



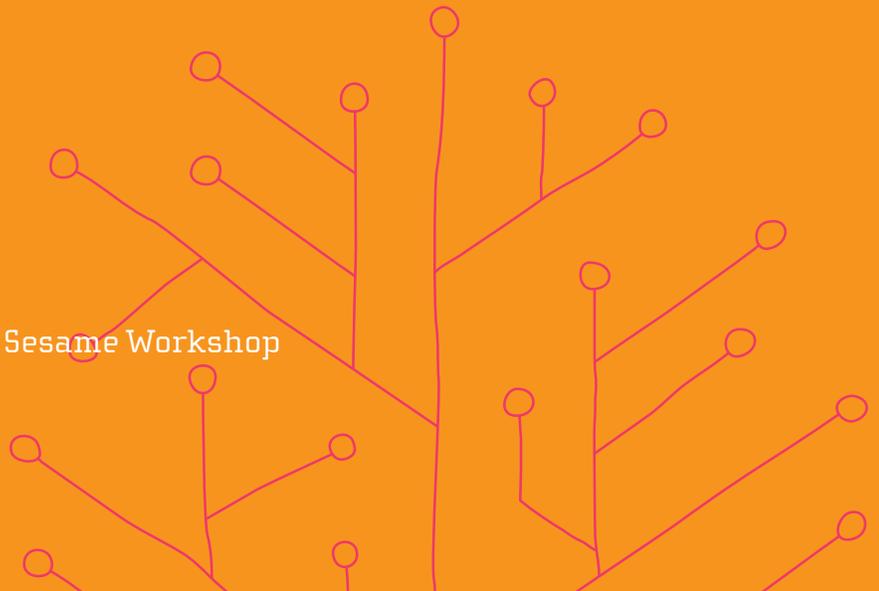
**The  
Families  
and Media  
Project**

# Apren­diendo en casa:

media as a resource for learning  
among hispanic-latino families

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## executive summary

This report examines media use in Hispanic-Latino families with young children in the United States. Drawing from data from a national survey of parents of 2- to 10-year-olds, it extends the findings from an earlier report that sheds light on educational media use among American families (Rideout, 2014). Those findings pointed to the need to more deeply understand how Hispanic-Latino families with young children use media for learning. Hispanic-Latino families hail from a spectrum of language, access, country of origin, generational status, education, and other socio-demographic markers. These analyses aim to add to a fuller understanding of the media experiences and family contexts of children growing up in these families.

In this study, we look at media access among Hispanic-Latino families, children's use of content that parents considered educational, parents' perceptions of their child's learning from educational media, parents' own use of technology for their learning, and parent-child joint engagement in media use. We also describe ways in which media can encourage conversations and extend playful activities. Given the importance of language as a proxy for a range of other socio-economic markers (including income, media access, and generational status), this study also closely examines media use by families that speak only English, only Spanish, and those that speak both languages. Case studies from ethnographic research further illustrate these issues. The report concludes with a set of implications for practitioners, designers, and researchers.

### **Key Findings**

- Access differed by language, with Spanish-only families experiencing least access to digital technologies. Hispanic-Latino families most commonly accessed educational content through television rather than via the computer, video games, or mobile devices. This points to the need to continue to create strong educational television content for this audience, while developing more mobile content (in Spanish and English) that serves their needs.
- Most parents of children who were regular users of educational media reported that their child learned academic skills from media, particularly in reading or vocabulary. Most bilingual and Spanish-only families also reported that their child learned English from educational media, suggesting that many families can benefit from content that supports English language learning.
- In addition to their child's learning, media access also has implications for parents' own learning. The regularity with which parents use the Internet to find information was closely tied to access to a high-speed Internet connection at home. Parents who often used digital technology for learning had children who used educational media more often, highlighting an important association between parents' and children's media use. This suggests that designing intergenerational learning opportunities can be especially powerful.
- Educational media often catalyzed other interest-driven learning opportunities for children, such as initiating dialogue, imaginative play, and asking questions. For parents from Spanish-only homes, educational media also enabled their child to teach them something new. The more often children used educational media, the more often these activities occurred. Parent-child joint engagement on computers, video games, and mobile devices happened less frequently than with television. Spanish-only families generally spend more time in joint media engagement than English-only families. There is value for both parents and children in media content that serves as a springboard for conversation and activities, as well as content that promotes joint media engagement. Such content is sorely needed across all platforms.
- Hispanic-Latino parents—especially Spanish-only speakers—want more information about media for their young child. Community resources have a special role to play in providing technology access and information. Information presented in non-digital formats (such as video or print) remains an important avenue to reach lower-resourced and Spanish-only families. A dearth of Spanish-language resources also hampers parents' ability to become more informed about how to find, curate, and mediate media for their children. More parent resources in Spanish and greater awareness of where those resources might be available will help support parents in their efforts to use media to foster their child's learning.

As part of a broader program of research on families and media, in mid-2013, the Joan Ganz Cooney Center and a team of scholars from Stanford University, Northwestern University, and Arizona State University fielded the first study to quantify how much of children's media time parents report to be educational. That study was published in early 2014 (Rideout, 2014). The survey comprised a nationally representative sample of parents of children ages 2 to 10, as well as an oversample of Hispanic-Latino and Black parents. This study confirmed that television still dominates children's media use and showed that most parents believe that their child has learned important academic content from educational media. More than six in ten parents whose children were weekly educational media users reported that media often or sometimes sparked conversations, questions, requests to start projects, or inspired their children to incorporate content from media into their imaginative play. The study also showed that parents believe that much of children's screen time is in fact educational (56 minutes out of 2 hours and 7 minutes of total daily screen time). In addition to these positive findings, there was evidence for disparities in parents' perceptions that digital media contributed to learning. Across subject areas and platforms, Hispanic-Latino parents were less likely than White or Black parents to report that they perceived their children to have learned math, science, or cognitive skills from traditional or digital media experiences. Other patterns in the report also highlighted the need to more deeply understand media use for young children in Hispanic-Latino families (Rideout, 2014).

Several recent reports shed light on the intersection between media, technology, parenting, and family and cultural contexts within the Hispanic population (Fuller, Lizárraga & Gray, 2015; Katz, 2010, 2014; Moran, 2010; Vaala, 2013). To better understand these patterns, this report takes a closer look at the Hispanic subsample of 682 parents of 2-10 year-olds from the Cooney Center's educational media use survey. Ethnographic studies are beginning to show the creative and resourceful practices that Hispanic families develop and share as they use digital tools to learn information, translate English materials,

stay connected with family and friends, help their children with school work, and support family-based interests (Levinson, 2014; Schwartz & Gutierrez, in press). In this report we provide quantitative data from the national survey and also offer several case portraits from our ethnographic research to help illustrate the role that digital media plays in family learning. We were interested in understanding how families' access to devices and parents' own use of digital resources for learning related to children's educational media use and parents' perception of their children's learning. Particularly important for us to understand from a design perspective was the role that media might play as a catalyst for children's questions, their imaginative play, and their interests in related projects and activities. These are markers of engagement with media content and can be drivers of learning and language development as children engage their parents, their siblings and other relatives in content they find of interest (Crowley & Jacobs, 2002). Understanding these patterns can help designers and producers create media experiences that offer opportunities to draw upon children's social context (parents, siblings, and others) as a resource for deeper engagement.

Recent data from the Pew Hispanic Center (Lopez, Gonzalez-Barrera, & Patten, 2013) suggest that gaps in technology access between Hispanic-Latino Americans and other ethnicities are narrowing. In many respects, Hispanic-Latinos are as connected as other groups: They are just as likely to own a smartphone, use social networking sites, and go online via a mobile device as White and Black Americans. Hispanic-Latinos, however, are less likely to own a computer or access the Internet than Whites. The differences in technology adoption *within* the Hispanic population are perhaps more marked. Higher educational attainment, higher family income, being native-born, and being English-dominant or bilingual were consistently related to higher rates of technology adoption (going online in general, going online using a mobile device, owning a cellphone, owning a smartphone, and owning a computer). A national survey of parents of children ages 8 and under (Wartella et al., 2014) revealed similar patterns. Hispanic families had

high access to mobile devices: 68% owned at least one mobile device. The gaps in mobile device and online access between Hispanic and non-Hispanic families is still large, however. They found significant disparities in ownership of digital tools such as smartphones and tablets within the Hispanic population based on language, income, and education (Wartella et al., 2014).

Understanding diversity among Hispanic families is critical if we want to better support learning through digital or traditional media. Hispanic families in the United States vary widely in their countries of origin, how long they have been in the U.S., their levels of formal education, the language spoken at home, and income. Researchers looking at this variation in relation to school performance have found that children living in homes where mostly Spanish is spoken score lower on standardized assessments of reading and math, tests that are given in English (Reardon & Galindo, 2007). Prior research suggests that parents' level of schooling, primary language, income, and discrimination all influence children's early learning, and as we think about how to better design media for family engagement, we need to understand and detail this diversity (Garcia, Jenson, & Scriber, 2009). As we show in this report, the majority of families see their children's engagement and interest in media reflected in question asking, requests to do projects, conversations, and in their imaginative play. Many report that children are learning English and early academic skills from their educational media use. Additionally, some parents report that their child has taught them something based on what they have learned from media. These findings are critically important for us to better understand and highlight the potential of well-designed media to serve as a catalyst for deeper learning.

## Media as a catalyst for learning

The extensive body of research on young children's learning from television supports the idea that media are most powerfully a learning resource when they serve as a catalyst for conversation and further activity. A major finding of the educational television research work done during the post

*Sesame Street* era was that co-viewing media with others enhances learning. Cook and colleagues (Cook et al., 1975) tested the hypothesis that parents' and others' guidance during television viewing, not viewing itself, explained why earlier researchers found *Sesame Street* to be effective in their experimental studies of the show's impact on literacy skills. Their analysis showed that co-viewing could account for some, but not all, of what children had learned in the prior studies. Learning was particularly supported when parents discussed what they were jointly seeing. A number of subsequent studies have shown that active co-viewing can enhance what children learn from educational television (Collins, Sobol, & Westby, 1981; Lemish & Rice, 1986; Linebarger & Walker, 2005; Nathanson, 2001a, 2001b; Reiser, Tessmer, & Phelps, 1984; Reiser, Williamson, & Suzuki, 1988; St. Peters, Huston, & Wright, 1989). Active co-viewing practices that supported learning included posing questions to children, labeling objects, and connecting story elements from the television show to children's life experiences (see Linebarger, Taylor-Piotrowski, & Vaala, 2007 for a review). In an environment that now comprises multiple screens and platforms, co-viewing now extends to co-engagement or joint media engagement (Stevens & Penuel, 2010; Takeuchi & Stevens, 2011). Joint media engagement refers to spontaneous and designed experiences of people using media together. Modes of joint media engagement include viewing, playing, searching, reading, contributing, and creating, with either digital or traditional media. These forms of collaboration around digital and traditional media are hypothesized to support learning by providing resources for meaningful communication in a particular situation, as well as for future situations. Sharing media in these ways can also foster the development of long-term interests.

We built upon these insights as well as ethnographic research from the LIFE Center at Stanford University, Northwestern University, University of Washington, and SRI International (Barron, Levinson, & Matthews, 2013; Penuel et al., 2010; Stevens, Satwicz, & McCarthy, 2008) when creating some of the survey items to capture the ways in which media serve as a catalyst for other activities. We created an index that asks

parents how often their children engage in activities sparked by media, including starting conversations, asking questions, requesting to engage in projects, and engaging in imaginative play activities. We also queried the frequency with which parents and children use media together. We know from prior research that children frequently teach their parents and siblings about topics when they possess relatively more expertise (Barron, Martin, & Mertyl, 2014; Barron, Martin, Takeuchi, & Fithian, 2009), so we asked parents whether their child had ever taught them something new based on media. Children's roles as brokers and translators have also been documented in studies of immigrant families (Valdés, 1996; Katz, 2010) and we expected to find parent reports of learning from their children in this sample.

Many scholars have underscored the importance of understanding Hispanic-Latino families on their own terms rather than as a foil to mainstream, White, middle-class families (Fuller & Garcia-Coll, 2010; Katz, 2013). This report is an effort to contribute to this understanding. It focuses on the findings from the Hispanic-Latino subsample of a national survey on 2- to 10-year-olds' use of educational media in the United States (Rideout, 2014). It also examines the diversity among these families, delineated by language (English-only vs. bilingual vs. Spanish-only). Socio-demographic markers such as income and education are often the focus of investigations of media use, but language is crucial in its own right. Language is also strongly related to these key socio-economic variables and is important in influencing the array of media options that may be available to young children. Research also suggests that the primary language spoken at home is a stronger predictor than ethnicity of parents' perceptions of the influence of media (television) and desire for more Latino programming (Moran, 2010). Though the majority of analyses focus only on the Hispanic-Latino sample, we do make comparisons to the non-Hispanic sample to report on differential access to computing tools and in relation to the time parents and children spend jointly engaging in educational media.

We present an overview of the key findings from

these analyses, followed by a detailed description of the results and their implications for research, design, and practice. The report also shares case studies from ethnographic research with Hispanic-Latino families in the Northeast and California, conducted by the Joan Ganz Cooney Center and Stanford University. These case studies help to punctuate the quantitative data with real-life vignettes of the dynamics we describe. Based on the findings in this report, we propose a research agenda that will strengthen our understanding of the ways in which parents and children use media, its relations to important learning outcomes, and ways to design media that serve as a springboard for both joint media engagement as well as for other non-media activities.