A discussion in this unit asks you to work in small groups to address the issues of Case 14, "Tomasito Is Too Big to Hold Hands" (Weiss et al., pages 149–157). Create your own analysis to the following questions:

* How do family processes influence Tomasito's development?
* How does Tomasito's sense of connectedness affect his motivation to learn? How does it affect those around him and the way they support his learning?
* If you were sharing the results of math work and math assessments with Tomasito and his family, how would you go about doing that to optimize his future success in the subject?
* What are the possible ways of building reciprocal relationships with this family? Which do you think are the most appropriate and why? What support can be offered and how can parents be encouraged to be more involved?

As with any analysis, your report should provide the reasons behind your assessments and recommendations. Use examples from the case study and other appropriate reading to support your responses. Your final report should be 3 pages long and be written in scholarly and APA style.

**CASE 14. TOMASITO IS TOO BIG TO HOLD HANDS: THE DEVELOPING CHILD AND THE HOME-SCHOOL RELATIONSHIP**

*Ellen Mayer*

**Characters**

Tomasito, second grader at Morrison Elementary School

Linda Brady, Tomasito’s teacher

Ria, Tomasito’s mother

Tomás, Tomasito’s father

Edward, Tomasito’s older brother

**Tomasito’s Portfolio**

It was early spring, and the final round of parent-teacher conferences was over. Linda Brady, in her sixth year as a classroom teacher, was cleaning up her classroom at the end of the day. She tucked inside Tomasito’s second-grade portfolio his most recent story, about traveling to a distant planet with his school friends. Like the rest of his work, this was excellent. Pausing in her chores, she leafed through his portfolio. A smile spread over her face. She glanced at his carefully drawn self-portrait—a tall boy, looking very big, standing proudly with his best friends in the background—and copies of his many Good Citizen school awards. Then she came to his math work. For the first time a shiver of concern ran through her—his math test results seemed so erratic. Was it possible that his math learning wasn’t that solid? Was he even slipping in math? Yet his homework was always perfect. What was going on with Tomasito?

As you read the case, consider applying the following theoretical perspectives in your analysis:

• Developmental-Contextual Perspective: How do family processes involving Tomasito’s mother and father influence his development? How had his development since kindergarten, in turn, impacted his mother’s well-being? How has it affected her participation at Morrison Elementary School?

• Media in the Lives of Families: How can Tomasito’s parents and teacher use his interest in digital media to enhance learning? What is the interplay between digital media and family relationships?

• Families, Time, and Learning: How would you characterize Tomasito’s need for independence from and connection with his parents, older brother, and teacher? How does this affect the parent-teacher relationship? How might this be different at a later stage in his development?

**Linda Brady, Tomasito’s Second-Grade Teacher**

“The most distinctive thing about Tomasito is that he is such a nice, kind, good little boy. I don’t think he has ever said anything bad about anybody in his whole life. He helps all the kids and gets along with everyone in the room. I have at least two kids in the room I’d call clinically misbehaving, who demand a lot of my time, so it’s a joy to have Tomasito, who’s quiet and obedient. He’s probably the most popular child in the room. Although he’s the oldest in the room, he’s very shy. He never speaks in class unless he’s called on, which makes him a model student in a way.

“He’s also doing well in school academically. Most of my students aren’t on grade level, but Tomasito is. He’s very conscientious and hard working in all his subjects. My sixth sense, though, is that we need now to look at him closely in math, and I’ve just been talking with my classroom aide about it. But we haven’t been able to figure out what’s going on. It’s not because of his language skills, since Tomasito is virtually fluent in English. I haven’t signaled to Tomasito my concern about his math, since he’s trying as hard as he can, and sometimes his self-confidence isn’t all that strong.

“At home, I think if I’m right, Tomasito is the oldest child. My sense is that he has a loving, supportive family that takes wonderful care of him—getting him to school every day on time, clean and well fed. Tomasito’s main weaknesses are that he has parents who speak limited English, and my guess is he probably doesn’t have an academic role model at home. Other than that I can’t really say. He’s a pretty reserved little guy and compared to most of his classmates doesn’t share anything about his home life with me. All these second graders are pretty good talkers by now, and most of them aren’t self-conscious about what they say. When we go around the room on Monday mornings talking about what we did over the weekend, and again on Fridays when the kids can volunteer for show-and-tell, I sometimes learn a good bit about my kids’ life outside school. But not from Tomasito—all he ever talks about is playing Wii over the weekend, and he’s never once participated in show-and-tell.

“Even though he doesn’t chitchat to me, I do have my special teacher radar, and it tells me that somebody at home is following up and making sure Tomasito does his homework. It’s always very neat, correct, and thorough. I’ve never asked Tomasito anything about his homework, partly because I’ve never been that concerned about him, and because whatever he’s doing is looking fine.”

**Ria, Tomasito’s Mother (Translated From Spanish)**

“Tomasito, my middle child, is my most wonderful son. He is noble—kind and unselfish. Tomasito likes to have friends, and people who have friends have everything, right? My husband, Tomás, and I think being noble is the most beautiful thing in a human being, and we want Tomasito to be this way for the rest of his life. His teacher says, ‘If I had 20 Tomasitos in my class, I wouldn’t have any problems.’ In meetings with her, the first thing she always says is that Tomasito is respectful, cooperative, and knows the rules. So maybe his personality has helped him win the teacher’s approval?

“I call him ‘Tomasito two-side’ because he can be shy out of the house, but at home he is so talkative and expressive. With Tomasito, *everything* he sees and hears outside of the house, he tells us about. He told us the teacher uses his work as examples for the class. At home, what a mimic he is! But at school he does not always participate. This is because he is reserved, like his father. He is not like me—I have a strong personality, I like socializing with all people. When I went to school I loved participating in all the social activities!

“We are a very happy family. I have vowed not to be harsh and neglectful with my children as my mother was with us in Mexico. We tell our boys that they are *nuestros muñequitos,* our little dolls, the most precious things we have in life. I try to kiss and hug my Tomasito a lot. When I am cleaning shops part-time, my husband takes care of the children; we have never ever used a babysitter. It is important that our sons have love and attention and what pleases them. But sometimes I worry if I am doing all the right things? Should I have rules about watching TV? I like it when experts give me advice. Once his first-grade teacher told me I should let Tomasito read to me every day, and I appreciated that. I also learn a lot from watching other families and analyzing what they do.

“When Tomasito grows up, most of all, we want him to have a *corazon bueno,* a good heart. Even though we are poor, we want him to finish college, although we don’t care if he becomes a professional or intellectual in life. In Mexico, I never went to college. Tomás graduated and works here as a restaurant manager. Tomasito’s older brother, Edward, is really an example to Tomasito. I know I shouldn’t compare the boys, but Edward is much smarter than Tomasito. Edward’s teacher says he is always determined to be first in academics. But Tomasito could teach him much about kindness!

“In the last conference, Ms. Brady just said that Tomasito was doing fine in all his school subjects. But Tomás and I share a worry about the math. Sometimes Tomasito just seems confused or he forgets what he has learned. I just don’t know why it is so hard for him.

“When Tomasito does his homework, we allow him to do it whenever he wants in the afternoon, but he is supposed to finish it before his father gets home. Tomasito often gets caught up with television, Wii, or with telling stories and his homework just sits there. Or he is doing his homework, and he gets distracted by his baby brother who is a lively toddler and wants to play. Tomasito needs a lot of help with his math homework. I am not much good at helping. At his school there are special math classes for parents to explain the math teaching, but I haven’t been to them. Edward is the one who helps Tomasito with math most of the time. If it is still needed, my husband helps when he comes home from work. Sometimes Tomás has to explain two, three, four times! Edward is so quick, but it seems so much harder for Tomasito to do math. I just discovered that Edward had been doing Tomasito’s math homework for him. I came so close to spanking Edward! I said to Edward, ‘I told you to help him—not do it for him.’ I put a stop to it.”

**Tomasito**

“My teacher tells me I’m good at school, and I like it when I get a lot of homework stickers for perfect homework. I am the tallest one in my class and really great at math. My friends at school and I share our Nintendo Wii games. But I wish I had Nike shoes like one of my friends—you know, stuff that is in style and not cheap. When I grow up, I want to be a football player like on TV. It’s boring just being an 8-year-old. You can’t go to any countries, and I like to travel. I can’t drive a car. I can’t have a wife.

“When my mom hugs and kisses me I pretty much hate it now. Edward and me like to watch football with our dad. Edward and me do a lot of stuff together. He is great at drawing, and I like to color in the pictures that he makes. I also like to watch him play Mario on Wii. He is *so great* and gets to really high levels! Sometimes he even helps me when I play it. In our bedroom we share a bed, and we even have our very own TV. Isn’t that an important responsibility?”

**Linda, Tomasito’s Second-Grade Teacher**

“I was standing in the classroom doorway just before the start of school, when an odd thing happened. Tomasito’s mother comes running in, waving a book. It was a classroom library book that Tomasito had borrowed and was due in today. I gathered his mother had just dropped Tomasito off outside, and that he had forgotten the book. Well, I never see her in the building like that. And I should add that parents often casually hang out in our building—our school has a nice village-like feel. Anyway, Ria Montero blurted out in her choppy English that Tomasito had been ‘careless with the book,’ embarrassing him right in front of all his friends. Tomasito darted out from behind me, grabbed the book, and ran back into the classroom. I tried quickly to take advantage of Mrs. Montero being there, and suggested that she come in sometime and chat with me. Who knows, maybe this would help me sort out what is going on with Tomasito and his math. But as soon as I invited her, she scurried away.

“Apart from those formally scheduled things, like parent-teacher conferences, open houses, or awards ceremonies, his parents simply don’t set foot inside the school. I’m not making a value judgment, but when we have a class party, poor Tomasito lugs in heavy bags of food all by himself, while his classmates’ parents carry in the stuff for their kids. I know that Tomasito gets dropped off at school and picked up by his mother every day, but all this happens outside at the curb. I have a bunch of parents who come inside for drop-off or pick-up, and I get to chat with them. I have several parents regularly volunteering in my room, but not Tomasito’s parents. I really like it when parents come in. Being able to have those informal chitchats feels like the best way to build up good relationships with parents. And when you have good relationships, it’s just so much easier to really talk about some things.

“It seems to me there are a bunch of reasons why Tomasito’s parents don’t come in. Mrs. Montero seemed to be just plain nervous being in the building that time with the book. She clearly lacks some self-confidence and is shy, just like her son Tomasito. When she does get in, like for a conference, her limited English isn’t a problem. She’s able to talk to me, which is good, since we don’t have enough interpreters here. It’s got to be hard for her to just pop in with her baby. In fact, the school doesn’t even have child care for the formally scheduled meetings like conferences. I don’t know whether she works, but I know that the father does. That’s the main story around here—working parents just can’t find the time to come into the building. I really should send home a reminder note to his parents that they are entitled to come into the building and hang out, observe in the room, volunteer. Since Tomasito is their first child, this is their first experience with second grade, and they just may not understand that they are welcome to be in the classroom.

“Speaking of notes, one thing his parents do is respond to notes. I always send them notes via Tomasito reminding them about when he will be getting Good Citizen awards at the assemblies. And he dutifully brings me back little thank-you messages from them. It’s partly thanks to Tomasito that we can communicate like that. Nothing ever gets lost in that backpack! Also, when I sent classroom parents notes home recommending the use of flash cards at home for math, Mr. and Mrs. Montero wrote back immediately, ‘Thank you, Teacher, for this advice. We have started to use the flash cards with our son.’ They certainly took what I said very seriously.

“Well, Mrs. Montero’s behavior when she brought in the book surely was odd. There was another odd encounter with them—at the fall open house. Mrs. Montero approached me, asked me how Tomasito was doing in school, and I said very well. Then she proceeded to tell me how Tomasito’s handwriting was bad! Whaa—? I was amazed that his parents seemed to believe that he wasn’t doing well academically. That just didn’t fit with the Tomasito in my class. I was surprised that they were so critical of his ability. It just made me wonder that maybe they don’t appreciate how great their son is.”

**Tomasito**

“Having your mom come into the school building—that’s definitely for *babies!* If your dad comes in, well that’s maybe not quite as bad. That’s like *kids’* stuff, I guess. Both are pretty bad, though. After mom brought me this book at school, that night I told her *not*to bring me stuff when everyone is at school. Mom brings us to our school every day, but Edward and me now make our mom leave us off and wait for us way over at the curb outside. Before she used to cross us, but now I tell her that the crossing guard is there. I used to hold the crossing guard’s hand, but since I’m in second grade I don’t. We always ask mom to get us to school early. Then I won’t be late, or I won’t be one of the last ones to be in the classroom. And I get to have time with my friends. Edward and me also told Mom that we want to walk home from school some days. We’re big, you know? And I bet she will let us do it!”

**Tomás, Tomasito’s Father (Translated From Spanish)**

“We have children of different ages, so that really helps us to see that children change and go through different stages as they grow older. In kindergarten, Tomasito was delighted to have his mama come into the classroom. Then that changed in first grade. Now Edward is in fifth grade, and I am volunteering once a week in his classroom, because the teacher really needs help with the older kids. And Edward accepts this.

“My wife told me the other day how mortified Tomasito was to have her come into school unexpectedly to bring him the book. She saw the terrible expression of embarrassment on his face—this made her turn around and leave right away. Later that evening, Tomasito said that his teacher and classmates would think he was not obeying the rules because he was not careful with the classroom library book.

“Poor Ria, she feels sad that not long ago, Tomasito would squeeze her hand tightly while crossing the street and close his eyes. He was little and scared and needed his mama. But now he leaves her in the street, while he goes into school by himself. She thinks maybe he is ashamed of her. She herself would have thought it a wonderful thing if her mother had ever taken her into school. I tell her this is because of his getting older. He does not want his mama being in school with him because this embarrasses him in front of his friends. But I don’t think he would want me there, either.

“Still I can see that there are times when he seems pleased that we are in the building. At open house—that’s when all the parents and little brothers and sisters come in to see the children’s schoolwork—Tomasito seemed very proud to be showing us what he had done. The teacher had told the students how to show their work to the families. Tomasito and Edward had said the week before, ‘Hey, Mommy—let’s go to open house, you know you have to.’ And Tomasito does not protest when Ria and the baby go to the big awards ceremonies every month.”

**Ria, Tomasito’s Mother (Translated From Spanish)**

“I love being in my sons’ school. It feels so safe, even when I go there at night to a meeting. This is a dangerous city, but the school is in a quiet place with houses and families. It’s easy to get to, close to our home. The principal is not Latina, but she speaks Spanish and says hello to parents by name when we come in. Ms. Brady wants parents to participate at school, which my husband and I feel is important. Children’s *fortuna buena o mala,* good or bad fortune, starts at home, not at school. The teachers are only our helpers, and parents are the ones who are responsible for their upbringing. However, besides their mom, the teachers are the ones who know kids the best.

“But I have a problem in participating with Tomasito’s teacher, and with doing things in the school. The problem is that my English is not good, like my husband’s, and Ms. Brady doesn’t speak Spanish. Tomasito says the classroom helper speaks Spanish, but I am not certain who he is. I can say things to Ms. Brady okay, but I have trouble really understanding her. When I returned the book, I just couldn’t understand what Ms. Brady was saying to me—she was talking quickly, and there was lots of noise. I would like to learn English well, so I could volunteer for the teachers and help them in the classroom. Also, if I knew English, I could be a better helper to my children with homework. I would like to be able to volunteer also so I could see how the teachers teach, what the environment is really like. Maybe they need someone to help clean up? And I could bring my baby son with me?

“With Tomasito’s teacher, I don’t know if it’s because I don’t understand English well, or who knows, but she always says in the meetings that Tomasito is doing things well, that he is improving. But that is all. Also, she talks mostly about his behavior. I used to get very excited about those little certificates. But then they give out so many awards to Tomasito, all for being a good citizen, for following the rules. I wish the teacher would let us know as much about his academic progress as about all those awards. It is true, after all, that Tomasito is not that far ahead in his schoolwork. And I wish she would tell us what to do about his math.

“I do like getting notes. Since my English is not good, this gives me a chance to slowly understand things. And notes, not like phone calls, you can share with your husband, or show it to the child and tell them—‘Look, this is what the teacher says.’ Most of all, I wish we could just talk together at school. But then Tomasito doesn’t like that.”

**Discussion Questions**

**Major Issues**

The purpose of this case is for educators to consider the child as actively shaping and being shaped by home and school contexts generally and the home-school relationship in particular. The case is designed to help educators gain a comprehensive and ecological understanding of the child, including the following:

• How the child influences the parent-teacher relationship, including the role of changing developmental stages and needs

• Different ecological contexts shaping the child’s development

• Communicating a comprehensive picture of the child to parents

**Recommended Reading**

Eccles, J. (1999). The development of children ages 6 to 14. *The Future of Children, 9*(2), 30–44. Retrieved from <http://www.princeton.edu/futureofchildren/publications/journals/article/index.xml?journalid=48&articleid=232&sectionid=1519>

Edwards, R., & Alldred, P. (2000). A typology of parental involvement in education centering on children and young people: Negotiating familialisation, institutionalisation, and individualisation. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 21*(3), 435–455.

Grant, L. (2009). *Children’s role in home-school relationships and the role of digital technologies: A literature review.* Bristol, UK: Futurelab. Retrieved from <http://dmlcentral.net/sites/dmlcentral/files/resource_files/HomeSchool.pdf>