalized people of color, as well as hegemonic societal and economic practices. He contends that the relationship between Latino parents and the school system is a micro-reflection of the societal tensions and conflicts found within institutional racism (p. 31). He further contends that this tense hegemonic relationship "works to the advantage of the school personnel as they exercise their power over low-social-class parents, convincing them that their child's failure is not due to the school's or possibly the teacher's inadequacies but due to the parents' failure to support the school's sincere efforts" (p. 31). The power dynamic established by the school disallows agency and stills parent voice at the local level.

In their examination of cultural capital in reference to family-school relationships, Lareau and Horvat (1999) argue that while all parents bring different forms of cultural capital to different settings, not all forms of capital are

assigned the same value. Like Olivos, they found that the rules of engagement used to mediate interactions between parents and school are race-specific, with White, middle-class parents positioned as the standard. Subsequently, the inferior positionality of Latino parents renders their cultural wealth as lacking cachet. Thus, Latino parents are often denied an opportunity for true partnership with shared decision-making power. For many Latino parents, the dismissal of their agency often leads to a sense of inferiority, shame, embarrassment, and helplessness (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990). There are some who are angered into resisting and structuring their own involvement. Such are the parents Olivos documents in this text. Based on the agency these parents displayed and the engagement they used to author their roles in their schools, Olivos is able to provide researchers and educators with four models of parent engagement to be studied and understood in order to realize effective parent-school relationships in schools.

Schools tend to maintain the ideals and beliefs of a capitalist culture, positioning the cultures of poor, minority, immigrant, and linguistically diverse families as subordinate (Delgado-Gaitan, 1996; Villenas & Dehyle, 1999). Often the parameters that are prescribed for parent involvement derive from a Eurocentric ideal that may not appeal to all members of society. In a recent study, Ramirez (2002) interviewed immigrant Latino parents in the United States. These parents, although concerned about their children's education, felt uncomfortable participating in school-sponsored events. They believed that such involvement would undermine respect for their children's teachers. They were being asked to participate in activities that the schools deemed important without considering the values and talents they brought to the table. Olivos found that the group of Latino parents he worked with made a conscious decision to shun school-sanctioned activities they perceived as patronizing and disrespectful. Olivos at first assumed that these parents did not appreciate all the hard work he was putting into creating opportunities for their involvement. What he found was that they wanted to author their own involvement, not participate in the involvement he sanctioned. Instead, these parents organized for empowerment that transformed institutions into community-owned schools with parents at the helm of governance and oversight. Olivos details this journey to empowerment, which was wrought with tension and conflict.

Olivos gives us hope for the future. Parents are in a position to demand culturally responsive curricula, better facilities, and qualified teachers. Many parents of affluent children already recognize the power of their voice and exercise that power for the continual improvement of their schools and neighborhoods. Parents of racialized, marginalized students can realize this same voice, be equipped with the tools for effective engagement, and engage in the great work necessary to ensure an equitable education for all students. The

parents Olivos describes within this book have done just that and are exemplars of engagement whose interactions with school personnel can be reproduced in schools serving all students of color. With parents taking authentic, engaged ownership of their schools and communities, perhaps we may realize a revolutionary change in our educational system.

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Reviewer

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Editor note: Ms. Reynolds amended her reviewer profile on June 5, 2008.