

An Ethnography on Parental Involvement in U.S. Schools from the Perspectives of Latino Parents: Methodological and Theoretical Considerations.

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EMIGRA Working Papers núm.105
ISSN 2013-3804



Resumen/ Abstract

At no other time in the history of educational reform is the role of parental involvement in U. S. schools of paramount importance (Comer, 2004; Esptein, 2004) Much research has shown that parents are critical in raising the achievement of students particularly where there is direct, curriculum related outreach and trust (Henderson and Mapp, 2002; Ascher, 1988, Baker and Soden, 1993). Others researchers such as Mattingly, Radmila, McKenzie, Rodriguez and Kazar (2002) indicate that there is no evidence of a causal relationship between parent involvement and student achievement. Schools have nevertheless been mandated to conduct outreach to parents in order to reduce the achievement gaps that persist for African American and Latino students in relation to European whites and to offset what are apparent shortcomings in the reservoirs of social capital limited expectations for children's success (Jeynes, 2002).

The ethnographic study presented herein is an attempt in identifying ways in which Latino parents in different communities (a community based organization, an after church group, a community organizing group, and a school group) who have undergone training by a university researcher learn how to use ethnographic research techniques and methods that help them understand schools, how to use data, and how they can become empowered by conducting their own research. Using focus groups, the training and research took place during 1999 to 2002 and was reinitiated during 2005 in communities with high concentrations of Latinos in the greater metropolitan area of Boston, Massachusetts.

The study was guided by the following research questions: 1) What do Latino parents understand of U. S. schooling and the ways that the curriculum, assessment, and teaching is organized? More specifically what do they see their roles as parents being vis a vis the schools? 2) Using the skills of ethnographers in observing, writing field notes, focusing on material culture, interviewing key school personnel, how can these parents gather data that helps them make decisions about what is going on in their schools? 3) What can parents learn from using this type of research approach that enables them to understand their roles in school and become empowered? 4) What considerations can ethnographic theory and methods gain from this research?

The study concludes that much can be learned from the perspectives of Latino parents, particularly in the way we employ some of the theoretical models for parental involvement. In addition, ethnographic research may gain from the theoretical and methodological considerations provided by using the perspectives of Latino parents in understanding their participatory roles and sense of empowerment.

Palabras clave / Keywords: parental involvement, latino parents, methodological and theoretical considerations.

Cómo citar este artículo: **MONTERO-SIEBURTH, M.** (2007) "Deciding Where to Belong. Gender differences in educational trajectories and migration in a rural Spanish Town" *EMIGRA Working Papers*, 105. Accesible en línea: www.emigra.org.es. Descarga realizada el (dd-mm-aaaa).

How to quote this paper: **MONTERO-SIEBURTH, M.** (2007) "Deciding Where to Belong. Gender differences in educational trajectories and migration in a rural Spanish Town" *EMIGRA Working Papers*, 105. Available on line: www.emigra.org.es. Last retrieved on (dd-mm-yyyy).

Este texto se presentó como comunicación al II Congreso Internacional de Etnografía y Educación: Migraciones y Ciudadanía. Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, Barcelona, 5-8 Septiembre 2008.



1. Introduction

Starting with the reform initiatives called into action by the publication of A Nation at Risk, during the 1980s, where parents were cited as necessary links in educating children, to the current 2002 No Child Left Behind legislation set forth by the Bush administration, which targets how schools need to work with parents as “partners” to better educate children, parental involvement has become a high stakes issue affecting all of American education (Jeynes, 2002; Redding, Langdon, Meyer and Sheley, 2004).

Thus in the current wave of educational emphasis on high stakes testing and accountability, the role of parents in the academic lives of children in U. S. schools is of paramount importance (Adams, et. al, 2004; Comer, 2004; Eccles and Harold, 1996; Epstein, 1998, 2002, 2004).¹ Unlike parental participation of the past based on tax support for education, parental visibility in schools, and active engagement in the Parents Teacher Organizations, today parental involvement has become the measure of personal commitment and social responsibility that parents have towards schools.

As Pomerantz, Moorman and Litwack (2007) point out more and more states such as California, Illinois, Minnesota, and Missouri include efforts at increasing parents’ involvement. Moreover, many national organizations as the Parent Teacher Association and the National Coalition for Parental Involvement in Education are also committed to promoting parental involvement (Pomerantz, Moorman, Litwack, 2007). Locally, many school districts promote some type of parent outreach program as part of this initiative and in many schools parent volunteers are courted by schools in order to fulfill this objective. At stake, is how students can academically achieve and how can the growing achievement gap that persists for African American and Latino students in relation to European American white students can be reduced. Involving parents directly is viewed as a strong argument also for offsetting the apparent shortcomings in the reservoirs of social capital and limited expectations that exist in schools for children’s success (Jeynes, 2002). Faced with these dilemmas, American public schools have been mandated to conduct parental outreach and to involve parents in an effort to stave off these growing concerns.

Research of the past 30 years substantiates the fact that parental involvement is the single most important indicator of student achievement in school (Epstein, 1988, 2002, 2004; Fan and Chen, 2001; Pomerantz, Grolnick and Price, 2005; Wheelock, 1990; Darder and Upshur, 1992, Hoover-Dempsey et. al. 1995, 1997). Such research also shows that direct curriculum related outreach and developing a climate of trust (Henderson and Mapp, 2002; Ascher, 1988, Baker and Soden, 1988) enhances parental involvement. In fact, parental involvement is most significant in contributing to minority student learning in those communities where there are limited reservoirs of social capital outside the school and reduced expectations for children’s success according to William Jeynes (2002). Thus programs such as Success for All, Wings and

¹ It should be noted that what constitutes parental involvement has been defined in different ways by researchers. Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) define parents’ involvement as “parents’ commitment of resources of the academic arena of children’s lives” (Pomerantz et.al, 2007, p. 374).

Roots, Coalition for Essential Schools, Accelerated Programs, James Comer's model—target active parental engagement and involvement as the underlying basis for their effectiveness, impact on learning, and success.

The major emphasis of these research efforts have been directed at the role that parents should have towards the school and academic achievement, without distinguishing the effects of home environments on student learning and school-based initiatives. Such distinction argue Pomerantz and her associates (2007) need to be made because there may be different effects of each on children's schooling.

The research undertaken has been based on two models which are described by Pomerantz and her associates (2007): 1) a skills development model, in which parent's involvement improves academic achievement based on making available skill related resources (language capabilities, phonological awareness, metacognitive skills), and a 2) motivational development model, in which parents provide intrinsic reasons such as valuing schooling, fostering personal enjoyment, and providing for academic competence to their children. Pomerantz et. al. argue that both skill and motivational development may work hand in hand in helping children achieve, by actively engaging parents in providing resources and by motivating children to engage and enjoy learning. Whereas skills prepare children to learn, the motivation shown by their parents is eventually internalized by children who come to value schools in positive ways.

This same theoretical and empirical research since the early 1980s has also covered families from diverse socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds in preschool to middle school, with additional research being conducted on families with children in high school. Pomerantz et. al (2007) indicate that this research has focused on the 1) naturally occurring involvement of parents using parents, teachers and children's reports which are reflected longitudinally through children's grades and 2) interventions aimed at promoting parents' involvement in children's schooling through reading contracts, academic activities, etc. The findings of the former approach indicates that the involvement of parents is beneficial to children of all ethnic backgrounds, and when related to the effects of parents' home based involvement, the more exposed children are to academic endeavors such as reading, the better their reading skills become in later grades. They also show that the effects of interventions are less clear and do not demonstrate the benefits of such programs. Studies conducted by Mattingly, Radmila, McKenzie, Rodriguez and Kazar (2002) concur with Pomerantz et. al. findings, and show no evidence of a causal relationship between parent involvement and student achievement especially since the evaluation of parent involvement programs has not been sufficiently and rigorously studied and the existing research is insufficient to draw firm conclusions about the effects of interventions.

Yet it is how parents are involved, the whom of parents' involvement, and the why of parents involvement that Pomerantz et. al (2007) strongly argue point to a next step that focuses on identifying the quality of parent's involvement rather than the extent of their involvement. Parents' involvement according to these researchers may be beneficial for children when it is 1) autonomy supportive, where children solve problems on their own; 2) process focused, where the emphasis is on the pleasure of effort and learning; 3) characterized by positive affect or connectedness, and is accompanied by 4) positive rather than negative beliefs about children's potential. More significantly, their research and that of Gutman and Eccles (1999), Anderson and Keith (1997) shows that parent involvement may be more beneficial among families of

children at risk, of children growing up in poor, in uneducated families, parent involvement than for European American children since it enhances their already difficult experiences in environments that detract from their academic experiences.

2. The Context of Latinos and Education

Given the emphasis on parent involvement and the research of the past three decades, the issue of how Latino parents are responding to involvement becomes a major focus of concern. In fact, most of the research shows that Latino² parents have low participation and engagement in the education of their children. They lack of knowledge of how the U. S. educational system operates and often for lack of speaking English do not know how to access information that helps them comprehend their role. Such findings stand in sharp contrast to the growth of the Latino population and their active participation in education.

Latinos now comprise one of the largest growing populations in the U. S. having outnumbered African Americans in the U. S. in 2002, and representing close to 47% of the total underrepresented populations, of the United States (Camarota, 2001). The growth of Latinos is four times that of the total U. S. population (Rumbaut 2006) given the current immigration trends and fertility rates, and according to U. S. Census projections, by 2050 will account for 25% of the U. S. population. Latinos also comprise close to 15% of the k-12 students and by 2025 are expected to increase to 25% (ERIC 2001).

Latino children's enrollment is known to increase with increases in parent educational attainment, yet of those Latinos under age 5, they are less likely to be enrolled in early childhood education programs than other group (20% Latinos compared with 44% of African Americans and 42% of whites) (ERIC, 2001). While attendance rates for Latinos in high schools have increased. Few Latinos age 25 or older complete high school than do African Americans and whites (ERIC, 2001). Latinos are accessing higher education in greater numbers and represent almost 10% of the total student enrollment in higher education. While there are increases in the percentage of Latino seniors planning to attend four year colleges which has risen from 34% in 1972 to 50% in 1992, only 35% of Latino students are enrolled in college preparatory programs that provide access to 4 year colleges as compared to 43% of African Americans and 50% of whites (ERIC, 2001). Latinos have doubled their undergraduate degree attainment since 1976 and have earned 50% of all bachelor's degrees and 7% of all associate's degrees. However, they comprise only 4% of the graduate students as compared to 6% African Americans and 73% for whites. Even more telling is the fact that Latinos comprise fewer than 3% of full time faculty and staff in higher education (ERIC, 2001).

As a group, Latinos face tremendous educational challenges influenced by poverty, lack of preschool program participation, attendance at poor quality elementary and high schools, limited English proficiency. Latinos have the highest drop out rates in

² Latino refers to U. S. born and immigrant populations of Spanish and indigenous ancestry from Latin America.



secondary schools, experience high attrition rates for community and 4 year colleges, and have some of the lowest completion rates for high school and college (Gibson, 2002; Scribner, Young, Pedraza, 1999). Moreover, they are often assumed to not care about the education of their children.

3. Purpose of Study and Research Questions

Given these educational outcomes and the assumptions that are held about Latinos and education, the purpose of this ethnographic study was to identify what Latino parents, being organized and trained through different community organizations in greater metropolitan Boston, understood about the education of their children. Important in this was how they understood schools were organized, what the curriculum was about, and what roles they had within schools.³

As a university researcher, who had been working with Latino community agencies in Boston, I decided to develop a multi-prong research and training agenda for Latino parents after conducting a pilot study of all of the community agencies and uncovering issues about Latino parent organizing and engagement (Adams et.al, 2004). The intent of the project was: 1) to train parents in the use of ethnographic methods using observation, data collection, writing of field notes, transcription, coding, interviews, and the development of memos, 2) to conduct field visits to their schools, and observe how they applied what they had learned; 3) to present information about timely issues they identified and wanted to expand their knowledge about, and 4) to engage these parents in conducting “research of their own schools” by modeling of some of the ethnographic techniques and methods that researchers use. The training was directed at helping Latino parents “think as researchers,” and to help them demystify schooling, by accessing information, recording such data, learning how to construct memo entries, learning how to generate interview questions they could seek answers to, and interviewing administrators and teachers. While the training for all of the Latino parent groups was generic, each Latino parent community group took on a different focus, depending on their particular needs, knowledge of the educational system and length of stay in the U. S.

The rationale for conducting this training and research was derived from personal observations, from having worked with Latino community members and educators concerning the education of Latinos, and from my review of the parental involvement research literature. Evident were the underlying assumptions: 1) that Latino parents often do not have the type nor kind of information which is essential for

³ This study in its different phases was supported by several grants. The initial pilot study was supported by the Gaston Institute for Latino and Community Development and Public Policy of the University of Massachusetts-Boston, during 1996-1998. The direct work with community agencies training Latino parents and the proposed intervention was supported by Healy Public Service grant and funds from the Gaston Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy of the University of Massachusetts-Boston during January 1999 to December 1999. Continuation of the study was additionally funded by a Healy Endowment Grant of the University of Massachusetts-from January 2000 to December 2000 and during 2001-2002, additional funds from the Gaston Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy of the University of Massachusetts-Boston made it possible to continue this research. The support for the 2005 study was supported by the training the researchers conducted in one of the local Boston schools.

making educational decisions, 2) that they tend to react to educational concerns out of crisis, often requiring one to one problem-solving from others, and 3) that they often underestimate their own power in taking responsibility and making decisions, out of fear, not knowing the language, nor much about education.

While conducting outreach to diverse community agencies working with Latino parents, I developed the research and training sequence that would respond to these issues, by helping parents learn how to use ethnographic methods, and by using data in constructive and creative ways.⁴The idea behind this project was that *if ethnographers attempt to uncover the cultures of schooling, by researching schools, why shouldn't Latino parents be able to do the same given the knowledge and skills of researchers? Why couldn't Latino parents become researchers of the schools their children attended?*

Because of my extensive work and research with different Latino communities throughout the greater Boston metropolitan area, I was fully aware of the complexities I would encounter in their educational, socioeconomic, cultural and linguistic differences. I knew I would find different levels of education and literacy for Latino parents, with some parents being illiterate, others having completed primary school, and others having completed high school. I also knew I would find some with university titles and degrees and that there would be all walks of life represented, from service workers, to managers and professionals. There would be Latino parents who had street knowledge while others would hardly know how to use the telephone system with all of its required notations, let alone the educational system their children attended.

Given such concerns, I introduced the research and training agenda during several meetings to each parent group, and identified the processes they would follow if they choose to conduct research. I also conducted a needs assessment of each of the parent groups in order to ascertain the readiness that each parent group as a whole had towards research or to some other type of agenda which would need to be generated by them. Some Latino parents opted to learn about issues which they did not have any knowledge or nor could access information such as the latest research on bilingual education, the types of opportunities in higher education for students who were undocumented, and the way Latino parents might access jobs given that they needed to find work. For those already working in factories, a request was made for the types of remedies they could find for carpal syndrome and for communicating about sexual issues such as the giving out of condoms in schools. In those cases where the Latino parent group was literate, was highly motivated and ready to act, they immediately wanted to learn how to use ethnographic methods and the sessions were planned. To assist me in the process, I worked with a team of people, who had different roles--I was the principal investigator, supported by a community liaison member who spoke Spanish, and two graduate student research assistants, who took notes and transcribed

⁴ I had found some evidence from school records, that parents without any training before they walked through the classrooms and hallways of schools, often relied on impressionistic reactions and opinions without any data to assess what was happening at a given school. In some cases, the schools feared the visits of parents, since they considered these to be negative most of the time. Rather than have what one principal termed "vigilante" visits, and avoid any surface analysis on the part of parents, I planned to provide these Latino parents with a sequenced, systematic and realistic ethnographic research training model that would be an alternative.

the audiotapes. In addition, I sought consultants who could address some of the issues parents identified and were willing to provide support to the parent groups and had a visiting professor from Venezuela observe and take notes of the meetings. In the focus groups and through the team and consultant work, the most salient issues for these parents became apparent. They brought their children to the meetings, we provided child care, but there were times, when feeding or diapering children was done in the middle of sessions. The number of children was often greater than the number of participants, and observing the mothers which were the majority of the participants, helped us understand their own process of learning and how we could adapt ethnographic research to develop their capabilities as “ethnographers of their children’s schools.” It became evident that there were disparate perspectives about education, and so the study focused on the following research questions:

1. *What do Latino parents understand of U. S. schooling and the ways that the curriculum, assessment, and teaching is organized? More specifically what do they see their roles as parents being vis a vis the schools?*
2. *Using the skills of ethnographers in observing, writing field notes, focusing on material culture, interviewing key school personnel, how can these parents gather data that helps them make decisions about what is going on in their schools?*
3. *What can parents learn from using this type of research approach that enables them to understand their roles in school and become empowered?*
4. *What can ethnographic theory and methods gain from this type of community research?*

Before turning to the actual methods of research and the staging of the study, a brief review of the theoretical frameworks that were reviewed in the parent involvement literature is presented.

4. Theoretical Framework: Brief Literature Review on Parental Involvement

While parental involvement programs have been in existence for the past 100 years in the United States according to Shepard and Rose (1995), their evolution from a deficit home intervention model approach of the 1960s to a language and socialization difference model approach during the 1970s and early 1980s has given way to the current trend of creating an empowerment model. Such empowerment is based on parents being able to use resources, engage in dialogue and effectively problem-solve. However, it has been during the past thirty years, that the growing literature of parental involvement and engagement proliferated by scholars and research institutes in education throughout the United States has begun to shift the responsibility of home interventions and changes in their parental responsibility to one of choice and decision-making (Curiel, 1991).

In this regard, among the most notable research has been the work of Joyce Epstein (1988, 2002, and 2004) who has written extensively on the topic and who has produced a six step involvement schema which is universally used. In addition, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995, 1997) have identified three critical factors that affect parent engagement: a) the parents’ role construct which includes their belief about involvement, b) the sense of parent’s self efficacy, and c) the types and kinds of school invitations parents receive. Erin McNamara Horvat, Elliot Weininger and Annette

Lareau (2003) have also uncovered that social class differences do play a role in the way that parents respond to problematic issues in schools. Middle-class parents react collectively using contacts with professionals to mobilize information, authority needed to contest issues, and expertise, networks that are not accessed by working class and poor parents.

While the research of European American mainstream parents has influenced and dominated the field of parental engagement and involvement, institutes such as the Harvard Family Research Project, (Weiss, Kreider, Lopez, and Chatman, 2005) have focused on Latino parent issues and throughout the Midwest, West, and Southern middle states, many community groups have developed their own grassroots initiatives directed at parent intervention programs that are at the forefront of their educational agendas.

In addition, Latino scholars have generated research that speaks directly to cultural and economic factors that influence Latino parents' perceptions of involvement. In this regard the need to learn more about the opportunities for learning that schooling presents has been studied by Carrasquillo and London, 1993, Delgado-Gaitán and Trueba, 1991, and Valdes, 1996. Delgado-Gaitán's (1991, 2001) research of Latino folkways of doing things and Latino parent's critical reflections in their *consejos* are critical markers of this type of analysis. In fact, Delgado-Gaitán shows that physical resources, emotional climate and interpersonal interactions all serve to support Latino parents in their socializing of children to education (Delgado-Gaitán, 1992). Valdes' (1996) research on Latino parent's child-rearing practices indicates they are different from white, middle-class culture. Most recently, Esperanza de la Vega, (2007) in "Mexican/Latina Mothers and Schools: Changing the Way we view Parent Involvement" shows how Latina mothers integrate language and culture into their every day lives and how they demonstrate aspects of culture such as *respeto* (respect), being *bien educado* (well-educated) sharing *dichos* or *consejos* (sharing sayings or how to be behave) and building up *confianza* (confidence) as part of the building blocks that Latinas use with their children and families and which she feels schools need to recognize. De la Vega (2007) argues that unless a two way process of cultural responsiveness is set up between schools and parents, Latinos will continue to be marginalized.

Such research has yielded much knowledge about the difficulties encountered by Latino parents in accessing schooling, being limited by not speaking English, lacking the knowledge of how schools function and are organized, not having the transportation to come to school, and assuming a locus parentis role for schools derived from their countries of origin. Yet much more needs to be studied (Scribner, Young, and Pedraza, 1999) particularly in terms of the way that Latinos teach their children at home, the education of the first and second generation, and their social and cultural capital. But equally important is research on the migration processes that many of the first generation Latino parents undergo, the types of family patterns which they bring from their countries of origin, and the types of changes they experience, and how they become re-structured once in the United States. We do not know how offspring of Latinos may need to adapt to even more different patterns than those of their parents,



and in this sense, the notion of families in change needs to also be studied in tandem with the engagement of Latino parents (Swidler, 2001; Landale and Oropesa, 2007).

In addition to these factors, there are also different social and cultural capitals being used to access schools by Latino parents who may lack the type of expected cultural/social capital that the school rewards (Coleman, 1987; Lareau, 1989; Lareau and Hargot, 1999). Different patterns prevail for the access to such cultural and social capital from the status of different migrant, immigrant, refugee or U. S. born Latinos. For those parents who have been in the U. S. longer periods than recent immigrants, “how things are done,” may be a common practice, whereas for many of the immigrant parents issues of survival, of meeting basic needs takes precedence over education, which is often relegated to a task of the school. Operating from a locus parentis framework of compliance to authoritative role relationships between administrators and parents, for many Latino parents, schooling may be a different social and cultural pattern.

Also making access to schooling difficult is the language of the parents if it is different from the schools. This is also a more difficult barrier to overcome, especially from one generation to the other and within generations (Mapp, 1997). Not only are the language differences accentuated between generations, with a trend towards using less Spanish as each generation becomes more acculturated and assimilated, but within the same generation, the different uses of Spanish and English between youth and adults is quite evident in the fact that for many Latino children, they play significant roles as interpreters and as mediators of language within the family (Díaz-Soto, 1997; Collier, 1995). Second language acquisition for adults is a major concern in relation to parental involvement and the need to communicate in English is a premium for many parents. For many, access, retention, and persistence within English as a Second Language programs and the use of developed biliterate skills are highly valued goals, but depending on their work schedules, time to study, and house chores, many readily give up on this most critical aspect of their own learning (Auerbach, Barahona, Midy, Vaquerano, Zambrano and Arnaud, 1996).

The English speaking abilities of parents become a bridge for parents who want to help their children with the demands of schooling. Yet this is complicated because there is limited knowledge of how Latino parents teach their own children at home (Zettlin, Campbell, Lujan and Lujan, 1994), even though research on the home environment has been extensive. Research on how Latino parents engage their children and actually teach them about how to learn within the confines of American society, has only recently been a focus of some of the community studies and of scattered qualitative and ethnographic studies (Darder and Upshur, 1992; Delgado-Gaitán and Trueba, 1991; De la Vega, 2007).

5. The Staging of Methods and General Outcomes

The research for this study unfolded in the following phases with phase I (1996-1998) having been the initial staging for the research. At this stage, a survey was conducted of the community agencies involved in parent training through the greater metropolitan area of Boston. Phases II-IV which was funded through a Healy grant from the University of Massachusetts-Boston, took place during 1998-2002, took place in three sites, a community based organization, an after church group, and a community organizing group, and Phase V was conducted during 2005 took place in a school site



where parents were being organized around leadership issues. While the process was not directly intended as a tool for empowerment, the transference of ethnographic knowledge and methods served to help parents interpret data, determine a focus, and develop strategies that lead to knowledge use in some cases, and a greater degree of empowerment in other cases.

Phase I (1996-1998): With the help of an undergraduate research assistant, I conducted a preliminary survey in which 12 community agencies which offered training and development to Latino parents in greater metropolitan Boston were identified. An analysis was undertaken of the types of organizing, skills, and knowledge as well as intervention they conducted with Latino parents. From the findings, we were able to identify only one community agency was directly involved in training parents, the rest of the organizations offered formal training without addressing the parent component into their infrastructure. While these were the results for that time period, it is likely that this has changed given the impetus of the Massachusetts reform act of 1993 and the follow through the No Child Left Behind measures of 2002. Needless to say, what became apparent is that in soliciting funding many of the organizations used the parent training as an umbrella to secure funds, yet parent involvement was an area that was underdeveloped for the most part. The other evident issue is that community organizations work with parents at arms length, doing outreach, but only the organization which was training and organizing parents through the Right Question project, was also inducing parents into working within the organization to acknowledge their capacity to work with other parents. One of the parents who underwent the training of this organization has her own bilingual preschool today and she learned on the job, moving into a parent liaison position at a local university and then becoming a certified teacher and owner of her school. Thus it is clear that few parents except for those who are mentored are able to reproduce the skills they learn from parent training.

Phase II (January 1999-December 1999): Based on the results of the survey, one of the key community agencies was asked to participate, and the first sets of training methods were conducted through focus group meetings during one year and were extended into a second year (1999-2002). The qualitative methods complemented the 4-6 week parent curriculum course that they had completed within the organization and which dealt with self esteem, role of communities and schools, responsibility of parents towards schools. In this group, 10 participating parents of Puerto Rican, Dominican, and Guatemalan backgrounds were taught to map the community, schools and classroom through didactic methods, record field notes, and conduct interviews. In addition, two school visits were conducted with two of the remaining parents of the total ten who actively came to the focus groups. In each of the focus group meetings, data was collected by audiotapes and was later transcribed and analyzed. Thus at the end of the intervention, although ten parents participated, two remained constant, and two others eventually became invested in parent training themselves. Interestingly, the initial ten parents used Spanish but as the training continued, it was the Puerto Rican parents who spoke English who preferred information sharing using English. It was also these parents who visited the schools and completed the training cycle. These two parents are still active within the Latino communities, and have become leaders within the schools their children attend.



Phase III (January 2000-December 2000 and February 2001 to May 2001): An additional second group was added from an after mass group at one of the local Catholic Churches. Twelve parents from Colombia, El Salvador, Peru and Mexico participated, and in this case, the parents selected the topics they wanted addressed in the focus groups which met once a month. From the total 10 sessions, 4 were directed at ethnographic research and the rest was directed at particular issues which the parents deemed important such as learning about bilingual education research, figuring out what to do after high school to secure entrance to college, learning about creativity, working on their personal curriculum vitas to secure jobs. The data at each of the sessions was tape recorded and later transcribed.

Of significance was the fact that in order to meet with the parents after mass, permission had to be solicited through the local priest who censored the topics to be discussed and influenced some of the substantive issues that were presented. For example, this priest admonished parents to remove their children from bilingual education programs, for they would need English in order to succeed in America. Yet many parents believed it would be in their children's best interest to continue in bilingual programs. They were left in a quandary. This same priest also brought in the local police to discuss violence and crime and to help parents detect drug use among their children. These presentations overtook the training of ethnographic research methods and the topics under discussion by the university researcher and team. The meeting context for the focus groups in a basement proved to be problematic. The priest would at times turn the heat off during the winter, and parents had to participate with their coats on. The findings from the research with these Latino parents indicates that unless parents are trained in neutral spaces, the agendas of authorities might prevail as was the case with the priest involved. Yet parents within this group as newcomers have particular needs that preclude learning about research until their basic needs are met.

Phase IV (December 2001-2002): The third group met out of the concerns Latino parents had about bilingual education in a parent group which was being reorganized. After requests to a lawyer about organizing parents to protest how bilingual education in this community was being replaced by English immersion failed, the parents who have been meeting for many years with a community leader felt the need to reorganize as a non-profit organization that would help parents gain their right. Through an invitation, I was brought into this community setting. A total of 20 Dominican parents, which diminished to twelve met as a community group, to assess their role in determining their children's education. While two of the six sessions focused on ethnographic research, the needs of the group demanded focus on specific topics which were identified by a core of parents. Central to their issues was the understanding of bilingual education with regard to English immersion. While these parents were highly vocal and were politically astute, they felt sheer frustration at not being able to overturn the roadblocks the school administration presented. After several sessions, it became apparent that without strong leaders in this parent group, who would take up the initiative of all of the parents, they would be silenced and this in fact was what occurred. The parents were not able to change what became the superintendent's decision and they had to abide by the terms set up within the schools their children attended.

Phase V (September 2005-December 2005): The fourth group of 20 Latino parents from Guatemala, Venezuela, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Colombia were constituted from the need parents had to participate more actively in their children's school. Under the

guidance of a new principal, of Spanish background, these parents, many of whom had been in this school district for over 15 years had felt alienated and marginalized were invited to participate in leadership training from September to December 2005. The new principal felt that this would allow parents to understand their role in schools and afford them the opportunity to learn English as a second language for those parents who did not speak English. At the same time, the principal also offered Spanish to those non-Spanish speaking teachers who were interested in communicating with parents. While these parents actively engaged in the training session and developed skills that were useful, the principal's initiatives at offering Spanish created a volatile situation for other parents who felt that "Spanish was being imposed." The end result was the suspension of the principal and her eventual resignation. While this training did not result in the advancement of Latino parents in terms of their being able to overturn the suspension of the principal, it did allow for two of the training completers to eventually become part of the school's PTO where they currently serve.

6. Analysis of the Training and Research Intervention: Methodological and Theoretical Considerations

The intervention by the university researcher surfaced several methodological and theoretical issues that need to be contemplated in attempting to transfer educational research methods to the community and to Latino parents such as those identified in this study. Among these are:

1. The development of trusting relationships in research setting. Attempting to link university research to the context of Latino communities requires the establishment of trusting relationships between all concerned particularly given the migration status of many of the Latino parents and their newness in some cases, and their seasoned behaviors to parental involvement in the case of the Puerto Rican parents. Such trusting relationships are about horizontal relationships but also about mentoring in the research process. On the one hand, community members are skeptic about being involved in a research process, where they can be viewed as "guinea pigs," yet on the other hand, they also need to see that the outcomes of the study will be put to use in their communities. As several parents commented, "How do I know that what is happening in schools is what I am being told by the administrators? I need to know basic facts of how my children respond to the teacher." Hence balance of power relationships, the establishment of horizontal linkages and trust, and rapport between the university members and team as well as community members needs to be developed prior to any research intervention.
2. The demystification of the research process. Ethnographic research needs to be demystified from its exclusive domain of social scientists and academic jargon to useful tools and discourses that can be utilized by community participants. Any intervention of this sort requires that participants have certain knowledge base in order to fully participate. At the same time, the intervention needs to use the language that parents feel comfortable and can access and that requires the researcher to use their own language, and examples that are conducive to expressing the same idea contained in the research process.



From the analysis of each of the Latino parent groups, it was clear that in the first group of parents, it was the Latino parents who had been more established in the community and knew about the political processes that were able to gain the most from the training, compared to the more recent newcomers, who were anxious about surviving, feeling their way and figuring out what was expected of them by schools. In the second group of twelve, which was mostly composed of recent immigrants, except for three who had been in the U. S. for over 15 years, their focus was on survival and on being able to figure out how to access the educational structures. The third group, faced head on the political agendas of a superintendent bent on eradicating bilingual education, hence even though they were quite vocal and had a strong political consciousness, how to access the educational system became a surmounting difficult task which they were not prepared to do. The fourth group, while positively engaged, had to face the attitudes of a system that had for the past one hundred years only hired from within and had turned to satisfying the needs of Latino parents as part of their tokenism. Latino parents in this group quickly realized that without the use of English, access to the PTO and town meetings, their own power as a group would become diminished. While they fought to keep the principal who had invited them to participate in the leadership training, in the short term, in the long run, they concentrated on getting their foot in the door. Thus interventions such as this need to be accompanied by not only literacy support for the Latino parents, but by strong linkages of university programs and interests to the community. More importantly, interventions of this sort need to align themselves with other community agencies as ways to galvanize the power of Latino parents as a platform.

3. Concretization of ethnographic language. The academic language of ethnography needs to be *concretized*, using Paulo Freire's notion into metaphors and examples derived from every day life. In many of the parent groups, while story telling and metaphors were used to convey parallel descriptions of ethnographic research methods, the parents used chisme, or bochinche (gossip) as a way to explain their social networks. We quickly learned to use childcare issues to highlight qualitative methods, and drew examples from their own experiences. They also learned to ask parents to talk about their ideas before writing these down.
4. Ethnographic research needs to be goal oriented. Ethnographic research needs to be goal and action oriented, whereby participants can relate the immediacy of their needs to useful outcomes. For example, some of the Latino parents complained about overworking and hence not having time to do homework with their children, and they talked about not knowing how to become "not tired." I sought out one of the community members who works on revitalization of the body and through several sessions, Latino parents learned to do massages, work on their carpal syndrome, and on relaxing their children through exercises as a means to rekindle their commitment to education.
5. Ethnographic research needs to engage parents not only directly but within their community settings and with other members of the community. Ethnographic methods alone are insufficient to engage Latino parents. In fact, they must entail collaboration between university researchers, community members, organizations and agencies that initiate needed dialogue, offer research opportunities and mentorship, and help develop political strategies for demanding rights (Salinas Sosa, 1997).

Among some of the theoretical considerations to be had derived from this study are the following:

1. Assumptions Held About Involvement for Different Ethnic Group of Parents. The fidelity with which parents attend parent meetings, school events, parent nights, communicate with teachers and administrators, or participate in local school site councils irrespective of race or ethnic background, is taken to be a sign of their commitment to education. When Latino parents show up at the school, talk with administrators and teachers, even with difficulties in speaking English, attend meetings, and are part of the local council, administrators and teachers tend to view them as being “involved” like any other American parent. On the other hand, if they are absent, do not call the school, do not communicate with their children’s teachers or administrators, the prevailing assumptions are that Latino parents don’t care about education, are more concerned about their work, and act in locus parentis, by relegating the important business of schooling and the socialization of their children to schools.

Underlying these assumptions is the belief that all parents in sending their children to school, are aware of how schools in the United States function, how they are organized, how the curriculum is shaped, how parents are to participate, and how the current standards of education have become translated into learning outcomes and products that parents can readily access. This belief may not altogether be true, more so in the case of Latino parents, who may not have access to school because of their work schedules, may not have completed their education, and not speak English. For them, knowing about the education of their children becomes not only a personal and critical issue, but also a public matter in which they are held accountable. Thus one of the key issues is to gain an understanding of what they consider education to be and what their notion of schooling is, what is an ideal school, and what the school their children attend represents. Only by unpacking these notions can the assumptions about what they want in education be known.

2. The Role of Community Agencies in regards to Training Parents towards Engagement. Clearly from the agencies surveyed, it became clear that with the exception of only one community organization where Latino parents had been trained in popular education using Paulo Freire’s methods, most community agencies in greater metropolitan Boston engaged in training Latino parents creating a link to parents in a dependent manner. While these organizations congregated parents in meetings, and intervened during their personal crisis, they did so without developing such skills in parents. Parents remained at the periphery of these organizations. For these community agencies to actually engage parents requires that they help them become part of the infrastructure and development, that is, that they become the trainers of other parents, and that training not be directed outwardly, but inwardly.

3. Contextual Stages of Incorporation for Latino Parents. Not all Latino parents are ready to engage in learning about ethnographic research, but are themselves at different stages of incorporation into U. S. society hence, it is important in conducting this type of intervention to analyze what it is that Latino parents need, whether it is basic survival, or learning about their rights to the education of their children. Figuring out where they are, what they need, and how to identify sources of knowledge are some of the critical issues that were learned from this study.



While the intervention was the same across all of the parent groups, the context in which Latino parents exist and the way they have conceptualized their educational issues are part of the context that needs to be understood in conducting this type of research. While I felt at ease within each of the settings, parent participation varied widely with few parents being consistently present at each of the training sessions. For many of them, the time spent in training was time away from their children or spouses and given their heavy work loads, of close to 60 or 70 hours, many of them felt either too tired to attend all of the sessions, or were pressured by family demands. Hence gathering of critical information about what was meaningful to them was made on the run and figuring out how to make their concrete experiences doable research practices took a great deal of listening and identifying their habits and preferences. The degree to which they have access to schooling determines their commitment and constancy in engagement.

4. Use of First and Second Language Use by Latino Parents. For Latino parents, the use of English is critical in their being able to participate, be accepted and recognized as full fledged members of the school and community. It was clear that for some parents, even the use of Spanish, demanded a great deal of them, since some of them had only completed less than sixth grade education in their countries of origin. Thus interventions of this type need to consider attaching the training component to whole family literacy programs such as those advocated by Elsa Auerback et. al. (1996) especially in newcomer immigrant communities. Likewise, access to English speaking programs, is part of the empowerment that particularly first generation Latino parents can experience.

5. Latino Parenting in light of Educational Demands. From the intervention, the issue of how to overcome assumptions held regarding the way that Latino parents is one of the obstacles that many of these parents faced. For example, in demanding more materials for reading to children, some of the parents, found that they ran into teacher union regulations that made teachers reluctant to spend the time with parents. Yet showing their concern for education from the perspective of the school demands their presence and participation. Thus Latino parents need to develop some of the social and cultural capital that will allow them access to education.

6. Recognizing Changing Latino Family Systems from Home to Host Country. Understanding the transitions that have taken place in Latino families and the structures they adopt as they live in the U. S. need to be understood. Some Latino families are sibling headed families; other family constellations involve parents having two sets of families, one in the home country, and another in the U. S. Thus interventions of this type also need to accommodate for such changes and to understand how to work with parents undergoing such transitions.

Latino parents become differentially involved in schools based on their levels of education, access and use of first and second languages, social and cultural capital knowledge, generational and country of origin and host family patterns and political consciousness. There is a prevailing monocultural model of parental involvement that is not necessarily effective for the variety of needs expressed by these Latino parents. Instead a contextually bound set of options are necessary that highlights how parents actually organize themselves around educational issues, how they are able to access knowledge and power, particularly when English is not their mother tongue and they may be illiterate, where there may be trade offs between economic survival and

education, and where knowing the concrete issues of schooling and educating their children may not be sufficient, but acquiring the social and cultural capital to be part of the Parents Teachers Organization, using research to expand their knowledge, and finding ways to express their political opinions becomes critical in navigating the educational system in the United States.

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