

Capitalizing on Early Childhood Education: Low-Income Immigrant Mothers' Use of Early Childhood Education to Build Human, Social, and Navigational Capital

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Research Findings: Research indicates that early childhood education (ECE) serves various functions for societies and in turn families, including economic, educational, and social functions (Fukkink, 2008; Vandenbroeck, 2006). Using qualitative methods, we explored an aspect of the social function of ECE for low-income immigrant families. Specifically, in-depth interviews with 40 low-income immigrant mothers (19 Africans, 21 Latinas) were conducted to understand how low-income Latina and African immigrant mothers use their children's ECE programs to build human, social, and navigational capital. Latin American and African mothers both developed capital through interactions with their children's ECE programs. However, Latina mothers tended to rely on ECE more for building all 3 types of capital. *Practice or Policy:* The findings from this study highlight the significant role that ECE providers play in the lives of families, and particularly immigrant families, that goes beyond basic economic and educational supports. These findings point to the importance of training ECE educators and staff in fostering connections among and between families in their programs; educating parents, as many parents rely on their ECE programs for parenting advice and support; and working with local community agencies and resources to benefit children and families.

Nearly one quarter of children in the United States are children of immigrants; that is, they have at least one foreign-born parent. Recent immigrants are more diverse in terms of socioeconomic status and country of origin (COO) experiences compared to previous waves of immigrants (Martin & Midgley, 2006; Singer, 2004; Terrazas, 2011). The majority of immigrants in the United States hail from Latin America; however, the number of African immigrants arriving in the United States has grown rapidly in the past three decades, making them among the fastest growing groups of immigrants in the United States (Kent, 2007). Given these demographics, it is important to understand more about these families' experiences. Immigrants from Latin America and Africa are diverse in terms of their reasons for migrating to the United States, their socioeconomic experiences in their COOs, and their native tongues as well as their English language

proficiency. However, compared to their native-born counterparts, on average immigrant¹ families experience higher rates of poverty, lower parental education, and lower wages (Wight, Thampi, & Chau, 2011) and have greater challenges receiving public assistance because of language and documentation issues (Yoshikawa, 2011). Specifically, Latino immigrants and recent African immigrants face some of the greatest challenges related to poverty and (for Latinos) documentation (Hernandez, 2009; Kent, 2007), which places children in these families at risk for lower academic achievement (Kao & Tienda, 1995).

With close to 60% of children of immigrants in early childhood education (ECE) 1 year before kindergarten (Magnuson, Lahaie, & Waldfogel, 2006), studies indicate that ECE serves important functions that may buffer against the risks that low-income immigrant families face. First, ECE provides necessary work supports for low-income immigrant families, the majority of whom (62%) are dual-earner households (Hernandez, 2009). Second, research shows that attending high-quality ECE prior to kindergarten can help ameliorate the risks of lower academic achievement (Gormley, 2008; Magnuson et al., 2006). Third, recent research indicates that the social function of ECE or how early childhood programs and providers support the integration of diverse families into ECE and a new host society in general (Fukkink, 2008; Vandenbroeck, 2006) may be particularly important to low-income immigrant families that are especially vulnerable. The literature on the social function remains limited, particularly in terms of how ECE programs help immigrants integrate into a new society through the development of capital important to raising children in a new country. The present study aims to increase understanding of the social function of ECE by examining how immigrant mothers build different types of capital using their children's ECE programs.

CAPITAL IMPORTANT TO IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

Various forms of capital, including financial, human, social (Coleman, 1988), and navigational (Yosso, 2005) capital, are particularly important to families in terms of child outcomes and families' overall well-being. Despite possessing a number of strengths, immigrant families on average are at greater risk of having lower levels of these types of capital. Researchers focused on parents' experiences (Lee, 2009) tend to couple financial and human capital together, as *human capital* generally refers to personal characteristics, skills, and capabilities that influence financial well-being. On average, aspects of financial and human capital among immigrants, including higher rates of poverty, lower educational attainment, and limited English proficiency, reflect the potential for lower developmental outcomes and well-being among immigrant children and families compared to their native counterparts (Hernandez, 2009; Matthews & Ewen, 2006; Wight et al., 2011). *Social capital* refers to the benefits and resources that individuals, families, and groups receive through social relationships (Coleman, 1988). This type of capital is particularly important for disadvantaged families that have fewer resources (Runyan et al., 1998), as well as children who are considered at risk (Furstenburg & Hughes, 1995; Teachman, Paasch, & Carver, 1996), as social capital can buffer against low human capital among disadvantaged families (Coleman, 1988; Kawachi, 2000). In addition, research indicates immigrant

¹*Immigrants* are defined as individuals who are born outside the host country (Capps & Fortuny, 2006), so for the purposes of this article the term *immigrant families* refers to two-generation households of individuals related by blood, adoption, or marriage in which one person was born outside of the United States.

families' social networks and ethnic niches, a reflection of social capital, can be a center for informal learning and skill development (Hagan, Lowe, & Quingla, 2011). Thus, developing these networks by building social capital development may be particularly important for immigrants.

Finally, *navigational capital*, a less researched and understood form of capital, refers to characteristics and abilities, including resilience as well as cultural strategies and the use of "individual agency within institutional constraints," used to maneuver various systems and institutions that may be "permeated by racism" (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). Previous research in this area has focused on how immigrant parents, shaped by individual, family, and community factors, navigate the educational system and the ways in which this shapes their children's academic experiences (Arrellano & Padilla, 1996). However, there is very limited research on how this necessary type of capital is developed among immigrant families with young children.

ECE AS A PLACE TO BUILD CAPITAL AMONG IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

ECE is uniquely suited to fostering the development of various aspects of capital necessary for immigrant parents of young children. ECE is often the first child and family institution with which immigrant parents have an ongoing, daily interaction, and thus it becomes a trusted entity in families' lives. More than any other child- and family-related institution or organization (e.g., hospitals, social welfare programs, compulsory schooling), ECE is often the first and primary institution that immigrant parents interact with on a daily basis over long periods of time—usually for a year or more. Furthermore, these programs and providers care for children during their youngest and most vulnerable years, which are often the years in which mothers need a lot of emotional and physical support, which creates a special sort of intimacy between families and their ECE providers.

Bromer and Henly (2009) suggested that programs with a dual focus on supporting both children and families can be more beneficial to family and child well-being. Small's (2009) research indicated that ECE programs can shape the social connections and in turn the social capital parents build, which ultimately improves parents' well-being. Finally, Vandembroeck (2006) and Fukkink (2008) shed light on the potential importance of ECE as a space for helping immigrant families build capital and adjust to U.S. society.

The present study aims to build on previous research focused on capital development to understand how this phenomenon operates for low-income immigrant families in ECE by focusing on the following research questions:

1. How do low-income immigrant mothers use their young children's ECE programs to build various types of capital necessary for parenting in a new culture?
2. How does this vary across mothers from different regions of origin, including Africa and Latin America?

METHODS

A qualitative approach that included in-depth interviews was used to understand how 40 first-generation, low-income immigrant mothers used ECE to build various forms of capital

necessary for parenting in U.S. society. Specifically, a modified grounded theory approach was utilized. This methodological approach to qualitative methods is rooted in grounded theory, which considers language as central to life (LaRossa, 2005) and encourages researchers to allow themes and new theories to emerge from the data without the confines of predetermined ideas or theories regarding the population of interest (Daly, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). A *modified* grounded theory approach considers ideas and theories from prior studies to inform and guide the goals and analyses of the study (Charmaz, 2006).

Research Sites and Recruitment of Participants

Mothers were recruited from three ECE programs accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children to participate in this study. These programs were located in the Washington, DC, metro area, which is home to many African and Latin American immigrants, and the first author had preexisting relationships with the programs from previous research projects. The first field site, River Banks,² was a school-based Head Start program located in a suburban community. The children and families in this program reflected the shifting demographic composition of the local neighborhood, which included a recent influx of immigrants from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Ghana, Sudan, and Somalia. The second field site, La Casita del Saber (Little House of Wisdom), was a multisite, bilingual (Spanish and English) program located within a public charter school in an urban neighborhood. The mothers recruited from the 4- and 5-year old classrooms mirrored the local neighborhood demographics, which included Salvadorans, Mexicans, and Guatemalans. Finally, mothers were recruited from Time of Wonder, which was situated at the edge of a large national park within a more affluent neighborhood. Time of Wonder was funded by a combination of Head Start funds, private tuition, and grants from the city, and consequently the families enrolled were more diverse than those in the other two field sites in terms of socioeconomic status and race/ethnicity. The families that participated in this study, the majority of whom were Latino, were all low-income families, as indicated by their qualification for Head Start funding.

Upon receiving approval from the institutional review board, we began to recruit mothers who were low-income, first-generation immigrants with a child between the ages of 3 and 5 at one of the three aforementioned field sites. The first author spent time in each of the programs and classrooms over the course of an academic year (9 months), and during this time she was able to build rapport with parents as she enrolled them in the study. She spoke with potential participants while they picked up and dropped off their children at ECE as well as during home visits, parent meetings, and parent-teacher conferences. These efforts yielded 23 participants being recruited from River Banks, 10 from Time of Wonder, and 7 from La Casita del Saber.

Data Collection

Prior to participating in the in-depth interviews, mothers read and signed the informed consent form and agreed to their interview being audio recorded and transcribed to be used as data for the study. Consent was collected in Spanish from Latina mothers and in English from African

²All names have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals and organizations involved in this study.

mothers. The consent forms were explained verbally and read to mothers in case their literacy skills in English and/or Spanish made reading and interpreting the document a challenge. Data were collected from mothers from two broad regional ethnic groups (Latinas and Africans), so data collection ceased when saturation was reached within these two groups.

One interview was conducted with each mother, and the majority of these were done in mothers' homes and lasted between 1 and 3 hr. Interviews with Latinas were conducted in Spanish with the help of undergraduate research assistants who were bilingual (Spanish and English) and bicultural (Salvadoran and American). Interviews with parents from various African countries were conducted in English because of limited resources and access to translators of Amharic and Arabic. The majority of African mothers spoke English well, as many had learned English in their COO or immediately upon arriving in the United States. Even with this limitation, this study is an important contribution given the limited research focused on low-income African immigrant families. Following the interview, mothers were sent a thank-you note that included a \$20 gift card; these gift cards were not used as incentives for recruitment but were provided after the interviews as gratitude to the mothers for their time.

Structured discovery, or the process of focusing on specific interview topics while allowing for flexibility such that other findings and important areas of study among these families can emerge, was used throughout the data collection and analyses (Burton, Hurt, & Avenilla, as cited in Roy, Tubbs, & Burton, 2004). Consequently, these interviews examined a range of areas, including mothers' demographic backgrounds, immigration histories, experiences with the ECE, parenting experiences, education experiences and beliefs, social support and advice for other immigrants, as well as experiences with the social welfare and health care systems. The questions that elicited the most important data for this article included the following: "Overall, how would you describe your experiences with your child's ECE program?" "Are you friends with or do you spend time with other parents from your child's ECE program?" "How does your child's ECE program support your parenting?" "From whom have you received parenting advice?" and "What kinds of support have you received from your child's ECE program?" The data focused on ECE were used in the analyses for this article.

Data Analyses

Transcribed interviews were loaded into Atlas.ti, a software program designed to assist qualitative researchers with data management. Using a modified grounded theory approach, we conducted analyses in three waves (LaRossa, 2005). In particular, during open coding all of the transcripts were read with a focus on codes developed a priori related to families' ECE experiences, including child care history, selection and navigation of the ECE system, and gains from ECE. Structured discovery allowed for flexibility in these analyses and during this wave of coding other codes, including employment support, education support, connections with other parents and families, information from the ECE program, and connections to other programs and services. During axial coding, we used Atlas.ti to draw data such that each code was read separately across all 40 interviews to understand the dimensions of each theme or category. Finally, during the third wave of coding, "the main story underlying the analyses" (LaRossa, 2005, p. 850) emerged. In particular, the ways in which low-income immigrant mothers used ECE to build human, social, and navigational capital, as well as the connections and overlap among these three types of capital, emerged as an important aspect of ECE for these mothers.

Data Quality

Strategies were used in this study to increase the data quality. Specifically, lengthy field experience and rich, thick descriptions of these experiences; triangulation; peer examination; and reflexivity were used to ensure the truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality of the findings (Guba, 1981; Krefting, 1999).

First, approximately 9 months were spent in the field in interaction with immigrant mothers in ECE programs as well as in these mothers' homes. This extended engagement in the field enabled the first author to become familiar and trusted among mothers as well as to observe their experiences over this period of time. Detailed field notes were kept during observations of interactions between parents and teachers in the ECE programs as well as before and after interviews. Also, mothers' interviews were digitally recorded. The findings, therefore, could be used to understand the experiences of mothers and families in similar contexts (Krefting, 1999).

A second strategy used to increase data quality was triangulation of investigators. The undergraduate research assistants who assisted in translating the interviews with the mothers also helped interpret these interview data from a cultural perspective. Also, data were analyzed with a graduate research assistant such that phenomena were coded with mutually agreed-upon codes. This method of triangulation increased the trustworthiness of this study and in turn helped to tell a more complete story about the experiences of these immigrant parents with young children in ECE.

A third strategy utilized to increase trustworthiness was engaging in peer examination. Specifically, the first author met with colleagues a few times during the course of data collection and analyses to discuss what she was learning during the interviews with the mothers as well as her interpretation of the data gathered. Peers provided feedback regarding the first author's interpretations of the data, particularly during the selective phase of coding.

A fourth and final strategy used to ensure data quality, particularly in terms of neutrality, was reflexivity. Reflexivity involves considering the researcher's background to understand how his or her experiences may influence qualitative data collection, analyses, and, in turn, the study findings (Krefting, 1999). The first author, who collected the data, is a White, upper middle-class woman who was born and raised in the United States, spent time in various countries outside the United States, and worked with immigrants in the United States through research, teaching English classes, and volunteer work. These characteristics and experiences influenced not only the development of research questions but also the collection, analyses, and interpretation of the data. During data collection and initial data analyses, the first author worked with three undergraduate research assistants who were of Latin American descent. In addition, the first author consulted with an African teacher from Senegal whom she knew from previous research. The first author spoke with these individuals regularly regarding assumptions she held based on preconceived ideas and experiences.

Not being a member of the racial and/or cultural groups of the mothers in this study was sometimes a challenge because of both language issues as well as establishing trust. With the help of translators, the first author was able to manage language challenges, and with the help of ECE program teachers and staff, families quickly trusted her. Many times not being of the same background as the mothers was a benefit during data collection, because mothers did not assume that the first author knew about or understood any aspects of their cultural beliefs or experiences. Consequently, when asked questions regarding their experiences mothers saw

this as an opportunity to teach about their culture. Overall, remaining reflexive throughout this research added to the trustworthiness of the findings.

Sample Description

All of the mothers lived below the federal poverty threshold. A total of 19 were from various African countries (Ethiopia, $n = 8$; Eritrea, $n = 1$; Ghana, $n = 5$; Sudan, $n = 2$; Egypt, $n = 1$; Morocco, $n = 1$, Somalia, $n = 1$), and 21 had migrated from Latin American countries (El Salvador, $n = 9$; Mexico, $n = 7$; Guatemala, $n = 2$; Argentina, $n = 1$; the Dominican Republic,

TABLE 1
Participant Characteristics

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>All mothers (N = 40)</i>	<i>African mothers (n = 19)</i>	<i>Latina mothers (n = 21)</i>
Maternal age			
Mean age (in years)	32.25	33.89	30.72
20–29	15	5	10
30–39	18	9	9
40–49	7	5	2
Maternal education			
Less than high school	11	4	7
High school	14	9	5
Some college	13	5	8
College	2	1	1
Income			
Less than 100% of the federal poverty threshold	40	19	21
Language(s) spoken at home			
Native language only	24	4	20
English only	3	3	0
Native language and English	13	12	1
Maternal employment			
Full-time employment	22	7	17
Part-time employment	8	4	4
Not employed	10	8	2
Maternal time in United States			
Average years	9.08	9.57	8.62
Child characteristics			
Focal child is the first child	21	11	10
Average number of children	2.22	2.42	2.05
Focal child mean age (in months)	29.5	33.1	26.6
Couple relationship			
Married/cohabiting	31	16	15
Single	9	3	6
Type of capital developed in ECE			
Human	30	14	16
Social	34	11	23
Navigational	11	1	10

Note. Except where noted, data are frequencies. ECE = early childhood education.

$n = 1$; Ecuador, $n = 1$). On average, they had been in the United States for 9 years, had two children, and were 32 years old at the time of the interview. Mothers' levels of education varied, with the majority having at least a high school degree ($n = 29$). More than half of the sample ($n = 24$) spoke only their native language at home; 13 spoke a mix of English and their native tongue, and 3 families spoke English only at home. Just over three quarters of the sample was married or cohabiting. Moreover, 25 mothers had been documented when they arrived in the United States; however, 12 mothers indicated having been undocumented, and 3 did not share this information. Almost 75% ($n = 29$) indicated having more family members in their COO than in the United States. See Table 1 for descriptive demographic data.

FINDINGS

The immigrant mothers in this study used their children's ECE programs to build different kinds of interrelated capital particularly important to parenting young children in the United States. See Figure 1, which depicts human, social, and navigational capital and how each type of capital overlapped with another kind of capital. Mothers' development of human, social, and navigational capital through interactions with their children's ECE programs were not mutually exclusive processes, but rather these aspects of capital development overlapped in certain areas. For example, maternal employment and education, which are aspects of human capital, were sometimes a result of building social capital or relationships over time with other parents, as well as ECE teachers and staff, many of whom helped link mothers with work and school opportunities. Moreover, aspects of navigational capital that were important to navigating U.S. society—particularly, communication skills, including English language knowledge and the ability to communicate effectively with schools and other organizations—were also an aspect of human capital developed by immigrant mothers in their children's ECE programs. Finally, social and navigational capital overlapped in relation to the information mothers gathered from ECE programs with regard to social welfare programs. Specifically, through the relationships mothers created with ECE

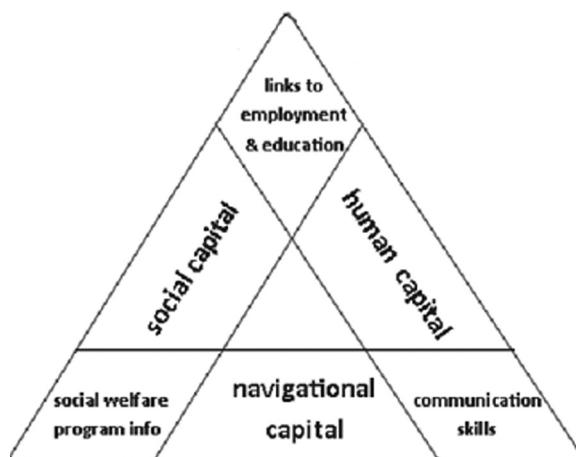


FIGURE 1 Capital developed by immigrant mothers in early childhood education programs.

teachers and staff they gathered information as well as made connections with public assistance programs focused on children and families.

Mothers' Use of ECE to Build Human Capital

More than half of the mothers identified their children's ECE programs as employment supports and, for many, education support for themselves. Mothers commented on how their children's ECE programs enabled them to remain employed and in turn how these programs supported their financial situations by providing a safe place for their children to be while they worked or attended school. Mothers like Viviana, a Salvadoran mother of four, mentioned the importance of the ECE program being free, as this allowed her to save more money by working outside the home. She was excited that the program was "less expensive than to pay a babysitter and they [the ECE program] provide an education." In addition, Desta, an Ethiopian mother of three, claimed that "for my family it help[ed] me a lot because of financial tuition plus I can go to work and can still plan to go to school."

Six mothers in the study mentioned the necessity of being able to work in the United States to support their children in their COOs, an experience and concern that is unique to immigrant families. Receiving free and subsidized ECE for their children in the United States enabled mothers to save enough of their employment earnings to provide financial support their children across borders. Camila, a Mexican mother of two, remarked that ECE provided her with the time and opportunity to work, enabling her to save money to send to her older daughter in Mexico so that her older daughter could live a similar lifestyle as her younger daughter in the United States.

Mothers discussed ECE as a means of continuing their own education by attending computer, business, English language, and general equivalency diploma classes while their children were in ECE. Nearly all of the Latina mothers at some point during their children's earliest years attended English classes and often did so while their children were in ECE. Daniela, a Salvadoran mother of two, decided to learn English after having her second daughter because she felt she needed to further her own education and not depend on others. She was disappointed that she could not take English classes because another ECE center did not have room for her two children. However, Daniela was thankful for the ability to continue studying after La Casita del Saber accepted both of her daughters:

There wasn't any room for the two of them in order for me to take English classes. Therefore, when they called me from La Casita del Saber telling me I can bring [my older daughter], that is when I started the English classes.

However, African mothers, whose English skills tended to be more advanced, on average, usually used the support of ECE to attend other kinds of classes, including computer, business, and medical courses. See Table 2, which illustrates the various types of capital that Latinas and Africans built in their children's ECE programs.

Mothers created *new* work and school connections through their children's ECE, which illustrates how mothers' human capital development was shaped by aspects of their social capital development. In particular, mothers ($n=8$) used social connections or social capital they developed with other parents and teachers at the ECE to bolster their education and employment. Through some of their connections with other mothers as well as with ECE teachers and staff they

TABLE 2
Immigrant Families' Use of Capital

<i>Type of capital</i>	<i>Aspect of capital</i>	<i>Latina and African mothers</i>	<i>Latina mothers</i>	<i>African mothers</i>
Human capital	Employment Education	Support current employment	Support attending English classes	Support for continuing postsecondary education
Human capital + social capital = links to employment and education	Material supports		Food and clothing	
Social capital	Reciprocal relationships between mothers	Logistical and employment support	New employment and education opportunities Child care support, socializing, information regarding adult education	Information regarding ECE
Social capital + navigational capital = social welfare information	Information support from ECE teachers and staff	Nutrition and developmentally appropriate practices Navigating public school system	Behavior management	
Navigational capital	Compulsory education system Health care system Social welfare system	Kindergarten transition Therapies/therapists for children Liaisons with social welfare programs	Social welfare programs Bilingual schools Dental care	
Navigational capital + human capital = communication skills	Communication	Communicating with educators and social welfare officials	English language skills	

Note. ECE = early childhood education.

learned about various adult education (parenting, general equivalency diploma, English) and community college classes being offered. Others were able to attend parenting education while they relied on another mother from ECE to care for their children during these classes. Finally, in terms of employment, a couple of mothers started to sell Avon products together as a result of their connection via their children's ECE program.

Using ECE to Develop Social Capital

Mothers considered the relationships with ECE teachers and staff as well as with other parents that they formed through interactions at their children's ECE programs to be an important benefit of these programs. Consequently, a number of mothers ($n = 18$) created and engaged in new social relationships, whereas some mothers ($n = 14$) strengthened already existing relationships with other parents through their children's ECE programs. Relationships among parents were characterized by trust and reciprocity, providing the mothers in this study with logistical, emotional, and information supports necessary for parenting in the United States. Relationships with teachers focused on communication regarding important parenting information and relying on programs for material supports.

"I can get involved with other parents": Building reciprocal relationships. One of the strongest relationships among mothers in this study was between four Latina mothers, Teresa, Alejandra, Maria, and Marisol, at the River Banks program. These mothers met because their children were in the same ECE classroom. All but Teresa, a mother of two from Argentina who spoke some English, had difficulty communicating with the teachers because the teachers did not speak Spanish. Teresa utilized her limited English skills to help the other three mothers communicate with the teachers. It was not long after this that these four mothers began to meet outside of River Banks, scheduling play dates at local parks and at one another's homes. They enrolled in English classes together and consistently informed one another of any programs and supports they thought would benefit the others. They even helped one another with employment—two of the mothers sold Avon products together and two worked at the same McDonald's. These relationships provided the mothers with multiple kinds of support as well as links to other resources necessary for parenting preschool-age children.

Social relationships were far more common among Latina mothers than African mothers. There were 10 Latinas who created new friendships and 4 mothers who maintained existing friendships via their children's ECE programs, whereas 7 African mothers developed new relationships with other mothers and 1 mother maintained an already existing friendship. Friendships among mothers in this study usually developed when parents were picking up or dropping off their children at the ECE; when parents needed assistance from one another; during field trips; or at other common activities outside of ECE, such as swimming and dancing lessons.

In some cases connections between mothers were initiated by teachers, particularly when mothers needed a certain type of support, such as transportation, that another parent might be able to provide. When Maria, a Salvadoran mother of one, did not have transportation to River Banks, one of the teachers introduced her to another mother, Vanessa, who was willing to drive Maria and her son Emanuel to and from the center each day. If Vanessa's daughter was sick or if Vanessa had to work and could not drive Maria and Emanuel, they took the city bus—a 30-min journey each way. Being an African American who had been raised in the United States,

Vanessa gave Maria a lot of information regarding the educational system and the transition to kindergarten in the United States.

The development of the relationship between Maria and Vanessa, which crossed linguistic, racial, and COO lines, was not common, however. In general, mothers tended to forge relationships with other mothers who were of similar racial and linguistic backgrounds. Yet mothers' relationships did cross religious lines, with outwardly Muslim mothers befriending very openly Christian women. Also, being from the same COO did not seem to matter to these mothers, as many women were friends with mothers from other COOs. The common thread was usually language.

Mothers utilized these friendships with other parents for a variety of parenting supports, including logistical, emotional, and informational support. In terms of logistical support, transportation was often shared among mothers. This was particularly common among mothers with children in the River Banks program, which was located in a suburban area. In addition to transportation, parents relied on one another for child care both at one another's homes as well as at activities their children had in common. For example, when Perla, a Mexican mother of two, discovered that her parenting classes conflicted with her daughter Rosa's dance class on Tuesdays, another mother, Daniela, was able to watch Rosa while she was in her lesson. Consequently, Daniela knew that she could later rely on Perla for the same type of care at either swimming or dance lessons in the future:

... Sometimes parents work but maybe help with a ride, maybe watch my child for example. Now I am taking parenting classes here [at La Casita del Saber] Tuesdays and Thursdays, and one mom helped me last Tuesday and watched Rosa while she was at ballet. It was Daniela.

Mothers also relied on one another for emotional support. Many parents who met at their children's ECE programs would get together socially and spend time at one another's homes or at the park on the weekends, during the summer, or on holidays when the ECE was closed. Isabela, a Mexican mother of three, described her experiences with a couple of mothers from Time of Wonder:

Some of them are parents of my daughter's classmates—two actually. I talk all the time with one of them and on some weekends we go to the park with the girls. The other one I talk to sometimes like when they are on break we go to their house or the park . . . I have known them since the girls started school . . .

Meeting socially outside of the ECE program as well as entrusting other mothers with the care of their children was more common among Latinas than Africans.

In addition, mothers called one another on the phone for emotional support, particularly regarding things such as employment. This was most common among African mothers. Makeda, an Ethiopian mother of one, described speaking with Sisi, a Ghanaian mother of two, about her employment experiences because they both worked as home health aides. Being in the same profession, Sisi could identify with Makeda's experiences and offer advice.

In terms of informational support, mothers gathered information from one another either in person or on the telephone. Sometimes the information shared pertained to the ECE program, whereas other times it provided parents with knowledge of community activities and programs

and someone with whom to attend these activities. Conversations regarding the ECE program itself provided mothers with information on upcoming activities or things that were happening in the classroom. Maria expressed her affinity for ECE not only because her son was learning but also because of the friendships she was able to develop:

... That [my son] can learn new things and that I can get involved with other parents, because at least with them, with Alejandra and Teresa, we have become really good friends and if there is anything going on, any information we are there telling each other, "Hey let's go to this," or "Did you hear about that?" So we get involved together with the children as well.

Yet there were some mothers who strengthened already existing social relationships during the course of their interactions with their children's ECE programs. They relied on these existing relationships for insider information regarding the logistics of the ECE programs, particularly if these mothers had been utilizing the program longer. This information included aspects of the programs that some parents initially were not as comfortable with or did not understand very well. Sharon, a Ghanaian mother of three, explained how a friend she had known prior to enrolling in River Banks and whose children were already enrolled in the program would answer any of her questions:

Therefore if there is something I don't understand or something I know she's been through already, and I am about to go through it, I just ask her... yeah, these home visits that the Head Start was conducting, and I wasn't sure what it was that was happening, so I talked to her, and she said, "Oh, it's nothing."

Rekindling and nurturing already existing relationships occurred among both Latina and African mothers but was most common among Latinas.

Finally, some mothers did not engage in social relationships in their children's ECE programs beyond saying hello to other parents when they brought their children to and from the program. Between their responsibilities as mothers, full-time employment, and, for some, going to school, they simply did not have time to socialize with other parents. There did not appear to be any other factors inhibiting these mothers from developing relationships other than time (i.e., their amount and type of social relationships outside of ECE appeared to be similar to those of mothers who did use ECE to build social relationships).

Using ECE for parenting education information. Mothers utilized the teachers and staff at their children's ECE programs for parenting education information support. This support focused on children's behaviors and parents' interactions with children at home. African and Latina mothers both used parenting classes provided by their ECE programs and actively sought individualized parenting information from teachers and staff. As Guadalupe, a Salvadoran mother of one, explained, the information that parents received was very important and helpful to mothers: "... more than anything you learn from [the ECE program] a lot because there are times when you are a mother for the first time and you don't know what you are supposed to do with them."

ECE programs imparted information by communicating with parents during pick-up and drop-off; through formal meetings, including conferences, home visits, and parenting workshops; and by providing parents with books, brochures, and notices on various topics. ECE

programs provided parents with information on developmentally appropriate practices, nutrition, and behavior management. Mothers mentioned learning a lot from their children's ECE programs about interacting with their children, particularly in terms of understanding the importance of reading to their children, as well as fostering their children's social and emotional development and their abilities to interact with other children at the ECE.

Desta mentioned learning from her children's ECE program, through parent-teacher conferences and parenting workshops, the importance of reading to children. Desta took this new information so seriously that even on nights when she was working, and her mother, who did not speak or read English and did not read Amharic, was taking care of the children, she made sure to have books rented from the library that included audio tapes:

... I thought when they stay in school the teacher read the story to them. But when they tell us before bedtime to read the story to them and to spend time with them and the storybook, then I thought "Ooo," and I went to library every 3 weeks. I rented the book and read it to them. Even when I'm not home, if my mom is home she doesn't speak English well but I have a tape recorder of the storybook. Yeah the library have that one, so I told my mom just put this one and they sit down and listen to the story. And when I come back the next day I ask them about the story.

For some mothers information on social and emotional development from their children's ECE programs was most helpful. For example, Makeda was worried that her daughter was too quiet and not talking enough in school, even though outside of school she talked a lot. The family service workers at River Banks helped Makeda work on this with her daughter by encouraging Makeda to stay in her daughter's classroom for about 20 to 30 min each morning until her daughter became comfortable. Over time Makeda's daughter began to speak more while at River Banks, and Makeda learned more about developmentally appropriate practices by being present in her daughter's classroom every morning.

Many mothers mentioned learning a lot from their ECE programs about nutrition and the importance of feeding nutritional food to their children. By observing what the ECE programs were feeding the children throughout the day, mothers learned about foods that they did not realize their children liked. In addition, ECE programs organized workshops that focused on cooking nutritious food with children.

ECE programs also provided parents with support and information to manage behavioral challenges that their children faced. Latinas tended to seek out this support more than Africans. Teachers were able to provide mothers with a sounding board and advice regarding how to manage their children's behaviors. When Selena, a Salvadoran mother of three, noticed her daughter Savanna becoming jealous after the birth of her younger brother, Savanna's teachers at La Casita del Saber taught Selena ways of quelling this jealousy. They suggested that Selena allow Savanna to help with aspects of her brother's daily care and routine if she wanted to do so: "So that is what she said—I have to include her more. When I am changing him if she wants to help, then I let her."

Sometimes if teachers knew certain behaviors were happening at home that the mothers were not happy about they would talk with the children about their behaviors—whether the parent asked the teacher to or not. Mothers generally appreciated this support. One morning Perla explained to Miss Binata that Mark, her younger son, had scratched her daughter, Rosa, near her eye. Rather than just listening to Perla and moving on with her day, Miss Binata spent a

few moments talking with Mark and Rosa about working harder to get along with each other, which Perla appreciated.

For a few mothers their children's behaviors were more challenging, so they relied not only on teachers but also on counselors and psychologists available at their children's ECE programs. Mercedes's daughter had severe behavior issues when she first began at Time of Wonder. The counselor at Time of Wonder spent 6 months working with Mercedes, a Salvadoran mother of three, to help her learn how to manage her daughter's outbursts. Mercedes indicated that talking with this counselor helped a lot because she did "not want to repeat [with her daughters] the ways [she] was treated by [her] mother."

Using ECE for material supports. A few mothers relied on ECE programs for material supports, including food and clothing to bolster their family's financial situations. In times of need, Esmeralda, a Mexican mother of one, rather than calling on her local public assistance office for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, turned to her daughters' ECE program for support:

They [Time of Wonder] give you a lot of help . . . they have helped me sometimes with food when I don't have any. They give you canned food and sometimes bread, and my daughter they have helped with clothes and shoes.

Mothers utilized ECE teachers and staff for informational support that went beyond their communications about children's progress. In particular, mothers made connections with their ECE providers that provided them with knowledge of how to navigate various institutions and systems in the United States that support children and families. This support was more than information, as ECE programs gave mothers actual physical and logistical support to build the navigational capital needed to parent young children in U.S. society, reflecting an overlap between social and navigational capital.

Using ECE to Develop Navigational Capital

The mothers in this study used their children's ECE programs as gateways or links to other child and family systems and services, including education, health care, and social welfare. ECE teachers and staff not only taught mothers about important systems, they also guided them in how to interact and communicate with various child and family professionals. These navigational abilities were transferable skills important for these mothers as their children transitioned into compulsory schooling and as they went on to interact with other child and family professionals. Thus, navigational capital consisted of not only making connections with programs important to raising young children in the United States but also building important knowledge and skills for navigating U.S. systems and institutions.

All mothers used ECE to navigate the kindergarten transition and various social welfare programs as well as to learn about necessary therapies for their children. Mothers gathered information and support from their children's ECE on the logistics of transitioning to kindergarten from their children's ECE programs. For many this was their only formal source of detailed information regarding this transition. For mothers at the River Banks program this information was specifically related to kindergarten registration, including scheduling English language

exams for their children. Time of Wonder and La Casita del Saber provided parents with registration information for the neighborhood public schools and familiarized parents with the process for enrolling in charter schools.

La Casita del Saber held a series of meetings for parents to learn about how to select a charter school, the reasons to consider using a charter school, as well as how to enter their children in lotteries at various schools, with a particular emphasis on bilingual schools. They also provided parents with a compendium of all of the charter schools in the metropolitan area, listing information about their locations, test scores, demographics, and other important data, which parents studied emphatically to decide which lotteries to enter their children into. In addition, administrators arranged for parents and children to visit a few neighborhood and charter elementary schools to help families prepare for the kindergarten transition. Daniela described how the program director at La Casita del Saber helped her with the process of selecting a school for her older daughter:

I did not know what to do to find a good school. The director that was working at La Casita del Saber at the time told me, "Look, we have options for Deirdre. What do you want for her? Do you want her to attend a bilingual school or an only English school? Do you want it close to your house? What do you want?" I told her I wanted the best . . .

The mothers in this study relied on their children's ECE programs to act as social workers, advocates, and resource brokers for them. They turned to ECE for assistance in navigating aspects of the social welfare system in the United States, including assistance with completing their applications for receiving support, accompanying mothers on agency visits, and speaking for the mother on the telephone with social workers. At River Banks the relationship with certain social welfare programs was made very apparent, as mothers could print their WIC vouchers at River Banks rather than having to make a separate trip to the local WIC office. Family service workers at all three programs supported parents in applying for programs like WIC, Section 8, as well as smaller programs such as energy assistance.

Aster, an Ethiopian mother of three who had had a few challenging interactions with the local social welfare office, turned to the family service worker at River Banks for help when her gas was turned off because she did not pay her bill. Aster was unable to pay her gas bill because she had recently cut her hours to be home with her older son, who could not be in after-school care because of his behavior issues:

[So what do you do if there is a month that you cannot pay the electric or gas?] I keep it for next month. [Do they charge you extra?] Yeah, like last time we didn't have gas, they cut it off—for like 20 days I didn't have gas. I couldn't cook, and it was cold. Even the heat wasn't working until I got money, and you know I paid half, and Miss Melissa [family services worker], she helped me with assistance like they [government energy assistance program] pay \$100 for me, and I pay like \$200 . . . and they put the gas back.

Mothers used their children's ECE programs to navigate aspects of health care in the United States, particularly in relation to securing experts and therapists that their children needed, including nutritionists as well as speech and physical therapists. Sometimes these efforts were

initiated by the child's program. Valeria, a Mexican mother of two, described how Time of Wonder assisted her in finding therapy for a problem that her daughter had with her feet:

They also worry about their health, like if they are missing therapy or they are up to date with their medical examinations. If they are missing therapy they look for a therapist. . . . They asked me if I wanted a therapist to come to my house to do an evaluation for my daughter because there was something wrong with her feet. It was because of them [Time of Wonder] the therapist was sent.

Sometimes mothers initiated searches for specialists for their children by asking their children's ECE programs first. When Sisi was having challenges with her daughter's eating habits she talked with her daughter's teachers and they found Sisi a nutritionist who came to her house and helped them work through these eating issues.

Moreover, not only did ECE programs connect mothers with other programs for support, they also provided important services within the ECE programs. At the River Banks program a local dentist would visit a couple times a year and clean children's teeth if their parents could not afford outside dental care. Parents mentioned gathering information on free dental and medical services that they could use for their children, as Alejandra, a Salvadoran mother of two, explained:

They give us information related to if you don't have documentation they send bulletins saying if you don't have medicine or money there are consultations there for free and everything. They give lots of information because sometimes they have meetings at these places and you have to go there [to receive free services].

ECE programs imparted information on health and health care services to mothers. Mothers discussed receiving reminders from their children's ECE programs about getting their children immunized and scheduling annual doctor visits. They remarked that getting these reminders was very helpful.

Finally, navigational capital development and human capital development overlapped in relation to mothers' use of language (English and their native tongue) and communications with their children's ECE programs. Language and communication are seemingly aspects of both human capital (a necessary skill for success in life) and navigational capital (important for interacting with and learning about various U.S. systems and services for children and families). Mothers learned about free English classes they could attend in their community through their children's ECE programs. These interactions enabled mothers to develop comfort in communicating with their children's teachers—a necessary skill for navigating the compulsory education system.

DISCUSSION

Immigrant mothers utilized their children's ECE programs to develop particular connections, resources, skills, and knowledge related to economic security, social relationships, and navigating U.S. systems and institutions. Compared to their African counterparts, Latina mothers in this study more often used their children's ECE programs to create new human capital as well as social and navigational capital. This may have been a result of Latina mothers being in closer

geographic proximity to one another, as the majority of Latinas in the study lived in the city within walking distance or a short bus ride of one another, whereas the majority of African mothers were in the suburbs and slightly more spread out from one another.

This study adds to the limited literature on navigational capital, as it is one of the first studies, if not the first study, to focus on the development of this type of capital among immigrant families with young children using ECE. These findings highlight how this capital can be built by institutions like ECE and not solely individuals' cultural communities, as discussed in previous research (Yosso, 2005). Moreover, Wight et al. (2011) noted that immigrants are less likely to utilize government programs like WIC despite being eligible. The findings from the present study indicate that ECE programs may help families connect with programs that will support their children's development. ECE programs brokered important resources for mothers by not only providing mothers with information but also connecting them with important programs through phone calls, in-person visits, and personal assistance completing applications. ECE programs also provided opportunities for mothers to gain greater linguistic skills, including skills in communicating with professionals and improved English proficiency. By brokering resources and working to advocate for and empower mothers, ECE programs helped prepare these mothers for navigating other systems and institutions, including the compulsory education and social welfare systems, well beyond their children's years in ECE.

The social capital connections mothers made reflected aspects of bonding social capital (Coleman, 1988) and previous research indicating immigrants' likelihood of creating relationships with others who are of the same cultural and linguistic background (Kao, 2004). Relationships only crossed racial or linguistic lines when teachers fostered these connections. This was true even among mothers who spoke English comfortably. Moreover, Latina and African mothers engaged in relationships via their children's ECE programs in different ways. Latina mothers tended to spend more time with one another outside of the ECE program, meeting at the park, visiting one another's homes, or coordinating their children's extracurricular activities together. African mothers spent time speaking with one another on the phone. For both Latinas and Africans, cultural models or shared understandings of how to raise children (Gallimore & Goldenberg, 2001) related to the importance of community and family being involved in this process (Harwood, Leyendecker, Carlson, Asencio, & Miller, 2002; Obeng, 2007) likely contributed to these mothers reaching out to one another socially. However, the difference in how mothers did this—meeting in person or talking on the phone—was likely due to structural or ecological reasons (Weisner, 2002) related to proximity, with African families in this study being more spread out in a suburban community than their Latina counterparts. Latina and African mothers alike solicited various kinds of information from their ECE programs related to kindergarten transition, parenting, and social welfare programs. Finally, out of convenience and trust, mothers relied on ECE rather than local shelters or food banks when they could not afford food or clothing for their children.

Mothers not only utilized their children's ECE programs to provide care while they were working or going to school, but they also used them to develop new human capital or new employment and education connections. This was especially true among Latinas, who were employed more and attended classes, particularly English classes, more frequently than African mothers. This study highlights the importance of ECE as a place for immigrant mothers' capital development. Moreover, it illustrates the ways in which ECE may help immigrant families integrate into U.S. society. This study provides new insights into the social function of ECE, with greater emphasis

on this function as it relates to immigrant families and their development of capital necessary for raising children in the United States. By not only increasing immigrant families' economic and educational opportunities, but also helping parents build capital needed to navigate U.S. society as parents, ECE may be an especially important space for immigrant children and families. Capital development, specifically through ECE, should be regarded as an avenue for immigrant mothers to integrate into American society.

Implications for ECE Programs and Providers

ECE providers are uniquely situated to help immigrant parents build types of capital important to their children's development and families' well-being. First, this study highlights the importance of ensuring that high-quality ECE is available and accessible for all low-income immigrant families, particularly during children's preschool years. Research indicates that more than 50% of immigrant children are in ECE 1 year prior to kindergarten, but this is still fewer than their native-born counterparts (Magnuson et al., 2006).

Second, we urge ECE providers to work with immigrant families to help them navigate all systems that are important to young children and families. Many ECE programs already focus on enhancing parents' and children's human capital; however, this study highlights other ways that ECE can support parents' human and social capital development by connecting mothers from varied racial/ethnic backgrounds with one another, linking parents with English classes, and providing clothes and food for families when they are unable to purchase these on their own. Moreover, there are ways in which ECE programs can broker important resources for families and help immigrant parents navigate U.S. systems and institutions.

Third, given the findings from this research coupled with what is known about the importance of capital development, particularly for child outcomes, it may be important for more ECE programs to hire staff that can help families develop the capital necessary for parenting in the United States. Furthermore, this study highlights the importance of ensuring that early childhood educators and staff receive specific preservice and in-service training related to working with diverse families. In addition to diversity training for ECE professionals that usually includes increasing cultural competency and reducing one's assumptions and biases about families from diverse backgrounds (Lynch & Hanson, 2011), training should also help providers understand the role they can play in supporting immigrant parents' development of human, social, and navigational capital as reflected in this study. In particular, teachers and staff should receive more training in parenting education and in how to access, utilize, and work with community supports important to the families with whom they work.

Fourth, this work implies that it is imperative for ECE programs to assess the needs and characteristics of their families so that they can tailor resources, information, and connections appropriately. These supports should consider the language in which families would like to receive materials about the ECE program as well as other child- and family-related programs. All materials, including those from the ECE as well as other child and family community supports, should be translated to help further develop parents' navigational capital. Finally, some mothers in this study were unable to develop relationships with other parents because they did not have time to connect during pick-up and drop-off. Thus, ECE programs might try to intentionally foster these connections among parents in other ways or during other ECE-related events.

Future Research

First, future research in this area should focus on how the process of building capital may develop in other ECE settings, including home-based as well as private care settings without designated family service workers. Given the significant proportion of immigrant children who are in non-center-based care 1 year before preschool, it seems important to consider how these processes unfold in different ECE settings. In addition, Bromer and Henly (2009) found that the level and type of support, as well as how providers thought about their roles with families, varied based on whether they were family, friend, or neighbor providers; home-based providers; or center-based providers. Thus, it seems as though the type of care would be of consequence in terms of how immigrant mothers use ECE to develop capital. In addition, it may be interesting to contrast ECE centers with varying levels of parental engagement to understand how this shapes immigrant families' capital building.

Second, in addition to considering other ECE contexts, future research should focus on how families from diverse demographic backgrounds use ECE to build social capital. In particular, the mothers in this study were from various Latin American and African countries and had been in the United States nearly a decade. Future work should consider the experiences of both Latinas and Africans in even greater depth by studying families from individual countries rather than regions of the world as well as considering the experiences of recently arrived immigrants. More broadly, it would be important to consider the capital development experiences of other immigrant groups, including Asians and Middle Easterners. In addition, the mothers in this study were from lower socioeconomic backgrounds; therefore, it makes sense to explore how these processes might unfold among families with greater socioeconomic means. Finally, this study focused solely on mothers, but it is important to explore how fathers, as well as other relatives who may be primary caregivers of children, participate in this process.

Third, this phenomenon of using ECE to build different types of capital should be explored further using quantitative methods. The findings from this qualitative, in-depth interview study are not generalizable. Consequently, future quantitative work could focus first on measuring various aspects of capital that are built in ECE settings and then on using this measure to understand how widespread the use of ECE to build capital is, particularly among immigrant families. Finally, this study does not show how building these various types of capital in ECE programs shapes parent and child outcomes. Thus, future quantitative studies may look at the association of building human, social, and/or navigational capital in ECE settings among immigrant families and the resulting child and parent outcomes.

CONCLUSION

ECE programs and providers serve essential functions for families and society. Helping low-income immigrant mothers build the capital needed for raising their young children in the United States reflects just one important aspect of the social function of ECE. ECE is a significant component of children's and families' daily lives, and thus ECE providers are uniquely positioned to work with families in a multitude of ways that extend beyond providing support for employment and interacting with children in developmentally appropriate ways. Consequently, it is crucial to build ECE providers' knowledge, skills, and abilities related to

working with families—particularly low-income, diverse families—so that they can help families build human, social, and navigational capital.

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