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The University of San Francisco

LATINO IMMIGRANT PARENTS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER  
STUDENTS, SCHOOL INVOLVEMENT AND THE PARTICIPATION BREACH

A Dissertation Presented  
to  
The Faculty of the School of Education  
Leadership Studies Department  
Organization and Leadership Program

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education

by  
José Vicente González  
San Francisco  
May 2012

THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO  
Dissertation Abstract

Latino Immigrant Parents of English Language Learner Students, School Involvement  
and the Participation Breach

The problem addressed in this study was the minimal school involvement by Latino immigrant parents due to the hegemonic practices, cultural misunderstandings and deficit-thinking models adopted by school personnel. The purpose of this Participatory Action Research (PAR) was to investigate the perceptions and benefits of participant and co-researcher parents who collaborated in the creation of an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program. The theoretical framework employed was Critical Race Theory because it addressed the issues of institutional racism, challenge to the status quo, social justice leadership and allowed for an interdisciplinary approach in order to utilize the parents' experiential knowledge to create new epistemologies that correspond to their cultural needs.

Participation included five co-researchers and five participants, all Latino immigrant parents of English language learner students. The co-researcher parents collaborated to investigate and create the components of the anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program. This particular study encountered a contradiction to previous research in that Latino parents felt that there were no obstacles to their involvement. It also uncovered that before any information is provided to parents in order to increase their participation, the security and comfortableness of their children has to be addressed first. In retrospect, this study found a genuine need for the understanding of the emotional and academic connections between Latino parents and students.

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

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May 3, 2012

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I am thankful to my friend and mentor, Mr. Jesse Barajas, for having given me the opportunity to start on the path of educational administration and mentorship as an ethical leader. Additionally, I would like to thank my friends for their support and words of encouragement, especially Gilbert for his time as my final reader. Finally, I would like to thank my wife, siblings and parents for believing in me.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my loving wife Nelly and to my son Emilio for their understanding and unconditional love. Thank you Amor for all your support and dedication in keeping our family strong and healthy during difficult times. Emilio, I am looking forward to your daily invitation, “Would you like to play with me, daddy?”

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## CHAPTER I

### THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

I am a Mexican-American Principal in charge of an elementary school in its third year of Program Improvement (PI). My school is predominantly Latino and located in the San Francisco South Bay area. We serve wonderful students and working-class parents who are beginning to become more involved, but not to the level I would like them to be involved in their children's education. Even though we have the traditional parent organizations like the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), the School Site Council (SSC) and the English Learner Advisory Committee (ELAC), I feel that parent participation should be stronger. Furthermore, it is not simply parent participation in the traditional sense that I am looking for, but parent involvement with decision-making power. For this reason, I embarked on this doctoral journey in order to find the answers to my questions in an effort to develop the best tools to serve and empower my community.

#### Statement of the Problem

The positive impact of parent involvement on the academic success of students has been researched, published and confirmed (Epstein, 1995). Universities, government agencies and Local Educational Agencies (LEA) have created outlines and frameworks on parent involvement in order to guide school principals and other officials (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2001). The problem addressed in this study is that not all parents are engaged in the home-school connection due to hegemonic practices, cultural misunderstandings and deficit-thinking models adopted by school principals and teachers. Such hegemonic practices are evident in the reinforcement of English as the dominant language without any regard or attempt to address the students' native language

or culture. Huber (2011) explained, “English dominance becomes an officially sanctioned form of English hegemony” (385). Furthermore,

Practices of English dominance in California public education, then, function to subordinate the language, social practices, lived experiences, forms of knowledge, and cultures of its largely Latina/o student population, and continue a colonial legacy of social, political, and economic domination over this group. (385)

Hegemonic practices in California schools are evident through the cultural misunderstandings or stereotypical views of immigrant Latinos as illegal, welfare recipients or criminals (Huber, 2011). These hegemonic practices or beliefs create the space for cultural misunderstandings because the dominant view of Latinos does not allow the school personnel who embrace the hegemony to see beyond their stereotypes and beliefs. This leads to the adoption of deficit thinking models where Latino and African American students are seen as lacking the ability or the skills to perform well academically (Goodman & West-Olatunji, 2010).

School personnel often intentionally or unintentionally (due to cultural incompetence) ignore and exclude parents of Latino immigrant English Language Learner (ELL) students (Quiocho & Daoud, 2006). Latino parents are therefore excluded from school activities and other forms of participation (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2001). Exclusion from the educational system is detrimental because it contributes to the academic achievement gap currently in existence (Lee & Bowen, 2006). The present situation for Latino students in California is not very promising based on past and current research. According to Yosso and Solórzano (2006), out of 100 Latino or Chicano students, only 46 graduate from high school. Out of these 46 Latino/Chicano students, 26 enroll in college, 17 will attend a community college, and nine will go to a four-year university. Of the 17 who attend a community college, only

one will transfer to a four-year university. In addition, the remaining 10 out of the original 100 Latino/Chicano students attending a four-year university, only eight will graduate with a baccalaureate degree. Moreover, two of these eight will continue their studies and receive a graduate or professional degree and less than one out of the original 100 Latino/Chicano students will receive a doctoral degree. On the other hand, the outcome is uniquely different if compared to 100 Caucasian students, 84 will receive their high school diploma, 26 will obtain their college degree and 10 will earn a graduate or professional degree (Yosso & Solorzano, 2006).

In order to close the achievement gap with Latino students, especially with ELL Latino students, school principals have to reach out to Latino parents and ask them what their needs are and how to better serve their children. While there is plenty of information stating what school principals can do to engage Latino parents from the academic perspective, but very little has been done to simply ask parents what they need and what they would like to research (Auerbach, 2009). School principals must make a personal connection with parents in order to develop a dialogue where parents can freely express their particular concerns and needs. It is important to note that this dialogue must occur in an environment where parents do not feel intimidated and are treated as equals.

### Background and Need

In January of 2008, California State Superintendent, Jack O'Connell, released the findings of his P-16 Council on the status of California's educational achievement gap. The report confirmed what I stated above; the academic achievement gap between Whites and various People of Color, primarily Latinos, and pointed out that this gap will affect California's economic and democratic future (P-16 Council, 2008). The low academic

achievement of U.S. born and immigrant Latinos will affect the economic stability of the country in a time where higher skilled workers will be needed and the demand for production and an unskilled labor force will diminish (Kirsch, Braun, & Yamamoto, 2007). What is even more alarming is that in California the number of Latino students in K-12 education is approximately half of the total students in the state's educational pipeline (API Report, 2010). Our society is facing a tremendous challenge that needs to be addressed immediately in order to deal with the problem of equity.

The most recent report from the California Department of Education (CDE) on student performance on the California Standards Test (CST) points out that 41.8% of Latinos scored proficient or advanced in the area of English Language Arts (ELA) compared to the 70.9% of White students who scored proficient or advanced; and 46.8% Latinos scored proficient or advanced in mathematics compared to 69.1% of Whites (AYP State Overview, 2010). I would also like to mention the scores for ELL's since 84.6% of Latino students belong to this category (Statewide English Learners, 2010). Thirty-five and a half percent of ELL's scored proficient or advanced in ELA and 45.6% of these students scored proficient or advanced in mathematics (AYP State Overview, 2010). Many Latino students fall in the category of ELL's and socioeconomically disadvantaged students, which demonstrates the complications that school personnel have to work with in serving disadvantaged students with various sociocultural needs. Teachers may not share this background with their students, but parents could communicate on a casual basis their situation with the teachers as they help out in the classroom so teachers could have at least a cognitive understanding of their students' status.

In the P-16 Council report recently reviewed also gave recommendations to close the achievement gap. The report outlined 14 recommendations for school districts and individual schools to follow in order to close the achievement gap. Recommendation number three was of utmost importance to this study since it addressed the necessary partnerships between the school and parents (P-16 Council, 2008). The document stated:

Research indicates that family involvement in schools increases student achievement. The benefits of parent and family involvement include higher test scores and grades, better attendance, higher rate of completion of homework, more positive attitudes and behavior, higher graduation rates, and greater enrollment in higher education. (P-16 Council, 2008, p. 27)

The document called for more parent involvement and stated the positive outcomes from having the participation of parents in schools from better grades to higher college enrollment. The P-16 report included ideas for the establishment of school-community relationships without providing specific information on how to develop partnerships with parents. The report did not look at the particular needs of the families of ELL's and therefore did not address the core problem of the home and school disconnect.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002) outlined specific mandates that school administrators need to follow in order to address parent involvement and the achievement gap under §1111. Furthermore, the law has a specific area under §1118 (g) (4) for the participation and outreach of parents of ELL students to help parents in order for their children to have higher academic achievement. The law states that parents need to receive notification of meetings in order for school personnel to obtain feedback from parents. The importance of this mandate clearly establishes a two-way communication protocol. Moreover, the educational agency needs to explain to parents how they can be involved in their child's education. On the other hand, the law does not provide details on

how this can be accomplished, but recommends that research-based strategies be implemented. Effective partnerships implementation with parents is crucial because the overall effect will be improved academic achievement, which in turn will help improve educators' efforts to close the achievement gap (Epstein, 1995). The overall result is that students will have better opportunities after completing their K-12 education, become productive members of society, and contribute to our economy.

As a result of NCLB (2002), the CDE and LEA's have implemented laws and policies that pertain to parent involvement. After ten years of NCLB, Latino students continue to have an academic achievement gap that is far from being closed; and Latino immigrant parents continue to be excluded from the educational process. School administrators and teachers will be faced with the increased challenge of educating Latino ELL's and working directly with their parents (Ochoa & Rhodes, 2005). Research has demonstrated that in order to close the achievement gap is to increase parent participation in school activities and to show them ways to help their children at home (Lee & Bowen, 2006). The fact that there are twice as many Latino children in California public schools is an alarming fact if the achievement gap does not close. Furthermore, if Latino immigrant parent school participation does not increase, it will negatively contribute to this gap. Consequently, the impact of a large unskilled labor force can be detrimental to any state; which is why it is in the best interest of everyone if Latino children have future academic success. The Involvement of Latino immigrant parents as school partners can bring a wealth of information and expertise into the classroom by providing teachers specific ways to address students in order to increase engagement, reduce behavior problems, and increase academic performance. Latino parent



involvement is crucial because they know their children better than teachers. After all, parents should typically have a deeper understanding of their children's likes and dislikes, which is why school personnel can should embrace this level of expertise.

### Purpose of the Study

My intention in this study was to provide Latino immigrant parents with an asset-based approach to their collaborative involvement in their child's education. The purpose of this study was to explore parents' perceptions of their participation in and creation of an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program for immigrant Latino parents. Specifically, I am defining the anti-hegemonic program as a curriculum and approach for parents designed specifically to challenge any institutional racism and to address the current status quo that systematically excludes Latino parents. A culturally sensitive program is program cognizant of the cultural, linguistic, economic, educational, religious, gastronomic, and health needs of Latinos. In order for parents to be able to challenge the racist systemic practices and be able to address their cultural needs, the program needs to empower and train parents to be advocates for their children and other parents.

Parents involved in this study served as co-researchers in order to discover the needs and challenges of other parents, but also presented solutions in an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program. Parents investigated their own reality and generated data based on their research and on their conversations. The participants and co-researchers were the parents of urban long-term ELL students in a Northern California elementary school.

## Theoretical Framework

I employed Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a theoretical framework supported by epistemological theories of Participatory Action Research (PAR). Critical Race Theory helped my Latino immigrant parents see areas where they had not been served properly and allowed them to state their story and to create a counter story that challenged the preconceived notions of their lack of participation and involvement in the school setting (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). The epistemological theories of PAR supported the demystification of the research process and involved the parents as the “beneficiaries of research” (Ladson-Billing, 2000, p. 268). Parents not only participated in the production of new knowledge but benefited from the application of this knowledge to their situation. Rahman (1991) explains,

An immediate objective of PAR is to return to the people the legitimacy of the knowledge they are capable of producing through their own verification systems, as fully scientific, and the right to use this knowledge – including any other knowledge, but not dictated by it – as a guide in their own action. This immediate objective is an integral and indispensable part of the objective of dual social transformation – in the relations of material production and in the relations of knowledge. (p. 15)

My participation in this study as a co-researcher, principal of a school that serves Latino immigrant parents and member of the community, provided me with a unique perspective. In fact, the knowledge produced not only allowed me to accomplish a doctoral degree but served to empower the Latino immigrant parents I serve within my specific learning community. By empowering my school parents with the tools to research their reality and provide a counter narrative of their story, I understood that I myself could have been the target of the discourse on the propagation of systemic racism in my role as a school official. The breaking down of hegemonic practices and school

hierarchies that I wanted to accomplish in order to provide Latino immigrant parents equal access required a close look at the role that race plays in a complex educational system.

### *Critical Race Theory*

Critical Race Theory had its origin in legal studies that examined neutral laws that claimed to be colorblind but that continued to be discriminatory in practice (Su, 2007). Critical Race Theory was then applied to the educational setting to examine racist policies and practices and attempted to analyze the impact that laws had on People of Color (Stovall, 2006). Critical Race Theory has five themes that helped me to empower my Latino immigrant parents. The five tenets according to Solorzano (1997) are:

- The Centrality and Intersectionality of Race and Racism [that is, that racism is prevalent and central to U.S. social interactions]
- The Challenge to Dominant Ideology [this is a challenge to the hegemonic practices and ideas of the dominant culture and the status quo]
- The Commitment to Social Justice
- The Centrality of Experiential Knowledge [this concept allows CRT to be accessible to anyone regardless of educational level because someone's experience cannot be denied]
- The Interdisciplinary Perspective

The first and second tenet of CRT, which is the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism and the challenge to dominant ideology, are fundamental themes because “racism, like capitalism, is an accepted structural phenomenon centered in maintaining the status quo” (Stovall, 2006, p. 250). Stovall explained that racism is not due to “individual bigotry” but the result of “systemic structures” that create laws and policies (p. 250). A prevalent racist ideology that CRT confronts is the concept of colorblindness. This ideology is harmful to Latino immigrant parents because, in the process of building neutral policies, it creates disadvantages for Latinos (Su, 2007). An example of this may

be a practice I have seen in schools where students have to wear a school sweatshirt that can only be purchased at the school and then punish the students who were out of uniform even though their parents were unable to buy it. Other mainstream ideologies that harm Latinos is in the case of language surveys. These language surveys have to be filled out by parents when they enroll their children in school. The surveys label their children as ELL or English Only (EO). The issue of Latino students who are categorized as ELL becomes a problem when they are in high school and continue taking ESL or English Language Development (ELD) courses without the opportunity to take college preparatory classes (Valdes, 1998).

The third and fourth tenets, experiential knowledge and interdisciplinary perspectives, allowed my Latino immigrant parents with little formal education to be able to contribute to a body of knowledge and the development of a counter narrative (Stovall, 2006). In this respect, I found that there is no epistemology that can exclude the oppressed or silence them. Critical Race Theory is therefore the model that can help communities to organize and cause change instead of paying lip service to parent involvement (Su, 2007). In order to obtain the full picture of what is occurring in the home-school disconnect between the parents of Latino ELL's and school personnel, established research methods need to be employed along with the experiential or "popular knowledge" through PAR (Fals-Borda, 1988, p. 4). There are three approaches that PAR employs that connect to the goals of CRT. The approaches are:

- the development of a new role for researchers, who do not simply mine facts "objectively" but facilitate joint and reciprocal work;
- a recognition of the part that grassroots reflection and inquiry have played in the development of knowledge;

- an insistence that research be linked not only to the process of knowledge-building but also to education and action, especially for less powerful people (Ansley & Gaventa, 1997, p. 47).

Each of the three approaches reiterate what I mentioned above in connection to the tenets of CRT in giving the immigrant Latino parents the opportunity to study their own reality; produce new knowledge, and to take action with the new information. The Latino immigrant parents of my school were able to participate as co-researchers, interpreters, motivators, and as advocates of other Latino parents.

The unique nature of popular and academic knowledge gives CRT its interdisciplinary perspective as the disciplines of sociology, psychology, leadership studies and pedagogy combine to form meaning. Previous educational research has not been able to affect the inequities between ethnic groups and has only reinforced deficit-thinking models (Nygreen, 2006). My participation in this study provided the traditional perspectives mentioned above through my formal academic training and the parents of my Latino ELL students brought their personal experiences or knowledge base.

The last tenet is a commitment to social justice as a school leader. My commitment to this last tenet was a self-reflective catalyst to challenge the status quo in order to give access to all groups of parents in my school. Social justice leadership is a challenge in regards to the continued resistance from many sectors and it has to be “a deliberate intervention that requires the moral use of power” (Bogotch, 2000, p. 3). This is a great task because I have to be ready to sacrifice “recognition and compensation” (Stovall, 2006, p. 257). In order to become, or help others to become, agents of change, I have continued to rely on personal fortitude to face a system that pushes and fights back. Stovall (2006) warned that resistance will not only come from the dominant group, but

from the group being served as well. Latinos are not a homogenous group and different ideologies may interfere with the change agent's plans for transformation. Therefore, I had to be very knowledgeable of the people I was serving in order to present the correct guidance to lead my parents in the right direction.

The day-to-day activities of a school, budget cuts, and other pressures that school principals face, adds to the challenge of leading under the ideals of social justice (Stovall, 2004). Much of the literature in educational leadership deals with the relationship between principals and teachers. Thus, far there is little research on the commitment of school leaders to engage parents (Auerbach, 2009). Also, there is no social justice in a system that is set up to exclude "by the ways in which school-conceived parent involvement programs disregard Latino knowledge and cultural bases" (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999, p. 415). The importance of having school leaders, especially principals, take the banner of social justice is crucial due to principal's nature as keepers of the school site. The particular challenge I found was while addressing issues of equity and social justice was the indirect nature of maintaining the status quo (Stovall, 2004). In response, I decided to tackle the core of the problem and break down the communication barriers between the hegemonic practices of school personnel and parents. Stovall (2004) argues that school administrators need "to engage in the practice of developing and maintaining a school with an anti-oppressive, anti-racist agenda" (p. 10). By mentioning that a school is keeping an anti-racist agenda can be caustic in itself because once a person hears the word race, they assume that 'they're being called a racist" (p. 11). The careful consideration key to this aspect of social justice leadership lies in the ability to

introduce the problem to the faculty staff in a way that consensus is achieved with the understanding that the problem does exist.

As a school leader, I faced another challenge outside the scope of this research, which is the delivery of professional development for teachers in order for them to become cognizant of the issues of social justice to keep an anti-racist agenda. It is possible that as parents become empowered after their interaction with this study by functioning as an advocacy-training program for other parents they will in turn provide actual professional development to teachers as they share their findings and needs in the future.

Through the acknowledgement of my ELL students' parents many began to feel empowered to participate in the school by forming a school-based support group. As a result, my empowered parents were able to create a culturally sensitive advocacy-training program in order to serve other parents as well and address the home-school disconnect.

The ideal roadmap used to guide the parents of Latino ELL's was Critical Race Theory in order to navigate through the educational system. This framework allowed the Latino immigrant parents in my school to confront the hegemonic and deficit-thinking models created by school administrators, teachers and the educational system (Yosso, 2005). By understanding the five tenets of CRT, the Latino parents in my school were able to analyze their situation against each one of the tenets. They explored and attempted to improve their situation with the use of the framework along with my sympathetic support of their needs. Furthermore, the parents in my school saw where they needed to address certain points as in the case of the centrality of race and racism. If parents find that race and racism is a concern at their school, then the roadmap can direct the action in

the employment of social justice or an interdisciplinary approach that can challenge the dominant ideology by establishing a healthy bridge of dialogue between parents and educators.

The employment of CRT served to generate a parent program that challenged hegemonic and racist practices; it created a program that is culturally sensitive, able to advocate against dominant ideology and to use the parents' life experiences in the educational system as scientific knowledge generated through an interdisciplinary perspective. Furthermore, CRT offered me, the researcher, "an opportunity to stand in a different relationship to the research (and researched)" (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 268). The fact that I am a Latino principal and member of the community I serve uniquely places me in a position of understanding their particular experiences. Ladson-Billings (2000) adds, "the insider status that scholars of color may have can alert them to the way oppressed peoples both protect themselves and subvert dominant paradigm" (p. 267-268).

#### Research Questions

Detailed herein this study addresses the following research questions:

1. What elements comprise an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program for the immigrant Latino parents of urban Latino ELL students in a Northern California South Bay elementary school?
2. What are the perceptions on school involvement of immigrant Latino parents of ELL students who participate as co-researchers and co-presenters of an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program in a Northern California elementary school?



3. What are the perceptions on school involvement of immigrant Latino parents of ELL students who participate in an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program in a Northern California elementary school?
4. What are the benefits to immigrant Latino parents of ELL students who participate in an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program in a Northern California elementary school?

#### Limitations

The limitations of this study included three main components that were specific to the nature of my study. The first is that it was conducted with a small number of participants because only my elementary school took part in the study. This limitation was only restricted to the number of participants, but not to the amount of knowledge that this small group of parents provided. A small number of participants and co-researchers gave me great insight into the study provided. The limitation in numbers did not inhibit the participants from creating their own counter narrative through their voiced concerns in the creation of the anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program.

The second limitation encountered was due to the short span of time the study took. There were many factors that could have changed the perceptions of the participants over time. These factors stem from the economy, changes to immigration law, national and local politics, and the personal effect of all these influences on families and individuals.

The final limitation that this study had was the lack of teacher perspective or input in the creation of this particular program. Teachers could have provided useful ideas and great insight, but the nature of the situation demanded that teachers not be included in the

study in order to hear and learn from the parents being silenced by current culture of the school and its hegemonic practices.

### Significance of the Study

The significance of the study addressed the gap in the literature about parents of ELL students, their involvement in schools and their collaboration with school administrators. Peressini (1996) stated that few studies have explored parents as equal partners of schools with the same level of power and influence as the representatives of the institution. In another study about bridging academic and cultural gaps in Latino students, the researcher recommended that further research be made where it includes Latino parents and principals (Good, Masewicz, & Vogel, 2010). This study specifically addressed the academic and cultural gap. It provided parents access to the leadership and direction of the school, it empowered them and broke down hierarchies in order to give voice to the parents of Latino ELL students. Furthermore, this study made parents active partners, but also took any recommendation that would result from the study for implementation. Howard and Reynolds (2008) add, “it is quite rare for parents, particularly those who are informed about educational processes of teaching and learning, to offer recommendation, strategies, or interventions critical to the learning of students” (p. 85).

Another unique perspective that this study generated was the fact that I am the principal of the school and an active member of the Latino community being served. Few studies have been reported where the leader of a school is committed to social justice and to the involvement of parents as equal partners (Auerbach, 2009). This study shed light

on the breaking down of hierarchies and what happens if shared leadership with marginalized parents really occurred.

In order to empower Latino parents of ELL students and address the disparity in the home-school disconnect, an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program is necessary for school-based transformation. School-based transformation is essential for parents of ELL students because the achievement gap between Latinos and the dominant group can only be addressed by those being affected (Freire, 2007). Freire states, “[i]t is only the oppressed who, by freeing themselves, can free their oppressors. The latter, as an oppressive class, can free neither others nor themselves” (p. 56). The school personnel does not have the ability to liberate (or empower) parents of Latino immigrant students. School principals or teachers do not have a grasp on the reality of Latinos to even help in the liberating process. An example of this would be a school or county administrator from a privileged group, not having the experience of Mexican indigenous children who are discriminated by the dominant group in the United States, end up perceiving them as members of a homogenous group and stripping them from their indigenous identity. Latino community leaders in collaboration with school principals and teachers can initiate grassroots movements in order to empower Latino families through academic dialogue. The implementation of the core concepts of CRT and PAR allowed my school parents of Latino ELL students to see themselves as “historical actors” (Hughes, 2005, p. 51) and subjects with the ability to change and affect the perception that the dominant group has of their children.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Introduction

The Participatory Action Research (PAR) herein focused on the creation of an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program with the collaboration of Latino immigrant parents of ELL students as co-researchers. The study explored how the parents' perception of their involvement in the school helped or impeded them from participating in their child's education. Some parents participated as co-researchers and others as participants and both of their perceptions were included in this study.

The purpose of this literature review was written to provide a current background on the topic of Latino parent involvement in schools. It also includes some of the relevant theories that describe the problem without providing a solution, and others that provide a solution and give a solid understanding of the problem. This review of literature also demonstrates the gaps in the current literature where this study attempts to contribute new information. The overall topics that will be discussed here are the issues that create the breach between schools and Latino immigrant parents of ELL students and the explanation that could be best applied.

#### Restatement of the Problem

Latino parents of ELL students have been excluded from the traditional school involvement due to deficit-thinking models and cultural misunderstandings of school principals and teachers. Research has demonstrated that parent involvement increases student success (Epstein, 1995). As the achievement gap in Latino students widens, stronger support for parent participation in schools is critical. Employing effective

models can serve as an important strategy for addressing the cultural misunderstandings that keep immigrant Latino parents of ELL students away from their child's school. I wanted to bring greater clarity to what such a model might look like, paying special attention to the Latino immigrant parents of ELL students. I presented in conjunction with my Latino co-researcher parents an asset-building model that demonstrated counter narratives, motivation for parents, and recognition from me, the school principal.

### Overview

My exploration of the two concepts: the cultural barriers that explain the breach between schools and Latino parents and the practical applications to bridge the gap between parents and schools. Both concepts were important in order to understand the problem, the solution and to have concrete examples of how to accomplish the task. Parents come to the educational system not knowing what to expect and with an already negative social perception and feelings of inadequacy (Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco & Qin, 2005). Furthermore, the cultural differences from the dominant culture add to the struggles that Latino parents of ELL students have to face. This review of literature provided further information on the problem and showcased ways to address the problem.

### The Breach Between Schools and Latino Parents

In this section, I explored the breach that exists between the home and the school environment. I looked at reasons why the home school disconnectedness increases as teachers and principals develop negative perceptions of Latino parents. I also examined Latino parent's lack of knowledge of the American educational system and focused on the barriers that prevent Latino parent participation in the schools due to their experience in their perspective countries of origin.

According to Marschall (2006), constant immigration in the last decades from various Latin American countries have brought multiple issues related to parent participation in the schools. Latino immigrant parents and ELL students come to schools with an array of issues besides the need to improve in English. Immigration and forced displacement have created challenges for American schools where school principals and teachers need to be aware and able to solve in order to ameliorate the achievement gap (Bollin, 2007). States like California, Texas, Arizona and Colorado are the most impacted with the number of ELL students in their schools (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2010). It is estimated that 4,512,560 ELL students are enrolled in American schools with 34% being in California (Aguila, 2010). The students who comprise these numbers come from “lower-socioeconomic groups; and many have immigrant and/or migrant backgrounds” (p. 2). The unique living conditions where some of these immigrant Latino parents and their children reside are dreadful and “parents frequently have limited English and lack the academic needed to help their children with their school work” (p. 178). Immigration becomes an issue to the home-school connection when Latino parents are unaware of practices of the American school system and expectations that teachers have of parents (Bollin, 2007). Consequently, the lack of communication or miscommunication between parents and school personnel create a convoluted problem for the education of ELL’s.

Whether Latino parents are recent immigrants or U.S. born, schools have not been able to cater to their particular cultural needs (Marschall, 2006). Latino parents have been left out of the educational process. Studies have reported that “immigrants who are culturally different and do not speak English are not viewed positively by many Americans” (Quiocho & Daoud, 2006, p. 257). Furthermore, Quiocho and Daoud,

explicated that a main concern of school personnel is that “children of immigrants either can not or will not assimilate into American culture” (p. 257). This notion leads to a negative perception of Latino parents because Latino parents appear to refuse to assimilate into the American system. Furthermore, perceptions of school personnel about Latino parents are based on stereotypes and other notions, leading to conclusions that the low academic performance of Latino students is due to parents’ lack of participation or uncaring attitudes about education (Shields, 2004). What is necessary to understand is that Latino immigrant parents face a tremendous challenge in trying to learn the English language themselves coupled also by the mainstream culture as they adopt to their new communities (Perreira, Chapman, & Stein, 2006). These parents struggle in order to adjust to a new environment, learn new ways and find ways to keep their families together and functional.

Latino immigrant parents do care about their child’s education, but the negative perceptions fabricated by school personnel are supported by the negative tone found in some educational research consistently frame Latino immigrant parents with an amalgam of deficits. Nygreen (2006) explained, “Decades of educational research and reform have done little to disrupt familiar patterns of school success and failure that reflect and reinforce existing disparities of race, ethnicity, and class” (p. 2). In other words, the research that was supposed to help, has only confirmed the negative views that school personnel and people in the mainstream have of Latinos and other People of Color. It has been proven through various studies that parents have positive views of schools and teachers when teachers treat their children well and attempt to have their children give their best (Perreira, Chapman, & Stein, 2006). Valdes (1996) adds in regards to the

Latino immigrant parents in her study, “[t]hey felt that education was important and that it was their duty as parents to send their children to school” (p. 152). Latino immigrant parents, in the spite of the many challenges of their limited schooling, want their children to have more than what they had growing up. In a PAR study where Latina immigrant mothers were able to create a space to make meaning of their relationship with the school and construct a counter narrative Dyrness (2007) explains,

For the Madres [mothers], sharing their experiences at the school in the safety of home led them to recognize and critique the images of parents that teachers were projecting onto them. They identified the way teachers used a ‘good parent/bad parent’ paradigm to delegitimize the claims of ‘problem parents’. The ‘good parent’ in this paradigm was the parent who said and did exactly as the principal or teachers wanted. (p. 266)

This asset-building PAR study allowed those Latina immigrant mothers to have a voice and fight the feeling of being “judged, silenced; framed as ‘problems’” (p. 266). This is a prime example of the empowerment that can occur when PAR is faithfully applied in a school research environment. The Madres Unidas study addressed the epistemological barrier between academia and the Latina mothers and provided a practical solution and guidance to the parents. In order for parents to know what to address and demand from teachers and principals they also needed to be aware of their limitations, the perceptions that others have of them and an open platform to communicate with other Latino immigrant parents to plan and challenge the status quo. The open hospitality of having a place to meet and discuss their concerns can occur in a school setting if the principal is in agreement that change needs to occur even if he or she does not know what that change will be in the end. If the principal is the main obstacle, then parents need to continue to drive forward, collect data as the mothers in the study above and present it to other school officials in order to cause and force change. As a school principal, I can honestly say that



hosting small group meetings at parents' homes to hear their concerns on a weekly or monthly basis may not be a practical approach for me to take or have my teachers do (besides breaking some contractual agreements); but it is a concept that can be tackled by parent leaders in close communication with me and teacher leaders. It would require a true democratic approach to school leadership and commitment to collaboration (Olivos, 2009). As mentioned above, the school principal can provide a location in the school to host parent-led meetings where full consensus can be reached on parent-generated agendas.

Ryan and Rottmann (2009) explained that deep-rooted perceptions in school personnel about Latinos might continue to exclude them from school involvement even when an open invitation to participate is given. Olivos (2009) adds, "it becomes apparent that implicit institutional and personal beliefs affect the potential for collaboration as much as do explicit practices" (p. 113). An example of this would be having parent meetings immediately after school to accommodate teachers' schedules. This leaves parents who work late or evenings out of the communication process. Meetings may be conducted only in English and no babysitting may be provided, thus excluding more parents. When teachers and principals see that no Latino parents arrive to the meetings after sending reminders home with the children, their views may be confirmed about the cultural deficits in those parents in regards to their perspective they did their best to involve parents but simply they did not show up. At times when school principals create programs to engage Latino parents, they seldom have success since the programs themselves are not created to address the needs of Latino parents (Lee & Bowen, 2006). The programs' failure is due to the program designers' lack of cultural understanding and

knowledge about local problems facing Latino parents and their children (Marschall, 2006). Mainstream teachers also share the same sense of frustration when they have “tried their best and appeared to fail” (Valdes, 1996, p. 167). The problem is not in the desire to help, but in the approach taken out of ignorance on cultural competency. As schools encounter repeated failure in attempts to engage Latino parents, a deficit-thinking model is developed (Garcia & Guerra, 2004). At times families attempt to approach and advocate for their children and employ their communication style, which in turn is deemed rude, colloquial or aggressive (Howard & Reynolds, 2008). In response, this causes no communication to be established and the families end up being “viewed through a deficit lens in need of transformation or acculturation” (p. 323). The feeling of defeat is understandable when school principals attempt to implement something that has worked in other settings and stop trying after the first few failed efforts. In order for a school administrator to be able to engage the parents of Latino ELL’s, an honest and well intentioned effort has to be attempted by the school personnel a number of times. Instead of pointing fingers at the families of Latino ELL’s, school administrators and teachers have to examine themselves and acknowledge that they may be the problem due to their belief system (Garcia & Guerra, 2004). A strong communication system has to be developed in order to inform and convey the right message to the parents. Valdes (1996) adds,

Teachers can be informed about what parents do not know, and parents can be taught how American schools work. What is not as easily fixed are values and beliefs that run counter to views held in Western industrialized countries about individual success and school achievement. (p. 168)

Understanding the belief system of the Latino immigrant parents being served and staying aware of the educator’s personal biases, is a challenge that cannot be addressed

by simply informing both parties about their differences. However, this is where an asset-building communication system needs to be established for a continual exchange of information, ideas, concerns and world-views.

The implementation of an asset-building communication system will not only have parents communicating directly to the administration and teachers, but would also allow the parents to communicate amongst themselves. Dyrness (2007) adds about her experience in conducting research in an asset-building model, “the relationship and trust that were developed through the open sharing of stories then encouraged the mothers to take on new roles at the school” (p. 264). It is important to note that parents do not lack the desire to participate in their child’s education; they lack the opportunity to be included in a manner that values their participation. When Latino immigrant parents are faced with direct and explicit resistance, it has been known that Latino parents organize and “protect school resources that they value; and assert their authority and cultural values at home” (Perreira, Chapman & Stein, 2006, p. 1386). In the words of one of Dyrness’ (2007) parent researcher, “it was not the ability to conduct research or participate meaningfully in the school that they lacked; it was the ‘chance’ to do these things, and the confidence to know they could” (p. 265). This is the challenge that I personally face in trying to include and involve the immigrant Latino parents of my school, in letting them know that they can and that it is okay to be a decision maker in their children’s school.

The lack of communication between schools and parents of Latino ELL’s prevents full participation. As I stated in the previous chapter, NCLB (2002) has established procedures for parent involvement and in some areas like §1118, the

participation of parents of ELL's is outlined and mandated. The document states the following:

§1118 (g) (4 ) Each local educational agency receiving funds under this part shall implement an effective means of outreach to parents of limited English proficient students to inform the parents regarding how the parents can be involved in the education of their children, and be active participants in assisting their children to attain English proficiency, achieve at high levels in core academic subjects, and meet challenging State academic achievement standards and State academic content standards expected of all students, including holding, and sending notice of opportunities for, regular meetings for the purpose of formulating and responding to recommendations from parents of students assisted under this part. (NCLB, 2002)

The California Department of Education (CDE) has followed these guidelines and created the English Learner Advisory Committee (ELAC) in schools and District English Learner Advisory Committee (DELAC) to uphold the law and the needs of those parents in the local school. However, Latino parents continue to stay away from their children's schools due to the negative treatment that they receive from school principals and teachers, regardless of the government's mandates on parent involvement (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). Due to some of these negative interactions that Latino immigrant parents have had with school personnel, miscommunication is spread among the Latino community about specific teachers or principals and each warns the other to not upset those individuals out of fear that their children will pay the consequences (Valdes, 1996). In my experience, I have received multiple requests at the beginning of the school year from Latino immigrant parents to change their children from a specific teacher's classroom based on what they have heard about the teacher. Upon each request I have remained firm and never conceded to any of the requests, but also held meetings between the parent and the particular teacher to express their concerns. I have also experienced many situations when a parent reported that a teacher had yelled at her or his child, but

did not want to let the teacher know that he or she had reported in fear of retaliation. Again, I would set up a meeting with the intention of empowering the parent to express his or her feeling about the situation. Most often the teacher seemed nervous and would apologize if what she did appeared to be yelling at the child. I do not recall any instance where the situation repeated itself with the same family.

It is difficult to imagine that teachers or principals are deliberately excluding Latino immigrant parents in American schools. I do not believe to be excluding parents from the communication pipeline at my school, but it may be possible that certain groups of parents feel excluded. I cannot think of which group, but I have to think in these terms because if I do not, I will be committing the same act as those who do exclude. Latino immigrant parents need to be explicitly shown what type of communication system the school employs. It could be that parents send verbal messages to the teacher via the child when the expectation is to send a note, call the school or meet in person with the teacher (Valdes, 1996). It can also be that teachers send messages home, as my teachers do, to request a conference and Latino immigrant parents take it as “invitations that did not have to be accepted” (p. 162). I have found that all the Latino immigrant parents in my school understand the process, but it is only those who move into the school that need the process explained. In addition, teachers and principals have to be clear in their communication, especially in written communication when they send notes or progress reports home. Valdes (1996) mentions that Latino immigrant parents employ a concrete communication style and contrasts with the vague comments of the teachers. She further adds that the families in her study lacked an understanding of the grading policies, programs their children could participate in and general school requirements. All aspects

added to the parents confusion and misunderstanding of the school system. In retrospect, I found as a teacher that the comments I could put on a report card were limited to the drop-down options presented in the electronic grade book we employed to submit grades. Moreover, I assume that many parents found those comments vague and unhelpful as well.

At times, the lack of communication is simply a result of not having anything translated to Spanish or lack of interpretation services. Without translation or interpretation, Latino parents are unable to express their needs to the school or participate in parent-teacher conferences (Smith, Stern, & Shatrova, 2008). Perreira, Chapman and Stein (2006) indicated that in their study Latino immigrant “parents felt alienated, and unable to advocate on behalf of their children due to the language barrier (p. 1396). The parents mentioned above felt frustrated when interpreters were not accessible to help them understand grades or other requirements. In some circumstances, the vocabulary or messages in translated communications may be perceived as unwelcoming or negative to Latino immigrant parents (Trumbull et al., 2001). Therefore, an understanding of Latino culture is essential in order to communicate and educate parents about the American educational system (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). Simply placing all Latino parents into one category of “Hispanic or Latino” will not help the school personnel to serve their needs.

Due to the rich historical and cultural past of Latinos, great diversity exists between the various Latinos. Latinos in the United States have been clustered and perceived by the dominant culture to be a homogeneous group. At times, the only common link between Latinos is the Spanish language or a dialect of it. In the case of Puerto Ricans, Padilla (1958) explains,

There are those individuals considered Negro in Puerto Rico, “Puerto Rican,” or “Spanish,” by the outgroup in New York, and Negro by the Hispano ingroup; those considered white in Puerto Rico, white by the ingroup and the outgroup in New York; those considered to be in intermediate categories in Puerto Rico and by the Hispano ingroup, Negro by the outgroup in New York; those considered white in Puerto Rico, white by the ingroup, and Negro by the outgroup; and those considered to be in intermediate categories or to be Negro in Puerto Rico and by the Hispano group, white by the outgroup in New York City. (p. 76)

This demonstrates the level of racial complexity between one Latino nationality. The way that Puerto Ricans view themselves is different from the view of the mainstream. Not having command of this culture as a school principal or teacher serving Puerto Ricans can certainly play a role in addressing parents in a culturally sensitive approach.

It is with great cultural understanding that the term Latino or Hispanic does not represent a particular race. The United States Census Bureau reported that 48% of Latinos declared White as their race and 42% reported that they were of mixed races (2000). Latinos comprise 14% of the entire population in the United States and 34% in California (Census, 2000). Out of this 14%, Mexicans make up 66.1% of the entire Latino population in the United States, followed by Central and South Americans with 14.5%, Puerto Ricans with a 9.6%, Cubans with a 4%, and the remainder being “other Hispanic” (Torres, 2004). These groups come to the United States with varying levels of education, economic attainment or political reasons. Those who migrate for political reasons are called *refugees*. Occasionally, as in the case of Cubans, groups receive “receptive” treatment by the United States, enjoy a “non-prejudiced societal reception” and are part of a “strong coethnic community” (Portes & Zhou, 2005, p. 91). The other Latinos who migrated for economic reasons resent this preferential treatment (Torres, 2004). A study by Padilla and Gonzalez (2001) showed that Mexican immigrant students receiving elementary school education in Mexico performed better academically than

third generation U.S.-born Mexican-American students. As we can see, even within a Latino group of the same origin, differences can occur affecting academic performance. Understanding the population group and addressing their needs is essential in order to obtain parent participation.

The breach between immigrant parents of Latino ELL's and the school personnel is widened by parents' understanding or misunderstanding of the educational system and different worldviews. It would be foolish to think that all countries employ the same educational system as the one used in the United States and that all parents have the same understanding of what it takes to have successful students. In fact, parent involvement in American schools has not always been the same and can be viewed in three distinct historical periods: a period when parents supported rural teachers with basic necessities, a period where parents provided financial support to keep schools functioning, and the current period where parents "have increased their efforts to reinforce the curriculum and promote cognitive development at home" (Lareau, 1987, p. 74). What the teachers at my school perceived as "involved parents" are those parents who come to volunteer in the classroom and who sit with their kids to do homework and read to them at home.

Countries like Mexico have only recently instituted the concept of parent involvement through the formation of school councils (Andrade de Herrera, 1996). The experience of Latino parents from Latin American countries has been shaped by their views of parent participation in the school, which was limited or not requested by the schools (Miller & San Jose East Side Union High School District, 1999). Simply stated, if you did not see your parents participating in your classroom as a child, you would probably not participate in your child's school as well. Latino parents "believe that it is



the school's responsibility to instill knowledge" (Smith et al., 2008, p. 9). Knowing that it is the teacher who has expertise and not the parent, why would the parents of Latino ELL's attempt to be in the classroom? In Mexico, it was not until the National Agreement for the Modernization of Basic Education (ANMEB in Spanish) signed in 1992 that parent participation became an issue and a mandate (Andrade de Herrera, 1996). As educational systems in Latin American countries adopt laws like NCLB and ANMEB, more parent participation will become the norm in American classrooms as new Latino immigrants come to the States with the notion that parent participation is welcomed and needed in the classroom.

#### *Barriers that Challenge Latino Parent Participation*

There are many external and internal barriers that inhibit Latino parent participation in schools. Some of these barriers faced by parents of Latino ELL's are a lack of cultural understanding of the American home-school relationship, level of education, family income, cultural and social capital and the epistemological view of such capital by educators from the dominant group. Each of the aforementioned barriers contributed to the lack of parent participation.

It is important to understand the concept of an "education" in the Latino world-view of its definition. The word *educación* or *educado* in Spanish not only means being academically educated but being well mannered (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992). The concept of "education" in the Latino culture exemplifies the value in social harmony and collectivism because the purpose of being "educated" in the Latino sense is necessary in order to get along with others. In contrast, being "educated" in the American culture denotes an individualistic approach because it exemplifies personal accomplishment

(Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). Furthermore, Latino immigrant parents consider that the main responsibility of the mother is to instill *educación*, which also includes the moral development of the child through the use of *consejos* which are “spontaneous homilies designed to influence behaviors and attitudes” (Valdes, 1996, p. 125). These *consejos* are told to children according to their age and always include a moral lesson. This, according to Valdes, is what Latino immigrant parents see as their primary responsibility and not playing the role of teacher at home.

The Latino understanding of the relationship between teacher and parent may also play an important function. Latino parents have a strong respect for teachers and view them as experts who cannot be insulted by infringing on their duties (Trumbull et al., 2001). This causes many Latino parents to not advocate for their children because it is assumed that the teacher knows best. The following adage has a sharp contrast with the Latino world-view on education: “the parent is the child’s first teacher” in contrast with the Latino mindset that “the teacher is the child’s second mother” (Trumbull et al., 2001, p. 19).

Latino parents’ interactions with their children at home when doing homework may be different than what teachers expect. Parents of ELL students may read with their children with the focus on “building family unity or mainly as a way to pass on moral lessons” (Trumbull et al., 2001, p. 13). This is exactly how Mexican mothers saw themselves in a different study, as the shapers of their children’s moral upbringing (Valdes, 1996). Latino parent involvement in their child’s education may be limited to simply supervising their daily home reading and homework completion. Valdes (1996) argues that Latino immigrant families “fall short” of the American teachers’ expectations

because they do not engage with their children in the same manner that middle-class families do. Again, this is a misconception on the teacher's part to expect Latino immigrant parents to see themselves as the student's teacher at home. Another misconception pointed out by Valdes (1996) was the "universality of what, in American schools, counts as knowledge" (p. 166). Additionally, parents may be intimidated when employing foreign methodologies or may lack the knowledge to help (Smith et al., 2008). On the other hand, teachers expect parents to check the child's reading comprehension and homework before being turned in. This may be a concept or skill that Latino parents may not have or simply ignore (Valdes, 1996). Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind the language barrier present in Latino immigrant parents, which can greatly diminish their ability to support their children's homework or reading at home (Perreira, Chapman, & Stein, 2006). I constantly deal with this barrier during Student Study Team (SST) meetings or when I translate for teachers during teacher-parent conferences where parents express with great embarrassment that they do not speak English and cannot help their children. In one situation one of the parents expressed that she had only been in second grade in Mexico and could not read in Spanish.

Since many adult Latino immigrants have low educational attainment, they feel embarrassed or intimidated to approach school personnel (Orozco, 2008). Valdes (1996) found in her ethnographic study that parents felt extremely embarrassed about their level of education and in the case of one parent, he kept an inconsistent report on the number of years he attended school. She reports that parents felt regret for not having had more schooling but blamed situations in life for not attaining a complete formal education. Additionally, Latino immigrant parents understood that in the United States people went

to school for more years than what they had experienced in Latin America. Furthermore, the author adds that many times the children of the Latino immigrant parents had already surpassed their parents' level of education. She adds, "This made the parents sensitive about the issue and aware of their own limitations in the eyes of their children" (p. 151). This adds to the breach regardless of the school's efforts to reach out to the parents of Latino ELL's. A parent's educational level positively influences his or her child's academic success (Plunkett, Behnke, Sands, & Choi, 2009). It is general knowledge that level of education correlates with economic status of families. In the case of Latino families, low economic status and low educational levels complicate the home-school relationship (Smith et al., 2008). Often times, family background is more important because the socioeconomic level of a family can rise and fall within years, but family background is much more difficult to change since it is part of an established network. Parental networks can, therefore, be understood in terms of social capital (Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003).

The concept of social capital helps educators to understand the problem afflicting Latino parents, but it does not provide a solution to the home-school disconnect (Yosso, 2005). Bourdieu (1986) defined social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (p. 51). Some parents will bring social capital that interacts with the capital of the school principal or teachers and consequently be viewed in a more positive light than those who do not possess the same social capital (Lareau, 1987). These differences give some families an

advantage over others due to the fact that People of Color, as in the case of Latinos, have less social capital (Horvat et al., 2003). Valdes (1996) adds,

Indeed, if teachers use the middle-class family as a standard, teachers will generally assume that all parents who are “committed to their children’s education” will engage in the same kinds of activities and behaviors. They will often surmise quite erroneously that parents who do not do so are unsupportive of their children’s academic performance. (p. 39)

This view through the social capital of the middle class is what places Latino immigrant parents at a clear disadvantage right from the first interaction with any school official. In my experience as a principal, I have heard teachers express themselves in those terms about the parents of Latino ELL students. In those situations it is our job to set the record straight, but one conversation will not change someone’s life-long views. This reinforces the previous points about the necessity of ongoing and democratic communication in order to understand the social capital that Latino immigrant parents bring to schools.

In schools where no progressive agenda is applied, Latino immigrant families are left out because their social capital is not perceived to be as important and their values not recognized (Weininger & Lareau, 2003). In this situation there is not much the parents of Latino ELL students can do because the actions demonstrated by school principals or teachers are internalized in attitudes that cannot be changed with a simple staff development session or a college class. School leaders, in collaboration with informed Latino immigrant parents of ELL students, have the responsibility to close the communication gap between parents and schools officials (Horvat et al., 2003).

According to Yosso (2005) the reason why families of ELL’s have not had academic success is because they do not have the social capital in order to increase their socioeconomic status. Under the concept of cultural and social capital, Latino immigrant

parents are perceived as lacking something and fall prey to the concept of a deficit-thinking model. The epistemologies of certain sociological theories, like Bourdieu's (1984) concepts of social and cultural capital, have silenced Latinos and other People of Color because it categorizes them using a mainstream lens (Valenzuela, 1999).

Furthermore, the application of the traditional concepts of social and cultural capital, give Latino immigrant parents an epistemological disadvantage within the research community because they are viewed as simply lacking something that prevents them from being successful. The writings of Pierre Bourdieu (1986) and his concept of social and cultural capital have addressed and identified why certain groups have not had success in the educational system but fail to provide a model to help Latino immigrant families (Yosso, 2005). In his definition of cultural capital, Bourdieu (1986) spoke of "embodied," "objectified," and "institutionalized cultural capital" (p. 47), which allow families to reproduce their social and economic status generation after generation. This type of cultural capital, in the form of language, objects and academic credentials, allows for students of the dominant groups to have access and success in the educational system that embodies and reflects their own social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984).

Yosso (2005) proposed that Latinos should not be seen through Bourdieu's (1986) framework of cultural capital but through the concept of community cultural wealth. Community cultural wealth permits school leaders and teachers to see the true cultural capital of Latino parents. Yosso provided five areas in which Latinos demonstrate community cultural wealth:

- *Aspirational capital* refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams;
- *Linguistic capital* [the experience of communicating in two languages];
- *Familial capital*;
- *Social capital* [community networks];

- *Navigational capital* refers to skills of maneuvering through social institutions;
- *Resistant capital* [being able to challenge the status quo] (Yosso, 2005, p. 77-80).

Yosso (2005) explained that aspirational capital are the goals and wishes that parents have for their children when they go to school. She mentioned that linguistic capital is the ability that Latino ELL students have of knowing a first language and developing a second one. Familial and social capital is the people that surround students and parents and are able to provide emotional, spiritual and friendship support. Navigational capital is the ability that Latino immigrant parents develop as they interact with government agencies, churches, and other institutions. The last type of capital comes from the historical experience of Latinos as a conquered people who have been able to challenge the status quo through the centuries. This explanation of the type of capital that Latino parents have to offer is important because it can inform school personnel to create a program that targets their assets and not simply their needs.

In a study by Perreira, Chapman and Stein (2006), the researchers point out the values that Latino immigrant parents demonstrate in order to cope with the adversity found in the American educational system. They describe four strategies, which are similar and support the work by Yosso cited above. The authors mention that parents demonstrated empathy and respect for their children's ability to adapt. Additionally, the researchers describe the capacity that parents had to find the necessary resources to support their children. They also mention the parents' ability to foster bicultural abilities for their children's American and Hispanic worlds. Finally, they report that the parents shared with other immigrant parents the importance of augmenting communication with their offspring. These skills demonstrate the ability that Latino immigrant parents have in

order to cope with the educational system. The challenge to principals and teachers is to be able to recognize that Latino immigrant parents have these abilities, to value them accordingly and to put them to practice.

The theoretical framework from where the concept of community cultural wealth comes from is CRT. Critical Race Theory is, therefore, the “framework that can be used to theorize, examine and challenge the ways race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact on social structures, practices and discourse” (Yosso, 2005, p. 70). As in the study of *Madres Unidas*, Dyrness (2007) mentions how a group of Latina immigrant mothers found a space considered a “counter-space, a site of radical resistance for racial inequality in education” (p. 268). Critical Race Theory helps Latino immigrant parents to identify a safe place to meet, the tools to identify inequities and the confidence to create a counter narrative.

### Bridging the Gap Between Latino Parents and Schools

The problems preventing Latino parents from being involved in their children’s school can be addressed with a solid and honest collaboration between the school principal and parents. The partnership between school leaders and Latino parents becomes crucial in order to change views and involve Latino parents at large. Below is a practical solution based on recommendations from previous research and personal insight that could be explored in order to cause positive change.

The integration of positive collaboration can and does exist in schools with the parents of Latino ELL students. This relationship should be a “democratic and collaborative model” instead of a forced one (Olivos, 2009, p. 114). Olivos (2009) offers four suggestions to foster the home-school connection. The first suggestion is to



understand and research the practices that work with Latino families. Here we could refer back to Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth. His second recommendation is that school leaders should not hold back any information from Latino parents even if school principals feel that parents may use this information to make undeliverable requests. The third advice is that the home-school connection should strengthen and take advantage of the "parent-child-teacher triad" (p. 114). The author indicated that this relationship is a strong one and parents generally trust their child's teacher. The final suggestion is that teachers need to work without fear and with a sincere desire to foster collaboration and communication. The suggestions above are good, but they lack a very important component of parent involvement; the ability to include Latino immigrant parents in the decision-making process as described in Epstein's framework where community collaboration, communicating, volunteering, parenting and home learning is included (Epstein, 1995). Furthermore, the author above and Epstein's framework lack an even more crucial and important generative component, the ability to explore one's reality through research.

In a study where minority parents performed participatory action research similar to my study; it was concluded that having had parents focus on a research topic to improve school discipline gave them authority to be heard with a legitimate concern (Ippolito, 2010). Having employed a scientific methodology provided those parents a voice that was perceived as informed and not biased or impartial. The author adds that the parent's ability to do research provided a way to develop a relationship with the school and increase parent participation. He also points out an interesting aspect that I have seen

in the schools I have led, the dichotomy between Latino immigrant parents (all Spanish-speaking) and those mainstream parents who mainly speak English. Ippolito (2010) adds,

The gulf between mainstream schools and families, in particular minority families, can be vast, but bridging this gulf by pulling parents on the shores of the school, or conversely, pulling the school on the banks of the home is short-sighted. Both options diminish the possibility for schools and families to mutually-specify each other in ways that promote balanced, progressive, respectful, and ethical relationships. The parent-led research method accomplished this by shifting the focus of parents and schools away from themselves and on to a common, research-informed conversation. (p. 63)

The validity of the point needs full attention in part to prevent the polarization of parents in a school community. If parents who are not Latino immigrants decide to join the research team, they too would be empowered with a more complete understanding of the issue being researched and perhaps develop empathy for the needs of their fellow Latino immigrant parents.

In order to accomplish a genuine change that will foster involvement of parents, a collaborative approach between the school leaders and the parents of Latino ELL's has to occur through a specific method. One of the tenets of CRT points to the need of an interdisciplinary approach and experiential knowledge in order to target hegemonic practices. An approach that employs a true collaborative instrument as seen in the study above is Participatory Action Research (PAR), which is

a collaborative approach to the social sciences founded on versions of justice, grounded in evidence, and working towards reform; it is a political use of research by community members to better understand and improve their own communities. (Stoudt, 2008, p. 8)

In this manner, Latino parents would not be silenced through rhetoric and their own inquiry would find solutions to close the communication gap between the home and the school. The initial guidance of the school leader by addressing social justice would

empower parents to do PAR. Participatory research employs the premise that people are capable of understanding their social needs and that collectively, the problem can be addressed and a solution found to remedy it (Nygreen, 2006). Furthermore, PAR gives individuals the ability to see themselves as part of the solution, knowledge creators and validates their knowledge as worthy and legitimate. This is reinforced by Freire's (2007) words in his seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, that only the oppressed can free themselves.

*Building an Anti-Hegemonic Culturally Sensitive Advocacy-Training Program*

Empowered parents of Latino ELL's have the capacity to develop a culturally sensitive advocacy-training program for other parents and school personnel in order to close the communication breach that will in turn impact the academic achievement gap of the students. This is accomplished through parents who understand the initial perception that teachers may have of them in terms of not having social capital, according to the mainstream lens, and their understanding of CRT and PAR. Under this model Latino immigrant parents of ELL students became school consultants to the principal and key parent leaders became the liaisons between many families and teachers. Before I continue with the concept of parents as consultants and liaisons, let me explain the general concept of the consultant and liaison in programs that have been somewhat successful.

School districts hire consultants in programs like the Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQUE) or Early College Outreach Parent Program (UCOPP) in order to inform Latino immigrant parents, motivate or for parent empowerment. Others employ community liaisons that directly communicate with parents and serve as the middleperson between the administration and the homes of Latino immigrant parents.

These two models have very strong components but lack an essential piece, which will be discussed below.

Some schools have addressed the home-school disconnect between Latino immigrant parents by applying the academic research that some studies have reported on the need of a community liaison in order to close the distance between minority parents and school personnel (Quiocho & Daoud, 2010). In a study that highlights the importance of a community-parent liaison, the author argues the following:

The selection and training of liaisons must emphasize the importance of such a view and build the capacity of liaisons to cross racial, ethnic, income, or experiential differences to build relationships that support their professional goals and responsibilities. (Sanders, 2008, p. 294)

I believe that liaisons are an important factor of the school but they serve the goals of the school and act as a bridge between the school personnel and the parents. After all, the liaison is hired by the district and serves the needs of the district. The problem with this is that parents are again, only the passive recipients of the information and the processes that the school has established. Unless you have a truly dedicated principal to democratic and social justice leadership, the liaison may easily replace the principal as the point contact between Latino immigrant parents and the administration. This takes us back to the well-intentioned programs mentioned in previous sections with no real success. In other words, hire a person to take care of them, help them get the addresses of some clinics or pro-bono law offices, and show them how the system works. However, at what point is the voice of these parents heard? Will the liaison be strong enough to communicate the parent's concerns to the principal as an advocate and not fear about being non-reelected the following year? These are questions that are true at the practical level of the profession and may never arise in a given study that truly examines the

motivation and beliefs of school leaders. School liaisons play an important role, but they are not the solution to Latino immigrant parents because they serve the district; not the parents. In the case where consultants, individuals or agencies who do not work directly for the district, but are hired to serve a specific purpose an option commonly used to engage minority parents.

In a study where school consultants, not parents, were employed to work with African American parents, the following functions were performed:

School consultants are viewed as change agents or facilitators of collaboration and shared problem solving among stakeholders (e.g. parents, teachers, school administrators). The consultant's responsibilities include identifying stakeholders, providing necessary education and training, guiding the participatory process, and enlisting the help of others with cultural knowledge, professional expertise, or links to community. (Nastasi, 2005, p. 123)

A criticism to the model above is that parents are still being perceived as incapable of being the experts that can serve their own school community and outside so called experts have to be the mediators between the school and the parents. By having a school principal who champions social justice and who empowers parents, those same parents can become the school consultants. The principal, even as an insider like myself, does not have the full understanding of what the families are going through and therefore PAR has to come in place in order for parents to empower themselves and see their research as "democratic methods of inquiry" (Ansley & Gaventa, 1997, p. 46). Parents would be able, as school consultants, to advocate for their children and other unrepresented students as cultural brokers and negotiators (Nastasi, 2005). This is an innovative perspective and unique aspect to this school-based research, but if one examines the tenets of CRT, PAR, critical pedagogy, and social justice leadership, one has to conclude that a school principal has to open his or her doors to disfranchised parents and allow

them to examine their reality, validate their ability to produce knowledge, respect and implement their ideas. By giving parents the title of consultants elevates them to a level of expertise.

In a second study on the impact of school consultants, researchers reported that the emphasis of their study was to focus on the entire family and the school, but not the issues simply presented by the student (Koonce & Harper, 2005). I would agree with this since it is important to take a holistic approach and see the underlying causes of the problems. These researchers also added that the objectives of the consultants were to empower parents to become their children's advocates, to instruct them on how to address school officials and role-play with their new acquired communication skills in order to partake in the decision-making process of the school, and to improve their self-efficacy. Even though this excellent and highly recommended as another tool to address the home-school disconnect, it still has certain flaws. Koonce and Harper (2005) add,

In our consultation work with families, all the outcomes are not as positive. Some of the outcomes of this model do not increase parental involvement or result in the attainment of educational or social support for the child. (p. 69)

The consultation model above was not fully successful because it attempted to give the tools to the African American parents being helped but it did not allow them to see themselves as owners and creators of their own knowledge. Furthermore, this consultation model was an example of the old adage; *give a person a fish and he or she will eat today, teach a person to fish and it will eat forever*. These parents were not given the right tools to create their own tools and collaborate among other disenfranchised parents. Having had parents with similar situations work together would have created camaraderie and a common objective for them to address. This would have increased

parental involvement. Again, I wonder what the purpose or real motive of the consultant model was and according to what philosophical framework? If the object of the minority parent engagement is to simply have parents be like the mainstream parents and help them conform, then we have a problem here. Freire (2007) states,

The pedagogy of the oppressed, animated by authentic, humanist (not humanitarian) generosity, presents itself as a pedagogy of humankind. Pedagogy which begins with the egoistic interests of the oppressors (an egoism cloaked in the false generosity of paternalism) and makes of the oppressed the objects of its humanitarianism, itself maintains and embodies oppression. It is an instrument of dehumanization. This is why, as we affirmed earlier, the pedagogy of the oppressed cannot be developed or practiced by the oppressors. (p. 54)

Latino immigrant parents are responsible for the destiny of their children and have to act with urgency in order to address the achievement gap. As demonstrated above in the consultant model, children are the ones who get shortchanged in their education. This is why minority and disadvantaged parents can only be the catalyst of change. These parents are not employed by the system and have nothing to lose and much to gain.

The point to conclude here is that full awareness of CRT and application of PAR, empowers parents to create knowledge, to legitimize their concerns, to serve as consultants to the school principal and teachers, and to advocate for their children using their research as the rhetoric and epistemology of their concerns. Employing consultants or liaisons is initially fine but it does not address the underlying concerns because they represent the establishment and status quo. School leaders have to allow for a spark to occur in order to establish true democratic communication. The initial spark that can cause this explosion of new and informed Latino immigrant parent advocacy is to have a social justice leader committed to their empowerment through PAR and through an epistemology that will not silence them (Valenzuela, 1999). This leader can be a

principal, a teacher, a community leader, or a university researcher but he or she needs to allow the parents to do their own research, interpretation and advocacy in their own terms. In the case of this study, it was I, the principal, who empowered my Latino immigrant parents to begin researching their reality and to produce something that would engage other parents like them. We created the prototype and the initial components of an anti-hegemonic advocacy training programs for the parents of Latino immigrant English Learner students. Previous research as presented above supports the creation of this program but critically needs a leader who would allow it to occur. This study was concluded but the foundations where established to continue the good work through the lens of CRT and the application of PAR.

#### Summary

The current academic research in education performed by scholars has been targeted on the achievement gap of students of Color and “it is not surprising that education research would reinforce prevailing myths of cognitive or cultural deficiency” (Nygreen, 2006, p. 4). The fact that scholars perform research without living the lives of the participants, limits their complete understanding. Nygreen (2006) suggests instead for “activist research” (p. 2) as a way to address the true needs of Latinos or other minority students. Studies have demonstrated that Latino immigrant parents want to be involved in their children’s school and when given the opportunity, parents have surprised teachers at their level of articulation and insight on the type of parent leadership needed to address their needs (Quioco & Daoud, 2010). For this reason a culturally sensitive advocacy training program created and researched by the parents of Latino ELL students for other parents was necessary to be established in our school.



The silencing that some Latino parents experience was countered by an outreach model that allowed them to feel comfortable and express themselves freely (Dyrness, 2007). The creation and research of a culturally sensitive advocacy-training program by Latino parents for Latino parents addressed any of the inadequacies that Latino parents have experienced. The breaking down of hierarchies occurred with the participation of a willing school principal and the democratizing of research that gave access to Latino parents. A true commitment and dedication to social justice and democratic participation has given parents of ELL students the tools to solve and correct previous inequities.

Latino parents, who were empowered with the understanding of CRT and PAR, were able to move into action in order to advocate for their own children and understand the Latino educational pipeline and information on what awaits their children. Critical Race Theory, as the framework to achieve a culturally sensitive advocacy parent-training program, was essential to guide parents in the various aspects where they are at a disadvantage. The five tenets of CRT pinpointed the areas and tools that parents had to employ in order to increase their participation in their children's school and cause positive change. It was crucial that parents became activists in order to support a pedagogy that "it is an orientation of fighting for the interests of the multi-racial, gendered working class and indigenous peoples all the way through" (McLaren, Martin, Farahmandpur & Jaramillo, 2004, p. 150-151). The shift in research restricted to those in academia and now given to ordinary people is essential for meaningful understanding of ELL students (Couch, 2004). Hopefully their advocacy can reach out to other Latino parents in the school community and cause positive change in other school settings that will "transform schools into political and cultural centers" (McLaren, Martin,

Farahmandpur & Jaramillo, 2004, p. 151). Freire (2007) stated that only the oppressed can free themselves and that education can become a liberating act. In this case Latino immigrant parents were able to make their presence known with the school personnel and help change the principal's and teacher's perspectives. The simple fact of having a full house during parent meetings was evidence to the teaching staff that what parents had researched and provided as suggestions to the principal, was effective. The benefit was twofold in this case as the deficit-thinking models were replaced with positive views of the parents and their children, and parents were able to help teachers close the achievement gap with their participation.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### Restatement of the Purpose

The purpose of my study was to explore parents' perceptions of their participation in an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program for Latino parents. Parents served as co-researchers in order to find the needs and challenges of other Latino parents. After researching the needs of immigrant Latino parents, the co-researcher parents created an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program. This program was presented to the school's Latino parents in a workshop format. The participants and co-researchers were Latino parents of urban long-term ELL students in a Northern California elementary school.

#### Research Design

The methodological design employed in this study was Participatory Action Research (PAR). Hall (1992) defined participatory research as "...a practice that attempted to put the less powerful at the center of the knowledge creation process; to move people and their daily lived experiences of struggle and survival from the margins of epistemology to the centre" (p. 15-16).

In my response to the study I employed PAR, which can create a balance of power between parents and the school. The fact that educational research has focused on urban and minority students has not decreased the achievement gap (Nygreen, 2006). The accumulation of research on Latino and other minority students has only emphasized the "prevailing myths of cognitive and cultural deficiency (p. 4).

The four elements of PAR that were present in this study and helped to address the concern given above: collective research, critical recovery of history, valuing and applying folk-culture, and production and diffusion of new knowledge (Fals-Borda, 1991). By collective research, Fals-Borda (1991) referred to the data that can qualitatively be collected by the group doing research and “which cannot be achieved through other individual methods based on surveys or fieldwork” (p. 8). Critical recovery of history is the information that can be obtained from the community and that is “useful in the defense of the interests of exploited classes” (p. 8). The concept of valuing and applying folk culture is essential because it recognizes the culture of the group being served or researched. The last concept, production and diffusion of new knowledge, is of utmost importance to PAR because the information gathered from the community belongs to the community and therefore should be presented and transmitted.

### Research Setting

The research for this study took place at my elementary school where I serve as the Principal and have worked for two years and to date now completing my third. The school is located in the East Side of San José in a predominantly Latino neighborhood. My school has served students since 1915 and is the oldest school in the district. Our district itself has been educating the students of this community since 1865. The school’s student population is composed of 88% Latino students, 5% Asian, 3% African-American, and the rest being Native-American and Pacific Islanders. Eighty percent of the students are English Language Learners and 85% are socioeconomically disadvantaged. Seventy-six percent of the teachers in the school are White, 14% Latino and 1% Asian. My school is in its third year of Program Improvement (PI) for having

dropped in the Annual Performance Index (API) points for the last three years before my arrival and consequently for having missed an average of 3 students not performing proficient in the last two years under my leadership. California schools receive API points based on the number of students who score proficient or advanced in a standardized test given after 85% of the academic year has passed. As noted in Table 1, the students in my school have never performed higher than 40.8% proficient or advanced in the state standardized exams in the area of English Language Arts (ELA). In order for a student to be considered proficient, he or she needs to score above 67% in the state exams. My school has a net gain of -31 API points over the last five years and because of these negative points, it has been placed in the Tier III list of the chronically lowest performing schools in California. If the school performs as it has performed in the last five years, it will be placed on the Tier I list and drastic actions will have to be taken by the district office or Santa Clara County Office of Education (SCCOE). Thus, far I have been able to turn the school around and expect a positive API at the end of this academic year, my third year.

Table 1

*School's API Scores*

Year	Score	Growth	% Proficient or Advanced	
			ELA	Math
2011	747	30	40.8	51.3
2010	717	10	37.75	43
2009	707	-11	31.25	38.75
2008	716	-9	27.75	42.5
2007	728	-51	28.5	52

I purposely selected participant-researchers from the school's English Language Advisory Committee (ELAC) and other parents who have been consistently coming to

my general parent meetings. The ELAC parent group has to meet four times in the year and is composed of parents who have children who are categorized as ELL. The majority of these parents are Spanish-speakers who also share a great concern for the ELL students in the learning community.

The school environment I used to meet with my co-researchers was my office for research as well as an open white board for parents to take notes and explain concepts to parents. In addition, two meetings took place in the cafeteria as we practiced the presentation and then presented. These co-researchers and I met in order to hold focus meetings and interviews with other parents. The meetings took place after school during a time when all participants were able to meet. After collecting the data, the co-researchers presented their findings and recommendations for an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program for other Latino parents in the school.

### Participants

The particular participants were purposefully selected parents from the English Language Advisory Committee (ELAC) and parents who regularly attended my parent meetings. According to Creswell (2008), purposeful sampling is to “intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon” (p. 214). I had two types of participants in this study. The first group served as co-researchers and collaborated in the data collection and implementation of the action research. The group was a small team consisting of five parents, four females and one male. This first group of co-researcher parents was chosen through a “critical sample because it is an exceptional case and the researcher can learn much about the phenomenon” (p. 216). The second group included parents not involved in the participatory research but involved in

giving the co-researchers information about their needs. This group was composed of 5 individuals. I selected the second group through homogeneous sampling “because they possess a similar trait or characteristic” (p. 216). Both groups of parents who participated were Spanish-speaking with minimal formal education and all from México. The parents who participated in my study were not complete strangers to each other since my community is not a large one. I had already been in contact with them through the various school activities we had during the year.

#### *Co-Researcher Parents*

In an effort to establish a respectful group norm I gave the following co-researcher parents different names in order to develop their anonymity. Gabriela and Ruben were husband and wife from Mexico with children in elementary and middle school. Jessica is a Mexican mother of three with two children in elementary and one in community college. Maria is a mother of three and all of her children are students at my school. It is important to note that Maria is a Mexican immigrant as well. Ofelia is a mother of three with children in elementary, middle and high school and is also from Mexico.

In order for these parents to be able to collaborate in PAR, I had to provide certain information, tools and skills to empower them to actively understand the scope of the study. The first step I took was to teach them how to use a digital camera and to surf the Internet to obtain information. The information we gathered was on the following topics:

- Laws, policies and regulations on parent involvement
- Parent organizations
- The educational pipeline
- The California educational system
- California standards
- The California Standards Test

- The California English Language Development Test
- The redesignation process for Limited English Proficient students
- High school graduation requirements
- A-G requirements (University of California requirements)
- Other concerns that parents may choose to research

Parent co-researchers not only benefited from the information gathered, but also indirectly learned how to do Internet searches. The second step I took was to have them learn the skills to interview and facilitate focus groups composed of other school parents. This focus group interview helped the co-researcher parents to gather qualitative data in order to plan the anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program.

The timeline for the co-researchers was as follows:

1. First meeting: co-researchers learned about PAR, Internet research, camera use and interview strategies. They also developed four to five questions to be asked during the focus group interview with the other Latino parents.
2. Second meeting: co-researchers had a focus group meeting with other Latino parents to find out their needs in order to create a culturally sensitive advocacy-training program.
3. Third meeting: co-researchers met in order to develop the culturally sensitive advocacy-training program. This actually occurred over three meetings because the team needed more time to develop the presentation.
4. Fourth meeting: co-researchers presented to other Latino parents their culturally sensitive advocacy-training program. A focus group meeting followed with the co-researchers and the members of the focus group. I conducted the questions.

The duration of this study took roughly a month and a half. Parents met every other week, giving the co-researchers time to digest the data and reflect on the next steps.

#### *Other Parents*

Parents who did not participate as co-researchers participated in the focus group meetings conducted by the parent-researchers and/or the presentation meeting. These parents were invited to participate in the focus groups or presentation of the anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program via a flier sent home. These parents were not all part of ELAC and only participated in two parts of the timeline above



(meeting 2 and meeting 4). In meeting 2, only four of the parents were invited to participate in the focus groups but all were present for the training during meeting 4. There were five participants, all of them from Mexico except for Monica who is from El Salvador. In order to protect their identity, I used the following names: Juan, Francisca, Silvia, Monica and Miguel.

### Validity

Creswell (2008) explains validity as “means that researchers can draw meaningful and justifiable inferences from scores about a sample or population” (649). Validity in this study was achieved by having field notes recorded by parents who corroborated the perceptions of their participation in an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program. As data was collected, parent-researchers and I examined and reviewed notes with the group before ending any of the sessions. Since all parents felt uncomfortable writing, only one parent decided to write things down, but everything was video-recorded. Parents, as critical thinkers and creators of their own knowledge, had the freedom to direct the study into specific areas not addressed before.

### Data Collection

There were four group meetings with the parents one week apart. All meetings were conducted in Spanish. I kept field notes and video recordings of all meetings with parents. As noted in Table 2, the parent meetings were as followed: 1) I had a meeting with the co-researcher parents in order to learn about PAR and CRT, learn about the educational system, and began the concept of an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program; 2) the co-researchers and I hosted a focus group meeting with other parents in order to find out their needs in regards to school involvement; 3) the

co-researchers and I met again to share the data collected and made meaning of it, we looked for information and prepared the anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program; 4) the co-researchers presented to parents the anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program and I had a focus group meeting right afterwards with the members of the first focus group and the co-researchers to understand their perception of their participation.

Table 2

*Data Collection Source*

<u>Meeting</u>	<u>Activity</u>	<u>Data Type</u>	<u>Parent Group</u>
First	discussion, question creation	video, notes	co-researchers
Second	focus interview	video, notes	participants
Third	program creation, discussion	video, notes	co-researchers
Fourth	presentation/focus interview	video, questionnaire	both groups

In the first meeting, I collected field notes to record the interaction of the parents, their conversations and their ideas about what the program. I shared about myself and asked the parents to provide a brief autobiographical description. I also asked the parents to keep their own notes and at the end of the meeting all notes were read in order to check for errors or misconceptions. The notes created by the parents were minimal and recorded to ensure proper documentation. The entire meeting was also video-recorded in support of the study and further documentation. This meeting was held in my office to effectively provide parents with internet access and white boards in an inclusive room. All ideas during the brainstorming session were documented and written on a large whiteboard located in my office. In addition, I took pictures of the notes on the white boards for accuracy to demonstrate once again further documentation protocol.

In the second meeting, my co-researchers held a focus meeting; I continued adding to the field notes throughout the focus meeting. Also, the session was video-recorded and held once again in my office. The co-researchers and parents invited to the focus group all sat in a communal circle. The co-researchers took notes and interviewed the parents, as other parents provided their ideas on what the needs of the Latino parents in the school community exist. The entire focus group interview was video recorded to provide proper documentation. At the conclusion of the focus meeting, all parties taking field notes read them for clarification and accuracy for additional documentation.

This study employed a focus group interview recorded on a digital video camera that could easily capture and document the interaction. According to Creswell (2008) a focus group is composed of four to six individuals where a researcher asks questions to all the members of the focus group. In the focus group, co-researcher parents interviewed four other Latino parents to give input on what their perception is of an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program and creation of it. The entire interview was video taped. The questions used to interview them were generated by the co-researchers, which were developed in their first meeting during the first week. The focus group meeting was no longer than one hour and was conducted by the co-researchers and in Spanish. At the last meeting, I interviewed the co-researchers and the original six members of the first focus group meeting to understand their experience and perception. This meeting was also video-recorded, as was the training program to deliberately document all responses.

In the third meeting, the co-researcher parents came together to create the anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program, I continued adding to the field

notes and video recorded the session as a means to provide documentation. The co-researchers continued adding to their notes to support the documentation. In addition, this meeting also took place in my office. All parties shared their findings from the focus group meeting and began addressing the needs of the Latino parents in order to establish the components of the program. After sharing notes, the co-researchers began doing research to address the needs of the parents in the focus group. This information was part of the training program created in cooperation with the parents. At the end of this meeting, the co-researchers practiced their role in presenting the culturally sensitive advocacy-training program in a part B and C of this same meeting due to time constraints. Basically, this section of the research took three meetings to formulate and document the collaborative communication. Moreover, I took precise notes of the roles that parents took in order to obtain an understanding of their perception of the creation of this program.

In the fourth meeting, where the co-researchers presented to the other Latino parents, I continued to take field notes and video record the session for supportive documentation. After the presentation, I had a focus group meeting and asked the following questions to my co-researchers and parent participants:

- What are your perceptions as co-researchers and co-presenters of an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program?
- What are your perceptions as a parent who participated in an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program?
- What are the benefits to parents of ELL students who participate in an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program?

#### Data Analysis

In order to keep the data documented I recorded the data by using a voice recorder, the co-researchers conducted videotaping and note taking as well. I transcribed

the information and used the conversations to analyze trends of thought and themes. I gave special attention to the themes generated from the parents according to gender and race. I expected that specific concerns about student achievement, parent involvement, school safety, school climate and other concerns could have risen from the conversations in the focus groups and the interviews with parents. The core group of parent-researchers provided further insight into necessary changes for school reform. I made copies of their notes and used them as I generated themes. In addition, I employed their biographies, place of origin and other details of their lives in order to understand the themes that came up as I evaluated the data.

I examined the newly produced knowledge through the lens of critical race theory. My particular expectations were to see parent concerns in the various areas that CRT addresses. I wanted to see how parents found that the school serving their children was institutionalizing racism and how they felt about challenging the current status quo. The data collected helped me to discover if the school exemplified the tenets of CRT or if new themes not addressed by the framework surfaced. The interviews during the focus group were especially important because it gave me the perspective of the parents who were not co-researchers. Since CRT employed experiential knowledge and an interdisciplinary approach, parents were able to share their experiences and viewed them as a valid contribution to a body of literature in order to create their counter narrative.

#### Protection of Human Subjects

The study followed the University's policies and procedures in order to guarantee that no participant was harmed throughout the study herein. The University's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) approved the research

proposal prior to its execution. I obtained permission from the school district where this study took place and informed all the co-researchers/participants and other participants of the study (*Appendix A*). I also informed the faculty and staff about the study even though they did not participate in the research, but to demonstrate professional courtesy to my school staff.

The aforementioned co-researchers and participants were not harmed in any way during the execution of this study. There was no compensation for the participation in this study. I informed parent participants and co-researchers that the data gathered during this study was going to be part of my dissertation and had to agree to it before initiating their participation.

#### Researcher's Background

The study of Latino immigrant parents of ELL students is an interest to me due to the fact that I was an English Language Learner in the late eighties and early nineties. I was born in California but lived my childhood in Mexico and attended school from pre-kinder to the middle of fourth grade in Tijuana. When I was brought back to California, I was already ten years old and in the middle of fourth grade. My English was limited to a few greetings and my exposure to the American culture was based on what I saw in the television. My parents, especially my mother, had no understanding of English or the American mainstream culture.

My parents' participation at my California school was very limited due to their busy working schedules, but their involvement in my learning at home was always present. My mother's emphasis on being a good student and "being someone in life" was a constant reminder of why I needed to get good grades and go to college.

Once in school, I experienced the ELL program offered in elementary and middle school, English as a Second Language (ESL) in those days. Even though I was redesignated in middle school, many of my peers stayed in that category throughout high school. These students were trapped in the “ESL ghettos, poor teaching, and the isolation of English-language learners in our educational institutions” (Valdez, 1998, p. 16). This prevented them from taking college prep courses and other opportunities that would have taken them to college. I always wondered why I made it and not them. This is the question that has led me to pursue this doctoral program and to study the population from where I came from as a student and with whom I now work. I believe that certain information needs to be given to the parents, but that the responsibility of educating children falls on the shoulders of the teachers; and if necessary parents need to demand it. My own academic success stems from the individuals who went out of their way to help and guide me by adding to my participation as a (GATE student and church support) All components played in my favor, but not because the system was set to serve Latino immigrant students like myself.

As an experienced school administrator I have heard the blaming that teachers place on “those kids” and their families. Consequently, it is true that Latino children may come to school with certain disadvantages, but time after time we find that academic success occurs because teachers are able to engage them and allow for learning to take place. In order for all students to learn, the right combination needs to exist within the student classrooms.

It is for this reason that I devised, in collaboration with my Latino parent co-researchers, the concept of an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training

program. As parents researched in collaboration with other parents, they too were empowered and understood the importance of their participation in the school.

Empowered parents were able to create the right conditions for their children to learn in the classroom and have academic success.



## CHAPTER IV

### RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research findings directly match the purpose of this study to understand the perception of Latino immigrant parents as co-researchers and parent participants in the development of an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program for the immigrant Latino parents of urban Latino ELL students in a Northern California South Bay elementary school. As mentioned in the first chapter, anti-hegemonic referred to the challenge that this program should present to the racist and hierarchy systems established to maintain the status quo. Cultural sensitivity implied an approach that appeals and welcomes Latino parents through the employment of Latino culture, religion, gastronomy, music, etc. The term advocacy is the nature of the program and the general approach to confront and demand from school personnel refusing to allow Latino culture to be represented. The research findings will be organized in the following manner. First I will present the profile of the co-researchers and the participants, which will explain some of their experiences as Latino immigrant parents. Then I will talk about the four sessions that the study took to complete (the third session took several meetings to accomplish). In regards to the four sessions, I will address the first research question by explaining the components of the parent program developed by the co-researchers and the steps that co-researcher parents and I took to develop the project's questions for the focus group interviews. The first research question asked: What comprises an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program for the immigrant Latino parents of urban Latino ELL students in a Northern California South Bay elementary school? Two research questions inquire the following: What are the perceptions of immigrant Latino

parents of ELL students who participate as co-researchers and co-presenters of an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program in a Northern California elementary school? What are the perceptions of immigrant Latino parents of ELL students who participate in an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program in a Northern California elementary school? The last question asks about the benefits of participating in the development of an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program and will be answered in this section. Finally, I will offer a summary of the entire experience with its main points.

### Profile of the Participants

The Parents who participated in this study contributed in two particular capacities. The first and most involved group was the co-researchers and co-presenters. Participant parents who were interviewed by the co-researcher parents composed the second group. The participants of this study were parents who I had known for two years and had collaborated in various school activities, but had not taken any leadership roles in the school. The names of the parents here were changed to protect their identity.

### *Co-Researchers*

#### *Gabriela and Ruben*

Both Gabriela and Ruben are parents who emigrated from Mexico to the United States of America. They have four children: a boy and a girl in middle school, a girl in elementary and a newborn at home. Their goal is for all of their children to go to college. Gabriela's mom lives with them and takes care of the newborn when she volunteers at school or works. Gabriela is a dedicated parent in the school and volunteers in the classrooms and the office. For that reason, I have gotten to know her very well as she

helps our secretary with printing and collating announcements and other clerical duties. She has a pleasant and humble personality. Gabriela's English is limited but she is able to communicate with her children's teachers. She only completed an elementary education, which in Mexico ends in the sixth grade.

My co-researcher Gabriela was a stay-at home mom for many years and had the time to volunteer at school even though that meant a financial sacrifice for the couple. Once their last child was born, things changed for them. Initially in the study, Gabriela was going to participate as co-researcher, but as she started a new evening job to supplement their income, she was unable to continue the sessions and asked her husband to participate in her absence. Gabriela, felt bad for not being able to complete the research, but most importantly felt more connected to the school community.

My other co-researcher Ruben attended a couple of sessions and contributed richly to the conversations that both benefited the study. His job in construction did not allow him to be on time or attend all the sessions and it was evident that he was tired and hungry when he arrived. He found value in the research we were doing and always had a pleasant smile and willingness to participate regardless of his long day at work. His level of English was not a problem in our sessions because all of them were conducted in Spanish.

### *Jessica*

Another co-researcher, Jessica is another dedicated parent who is constantly helping in the classroom or the office. She presents herself by saying "My name is [Jessica] and I was born and grew up in Mexico" and completed her *secundaria* or secondary education, which goes from 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade. She adds, "I have three children,

two in this school and one in the community college and he is going slow but he keeps going. Luckily he has not gone astray as he works and goes to school.” She is extremely involved in her children’s education and has them involved in the cub scouts, sports and martial arts. Her goal is for all of her children to complete a college education. When we have weekend events, she is regularly present with her entire family helping out or participating. She is able to communicate in English at a somewhat proficient level.

Jessica is a stay at home mom and baby-sits two boys during the evenings, which prevent her from being involved in the school site council or PTA because those meetings are conducted during the evening. She is a friendly and responsible lady, but appears reserved and serious in nature. She has full support from her husband who works as a professional painter and is rarely seen in school due to his demanding job duties. She often volunteers him to do various activities at school that involve for instance the time we painted the entire cafeteria.

### *Maria*

Maria is a respectfully quiet and involved mother of three children. She has two twin boys in fourth grade and a daughter in fifth grade. She is very humble but is always willing to give a helping hand. She feels comfortable providing manual support in our school events. She was only able to attend the first three years of elementary school in Mexico and feels somewhat embarrassed for that but wants her children to have the best possible education. She stated that she did not speak English and that due to her lack of formal education, she does not speak Spanish properly. This is what she said,

My name is [Maria] and I was born in Mexico and I was not able to attend school. I only went to three years and I don’t know much but I like to help in what I can. And my children I try to motivate them to tell them that school is the best thing and that I was not able to get to school but that you have an opportunity here.

In my point of view she speaks fine, but is a very humble lady who is cognizant of her concern for her children's academic success. Her innate desire is that her three children attend college and tries to religiously keep them occupied in various activities and reading. She wants her children to have what she did not have in life an formal education and other opportunities. Her husband is also very involved in school through regular participation within school committees.

### *Ofelia*

Ofelia is a very assertive and proud mother equally concerned with her students. Upon our initial interaction she began by stating the following, "My name is [Ofelia] and I was born in Mexico and I came here, I've been here for a number of years. I also understand English and I speak it, not perfectly but I do okay." She has three children; the oldest is a boy in high school, a daughter in middle school and a son in kindergarten. She is very proud of her children because they are academically at the top of their class. Ofelia expects her children to attend college and her oldest son is well on his way. She is a stay at home mother and has her husband's full support to be a volunteer at school. Ofelia offered many comments and is a person that likes to take charge in conversations, especially if sharing about her children.

During this sharing time, she began a very interesting topic that was discussed at length with other participants. What she stated was that she did not achieve anything because she gave her one hundred percent to her children and that she expected them to repay her by being great students. The other mothers jumped on this topic stating that they too did not think about themselves, but only about their children. I will cover more of this in the sections below.

There was one more person who was present in the first co-researcher's meeting and who was unable to continue the study due to an eye surgery. She wanted to support my research and wanted to share her experiences but did not meet the criteria of the type of participants or co-researchers I was looking for. She was a retired Mexican American elementary school teacher who worked diligently with the Latino immigrant community. Since she was unable to continue her participation, I would like to include some of the experiences she shared with us,

I was born here; my parents spoke two languages but insisted that we speak Spanish. I am very thankful for that. I have been able in my career to help many Latino children. I always say that I was born to be a teacher. I am here to help children in school with my few experiences, not only children but also parents.

Her words validated the efforts of the mothers to preserve their culture and language as they push them to be successful in school. Her status as a retired professional and as a mother and grandmother had a stronger impact on the co-researchers. I also valued her input and found it to be insightful and meaningful.

### *Participants*

#### *Juan*

Juan is a Mexican immigrant parent who is monolingual in Spanish and has not had a strong experience with the American educational system. He attended elementary school in Mexico but did not complete it. He has lived in the United States for a couple of decades and has a child in third grade. Juan comes to parent meetings and is responsive to his child's teachers if he needs to be there. Juan is divorced and has custody of his child. He demonstrated a true interest in giving input on how Latino immigrant parents can be involved in school.

*Francisca*

Francisca is also a Mexican immigrant parent and is the mother of two children, one in fourth grade and one in first grade. She is also a Spanish monolingual speaker and comes to school meetings but is not involved in any type of leadership. She has a limited experience with the American educational system and only attended elementary school in Mexico. She has a supportive husband and she is a stay at home mother. She is a humble lady with a pleasant personality always willing to support the school if necessary. Her children are also involved in my school's karate club and she is present in every practice. She wants her children to go to college and also become successful in life.

*Silvia*

Silvia is a Mexican immigrant parent and has two children in my school. She did not share much personal information. She is present in most of my parent meetings, but does not hold any leadership position. She comes to the PTA meetings and is always willing to help out in any activity that the school may have.

*Monica*

Monica is an immigrant from El Salvador. She has two children, one in kindergarten and one in third grade. Her English proficiency is good and can hold a basic conversation. She attended college in her native country and holds a Bachelor's in Laws (degree not given as an undergraduate in the U.S.) but does not use her degree here. She is eloquent and had explicit and well thought out ideas on parent involvement. She volunteers during the day and is present during evening events. She understands the value of an education but does not completely understand the American educational system. She displays an easygoing demeanor and humble attitude.

*Miguel*

Miguel volunteered to be a participant, but I had not seen him before nor have I seen him after the interview. He is a Mexican immigrant, parent of one child and a hard working man. He wants his child to do well in school, but is not involved in the school in any capacity. His presence was important but his involvement was minimal .

*Results*

This study was completed in four sessions in order to develop the advocacy-training program and understand the parents' perception and benefit of their participation in the program. The third session was completed over two meetings in order to discuss, develop, and practice the presentation of the program for the other parents. All four sessions helped develop the study.

*First Session**Empowerment of Latino Parents*

I began the first session, which took about one hour, by informing my co-researcher parents on current issues of the Latino home school disconnect, the achievement gap, the tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT), Participatory Action Research (PAR) and the fundamentals of the American educational system. The parent co-researchers participated by asking some questions, making a few comments and internalizing the information since I was introducing new and academic material. The conversation was more of a lecture with limited participation on their part during this half hour period but changed once I completed the informational piece. The retired Latina teacher expressed excitement in learning new words like hegemony and expressed her satisfaction for being part of the group.



I explained the concept of hegemony and gave them a concrete example of this by letting them see how our current calendar system is a Christian one and that if we were Buddhist, it would not address our religious beliefs or cultural needs. Since all of the co-researchers had a Christian Catholic background, they understood how the current school calendar benefits them with breaks during the celebrations of Christmas or Easter. I also pointed out how we have a break in February called *ski week* and that this break is meant to satisfy teachers and students in some of the other schools and that this is not something most or any of our families do. We discussed how the local high school district got rid of the *ski week* and added it to the two weeks in December in order to satisfy the Latino families who go to their countries and who end up taking their children out of school for an additional week; thus affecting students who come back to finals without participating in the preparation week and costing the districts thousands of dollars in lost revenue. Furthermore, I informed them that there are other factors of hegemony that excludes Latino immigrant parents either from society at large or in the educational system. All the parents agreed with the explanation and Ofelia expressed in regards to the hegemony around us, “We adapt to this” in regards to expectations from the mainstream and showing her ability to be flexible.

After explaining the concept of hegemony, I began to describe the tenets of CRT and made emphasis on the concept of systemic racism and experiential knowledge. I shared with them the origins of CRT and the reasons it was developed in the field of legal studies and how it then was applied to sociology and education. For most of this section, the co-researcher parents only agreed with what I was saying through body language but they did not make any comments. In order to make them feel that CRT values what they

know and what they have experienced, I focused on the tenet of experiential knowledge and the importance and credibility that this gives to research. I emphasized the fact that experiences count and that their experiences are important to record. I gave them personal examples of my experience going through the American educational system as an immigrant and how those experiences are true and valid.

The next concept that I explicated to my parent researchers was the method of investigation that we were going to employ. I told them that PAR is performed in collaboration with the participants for their benefit. I explained the importance of epistemology and how some epistemologies exclude certain groups. The example, I utilized to illustrate this was the study of African American women by White feminists and how researchers like hooks (1989) explains that White feminists pointed to patriarchic systems as the root of racism and that this “thinking prevails despite the radical critiques made by black women and other women of color” (p. 19-20) but that it does not ask African American women to describe their own reality. It was clear to the parents that they had to own their own research and that it was important that they produced this new knowledge.

By following the concept of PAR, I exposed them to three philosophies of education in order for them to understand where teachers may be coming from in their approach to teaching. I talked to them about perennialism, progressive education and social reconstructionism or critical pedagogy. I informed them how in the first philosophy of education, the pedagogy is teacher-centered and that in progressive education the child is at the center of the philosophy. I shared my bias about my personal inclination to social reconstructionism and explicated that in this type of education,

pedagogy is community-centered. The parents agreed with me, but in the few minutes of my explanation, I was not sure if they were able to understand it completely.

The last concept that I presented was the American educational system. I mainly focused on the fact that California has certain standards that students need to learn and that there is a test at the end of the year. I also, explained the redesignation process and the dangers of not getting their children out of the category of English Language Learner. Since most of my parent co-researchers had at least one of their children in the Redesignated Fluent English Proficient (R-FEP) category, they understood what I was talking about. I also mentioned a few things about A-G requirements for the parents who had students in high school or middle school. I covered the Grade Point Average (GPA) and the high school exams students have to take in order to complete high school and apply to college. This information was practical and powerful because their children were heading in that direction and understood that their children could be getting good grades, but not the type of good grades that universities would accept.

The information that I shared with the parent co-researchers was beneficial in order to have a starting point when we began interviewing other parents during the focus group interviews. Before getting to the construction of the questions, the retired Latina teacher praised the idea of having mothers come together to share their experiences. She stated, “this idea of bringing mothers and parents to tell their experiences for their children is important. Parents are the foundation of the family.” She added,

It is very important that the other students realize that Latino parents are working here, and mothers as well, and how mothers participate because both men and women can be heads of the family. It means not just the one who works but the one who helps at home, like her, who feels that she has not had an education, is a family head, because instead of continuing her studies she has focused on the family.

*Developing the Focus Group Interview Questions*

The development of the focus group interview questions was accomplished in collaboration with all the co-researcher parents and served to answer the first research question which stated: What comprises an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program for the immigrant Latino parents of urban Latino ELL students? We discussed and established these questions following my chat on the American educational system and the concepts of CRT and PAR. One of the co-researchers shared her experience as an adult student trying to learn English in an ESL class, “I have registered to go to school, but my children are first.” Maria followed by saying,

I have also signed up for school, but he says to me [husband], why are you going? What’s important to me is that my children learn not you. I don’t want you to go [to school], what’s important to me is that our children learn.

Jessica countered this by stating the following comment, “there is one more thing, that if you, as a parent, get educated, you can help your children more.” Jessica did not oppose Maria’s comment directly, but she did speak her mind and highlighted the importance of education regardless of age.

We started to go on a tangent but Jessica was the first one to get back on track and played with some ideas as she came up with the following question,

In order for them [the parents] to feel better, what they need is to be attracted to school... how to help them to come to school. What do they expect from the school?

Ofelia took the idea and added, “I would say, that, we ask why they are not coming around school more often. What impedes them from being here?” Jessica continued the train of thought and shared her question, “what are you expecting from your child’s school? What do you want, what do you wish, what do you need in order to have more

connection [with the school]?” The discussion continued and I took notes of their comments to summarize their main ideas. After discussing various points on the importance of parent participation, we concluded that we would employ the following questions:

1. *¿Qué significa para usted participar en la escuela?*  
What does it mean to you to participate in school?
2. *¿Cuáles son los obstáculos que le impiden participar en la escuela?*  
What obstacles prevent you from participating in school?
3. *¿Cómo podríamos involucrar su cultura y lenguaje?*  
How can we involve your culture and language?
4. *¿Qué puede hacer la escuela por ustedes para que participen más?*  
What can the school do for you so you can participate more?
5. *¿En qué consistiría un programa de capacitación en abogacía con sensibilidad cultural para padres inmigrantes latinos?*  
What comprises a culturally sensitive advocacy-training program for immigrant Latino parents?

In developing the aforementioned questions, parents reflected on their experiences with the American educational system as adult students and with their children’s interaction with school and teachers. An interesting theme came up which will be discussed in the next chapter, the perceived sacrifice that Latina mothers make for their children. Latina mothers choose to not go to adult or ESL school in order to keep a close watch on their children. Even though two of the mothers demonstrated this trend, Jessica reiterated the importance of education especially for parents. Her comments did not change the view that the other two mothers had and these conversations appeared again in the future sessions.

### *Second Session*

The second session revealed the core concepts of this study as parent co-researchers interviewed and learned from other parents who shared similar

circumstances. The following statements contribute to the core findings of this particular study.

*Focus Group Interview*

In the first question, which asked, what does it mean to you to participate in school? Silvia initially responded, “to support my daughter.” Monica followed by adding, “that my son feels that his education is important to me.” Juan gave a different answer by explaining, “that he feels that he is protected, that there is someone who is involved more and more in his studies.” Monica then gave an important perspective on this question by focusing on the adult in charge of her child’s education. She stated, “see how the teacher is developing or the school, what are they giving him, how is he getting guided. Because if I don’t know the teacher or the school, I don’t know.” Monica had more to explain,

I too feel the need to come to school to see if my son likes to study. To see if he feels comfortable, that he won’t have any fears. What if he doesn’t know his multiplications, algebra and that I won’t know that he does not understand. Then, by being close I see that he doesn’t understand and I can tell the teacher that he is not progressing, that he doesn’t understand.

It is evident that to the parents being interviewed that participation in school means to provide protection and support to their children. They want to make sure that their child feels comfortable and that teachers are able to explain things if he or she does not understand. This view is different than what teachers may expect of parent participation.

After Monica’s explanation of what it meant to her to participate in school and with no further comments from the other parents, we moved to the next question, which asked: What obstacles prevent you from participating in school? The first parent participant to reply was Juan. He said, “for me, there are none” and added, “there is

always time for everything.” Silvia then followed and stated, “there are no obstacles, at times we are lazy.” Monica followed this trend of thought and said, “excuses, some of the excuses are that we have to work.”

In addition, Jessica, one of the co-researchers, thoughtfully affirmed, “the language.” Then everyone agreed that English was a barrier. Silvia also, then vividly explained what she feels; “right now we are understanding everything well, but when they speak English, I feel like my guts get twisted.” Monica, in her insightful manner communicated her experience,

For me, maybe I’ve been lucky, it has been very difficult to learn English, but the teacher even though she did not understand me and I did not understand her, we were always able to communicate even if it was with hand signs.

Gabriela added, “it is not a barrier. For example, if I go to China, I will communicate with hand signs or in whatever way.” Monica continued, “if it’s necessary, you will accomplish it. That’s why I think that there are no obstacles, it’s just that we do not want.”

Jessica then added another comment that took the conversation in a different direction: “Is it that we think that we are not important in school for the teachers, that we think that we know very little and that we cannot help much?” Gabriella replied to this the following words,

There are also things that are cultural. When I would come by I would ask mothers, are you going to the meeting? And they would say, what is it about? In Mexico my parents never went to meetings.

Silvia added, “My father used to attend meetings and when the teacher would say that Don Moisés had attended, I would feel very proud. He did get very involved in school.” Jessica brought the conversation back to our school and declared,

Another thing that I have experienced and have noted is that when my children started kindergarten I was always here. When my son started first grade I went to see the teacher and told her that I was at her disposition and she said, "I don't need you." My child then went to second grade and my daughter to first grade. I went to see the first grade teacher and she told me that she didn't need me and I did not help that year. It wasn't until my son reached third grade that I returned and I almost lived here. I almost came every day from 8 to 10 in the morning and now I'm here more often but I did stay away because they told me, "I don't need you."

Gabriela shared her experience and communicated that when her children were in kinder she was allowed to help but that she was no longer needed. She also explicated that in the beginning she was not as involved and that her son is now suffering because he is not as academically strong but has told him that if he doesn't improve, she will go and sit with him until he does better. Silvia, on the other hand, expressed that she has had positive interactions with the current teachers. Francisca agreed with the last comment and feels that kids feel safe and confident. She also made a comment in regards to a karate club that we have had for a year in our school,

I have seen a change in my son because he was very timid and wouldn't participate. He needed a stimulus to make him have self-confidence and that's why I like brining him to karate. It has given him motivation and self-confidence. In the beginning he didn't want me to come and he would tell me, "you don't speak English well" but now he says, "let's go" that is why I have liked the system that this school has. It has been very interesting to me and I have seen the change even in the teachers, they motivate the students more.

Monica remarked,

It's important that the child is told where he will be going and why he comes here and wake up early, it's because he will be going to college. He's not just going to sit all the way to fifth grade, but will be going to college, that is the goal. Not to go work in a McDonald's because you can do that without going to school.

The other parents agreed that the ultimate goal is for their children to go to college and that taking them to visit a university campus and buying them t-shirts from that school is important. Francisca continued praising the new school system and agreed with other



parents that they also become motivated when their child is receiving recognition to also attend the event. Monica added in agreement, “If we don’t go, who will applaud them?”

There are six specific points that I received from this question in retrospect. The first one is that parents felt that there are no obstacles to be involved in their child’s school. Then the parents felt that perhaps English could be an obstacle and one parent participant shared that her own son asked her not to go to school because she did not speak English. A third important point that came out was a reflective question asking if parents feel important enough to be at school. This led to the fourth point where a parent co-researcher shared that a teacher told her that she did not need her help and was disengaged from school for two years. The fifth point made was that Latino parents are not involved because it is a cultural component tied to the experience of Latino parents in their native countries where parents were not expected to participate in school. The last point was in regards to the parents’ aspiration for their children in that they expect them to attend the university and that they find it necessary for parents and teachers to tell them about it.

The third focus group interview question asked: How can we involve your culture and language? Jessica was the first one to respond and said, “by celebrating the 5 de Mayo, 16 of September, it’s what I can come up with.” Monica, who is from El Salvador replied, “being a good Central American, I would say a Latin American celebration.” Jessica commented, “as a matter of fact many Latin American countries celebrate their independence in September.” Since it appeared that the parents had finished expressing their ideas about culture and celebration, I focused the question on the language and how

the school could present it but the answers were not exactly focused on the implementation of the Spanish language. Monica explained that she does the following,

In my case, I talk to the teachers about my country, that's what I've done. All the teachers where my girls have been know where I'm from, what we eat and I bring them a dish. I talk to them about my country.

Francisca asserted, "It would be good that once a month each mother would bring a dish where she is from and talk about it. Because even though we are Hispanic, every place has a different dish." Jessica revealed, "also music or a dance performance or as the lady said, that everyone would bring a dish, I also think that music like mariachi."

Monica raised an important question to which I answered. She asked, "how can we discover what population we have in the school of different cultures, for example, I don't know what percentage of Latino children are in the school." I immediately told her the percentage and satisfied her question. It appeared that both the co-researchers and the participant parents had given all their ideas to answer the second question and decided to move on to the fourth question.

There were three important points raised as the parent co-researchers asked the third question. One of those points was the fact that Latino immigrant parents and their children can celebrate the independence of their particular countries, share their traditional food with their child's teacher or simply let them know where they are from. The second point came as a result of the brainstorming on what to do to represent the students' culture and even though we have a high percentage of Latino students, they are not all of Mexican descent. As stated in a previous chapter, at times the only similarity between Latinos is the Spanish language. In particular, the last point was the need to

know the demographic data of the school in order to know what cultures are represented in the school.

The fourth focus group interview question asked the parents: What can the school do to have you participate more? The initial response was somewhat superficial and the parents commented on what I had already been implementing to involve parents. Jessica on the other hand, went a little deeper and said; “sometimes one feels that we are not important because they tell you, ‘I don’t need you.’ Therefore it’s important that they tell you, ‘Can you come? I need you.’” Monica followed with a similar observation,

They have to be more direct, say, you have three days for your appointment, which one do you want? Because when they give you options, people do not go. Like in the first day of classes, say when one is going to help and fill the paper out. They have to require the parent to go, because if not, there will be no results, especially now that there are more kids and less resources. I think that it’s necessary to help. That’s why it can be like a bank, a bank of parents that can help because there could be teachers who do not need help. This way, teachers who need help can get help there. This way teachers don’t feel invaded by parents and can just request help from parents.

Her insightful comment was well received by the rest of the parents. The other participants reported that teachers could give work for the parents to help at home. Gabriela affirmed, “like my son’s teacher that would give me the papers to take home when I couldn’t go to school to help.” The idea of having a parent bank to support the teachers was brought up by Monica and was well taken by everyone.

The two points raised by the fourth focus interview question was jumped started by Jessica’s point about not feeling important and excluded by the teachers. This was an example of the parent’s experiential knowledge not being appreciated and kept out of the classroom. The other parents’ approach was more practical and pointed out the fact that their involvement can be by taking teacher work home. This demonstrated the Latino

parents' willingness to support by helping the teacher with their duties even when they are not able to go to school due to other obligations.

The co-researcher and participant parents did not have anything else to add to this question and prompted me to move to the final question: What elements comprise a culturally sensitive advocacy-training program for immigrant Latino parents? I gave a short explanation on what the question meant in regards to advocacy and being culturally sensitive. Juan was the first one to respond, he declared, "by participating just like how we are doing in order to have everything go well and if one can help in something, to do it." I felt that they did not quite understand and so I asked them: "What tools would you need to be your child's advocate?" Monica was the first one to declare,

For me it's knowing the annual content of what should be learned, the first trimester of kinder for example is to know from one to ten, the colors as the paper says in the beginning of the year and I can help because I know what will be there. But in first, second, etc. I don't know and can't help. For example, your child now needs to know the multiplication tables, multiply from one to ten, the second trimester your child needs to read because he is going to learn pronouns. This way I can help my child more if I knew the content of the class.

The parent participants then suggested ideas of when this information could be shared with the parents and they all concurred that the first day of being back at school was the best moment so parents could know what their children were going to learn. Another element that surfaced from this question was the fact that it was necessary for school officials to go over the standards with the parents line by line and allow them to ask questions. Monica proposed that it was necessary to make an appointment with parents and not just say that there was going to be a meeting. Jessica remarked the following,

Another thing, that in the first day of back to school night, the teachers can tell us how important it is to be involved in school and that any support given is valuable for the student.

I informed Jessica that I already had plans of changing the structure of the Back to School Night for next year in order to address some of those concerns. All the parent participants consented that it was important to bring this information to their attention at the beginning of the year. They also agreed that giving a non-uniform pass to those parents who come to meetings works in getting parents to show up. Monica shared, “I know girls who tell their mothers, ‘I want a free dress day’ go to the meeting.” I assented that non-uniform passes have increased participation in parent meetings. I then asked if there was anything else to add and they all said, “No, that’s it.”

In this last interview question, two points were brought up to address the prompt. The first one was about informing parents on what the child was supposed to know and the second one is about informing parents on back to school night. They all concurred that those points would empower them to be their child’s advocate but I think that more discussion was necessary in order for parents to go beyond asking for information and truly think about advocacy. The issues of simply giving the California State standards to the parents in order to inform them on what their child will learn will not solve the problems that Latino immigrant students face or the home school disconnect.

### *Third Session*

The most informative of all the sessions was the third because as the co-researcher parents discussed what the parent participants said, they gave their own opinions and made the conversations very rich. The co-researcher parents acted as participants and truly made this a PAR study because they did not limit themselves in analyzing what the other participant parents said, but added their own experiential

knowledge. The co-researcher parents also developed the core points of the presentation and main components of the advocacy-training program.

The third session began by going over our notes from the focus interview questions. We read the questions and shared what we had written for each individual answer. After verifying our notes, we began exploring the ideas that came out of the focus group interviews. This session was very beneficial because new and recurrent themes appeared.

In the first question, which asked about what it meant to participate in school, we discussed the concept of making children feel protected. Ofelia added her own idea of making her child feel protected and shared,

Give them a hug when we leave them at school and tell them I love you a lot and you are going to learn a lot in school today. You have to pay attention and obey everything the teacher says. Everything will be okay. You can play outside when you go out, that's when you can play. When you are going to study, study.

Ruben continued,

To give them support and good advice like the majority of parents, but I have come to meetings and you don't see parents here. All the parents will say the same, "I bring my child to learn" but they don't come to the school. The child feels protected if one helps him with the homework and everything else.

Jessica remarked,

I tell my children that whatever happens, they have to tell me and they don't have to keep anything, good or bad. They have to behave well, but if they misbehave, they are going to pay the consequences of what they've done. But if they do something bad to them, they have to tell me. If the teacher says something they have to tell me and I'm going to help or fix it. Sometimes certain situations arise and one has to be there. It's important for them to feel safe but if something bad happens, one is there to face the situation for them.

Ofelia's perspective was a proactive one and suggested, "I always introduce myself with the teacher and I tell them that I'm her mother and tell me how I can help you." Ofelia's positive example completed the conversation on this topic.

There were four points that were developed as the co-researcher parents discussed the first focus interview question. The first point was in regards to physical affection that parents can give their children as they drop them off to school in order to set the students up for success. The second point was an observation of the limited participation of Latino parents that one of our co-researcher perceives is a hindrance. He felt that parents are not as involved as they should be in their children's education. The third point raised here was the need to have open lines of communication with children in order to understand what is happening in the classroom whether it is good or bad. The last point touches on the need to introduce oneself to the teacher so they know whom the student's parent is. The idea in all of these points was to define what participation meant to the parents. It is obvious that there are multiple perspectives on what participation means and in no way close to the definition of participation by the mainstream as explicated in previous chapters.

The particular conversation in regards to the second focus interview question, which asked about the obstacles preventing parents from participating in school, began when Ruben shared,

I have come here for meetings and other meetings for my oldest son and Latinos are not seen in schools. I have many Latino friends at work and they never talk about meetings. They get home from work and I don't know if the wife is the same that they don't have time. There is no relationship about how the child is protected. That's why if the child doesn't see any interest, he will learn whatever he can. That's something that got my attention when I came here, because I was one of those that never came.

Ruben was sharing a very unique perspective about fathers being involved and I asked him to elaborate why he was coming to meetings; he responded that his wife would make him. He declared,

Yes, I would come home tired but there is always time for everything, if one wants to. Why go if others are not going to attend, but what is important is for one to go. If one goes more people may come. That's how you initiate everything. I don't know what mentality other men have. They say, "why should we go to the parent meeting?" But we should always go as a couple, if possible both.

I asked them, what could I do to involve fathers? Jessica was the first to respond with her statement,

A note should be sent home and let them know that we have a meeting by grade level. In the beginning it will be difficult but once mothers get involved, fathers will join. The mother little by little will be motivating the dad.

Ofelia on the other hand had a different idea by adding that she added,

I think that we would ask the dad, how many hours could you donate in a month? This way you can know how your child is doing in school and in class and you can help him. Not demand, but to ask how much time to see your child.

Jessica concluded this section by stating that parents could help in the classroom even if they did not speak English. She commented that Spanish-speaking parents could help those students who spoke Spanish and need help with mathematics. Ruben explained in regards to speaking English, "It's the fear. One understands and can speak it a little bit but with children it's different because they laugh and then one doesn't want to speak it again." Jessica retorted to this comment by stating, "It would be a matter of explaining to the students that parents are there to help and that they should not laugh at them."

The main two points of discussion raised with the third focus interview question was the involvement of Latino fathers in schools and the parents' proficiency in English. Ruben began by complaining about the low level of Latino parent involvement but



admitted that he himself was not involved and started participating in school because of his wife. Jessica pointed out that if mothers were the first ones to take the step and set the example, fathers would soon follow. Ofelia offered a very direct solution expecting fathers and parents in general to give a specific number of hours with the understanding that it was to help their children. At this point the parents' struggle with English became evident because Ruben felt uncomfortable about speaking English and having students laugh at him if he volunteered in a classroom. Jessica, like in other areas of controversy, provided a sound response to Ruben's concern. Jessica expected students to understand the parents and to not ridicule them in their efforts.

No other parent made any comment in regards to this topic and we moved on to the fourth focus group question on what could the school do to involve more parents. Jessica was the first one to provide a response, "the teacher should let parents know directly that their help is needed for homework so they can have more success." Jessica also gave input on the fact that when parents volunteer in the classroom they see which student knows and gets help at home. The co-researchers agreed that children are ahead because parents help them but María proceeded to say the following,

Teachers have to tell a parent. Because my son tells me that others don't do their work. But I say you have to think about yourself. And then we also have him do the multiplication tables at home but what about in school? And I say to him, what's going on, why are you behind in this?

Ruben on the other hand shared that schools need to find what is attractive to the parents and find ways to get their attention in order to involve them more with their child's education. Ofelia supported this comment by indicating that parents sometimes say that they will not go to school in part because they feel that teachers are the ones who help

students; not parents. As my co-researchers continued providing input on the topic, Jessica added the following,

Something that is very important to do is to ask teachers that they motivate children more. That way they come to school motivated and they tell us that something is going to happen. It's very important the papers they send home, but it has occurred to me that because I'm busy it stays in the backpack and I don't see it. Teachers just pass the paper out and children just put it in their backpacks and forget it. I have noticed that when they get motivated the children say, "look at this."

Ruben touched on an important point in order to have more parents involved and took the approach of having involved parents tell other parents about school events. Ofelia added that it should not be mandatory but that we provide an invitation. Here Jessica retorted,

First we need to make them [parents] see the reality of the problem, because I see it as a problem. The fact that you go to a class and see the academic level that certain children have, for me it's a problem. We need to explain the statistics of the Latinos who go to a university, the statistics of the Latinos who end up in prison, of the ones who drop out of school. Maybe that will make them react, it may awake them, also the statistics of the children who go astray into gangs and drugs.

The session ended at this point and the co-research team was not able to complete the development of the advocacy-training program. We decided to meet again in order to develop the presentation points based on the pertinent discussions above.

The co-researcher parents pointed out an important aspect, and that is that teachers have to motivate and communicate with the children on when events are supposed to occur in order for students to go home and inform the parents. Another point was the importance of making things attractive for parents in order to motivate them to come to school. One of the parents pointed out an important point that at times parents do not come to help in the classroom, because they feel as a parent that they would be interrupting the teacher's job to teach. Jessica concluded this section with great insight

about the importance of presenting statistics to parents about the number of Latinos who go to the university and those who go to prison. She felt that this information would wake them up and convince them of the importance of school involvement.

The rich discussions that came out of this section were fundamental in the development of the anti-hegemonic advocacy-training program. The co-researcher parents thoroughly discussed the reasons why Latino parents do not get involved and brainstormed ways to get them involved. It appears that mothers are the first ones or only ones to be involved in school, but as stated before this can be the catalyst to get fathers involved as well. The English language was another topic that came up in this section through discussion. It was initially perceived as an obstacle to simply an excuse that Latino parents can work around. I can see that the majority of these parents have a high level of resiliency through my interaction and observations. The topic of communication was a strong one and it was mainly the communication between the child and the parent in order to know everything that goes on in class. There was a subtle implication of mistrust with the ways that teachers would treat their children and for that reason communication was at the top of list just as protecting their children. To the parents, protecting their children was a concrete act demonstrated by physical attention. There was no discussion of protecting them legally or other abstract ways. In general, parents wanted their children to feel safe and to be treated well. This was their practical definition of being involved in school – protecting their children.

#### *Development of the Advocacy-Training Program*

The building of the advocacy-training program was the key component of this study and what gave parents the most satisfaction. This session was also difficult for one

of the co-researcher as she reflected on why her older son was not able to enter a four-year university. The co-researchers participated in discussions of what Latino parents would appreciate and need to know if they were given information about the educational system. At the end of this session, the co-researchers had established the main points of the presentation for the program.

This section answers the first research question: What elements comprise an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program for the immigrant Latino parents of urban Latino ELL students in a Northern California South Bay elementary school? In order to get parents thinking of the components of the program, I prepared several pieces of information from our school, community, Latino educational pipeline, college acceptance requirements and census information for them to analyze and put together for the parent presentation. As the co-researchers were looking at the A-G requirements, a conversation sparked about Jessica's son who is doing well in community college but was not able to be accepted into a four-year university because he lacked the necessary requirements. Jessica stated, "my son is stuck, the classes get full. My son says, I selected the classes for the summer but they are all on a waiting list. There are many classes that are not offered." She blames this on the fact that she was not informed enough to guide her son. The other parents only listened because their children have not completed middle school. Jessica then took the discussion to another level by making a comment on the need to know the American education system and support children in school in order for Latinos to make a positive impact in this country. She argued,

Sometimes, as a parent, one doesn't know this. And for that reason, because one doesn't know, one doesn't think of the importance of it. You only go to school and seeing this, it's time to think and say, what is going to happen with the country when it's on our population [the responsibility] and it's growing so much

and they are going to be the ones leading the country? If we continue like this we are going to get old and we are going to be surrounded by uneducated kids. They are going to grab us and throw us away. It is now that we need to invest in them to have good results.

This was an important point to make because it helped the other parents to see the big picture. The other parents agreed with her comment and were motivated to continue our work of developing the parent program. As the conversation continued, Jessica stated the importance of parent involvement and gave an example of another parent who had complained to her about her daughter not receiving enough support from the school and this is what she suggested to the parent,

If I as a parent cannot send my child to a private school, pay a tutor and if the school doesn't offer something, I will look for someone who will help. Look, there is one teacher for so many students. If as a parent I cannot pay a tutor, look in the computer for help or find a relative or cousin.

To this Maria responded, "There are times that they don't help them in the classroom."

Jessica rebutted,

Or tell [parents] that there are students who are really low, that we need to help those children more. I have seen, by personal experience I say this, that the teachers collect homework and do not revise them and if they revise them, do not send them home. And one asks, how is my child doing? And they say, your son is doing well but I want to know how well. If they tell me 95%, I want to know in what he failed.

As we discussed the development of the parent program with the needs of our students in mind, Jessica gave the idea that parents who feel academically confident should become tutors after school. All the other parents supported the idea. Maria commented, "I say that they can help for one or two hours." Jessica added, "I can help up to third grade." Ruben added, "There are many things one doesn't know. But how many people are willing to help? There must be a lot of parents that must be at home right now." Jessica retorted, "It's more important to work with our kids at home because if our

kids are doing well, one can come and help others.” Ruben added, “now that my wife is not working she dedicates a lot of time, doing the homework.” Maria shared, “I get the homework and I check one by one and the next day the teacher is really happy.” Jessica concluded with the last comment on this topic, “Sometimes the kids say, today I didn’t get any reading homework, but I say to them, you’re going to read anyways and I sign so the teacher knows that I checked it.”

The points raised in this section address the lack of information about the educational system and the consequences that Jessica’s son is now facing as he goes through community college. Jessica also pointed out the importance of parents taking charge of their child’s education and finding the necessary tools to help regardless of what the school has to offer. A wonderful idea that came out of Jessica’s input was Maria’s comment on having a parent tutor center. Jessica mentioned her limitations but was excited to start something like that.

After the homework discussion, we continued brainstorming ideas on what were the key components of the parent program. Jessica and Ruben agreed that little by little the program was getting completed. Ruben stated,

Since you don’t see programs like this in schools, many people don’t say anything. They take kids and drop them off at school. They don’t know anything else but taking and picking them up. So if all this is offered it’s good. I can imagine that more people will get involved.

Maria shared,

The fact that you [the principal] have meetings at different times, people feel excited. They say, “It’s because he has the desire to help and we have to support him.” I have heard people say that you [the principal] really wants to help and people get motivated.

Jessica added when she has felt like not attending a meeting, “and one really feels committed. So much that he is doing for us, we can’t miss the meeting. I cannot pay with

indifference.” Ruben concluded the discussion by stating, “It’s nice. He gives us ideas to start changing.” I had to bring the conversation back to the components of the program because they were focused on the positive elements that I already had established in our school.

In this section the parents started to see the shape that this program would take and their ideas were now becoming more concrete. Again, the parents took a lot of responsibility for their level of involvement and pointed out the need for other parents to be involved as well. An interesting point that came out, which flattered me, was some praise for the systems so far in place about parent involvement and the sense of commitment that they feel because of it.

The co-researcher parents discussed what the components of the presentation would be and as Jessica suggested informing parents on who are the students who are performing low and the importance of being in the classroom to not only help the teacher but to see what the students are learning. In regards to informing parents about student performance, she wanted to demonstrate how Latinos are doing in comparison to other ethnicities. The co-researcher parents agreed that it was necessary to inform parents about drop out rates for Latino students and the key components of what students are supposed to learn in school. From the co-researchers’ feedback I took that they mainly wanted to present the following points: data on Latino students and education; ideas on getting involved in school; and motivation for parents to participate.

In discussing what was important to show parents, we settled on the following topics (*Appendix B*) which answered the following: What comprises an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program for the immigrant Latino parents of urban

Latino ELL students in a Northern California South Bay elementary school? These topics comprised the PowerPoint presentation.

After developing the topics and general outline, Ruben requested that we meet to practice delivering the information because he was very nervous about presenting in front of other parents. We agreed to meet the following week and do a rehearsal in the cafeteria where the program was going to be delivered. Everyone was in agreement and we assigned sections to each other and practiced using a computer, projector, microphone and PowerPoint slides.

Parents completed this session feeling accomplished as we agreed on the points to present to other parents in order to empower them. The important points to take from this section was the commitment that parents had to their children's education, the importance of looking for academic support even if the school is not able to provide it, and the commitment and bonds developed between parents and the principal when the principal is committed to inclusion and social justice. Their comments confirmed to me that I was heading on the right direction in regards to parent involvement and academic success. The co-researcher parents were in high spirits and ready to share their leanings with others.

#### *Fourth Session*

The final and fourth session addressed the last three research questions: What are the perceptions on school involvement of immigrant Latino parents of ELL students who participate as co-researchers and co-presenters of an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program in a Northern California elementary school? What are the perceptions on school involvement of immigrant Latino parents of ELL students who



participate in an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program in a Northern California elementary school? What are the benefits to immigrant Latino parents of ELL students who participate in an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program in a Northern California elementary school? The answers to the questions above were accomplished through the presentation of the parent program, the co-researcher parents' testimony, and the written response of the co-researcher parents and participant parents. Parents participated with the conviction that their work was not only beneficial to them and their children, but to other Latino parents. The co-researcher parents were nervous to present but felt proud of their participation.

#### *Presenting the Program*

The presentation of the program was a successful and culminating event for my co-researcher parents. Only three of them were able to be present: Ruben, Jessica and Ofelia. They presented the slides and explained the data that we had examined on Latino statistics and the educational system. They also integrated personal experiences as they presented the information to participants, which made it credible and practical for the other parents. I also participated in explaining certain components of the educational system as we had agreed in the previous meeting.

#### *Perceptions of Parents*

The culminating event was the presentation of the program by the co-researcher parents to some of the participant parents from the focus interview. The co-researchers were a bit nervous but felt prepared in presenting their piece of information. They seemed proud and came dressed with professional attire. In the previous practice we had divided the presentation into parts and rehearsed what to say and how to use the microphone,

PowerPoint and computer. We presented in the school's cafeteria and had the participant parents sitting in a semicircle. The co-researcher parents gave a brief testimony of their participation and their general experience with the educational system. They also encouraged the other parents to get involved. After the presentation the co-researchers and participants completed a form that asked about their perception as co-researchers or participants in the creation of this parent program (*Appendix C*). The following are their perceptions.

#### *Co-Researchers*

This section answers the second and fourth research question of this study: What are the perceptions on school involvement of immigrant Latino parents of ELL students who participate as co-researchers and co-presenters of an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program in a Northern California elementary school? What are the benefits to immigrant Latino parents of ELL students who participate in an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program in a Northern California elementary school? I was able to gather the co-researchers' perceptions and the benefit of their participation as they spoke and gave their testimony to other parents and through their written response.

I had three parents who participated in this presentation. This is what Ofelia reported as her perception,

It was a pleasure to me to participate because we are going to help other parents to become more involved. I think that there are no obstacles. This was a good presentation. My impression is that everything was about the education of the children. I feel very happy. There are many benefits because children feel happy if parents support them at all times to reach the university.

Ofelia also gave a short testimony to the participants present and suggested,

I ask you that you are always with your children; I have not worked because of them. I have not worked; I have not done anything for myself in order to be with them. Everyday I remind them of that. They have to improve everyday and they have to pay me with a diploma, they have to repay me all the time I have spent with them. But everyday, thanks to God, I feel very proud and satisfied to be with my children. My son, God willing, is going to graduate and will have a career. He wants to help other children like him. He now helps kids in high school from 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup>. I tell them everyday and my daughter is going down the same path. They tell the youngest, if we are of gold, you have to be a diamond. And that's how I started since they were small; I have always been in school. And even now, I'm in the classroom.

Her comments were sincere and showed pride in the academic accomplishments that her children have reached thus far. Parents listened attentively to her words throughout the discussion.

Ruben's perception was in accordance with the following,

We need to look for more things between the parents so they can get more involved in the school and pay more attention to their children. I'm going to try to come more to school to be more informed. I would like to have these programs more often and try to bring more ideas and testimonies. First we need to learn how to understand our children and how to help them with their homework.

Ruben also gave a short testimony to the other parents and explained in detail the following,

First of all, my wife started to come when she stopped working. Before it was all work and we did check the homework but not the same, we are more involved in school. Right now I have tried to come and learn new things every day that sometimes you do not know or gave no importance to. Sometimes we prefer to watch television or go out and don't know where the students are. We just send them to school and don't help them.

Ruben's main message was that parents prefer to spend time doing other things than understanding what their children need academically. He considers himself one of those parents who was not involved, but now knows what it takes to help them succeed academically. He is a convert of the inclusive nature of the study.

The last parent co-researcher to report her perception of her participation was Jessica. She stated the following,

I was able to personally notice that it's very important to have participated in this program because I learned different ideas and opinions from other parents. And that if we express our worries we can make changes that can take our children to accomplish better goals. I was able to note that with everyone and united, we can make the difference. I noticed that the parents who assisted were interested in receiving the information that they received and that they are interested in participating and helping their children more. The biggest benefit that I personally can see is the success of our children, confidence in themselves and the importance of school and above all a better future.

Jessica, being the only mother with a child in college and two children in elementary, was able to provide a deeper perspective than the other parents. Her testimony was very moving and helped her reflect on her misguided involvement with her first child. Detailed below is her testimony,

I want to share something with you that is very important. I have a boy of 20 years. I say boy because he is a boy. I was always involved, I helped with everything I could, but the teacher told me that my child was fine and I saw that he was going well, but was doing well and he got to high school and my, oh my child is graduating from high school, I was so blind that I did not know the school system, I did not know that classes for graduating were one set and the requirements for the university others. I want to share this with you because for me it's very important. Now I understand the time and I can not return.

In particular, this was a very emotional experience for Jessica as she opened up to other parents through her personal reflection of misguided school involvement affected her first son. She was consistently involved, but was not well informed about the educational system; blames herself for not searching deeper as she sees her son struggling through the community college system. She added,

Now I'm trying to do better with my other kids, off course, I get involved in school. Now I ask more questions, for example it's not enough that they tell me, your son is doing well and that he gets 85%, for me, I want my child to be at the top. With my other son it was different, I did not put pressure or motivated him and if he said everything was well I conformed. Now I look back and I see that I

didn't do it well. He graduated high school and I felt proud that he completed high school but now I see that it was not enough, that if I had motivated him more, that if I had known the system better and that it's not just to graduate from high school but that I needed to have seen his classes, his GPA and the classes that my son needed to get scholarships.

Jessica's experience was powerful one in that she was the only parent who had a child in college and little ones in elementary school. She also felt guilty for not having asked or demanded more from her son or the school. Her testimony served as an example of what could happen to the children of the other parents if their involvement was not an informed and committed involvement. Jessica continued through her statement,

Now my son continues going to college. But my son is stuck in there moving very slowly, why? Because classes in college are saturated and it's costing him, not because he cannot pass the classes, but because he is losing time there. Because the classes he took in high school do not help him there. So for me, I feel it is important to share this because we are often conformist.

It was interesting to hear that Jessica took responsibility for her son's struggles in community college for her lack of understanding of the educational system. She raised an interesting question about the level of parent responsibility for his or her child's failure if they are simply not aware of the educational system.

In further agreement, the co-researcher parents gave two simple messages: be your child's advocate by getting involved and there are no obstacles to school participation. Jessica's testimony confirmed to the other parents the need to be informed about the educational system and parent involvement. The message that all of the co-researcher parents gave to the other parents was to get involved and be an advocate of their children. They were able to articulate their concerns and what they learned in a cultural context with an understanding of the fears and limitations that Latino parents may think they have. The second message was that there are no obstacles and that parents

can be involved and truly make a difference in their child's life. This was reaffirmed by Jessica and her story about her son in community college. It was admirable to hear that these Latino parents were taking responsibility for their children's failure even though the educational system was not designed to serve Latinos. Their attitude can only be described by the boycott words used by César Chavez, "Sí se puede" [it can be done].

The enthusiasm demonstrated in the cafeteria that can only be described by those who were present that day. The co-researchers parents presented with the authority of someone who owns, understands, describes and produces his or her own epistemology. As philosophers of their own reality, the co-researcher parents presented a demonstrative change of their livelihood by participating in this program.

### *Participants*

In further study this particular section answers the third and fourth research question of this study: What are the perceptions of immigrant Latino parents of ELL students who participate in an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program in a Northern California elementary school? What are the benefits to immigrant Latino parents of ELL students who participate in an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program in a Northern California elementary school? Only two of the parents who participated in the focus group interview were able to attend this presentation.

Monica reported the following when asked about her perception as a participant,

There are no obstacles to participate in the education of our children. We always need to know what they are required to know to be future university students. Now I understand why I need to be my child's advocate: because we need to know what they need, what they lack, where can we get help and to know the reach of the Spanish-speaking educational attainment in this country.

It was interesting to note that Monica mentioned the fact that she understands the connection between knowing the system and being an advocate. The word “advocate” in Spanish is *abogado*, which also means “attorney” and comes from the verb *abogar*, which means, “to plead or intercede” as in a court case. The parent participation demonstrated herein clearly understood the purpose of being an advocate and can probably be attributed to her educational background as a trained lawyer in her native El Salvador.

Another parent who participated in the focus group interview, Silvia, added the following as her perception as a participant,

We need to motivate parents who come to the meetings. Let other parents know that we are more important than what we sometimes think and that together we can accomplish many things for the success of our children.

In addition, her idea of parents being more important than what they think they are, touches upon a special point in the empowerment of parents. It was good to see that she understood this aspect of the program. As a benefit of her participation in this program she states the following:

To learn more things about how to help when something is going wrong as well as to where to ask for help and be attentive to push for her academic success in the university. Thank you for being interested in something that we sometimes think that is not important.

Both participant parents shared key points necessary for the implementation and existence of a productive parent program: advocacy and seeing the importance not just in their participation at school but that they themselves are important. These participant parents also mirrored the co-researcher parents in stating that there are no obstacles to parent involvement and take responsibility for motivating other parents. They saw learning as a benefit of their involvement and as a key component for understanding the

educational system and advocacy. To affirm, this last point was an important aspect shared by both group of parents.

### Summary of Findings

In response to findings based on the three research questions were clear from both groups of parents, co-researchers and participants. In regards to the first research question: What comprises an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program for the immigrant Latino parents of urban Latino ELL students in a Northern California South Bay elementary school? The co-researcher parents found that it consisted in presenting parents with statistical information on Latinos, the educational pipeline, some aspects of literacy and its effect on academic success, motivation to get parents to participate, information on the importance of parent participation, testimonies and delivery in Spanish by Latino parents. They also mentioned having parent support in the creation of a homework center where parents who were able to help kids could donate one or two hours of their time. The program also included a rewards component to recognize parents who donated many hours in service to the school. This was presented to the parents in an effort to continue to motivate students to witness their parents recognized for their support of the school. The co-researchers did not include aspects of CRT in the presentation but did use PAR as the tool to collect and present information. Critical Race Theory was represented superficially and I did not expect them to become experts in this philosophical framework.

In response to the second and third research question asked: What are the perceptions of immigrant Latino parents of ELL students who participate as co-researchers and co-presenters of an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training



program in a Northern California elementary school? What are the perceptions of immigrant Latino parents of ELL students who participate in an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program in a Northern California elementary school? The main difference in these two is the type of parent who participated, co-researcher or participant. The parents' perception did not differ from group to group. I found that they reported similar perceptions of their involvement. The only notable difference was the co-researchers extensive participation and development of the presentation and program. They also contributed more with their testimonies and analysis of the participants' answers. The core themes present in both groups of parents included the following: there are no obstacles that prevent Latino parents from being involved in school even if English is a barrier; parents are important; understanding the educational system; culture can be addressed through dances and music; and the need to understand the system in order to be your child's advocate.

The parents expressed disappointment at the fact that other non-participant Latino parents do not show up to the meetings even though they have seen an increase in parent participation that I have implemented to include them in the school . The comment, "there are no obstacles" to parent involvement, kept being brought up, suggests in my understanding is that if they are simply blaming themselves and do not understand the system that has rejected Latino parents; or if they feel that because I am a Spanish-speaking principal in communication with all families in both English and Spanish. In other words, I became inquisitive to what if I did not speak Spanish and did not accommodate their schedules when I have parent meetings in the mornings and the evenings? What about parents who work and cannot take the time off to support the

school? The fact here is that my parent participants and co-researchers did not see an obstacle and place the blame and responsibility on the parents.

One of the parents Monica, who was trained as a lawyer in El Salvador, understood that the concept of being an advocate; only works if you have the necessary information or knowledge. Here we can apply the adage, “knowledge is power.” This is true because only by having knowledge of the educational system and seeing that someone’s child is not being given the proper education by the school, can you advocate for what is right. You can only demand what you know exists.

Parents participation and time in order to learn ways to help their children and support our school also developed the scope of study. As Jessica stated, now she knows what to expect from her children in order to have them go to a four-year university. She might have made a mistake once, but empowered as she is with all new information, her children will now have a better chance to succeed academically.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION, THEMES CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the findings and explore the aforementioned four research questions in regard to the study. Furthermore, I will discuss the themes produced by the parent conversations and I will analyze them through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and its tenets. After concluding my discussion, I will specifically address the implications and recommendations that this Participatory Action Research (PAR) study has provided for future practice. The work that the co-researcher parents and completed resembles Rahman's (1991) research with regard to what the parents participation has informed us about the changes we need to make at our school site. Moreover, the application of PAR has demystified the research process for the parents who participated in this study and have benefited from the findings and is supported by the work of Ladson-Billings (2000). Additionally, the parent co-researchers could continue future parent-led PAR studies if they decide to investigate another concern about our school. Through this research, parents have been able to create a counter story that validates their social and cultural capital in order to defeat any established deficit views (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

#### Discussion

The discussion is organized into four specific sections in order to address the research questions presented in the study. The first section is a discussion on the first research question. This section by far the bulk of the study because it discusses the five interview focus group questions developed by the co-researcher parents that lead into the

answer of first research question. In addition, this section also compares and contrasts the input from the co-researcher and participant parents. The second section discusses research questions two and four, which address the perception of the co-researcher parents including the benefit they received from participating in this study. The third section discusses the initial third and fourth research question, which address the participant parents including the benefit of participating in this research. The final section is a conclusion and reflection on my thoughts in response to the findings.

### *First Section*

In the first research question asked: What comprises an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program for the immigrant Latino parents of urban Latino ELL students in a Northern California South Bay elementary school? In order to answer this in a collaborative manner, the co-researcher parents participated in developing focus group interview questions to arrive at the answer of the first research question. These interview focus group questions provided an in depth understanding of the parents' view on parent involvement and the components for the parent program.

### *First Focus Group Question*

The first focus group interview question asked: What does it mean to you to participate in school? Most parents said that school participation for them meant giving their children security, protection, comfortableness, and support. For example, Monica stated that she visits the school "to see if he feels comfortable, that he won't have any fears." They also mentioned the importance of having open lines of communication, advice, and the importance of introducing yourself to the teacher. I was surprised with their answer because I felt that most comments had to do with giving protection and

demonstrating physical affection to the children as Ofelia stated, “give them a hug when we leave them at school and tell them I love you a lot.” Their replies astounded me because I was expecting a mainstream answer. I thought that they would say that parent participation for them was doing their homework at home with their children and coming to school to help out in the classroom as stated by Valdes (1996). The concept of providing protection, even though we can understand it as one of the primal elements of parenthood, did not cross my mind as something needed in the school setting. Garcia and Guerra (2004) point out this exact point, that the school administrator may be the actual problem of the home school disconnect due to their belief system. Specifically, this goes to show the importance of PAR because I myself had a different perspective. My belief system would have made it impossible to acknowledge any issue related to this since I did not see parent involvement in any way related to protecting or affirming the safety of one’s children in school.

The other topics that arose from the first focus group interview questions was the need to have clear communication with the children and the importance of giving advice. One example of this was Jessica’s comment, “I tell my children that whatever happens, they have to tell me and they don’t have to keep anything, good or bad.” This makes me think that the reason why Jessica was asking her children to tell her everything that happens is because there is an underlying concern with the way that her children may be treated by the teachers. Monica’s response resonates with Jessica’s comment because she stated that the reason she visits classrooms is “to see if my son likes to study.” In no moment during the conversation did the idea of bullying or other students intimidating their children come up. The discussions had to do with parents, teachers and their

children. Numerous studies have proven that parents will have positive views of schools if teachers treat their children with respect and appreciation (Perreira, Chapman, & Stein, 2006). From what I gathered, the co-researcher parents had the opposite experience. They had negative experiences with the teachers at my school; especially Jessica and that can explain her reasoning of wanting to know everything that happens in the classroom “good or bad.” Some of those negative experiences were the instances when teachers asked them to leave their classrooms and stating that they did not need their help. This occurred to Jessica, Maria and Gabriela and they all reported it during the discussion sessions. These parents also reported that they knew for a fact that some teachers did not help their children, did not check their homework or graded it, and that they did not motivate them to learn. For this specific reason, Jessica has as a rule of thumb with her children that she has her children read and she signs a paper for her children can take it to their teacher. I could not conclude if she did this to show her children’s teachers that even though they did not give them homework she still has them read or if she is doing it to show how involved she is in their education. Ruben on the other hand brought up something mentioned by Valdes (1996), the importance of giving advice or *consejos* as a way of communication with children. Ruben stated, “to give them support and good advice like the majority of parents, but I have come to meetings and you don’t see parents here.” Even though he mentions in regards to giving students advice is what I have seen in research, it is the second part of the comment that interests me because he blamed Latino parents for their lack of participation.

In response, Ruben blamed Latino parents for their lack of participation and pointed out their lack of interest in education. I thought about this and I know that the

level of parent participation has increased at my school, but more work still needs to be developed. Ruben is simply the catalyst to the study that we are not finished and that more needs to be done to include the other Latino parents. I find that this is a systemic and school culture problem that I can address in the future months and which this study tried to address by having co-researchers explore their own reality. Ruben's comment point out Marsschall's (2006) observation that parent programs fail because the designers lack cultural understanding. In my case and as an insider, I lacked the understanding of what Latino parents at my school thought about what it actually meant to participate in school. It is possible that the reason why Ruben found that Latino immigrant parents continue to not be included maybe because I do not have a complete understanding of the Latino parents at my school.

#### *Second Focus Group Question*

The second focus interview question asked: What obstacles prevent you from participating in school? The general answer for this question was that there were no obstacles to participate at home and it was lead by Juan who said, "for me, there are none." All of the parents agreed with this but certain points did surface that I thought were the tip of the iceberg. One of those was the fact that English is an obstacle and that even though if a parent wants to communicate, they will communicate regardless of language barriers as stated by Gabriela. Silvia gave a physical and vivid description of what she feels when English is spoken, she said, "I feel like my guts get twisted." Perreira, Chapman and Stein (2006) reported that for Latino parents not being able to speak English create a barrier that prevents them from being involved. Jessica made an interesting inquiry that I felt was courageous and well thought out, she asked, "Is it that

we think that we are not important in school for the teachers, that we think that we know very little and that we cannot help?” This is the champion question because she is inquiring about her own reality and the status of all the other Latino parents. Her question exemplifies what Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco and Qin (2005) point out as a feeling of inadequacy and a negative self-perception. Jessica’s previous experiences with some teachers who told her, “I don’t need you,” lead her to believe that perhaps she was not important and as shown by Orozco (2008), felt embarrassed because she did not have a college education like the teachers. Gabriela had a similar experience when a teacher told her that she was no longer needed and asked not to come back. Her explanation on why Latino parents do not get involved is that “in Mexico my parents never went to meetings.” This is also supported by the literature where it is stated that the educational system in Mexico did not have it as a practice to include parents but has recently changed with the adoption of certain laws that mandate parent collaboration (Miller & San Jose East Side Union High School District, 1999).

In further affirmation, Jessica and Gabriela’s comments were particularly significant to this study because they addressed an important concept in CRT. Yosso (2005) explained that Latinos might not be perceived to have the cultural capital that resonates with school personnel, but have community cultural wealth. The only concern is that teachers may not see any value in this community cultural wealth. I can see that teachers in previous years excluded Jessica and Gabriela from participating because their social and cultural capital was not seen as noteworthy. Silvia and Jessica had similar comments in regards to their social and cultural capital when they commented that they have to see themselves as important individuals in order for teachers to see them as



individuals who can contribute to the pertinent educational system. This is what Weininger and Lareau (2003) explicated occurs when Latino immigrant parents' social capital and values are not perceived as being important.

### *Third Focus Group Question*

The third focus interview question prepared by the co-researcher parents for the participant parents asked: How can we involve your culture and language? The initial response was a superficial one and dealt with having celebrations like the 5 de Mayo or Mexico's Independence Day. Monica, who is from El Salvador, opted for a pan Latin American celebration so all nationalities from the Spanish speaking countries were recognized. Torres (2004) points out that there are historical, immigration and cultural differences among the various Latinos who immigrate into the United States. I am fully aware of these differences because my undergraduate and master's degree are in Spanish philology. In particular, this is where I have to keep a balance since the majority of the Latino immigrant parents at my school are from Mexico. As we brainstormed other ways to represent our students' culture so the Mexican culture did not overpower, parents mentioned taking a dish to the teacher, music and dance performances or simply informing teachers about their country of origin. In the belief of having cultural performance, it directly implies that parents would take care of this because the teaching staff do not know the dances or do not have the time to teach them to the students. During this time Jessica requested demographic data to know who we had represented within the school. I thought this was important since her request resonated with my own education and need of data to prove points of study.

In further response, Ruben reiterated his position about the lack of Latino parent involvement and shared how his friends at work are also not involved and said that he himself would not be involved until his wife encouraged him to go. This provided me an opportunity to focus on how wives can help to motivate fathers to attend school meetings or participate in other ways. Jessica confirmed this and Ofelia offered a more direct approach to involve parents. Ofelia's comment parallels the research of Valdes (1996) where she found that Latino parents preferred direct communication instead of vague comments that could be perceived as invitations. As the parents brainstormed more ways to involve parents, particularly dads, Jessica presented the idea of having parents volunteer time in the classroom and as the excitement of making this a reality, Ruben expressed uneasiness about this because he feared that children would laugh at his English. This parallels the research by Valdes (1996) where she states that parents felt "sensitive about the issue and aware of their own limitations in the eyes of their children" (p. 151). It is no surprise that Ruben felt this way as Jessica set her own limit by saying that she could only help up to third grade because after that she would not be able to help the students. I still think that regardless of academic level or English proficiency, parents can be in the classroom and support children in their learning. After all, what the participant and co-researcher parents expressed they wanted to do was to provide protection, physical affection, and support to their children – this would be accomplished by their presence in the classroom.

#### *Fourth Focus Group Question*

In the fourth question the co-researchers asked: What can the school do for you so you can participate more? The idea here was to put the responsibility on me, the

principal, and provide insight into things that I could do to improve their participation. The concept of parents not feeling important by the things that teachers say resurfaced again. Quioco and Caoud (2006) explained that minority parents who are not able to communicate in English feel excluded. I believe this is exactly what Jessica experienced and why she felt that she was not important. Monica reiterated what Valdes (1996) added above, that communication has to be direct and concrete. Monica says, “they have to be more direct, say, you have three days for your appointment, which one do you want? Because when they give you options, people do not go.” The conversation moved from observations and sharing of experiences to a plan where Monica offered the idea of having a parent bank where teachers could go and request for help. I thought that her idea was brilliant and a solution to some of the problems and perceptions we had earlier. However, Ruben took a different position on the topic saying that the school personnel had to find out what was attractive to parents in order to involve them. I liked Ruben’s idea and would combine it with the other view where we would have attractive activities for parents where commitment is expected and parents would hold other parents accountable by checking in or keeping track of their hours of service.

Upon further discussion Ofelia offered another view, which is supported by the literature and stated that the reason some parents do not get involved, is because they think that they are getting in the way of the teacher who is the professional. Trumbull et al (2001) stated that Latino parents have tremendous respect for the teaching profession and that they would not dare to infringe on their practice, thus, making them look as unwilling to participate. Jessica, due to her experiences with the educational system, did not agree with a passive approach and requested that we include the statistics of Latino

children who complete a college education and those who do not make it as a way to create a sense of urgency for parent participation. I am in complete agreement that data has to be shared in order to show parents the current patterns affecting Latino students regardless of the consequences that making this information public can bring about. Olivos (2009) added the same advice stating that no data can be held back even if the information is used to request things from principals that may be difficult to do.

*Fifth Focus Group Question*

The last question, which is the culmination of the focus interview questions in order to answer the first research question, asked: What elements comprise a culturally sensitive advocacy-training program for immigrant Latino parents? Monica was the first parent to respond with the particular response I had expected. Specifically, she wanted to know what standards students were supposed to master in each grade level. In addition, she also wanted the school to force parents to come to parent meetings. I told her that we could not do that but that we could have some type of an incentive program for parents. The parents had some praise for the systems I had in place and they felt that we were going in the right direction. I redirected them to the question and the components for our parent program. I took note of the parent's request of having a staggered back to school night in order to give parents with two or more children the opportunity to see all their teachers. I also informed them that I would give the standards at the end of the school year so that parents could prepare their children during the summer. Jessica reiterated the importance of knowing exactly how their children are doing; not settling with a simple reply that they are doing okay. I liked Jessica's idea about parents forming a type of homework club where they would help their children and other students. I think this

would be an example of Olivos (2009) research on having a true democratic leadership committed to collaboration with Latino parents. I do not agree with forcing parents to give their time as volunteers, but I do believe in setting up strong incentives to motivate parents to see the importance of school participation. It was clearly evident that the time that parents did participate at meetings was because they felt a sense of commitment and responsibility to attend. I also believe that since I, as the principal, had requested their presence they felt more compelled to attend. I feel I have the established credibility with the parents to provide them with awareness that what I do is to help their children navigate the educational system. I know that if I were to establish a homework club ran by parent volunteers or a parent bank for teacher support, that it would come to fruition.

I believe I gathered subtle and relevant information from the analysis and discussion about the parent program after concluding the study than at the moment of the parent co-researcher sessions. At the moment that we decided on the topics to present to parents about our program we included the following: data on Latino students and education; ideas on getting involved in school; and motivation for parents to participate. Furthermore, Villenas and Deyhle (1999) added that Latino parent programs have to add the parents' culture and worldview in order to have a successful program. I believe this is exactly what this program accomplished by its application of CRT and PAR but as I reflect, I find that we missed two important components, a system to allow parents to show affection and protection to their children and the establishment of a parent-ran homework club or parent volunteer bank for teacher support. I find the latter one to be the easiest to establish as long as I have a certificated teacher facilitating the program to cover legal components. The former would be something I would need to go back to the

parents to inquire about. It could be that we have a lunch with students and parents, a scheduled parent visit to a specific classroom or the hug your parent day.

I think that our presentation addressed the intellectual component of the program but it did not address the emotional needs of the parents. Jessica, Ofelia and Monica stressed the intellectual components as I did but I did not pay attention to what Maria, Juan, Ruben or Silvia stated even though they did not explicitly said it. Their words were there and I failed to incorporate them into the program itself because I heard them but did not listen. Perhaps the reason this was not overtly stated is because I am an insider and it was understood that I would incorporate them or maybe they themselves did not see this as well. I reflect on the work of Perreira, Chapman and Stein (2006) where they stated that when Latino parents feel that their resources at the school are disregarded, parents fight back. In our school's case, there were no established resources at stake and parents had the impression that our school is improving as in Francisca's testimony of how her son wanted her to go to school when before he was embarrassed of her visiting the campus. She credited that to the changes and systems that I set in place. This in itself could be a trap because as parents have the perception that things are getting better at the school, I may be simply keeping the status quo. I do not believe I am doing this because I aim for continual improvement, but what if what I think is good is not really good enough? This is where empowered parents and a true democratic approach are necessary (Olivos, 2009). Empowered Latino immigrants could "transform schools into political and cultural centers" (McLaren, Martin, Farahmandpur & Jaramillos, 2004, p. 150-151).

The most intriguing lesson I took from the first research question was what I initially disregarded as a misunderstood question. I did not know what to do with the

initial responses that the participant and co-researcher parents gave and I simply took it as an interesting insight into the idiosyncrasy of migrant Latino parents. What I am referring to is the definition of what it means for the Latino parents at my school to be involved; which to them is protecting and giving their children support. Their responses did not fit what I had seen in the literature review and therefore felt that the parents were misguided in their response by the first parent, Juan, who answered the question and that a trend developed where everyone else followed. I now can see how deficit models can be created when researchers in good faith misunderstand data due to their inability to recognize it leading them to create models that eventually do not work based on their misunderstanding of the parents' culture (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Perhaps this is the reason why decades of educational research have only created deficit models for Latinos and other People of Color (Nygreen, 2006). This goes back to Marschall's (2006) research about educational program designers who lack cultural competency. I believe I did not recognize this data in part due to my pertinent make up in recognition to my privileged status as a school principal, and parent of children who are not in school both blinded me to the reality of the co-researcher and participant parents. I think that as a team of co-researchers we intellectually answered what an anti-hegemonic advocacy-training program is for immigrant Latino parents but we did not address the emotional component of it. It would be difficult to address the mind if the heart is ignored. Perhaps this is why some programs fail, because they do not address the emotional component of the issue and expect parents to change their behavior simply because the data is logical and true. Valdes (1996) addressed the heart and mind problem as beliefs versus information and how simply giving information will not change beliefs.

*Second Section*

The second and fourth research questions asked the following: What are the perceptions on school involvement of immigrant Latino parents of ELL students who participate as co-researchers and co-presenters of an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program in a Northern California elementary school? What are the benefits to immigrant Latino parents of ELL students who participate in an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program in a Northern California elementary school? These two questions were asked to the co-researcher parents who proudly answered as individuals who felt that they had positively contributed to the improvement of our school. I believe that their perceptions were no different than what they had already said. What I did encounter is a deeper understanding of the perception of their journey through this investigation.

In Ofelia's case, I learned that the fuel of her motivation for her children was the sacrifice she has made for her children. She gave up work or her education in order to watch her children and be involved in her school even though she knew that she was not adding to her "social security" and that when she got old, she would not have any money for retirement. Because of this sacrifice, she demanded the best grades from her children. I do not know if I agree completely with this idea and Jessica even mentioned that the more educated you were as a parent, the more you could help your children but I make no judgment on this. Her overall perception was that there were no obstacles and that you have to be involved if you want your children to be successful. The benefit she saw from being involved is the happiness of her children. The fact that she was informed about the



educational system gave her the tools and satisfaction to continue the work of academic achievement in her children.

Ruben experienced a micro transformation as he changed his point from blaming parents for not being involved to “look for things that can attract parents to school, understand children and help them with homework.” This was an important finding because he moved his position from a reactionary to a proactive one. I think that his experience with the educational system or the overall hegemonic atmosphere in society, has made him see fault in parents instead of looking deeper and see that the system was not set up to give Latino immigrant parents access. The fact that he moved his opinion from blaming to looking for ways to involve parents is in my opinion, a success. Another important point in his story is that his wife was instrumental in getting him involved in the study.

Jessica was definitely the leader of this group of co-researchers. Her perception was on target with what I expected the co-researcher parents to say. She felt that information could help parents take children to better academic levels. She also mentioned that it is necessary to express worries in order to cause change. I second her opinion in that Latino immigrant parents have to express their concerns to the leadership of a school and continue to do so until their concerns are heard. I think that in my school parents have been satisfied with the systems I have set in place but I can also see areas where parents could demand more. One example of this is our lack of an all-day kindergarten. So far our kindergarten students only receive 200 minutes of instruction per day when most districts have changed to an all day or extended kindergarten day. The administration of our school district is aware of this and wants to provide more time for

our students but so far we have not been able to negotiate this with the teacher's union. If parents were aware of this and knew the power they have, they would be marching in and demanding a full day kindergarten for their children regardless of the union's stance. This takes me to the next point that Jessica made in response to her perception as co-researcher and that is that united parents can accomplish more. As a school leader I can see the benefit of being the facilitator of change because to a certain degree I can direct or redirect the parent's concerns. This gives me a certain level of power and tremendous ethical responsibility in serving the parents' needs and not my own personal agenda. I believe this is why parents have to ultimately organize and find leadership among them in order to meet their needs and not a diluted version of their original plan after negotiating with the principal for a balanced approach. The principal who is a true change agent or catalyst of change has to empower parents and allow them to build the confidence in order to take charge and execute their own agenda. This would be the ultimate benefit for parents and as Jessica stated that, the benefit she saw in her participation was the "success of her children, self-confidence in kids, the importance of school and a better future for them." She hit the target; it is about the children and not about the adults or their agendas.

The last session was an emotionally charged one as Jessica took responsibility for her son's struggles in community college, not because of her lack of involvement, but due to her lack of understanding of the educational system. I believe that it was not her fault; it was the principal's fault for not informing her explicitly on what it took to get her child to a four-year university. I think that the co-researcher parents' perception of having no obstacles for their involvement is misinformed because I have made parent involvement easy and accessible but once their children move to middle school or high school where

the children themselves do not want their parents to be around, parent involvement drops dramatically if systems are not set in place to continue that involvement. This is where the information stops flowing to the parents and issues like Jessica's experience will repeat itself. The responsibility then goes back to the principals. I disagree with the co-researcher parents' perception that there are no obstacles because obstacles will come up and they need to have the tools to solve or dissolve those obstacles and make certain their child has academic success.

### *Third Section*

The third and fourth research questions asked the following: What are the perceptions on school involvement of immigrant Latino parents of ELL students who participate in an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program in a Northern California elementary school? What are the benefits to immigrant Latino parents of ELL students who participate in an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program in a Northern California elementary school? I only had the perception and reported benefits from two participants and they stated points that I found to be very interesting. Monica's perception was similar to the comments she gave in the beginning of the study and to what some of the co-researcher stated. She reported that there are no obstacles to parent participation and that kids have to be informed or motivated about college from an early start. Silvia on the other hand stated that parents are more important than they think and reiterated the importance of parent unity. I think that Silvia's comments were very powerful and were similar to Jessica's perception. I completely agree with the perception that parents have to see themselves as important players in their child's education. I think this is the first step in the liberation process that

Freire (2007) asked the oppressed to do. Latino immigrant parents, as disfranchised individuals from the educational system, have to become aware of their situation and critically question their status as Silvia has done in order to be noticed, heard and acquire the benefits of the educational system. So far, Monica and Silvia stated that the benefits of their participation are their new view of the importance of learning and where to ask for help. Monica stated, "I understand why I need to be my child's advocate: because we need to know what they need, what they lack, where can we get help and to know the reach of the Spanish-speaking educational attainment in this country." Their words confirmed the importance and purpose of this study. In fact, this is only the beginning of the study as I already have plans to put in place the parents' ideas. An added benefit was the commitment and devotion that these parents have developed towards our school.

#### *Fourth Section*

The most important part of this study was not the development of the anti-hegemonic advocacy-training program for Latino immigrant parents, but the process and the understanding of their perceptions and benefits. The information we put together for our Latino parents was regular information that any parent empowerment program has presented, but it was the insight into the parents' psyche and idiosyncrasies that provided the most valuable data. I bring this study to a close with the understanding that it is about addressing the need of protection and support for children that Latino immigrant parents seek first. Parents perceived that they do not feel that there are obstacles to parent participation, only idleness in their participation. They also realized that they needed to see themselves as important and key players in the school. For them the overall benefit is the happiness of their children and their own conviction that what they were doing was

good. This process has allowed me to reflect on how I will implement this program school wide with the parents' insight in mind. There is a saying in Spanish, *la comida entra por los ojos*, food enters through the eyes and in the same manner I would say that *la información entra por el corazón*, information enters through the heart. This tells you that before you try to impart information, you need to know what the emotional needs of the parents are.

### Themes and Critical Race Theory

In this section I will discuss the themes or absence of them related to CRT under the tenets of racism, challenging the status quo, interdisciplinary approach, experiential knowledge and social justice (Solorzano, 1997). Then I will discuss a recurrent theme that surfaced during the process of this study that did not correspond to CRT. Finally, I will conclude this section with my final thoughts about the themes discussed.

Critical Race Theory helped me to understand the research questions of this study by placing them into a theoretical framework that would allow me to see certain themes or patterns that surfaced from the qualitative data. Critical Race Theory examines the policies created to place Latinos or other People of Color at a disadvantage (Su, 2007). Stovall (2006) explained that CRT examines racism as an established element “centered in maintaining the status quo” (p. 250). I attempted to see if this element was present in the comments of the participant parents or co-researcher parents and below is what I gathered about this theme.

### *Racism*

The centrality and intersectionality of race and racism did not appear or was brought up by the parents. During the first session I addressed this as I was explaining the

tenets of CRT and examples of them. I was expecting the co-researchers or parent participants to bring up the theme of color blindness as an example of racism but it was also not brought up. Outside of this study, the concept of color blindness and low expectation for Latino students has been brought up by the teaching staff so I know that it does exist, especially when parents come to report to me that they think that their child was discriminated. Perhaps the individual teachers have never acted in a racist manner towards the parents, but the system we have in place is racist. We would not be seeing the levels of dropout rates or low academic attainment by Latino students if the system addressed their needs and their culture. We have Jessica's example where she was involved and participated in school helping the teachers but her son was still not able to enter a four-year university. This was an example of the structures created to keep the status quo (Stovall, 2006). The fact that teachers told her and Gabriela that they were not needed could be perceived as an act of not seeing their worth as individuals because their English was not at the teacher's level of expectation (Quiocho & Daoud, 2006) or perhaps their social capital was seen as worthless (Lareau, 1987).

Before I arrived at this school, the culture of the school was devoid of the Hispanic culture and even now, we are far from being culturally competent. Perreira, Chapman and Stein (2006) point out the importance of fostering bicultural abilities in Latino students and offering or finding the resources to give them access to their development of bicultural abilities. So far we do not have a Cesar Chavez celebration but we just had our first Cinco de Mayo Festival last year. I am also the first Mexican-American principal in the history of this school, which opened in 1915. It was this year that we established our first ballet folclorico and I have plans to start a mariachi program

next year. These elements of culture will help our students and families feel represented in the school. I am not implying that the Latino culture will replace the established school culture, but that we need to give our students access to their own culture in order to make them feel pride in themselves. Suarez-Orozco (2005) states,

Rather than advocate that immigrants, especially their children, abandon all elements of their culture as they embark on their uncertain assimilation journey, a more promising path is to cultivate and nurture the emergence of new hybrid identities and transcultural competencies. These hybrid cultural styles creatively blend elements of the old culture with that of the new, unleashing fresh energies and potential. (p. 17)

This is exactly what I want to achieve. Imagine my Latino students learning to read notes and play a mariachi instrument by the time they leave fifth grade. Once they get to middle or high school their understanding of music can then be applied to other musical disciplines like band or orchestra. They would have created a “hybrid” understanding of music as Suarez-Orozco states with their knowledge of Mexican mariachi music and European classical music. After all, learning to play the violin or the trumpet can serve many musical genres.

### *Challenging the Status Quo*

The challenge to dominant ideology or the challenge to the status quo was addressed as parents spoke about establishing a homework club directed and conducted by parents. This is definitely a challenge to the status quo because so far teachers are in charge of running the homework club. Their ability to speak up and say that they would want to give teachers recommendations is a challenge to their own cultural norms since it is understood that Latino parents “believe that it is the school’s responsibility to instill knowledge” (Smith et al., 2008, p. 9). I was glad to see that the co-researcher parents had the courage to challenge established norms and be willing to go through with the

preparation. I plan on encouraging parents to set up this homework club and demonstrate to their children that they too know and can help.

The fact that these co-researchers participated in this study and interviewed other participant parents is in itself a challenge to the status quo of academia. The parents became producers of new knowledge and benefited from it as well (Rahman, 1991). This theme not only addressed CRT but PAR as well as. In regards to action research, their participation has already made a positive impact as we have established certain components of their research.

#### *Interdisciplinary Approach*

There were no specific themes in regards to the interdisciplinary approach but the fact that I employed PAR as the methodology of this study, opens up the concept of an interdisciplinary approach. In order to accomplish this study, we touched upon the areas of education, sociology, education, economics and history. I collected qualitative data but parents requested quantitative data that I was able to pull for them from the Internet on Latino students. I essentially organized a study within a study in order to understand the perceptions of Latino co-researcher and participant parents. They were gracious to participate and empowered to do future research and assert their leadership.

The particular interdisciplinary approach I took in this study began by showing an academic gap that exists between Latino immigrant students and White students. Then, I presented the economic impact that this would mean for society and census data that demonstrated the future numbers in the Latino population. Jessica reported her concern about having an uneducated society in its impact on everyone. As one solution to the



macro-problem, I presented the importance of parent involvement and its impact on student achievement, thus the importance of this particular study.

### *Experiential Knowledge*

In recognition, this study is based on the experiences of the parents who participated as co-researchers and participants. Parents were able to participate in the creation of their own counter narrative (Stovall, 2006). This study is based on the production of their own epistemology, which cannot be denied because it is based on their experiences and they own them. I did not pay lip service but empowered them to be agents of change (Su, 2007). Once their experience and plans are put into place, they will be able to work with teachers in a reciprocal manner (Ansley & Gaventa, 1997).

In retrospect, I am the first one to admit that I initially disregarded the parents personal experiences when I was excluding their concerns to provide support and affection for their children. It is almost as if I had denied their experiences, but this is exactly what we need to pay attention to as educators. I thought that I completely understood their needs and wants because I shared the same culture, but Villenas and Deyhle (1999) point out the importance of really understanding the culture of the people we are serving within the learning community .

### *Social Justice*

In cognizant identification, I am an educational leader committed to the many facets of social justice. I believe that I empowered the co-researcher parents and participants to be advocates for their children and to be leaders as wells. It is not easy being a champion of social justice because sooner than later you face an obstacle that attempts to keep everything status quo. The need of moral fortitude is something that is

essential for any social justice leader (Bogotch, 2000). Trying to involve Latino immigrant parents in classrooms where teachers may feel that the parents are not able to contribute anything because they do not speak English could be a tough battle to fight. This is the experience of Jessica and Gabriela but they had the resiliency and fortitude to return to school and continue being active in their children's education by being involved years later. This is why it is so important that I empower parents to be advocates for their own children, so they can be strong enough to be there and help to create an inclusive culture. This is not as easy as it sounds because resistance may actually even come from Latino parents themselves (Stovall, 2006). Latino parents may feel that it is not their job to be involved and that they are in fact, infringing on the teacher's duties (Trumbull et al., 2001). I would address this with the support of other empowered parents to talk to these folks and have them participate. According to Valdes (1996), Latino parents may feel embarrassed to participate due to their level of education but the social justice leader can empower them to help them see the other positive traits that they bring to the school.

There was one theme that arose from this study both in the co-researchers and the participant parents. This theme did not fit the tenets of CRT, but I wanted to document nevertheless. This theme is the sacrifice made by the mothers, both co-researchers and participants, to stay home and not complete their education. These mothers reported that they decided not to work and or go to ESL school to stay focused on their children. The concept itself is not new to me because I have seen many Latina immigrant mothers not work or go to school but I always assumed it was an issue of *machismo* where the husband did not allow them to work or go to school due to insecurities or other cultural reasons. I had never explicitly heard that the reason they were not attending school was to

stay focused on the children. I commend these mothers for their sacrifice, but feel like Jessica, that education is important because educated parents can help their children navigate the system even better. This theme came up from the first meeting to the last one and the mother who promoted this the most also felt that her children owed her and that the only way they could pay her back was by being great students. I do not judge her parenting but do feel that children have to do or accomplish things because there is an intrinsic motivation and not simply because your mother is putting a guilt trip on you. I wonder how much of this is truly because of the children and how much may be fear of going through the system. If the reason why these mothers decided not to attend school to complete their studies or learn English was because of the system, then we do have a CRT case but given the information I have, I cannot link it to it.

The themes discussed above had a special impact because it made me reflect on the struggles that the Latino immigrant parents have to go through. The systemic problems that Latino parents encounter may not be in a personal face to face manner with their child's teacher or principal, but through the overall experience of going through the K-12 system. I can only wonder if the blaming that Ruben kept reporting about parents not getting involved was a projection of his own feelings of inadequacy about participating in the school or the language barriers that the parents kept bringing up only to say that it is not really a obstacle (Valdes, 1996) are systemic problems still not addressed by the educational system and in place to keep the status quo (Stovall, 2006). The recurrent theme of the mothers who decided to ignore their ambitions in order to protect and support their children through school tells me that there is some sort of fear in them in order to do something like this. Perhaps they have mistrust in their children's

teachers and for that reason Jessica would tell her kids to inform her on anything that occurred in the classroom, good or bad. This may be the way that these mothers found to fight the system established to leak 92% of the Latino students out of the education pipeline (Yosso & Solorzano, 2006). Howard and Reynolds (2008) asserted that the communication or advocacy that minority parents employ is oftentimes seen in a negative light. The importance of social justice leadership and cultural competency are crucial to lead and empower parents of Latino immigrant students. This research added a bit more to the body of literature which still needs more studies on principals dedicated to social justice and parent engagement (Auerbach, 2009).

### Conclusion

I conclude this study with a very humble answer to my research questions. It is almost as if I had gone through a Zen experience about Latino parent involvement – I went from the simple to the complex only to return to the simple. In my first research question which asked: What comprises an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program for the immigrant Latino parents of urban Latino ELL students in a Northern California South Bay elementary school? I would simply say that it comprises a respect for the parents' primal needs to protect, support and provide happiness to their children. This simple answer can be broken down into all the necessary components to achieve this, for example: communication, understanding of the curriculum, understanding of the A-G requirements, relationship building with the school personnel, awareness of the statistics of the Latino academic pipeline, motivation, and all the other elements mentioned in this study. But if the essential need is not addressed, the rest of the information will not be relevant. The other two research questions ended up supporting

and confirming the findings of the first research question. The parents' perceptions and the benefits they saw in their participation were for the academic and life success of their children. It appears to be a very simple answer and one that any parent would have been able to tell me without having to go through two years of courses and two years of research and writing. Was it worth it? Yes, it was worth it because what I know is based on my and my co-investigator research. The knowledge production process was important because it also allowed us to make a plan to educate and take action (Ansley & Gaventa, 1997).

As an insider I was able to understand more and connect themes to CRT because my status informed me about "the way oppressed peoples both protect themselves and subvert dominant paradigm" (p. 267-268). This is how I was able to conclude that the choice that the mothers took about not working or going to school was to protect their children from the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism (Solorzano, 1997). As I mentioned before, the link is not clear but I can conclude due to my previous conversations with parents and their complaints about certain teachers. Again, this is where the fortitude of the social justice leader comes in place. I had the courageous conversations with both parents and teachers to address some of these prejudices but addressing the systemic ones are the real challenge. I believe those challenges can only be addressed through a democratic and collaborative approach with all stakeholders (Olivos, 2009).

### Implications

I find three implications that will cause positive change and will challenge the status quo at my school or any school where the principal applies PAR and breaks down

the educational hierarchies in order to give Latino immigrant parents access. These implications are serious because I need to put them into action and expected to do so by the participant and co-researcher parents who are waiting to see what comes out of their involvement. The first implication is to find ways to openly address the parents' needs to show their protection, support and affection towards their children. I have to address this in meetings, back to school nights, newsletters and in any form of communication I have for parents so they know that I am aware of it and that I validate their needs and concerns. I understand that this may come across as unnecessary to teachers and I will have to educate them about the findings of this study.

The second implication is the establishment of the parent homework center that the parents suggested they wanted to have. This is not a difficult task and I can see it being successful next year. The exciting part of this is that parents will take ownership of this program and students will begin to see parents as persons who also possess knowledge like their teachers. Again, I will address this with the teaching staff because one certificated teacher has to be in charge. I will be able to use the talents of many parents with the added benefit that they will be able to explain things in Spanish to the students. If I establish this well, it could be a great way to connect teachers and Latino parents.

The third implication is what to do with parents who continue to be disconnected. The only answer I see is having other empowered parents make an invitation to those parents and set up a system where there is accountability on parent involvement. This is not as demanding as some of the participants parents wanted – to force parents to volunteer a number of hours, but an accountability system that if they say they are going

to be committed, they have to and will have to answer to another parent or me, the principal, if they do not. All of these three implications have direct effect on students and I expect them to contribute positively to the academic success of children. I am not sure if I can address the systemic problem of race and racism but I do know that if parents were aware of this, they would be more prone to see if such practices are giving their children a disadvantage.

### Recommendations

The findings in this study have led me to want to see research related to the emotional and academic connection between Latino parents and children. This is interesting to me because I would have never thought that my findings would lead me to think this but I find that this is the link between addressing the Latino parents' belief system and the valuable information that needs to be delivered in order for them to understand the American educational system. I would like to see the implementation and application of community cultural wealth and not just discussed as something that Latino immigrant parents possess. I recommend this as a mixed methods study where an in-depth study is performed to see the perception of parent protection, support and sense of happiness in the child compared to student grades and teacher perceptions. This may touch upon developmental assets as compared to Latino immigrant parent involvement.

I would also recommend similar research to this qualitative study where teachers who understand CRT and PAR participate as co-researchers and knowledge producers. I believe the perspective of informed and progressive teachers is important because they are either the protagonists or the antagonists of the achievement gap in Latino and other

minority students. It would be interesting to see these studies not only in elementary schools, but middle and high schools.

A third recommendation on future research is on ways that Latino immigrant parents can have a space and time to demonstrate their love and affection to their children without being perceived as over protective or spoiling their children, especially the Latino boys. This again, would be a PAR study led by an administrator or teacher interested in addressing the emotional needs of Latino students. This study could compare the level of affection given at home and the students' reaction to it and the level of affection given at school and the student's reaction to it.

#### Personal Reflection

In this section I would like to reflect on three points that I found to be very powerful, personal and central to this study. The first point is the need for parents to protect their children at school based on their understanding of what parent involvement means. The next point is the engagement of parents through PAR in my capacity as educational leader. The final point is the practical and necessary application of Yosso's community cultural wealth as a response of CRT in a school setting.

As stated above, I did not see the importance of the parents' need to protect their children as they attend school. I think that it is obvious that I do not find my school to be unsafe or violent. Perhaps my perception is distorted and I do not see the parents' concerns because I work there and so far I personally do not find the school to be unsafe. If it is not the safety of the school that creates the parents' concern, then what is it? I can only speculate but it is possible that parents feel an overall need to protect their children based on what they hear and see in the media. Their feelings may reflect the same



concerns of all parents regardless of where their children go to school. It is also possible that the parents felt the need to protect their children due to the fact that there are twenty-four registered sex offenders and three halfway homes within a mile from our school or the increasing gang activity and murders in the neighborhood. Perhaps the parents who helped me to co-research and participated in this study shared a similar experience growing up and going to school in Mexico and Central America. I can attest that growing up and attending school in Mexico I often felt afraid of going to school because of the many aggressive dogs in the streets, the constant lunch fights or the teachers who used corporal punishment to discipline us. I mentioned above and based on the data that I collected that parents did not feel completely comfortable with the way that teachers treated them or treated students and that this may be the root of their interpretation of parent involvement. It is possible that the communication and cultural barrier created mistrust in the parents because they were not able to completely understand the teachers. I can only speculate at this point and would have to do a different study to find the reason why their definition of parent involvement was to protect their children.

Parent involvement here has taken a different direction than what is traditionally found in the literature. In fact, I would say that the parents' understanding of school involvement addresses one of the core elements of being a parent – to protect one's child. I would argue that the ultimate goal of any parent who sits to read with his or her child in school or at home is to protect. By giving our children the advantage of obtaining an education, we are protecting them from ignorance, from poverty and from the disadvantages of not having a profession in this competitive world. We could call it anything we want but the bottom line is that parent involvement addresses a primal need.

In other words, “protection” is the active ingredient of parent involvement. I believe the reason the co-researcher and participant parents used this term to identify involvement is because they face the basic need to protect their children from the aggression of school personnel or folks in the community in the form of yelling or exclusion (as I have had to address those issues with teachers when parents bring them to my attention). Please keep in mind that the parent concerns in this area have diminished and that the data collected for this study were from the parents’ experiences three plus years ago.

Having to address parent concerns about teachers who mistreat their children takes an emotional toll and requires moral fortitude in order to move forward and be a leader. Many times when parents informed me that a teacher was being mean to one of their children, they often felt that it was due to discrimination or racism. The co-researcher and participant parents never mentioned this but I know that it has been and continues to be a concern and evident once a problem arises between a Latino student and a White teacher. It is for this reason that I found that PAR and CRT were the best tools to address the concern of parent involvement and because I believe in the words of Paulo Freire that only the oppressed can free him or herself. An example of this action was the parents’ conversations and planning on potential programs that they could run and implement in our school for the benefit of their children.

I found that even though I am the principal and perceived as the leader of the school, I had to follow the parents’ leadership as well. This is the practical aspect of what I meant about breaking down hierarchies and leaving one’s ego out of the picture. This is also an essential element of PAR and a convergence with CRT as both address the challenge to the status quo and systems of power. In this study I became the student who

learned from the parents' knowledge and understanding of culture. I took their valuable experiences with the American educational system and took their lead when they suggested ways to improve our school systems. They taught me their worldview and why they engaged the school system the way they did. The parents' recurrent theme that there are no obstacles to parent involvement remind me that it may be because they feel free to communicate with me in Spanish. This lead me to ponder on the fact that our school has been very harmonious after my initial year as principal and even though harmony is something we all strive to achieve, it can also be an indicator of my reinforcement of the established system that continues to disadvantage Latino immigrant parents. The fact that parents feel comfortable with my presence may create a bystander effect on them. They could assume that I am looking out for their child's best interest and in reality I may not. I may be addressing something that is not important to them at all or because I am a Spanish speaker I could be appeasing the Latino immigrant parents and not addressing their concerns or protecting the teaching staff by not communicating the parents' issues. My question here would be, is this harmony a perpetuation of racism through me as the leader of the school and part of the American educational system? Solorzano (1997) points out the fact that race and racism are prevalent and central to social interactions and therefore I ponder at the fact that I may be helping this by keeping a harmonious atmosphere that leaves no room for conflict or challenges to my status quo.

Yosso's (2005) CRT approach to the problem of Latino parent involvement through community cultural wealth provides answers to the needs that the parents in my study reported. The need for parents to show physical affection in a place where California law prohibits teachers from hugging children is an example of the way that

familial capital can be demonstrated in the school and substitute something that is lacking and desired by Latino immigrant parents. Even though parents may not be able to address this, grandparents or other family members can be present to fill the need and demonstrate that specific form of capital. Similar concerns that cannot be done at school because of laws are the religious beliefs of Latino immigrant parents. One example of this is the practice of blessing children with the sign of the cross in Catholic families. This practice, when I have seen it, is done in the parent's car and almost in secret because such activities could be ridiculed or regarded as superstitious by mainstream students or school personnel. I believe that familial capital can address this as parents make such practices part of the norm and accepted by others.

Community cultural wealth also addresses aspirational capital and as stated by the participants, they all want their children to attend college. Our school has addressed this, thanks to the parents' insights. We have a vision and symbols around the school that value the parents' aspirational capital. One formidable example of this is the fact that Ofelia's son just got admitted to UC Berkeley. Her sacrifice has just paid off with her oldest son. All parents who participated in this study as co-researchers or participants shared the same goal for their children and strive for them to become college-bound. The beauty about PAR is that those parents now have the tools to investigate their own reality.

Before concluding, I would like to share the transformation after a year from the initial focus group interviews and discussion sessions. The positive change is evident in the growth of all the parents who participated in this study. Jessica is now a parent leader who is organizing and bringing a parent program through the Mexican Consulate that allows adults who have not completed their elementary or middle school to finish it and

receive a diploma. Gabriela moved out of our school district but continues to volunteer at our school even though her daughters attend a different school. Maria has participated in all the other parent programs we have had and supports every PTA event. Our participant parents have also taken leadership roles at our school. Silvia has become a parent leader in our new Ballet Folclorico (Mexican traditional dancing) at our school and recently had the students perform for our Cinco de Mayo festival. Francisca continues to support her two sons in school and has joined the karate club in order to learn the techniques and become an instructor. Monica has been serving as a parent volunteer in one of the kindergarten classrooms and has not missed a single day this academic year. Miguel, who was a quiet participant, now leads the after school soccer club. I am thankful to these parents because without their support, our school would not have reached the level of participation and involvement that we currently have.

In incredible form, I have been informed that this year will be my last year as principal of this school. Therefore, my efforts now will be to continue building capacity with our parents and teachers for the future. After completing this study, I will definitely share my finding and outcomes with the faculty and staff the overarching importance of community cultural wealth in order to embrace the parents' various forms of capital. Ultimately, the goal is to increase student academic success, but this can only happen if the teaching staff has an understanding of the parents' view on parent involvement, their capacity to investigate and interpret their own reality using PAR, and the honest and deliberate application of community cultural wealth within the learning community.

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## APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

## INFORMED CONSENT FORM

### UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

### CONSENT TO BE A RESEARCH SUBJECT

#### **Purpose and Background**

Mr. Jose V. Gonzalez, a doctoral student in the School of Education at the University of San Francisco is doing research on immigrant Latino parent involvement. It has been proven that parent involvement increases student's academic achievement and that there is an achievement gap in Latino student. The researcher is interested in doing a study where Latino immigrant parents collaborate as co-researchers and develop an advocacy training program for other Latino immigrant parents.

I am being asked to participate because I am a Latino immigrant parent.

#### **Procedures**

If I agree to be a participant in this study, I may choose to be in one of these two groups:

Co-Researcher Group (4 members)	Participant Group (20 or more members)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I will meet with other co-researchers and investigate the education system, learn about Participatory Action Research and begin planning the advocacy training program.</li> <li>• I will conduct a focus group meeting to determine the needs of other parents and how to involve them in the school.</li> <li>• I will meet with my co-researcher group to analyze the information from the focus group meeting and create the advocacy training program.</li> <li>• I will present the advocacy training program to other parents and participate in a post-focus group meeting.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I will participate in focus group meeting (only 6 participants) where I will be asked questions on school involvement.</li> <li>• I will participate in a parent training (the rest of the 20 or more members) conducted by other parents where I will receive information on school involvement. After this training the original 6 participants from the focus group above will participate in a second focus group meeting.</li> </ul>

#### **Risks and/or Discomforts**

1. It is possible that some of the questions during the focus group meetings may make me feel uncomfortable, but I am free to decline to answer any questions I do not wish to answer or to stop participation at any time.

2. Participation in research may mean a loss of confidentiality. Study records will be kept as confidential as possible. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications resulting from the study. All data will be stored in password protected computer.
3. Because the time required for my participation may be up to 2 hours, I may become tired or bored.

### **Benefits**

There will be no direct benefit to me from participating in this study. The anticipated benefit is that I will be creating positive relationships with other parents and the principal in order to be more involved in the school and advocate for my child's education.

### **Costs/Financial Considerations**

There will be no financial costs to me as a result of taking part in this study.

### **Payment/Reimbursement**

There will not be any payment or reimbursement for my participation in this study.

### **Questions**

I have talked to Mr. Gonzalez about this study and have had my questions answered.

If I have further questions about the study, I may call him at (408) 223-3702.

If I have any questions or comments about participation in this study, I should first talk with the researcher. If for some reason I do not wish to do this, I may contact the IRBPHS, which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. I may reach the IRBPHS office by calling (415) 422-6091 and leaving a voicemail message, by e-mailing IRBPHS@usfca.edu, or by writing to the IRBPHS, Department of Psychology, University of San Francisco, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1080.

### **Consent**

I have been given a copy of the "Research Subject's Bill of Rights" and I have been given a copy of this consent form to keep.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. I am free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point. My decision as to whether or not to participate in this study will have no influence on my present or future status as a parent in this school.

My signature below indicates that I agree to participate in this study.

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Subject's Signature

---

Date

---

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

---

Date

## FORMULARIO DE CONSENTIMIENTO INFORMADO

### UNIVERSIDAD DE SAN FRANCISCO

#### CONSENTIMIENTO PARA SER UN SUJETO DE INVESTIGACIÓN

##### **Objetivo y Antecedentes**

El Sr. José V. González, un estudiante de doctorado en la Facultad de Educación de la Universidad de San Francisco está haciendo una investigación sobre la participación de los padres inmigrantes latinos. Se ha demostrado que la participación de los padres en la escuela aumenta el rendimiento académico de los estudiantes y que hay una brecha en el rendimiento de los estudiantes latinos. El investigador está interesado en hacer un estudio donde los padres latinos inmigrantes colaboran como co-investigadores y desarrollan un programa de formación de abogacía para otros padres latinos inmigrantes.

##### **Procedimientos**

Estoy siendo invitado a participar porque soy un padre inmigrante latino.

Grupo de co-investigadores (4 miembros)	Grupo de participantes (20 o más miembros)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Me reuniré con otros co-investigadores e investigaré el sistema educativo, aprenderé sobre la Investigación de Acción Participativa y comenzaré a planificar el programa de capacitación de abogacía.</li> <li>• Voy a llevar a cabo una reunión de grupo de enfoque para determinar las necesidades de los otros padres y cómo lograr su participación en la escuela.</li> <li>• Me reuniré con mi grupo de co-investigadores para analizar la información de la reunión del grupo de enfoque y crear el programa de capacitación de abogacía.</li> <li>• Voy a presentar el programa de capacitación de abogacía a otros padres y participar en una reunión de enfoque después de la presentación</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voy a participar en una reunión de enfoque (sólo 6 participantes), donde se me preguntará sobre la participación en la escuela.</li> <li>• Voy a participar en un entrenamiento de padres (el resto de los 20 o más miembros) conducido por otros padres de familia en la que recibiré información sobre la participación en la escuela. Después de esta presentación, los 6 participantes del primer grupo de enfoque participarán en otra reunión de enfoque.</li> </ul>

##### **Riesgos y / o molestias**

1. Es posible que algunas de las preguntas durante las reuniones de enfoque me pueden hacer sentir incómodo, pero yo soy libre de negarme a responder cualquier pregunta que no quiera contestar o dejar de participar en cualquier momento.

2. La participación en la investigación puede significar una pérdida de confidencialidad. Los registros del estudio se mantendrán de manera confidencial. No se utilizarán identidades individuales en los informes o publicaciones resultantes del estudio. Todos los datos serán almacenados en una computadora protegida con contraseña.
3. Debido a que el tiempo necesario para mi participación puede ser de hasta 2 horas, me puedo llegar a sentir cansado o aburrido.

### **Beneficios**

No habrá ningún beneficio directo por mi participación en este estudio. El beneficio previsto es que voy a desarrollar relaciones positivas con otros padres y el director con el fin de participar más en la escuela y abogar por la educación de mi hijo.

### **Costes / Consideraciones financieras**

No habrá ningún costo financiero para mí como resultado de tomar parte en este estudio.

### **Pago / Reembolso**

No habrá ningún pago o el reembolso por mi participación en este estudio.

### **Preguntas**

He hablado con el señor González acerca de este estudio y contestado toda pregunta. Si tiene más preguntas sobre el estudio puede llamar al (408) 223-3702.

Si tiene alguna pregunta o comentario acerca de la participación en este estudio, primero debe hablar con el investigador. Si por alguna razón no desea hacer esto, puede contactar a la IRBPHS, que se ocupa de la protección de los voluntarios en proyectos de investigación. Puede llamar a la oficina del IRBPHS llamando al (415) 422-6091 y dejar un mensaje de voz, por correo electrónico puede escribir al IRBPHS@usfca.edu, o por escrito a la IRBPHS, Departamento de Psicología de la Universidad de San Francisco, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1080.

### **Consentimiento**

Me han dado una copia de la "Declaración de Derechos para la Investigación de Sujetos" y se me ha dado una copia de este formulario de consentimiento para mantener.

**PARTICIPACIÓN EN LA INVESTIGACIÓN ES VOLUNTARIA.** Yo soy libre de negarme a participar en este estudio, o retirarme del mismo en cualquier momento. Mi decisión de participar o no en este estudio no tendrá influencia en mi estado actual o futuro como uno de los padres en esta escuela.

Mi firma abajo indica que estoy de acuerdo en participar en este estudio.

---

Firma del Sujeto

Fecha

---

Firma de la persona que obtiene el consentimiento

Fecha

## APPENDIX B: PARENT PROGRAM PRESENTATION POINTS

1. Engaging questions for parents
  - a. Would you like your child to have a good future?
  - b. How are you going to advocate for your child's academic success?
  - c. Do you think statistics favor your child going to the university?
2. Statistics on Latinos in the U.S. and California
3. The Latino educational pipeline in California
  - a. Literacy development and when a child "drops out" of school
  - b. Correlation between salaries and education
  - c. The cost of going to college and financial aid
  - d. Types of universities in California
  - e. Going from kindergarten to college
4. How you (parent) can make the difference.
  - a. School participation
  - b. The triangle of academic success
    - i. Parent participation (parents)
    - ii. Study habits (student)
    - iii. Academic rigor (school)
  - c. Getting involved in school
  - d. Opportunities to participate
  - e. What I need to know (parent) to help my child?
5. Participation Program
  - a. Participation points (incentives)
  - b. Parent recognition
6. Testimonies from co-researchers

## APPENDIX C: PARENT PERCEPTION AND BENEFIT QUESTIONNAIRE

**Desarrollo del Programa de Abogacía para Padres**  
(Development of the Advocacy Parent Program)

Las siguientes preguntas serán hechas por el investigador.  
(The following questions will be made by the researcher.)

- ¿Cuál es su percepción como co-investigador y co-presentador de un programa de capacitación en abogacía anti-hegemónica con sensibilidad cultural para padres inmigrantes latinos de niños que aun están aprendiendo inglés?  
(What are your perceptions as co-researchers and co-presenters of an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program?)
  
- ¿Cuál es su percepción como como padre que participó en un programa de capacitación en abogacía anti-hegemónica con sensibilidad cultural para padres inmigrantes latinos de niños que aun están aprendiendo inglés?  
(What are your perceptions as a parent who participated in an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program?)
  
- ¿Cuáles son los beneficios para padres que participan en un programa de capacitación en abogacía anti-hegemónica con sensibilidad cultural para padres inmigrantes latinos de niños que aun están aprendiendo inglés?  
(What are the benefits to parents of ELL students who participate in an anti-hegemonic culturally sensitive advocacy-training program?)