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**CREATING FUTURES:
Transformative Involvement Experiences
For Immigrant Latino Parents.**

A thesis
presented to
The Faculty of the Department of Educational Policy Studies & Research
College of Education
DePaul University
In Partial Fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Social and Cultural Foundations on Education

By

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November 2014

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Abstract

CREATING FUTURES:

Transformative Involvement Experiences For Immigrant Latino Parents.

María del Carmen Aragonés Guarro

Despite more than half a century of debate about parental involvement in the education of children, it still remains an evolving and elusive topic. While much is written about Latino immigrants and U.S. schooling, much less is known from the parents' perspectives. This qualitative case study explores the experiences and perspectives of immigrant parents in an early childhood Latino parent education program and the impact of this non-formal educational program on their role as parents. Theoretical lenses for this study are transformative learning (Mezirow, 1978) and popular education (Freire, 1970). Findings demonstrate that: (a) a context of isolation impacts parents' roles and learning experience; (b) a nurturing and safe space for learning is critical for transformative learning; and (c) transformation is evident in parents as they move from self-doubt and fear to self-confidence, understanding and determination. The role of context, emotions, and the spiral nature of the process are key factors of transformative learning. Educators and organizations are to provide systematic support to sustain the transformative processes engaged by parents. Policy makers and private funders need to facilitate funds.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank my advisor, Dr. Karen Monkman, for her unconditional support throughout this process of research. I also want to thank the members of my committee, Dr. Amira Proweller, who was the first one to introduce me to qualitative research, and Dr. Jennifer Mata, with whom I share a common language, Spanish. I thank Dr. GianMario Besana, who made it possible to start this path at DePaul University. I thank my family and friends for their constant encouragement. Finally, I want to remember the Latino fathers and mothers I have met along my stay in Chicago for all the inspiring love, care, and courage they live in their families and their communities. They have been the strongest motivation for my work.

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Parental involvement is a crucial issue in schools and a key factor in the academic success of children, in some circumstances even more so than the socioeconomic background of the family (Rasmussen, 1988, as cited in López, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001)¹. In reference to Latino parental involvement, this topic becomes even more fundamental when one takes into account the increasing growth of the Hispanic population (43 percent in the last ten years, according to the 2010 Census), which has become the largest ethnic group in the United States since the year 2000 (Smith, Stern, & Shatrova, 2008).

Parental involvement often focuses on all the activities that parents can do in the school and at home to collaborate with teachers in order to improve their children's educational outcomes (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001, as cited in Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005; Walker, Ice, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2011). In more recent findings, teachers and principals recognize what parents are already doing for their children, by inculcating the value of education and hard work, thus raising their children's motivation for schooling and higher education (López et al., 2001; López, 2001; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992, 1993; Soltero, 2011).

¹We cannot ignore the structural factors of academic achievement and the responsibility of the schools and the school system to provide an education that offers equal opportunities to students. In this sense, in 1966, the Coleman Report illustrated the relationship between students' achievement and the schools they attended, and how minority students, such as African-Americans or Mexican-Americans from first grade to 12th grade progressively increased their achievement gap relative to white students. They demonstrated that it was affected by the quality of the school (Coleman, J., Campbell, E., Hobson, C., McPartland, J, Mood, A, Weinfeld, F., & York, R.).

However, there is a gap in the literature, where parental involvement is often understood as presence at school (Scribner, Young, & Pedroza, 1999, as cited in Larrota & Yamamura, 2011) and at school-related activities. The lack of physical presence, as is often the case of Latino parents, is perceived as being uninvolved (Williams & Chavkin, 1989, as cited in López et al., 2001). This is a problematic assumption that makes it necessary to take into account the perspective of Latino parents. Moreover, there is a scarcity of research on referring to the early childhood parental involvement practices (Durand, 2011) and the work that organizations are doing to promote Latino parental involvement.

I focused my study on the perceptions experienced by participants in the program “Creating Futures”² geared towards parents of children in early childhood education (ages five years or under). The program was run by a grass-roots organization called “Fortunada Neighborhood” and involved 14 Spanish-speaking parents. It consisted of ten sessions dealing with child development, health, education, advocacy, and social change in family, school and community. The goal of the program was to improve the educational outcomes of Latino children, starting with the early childhood programs, through fostering the abilities and self-trust of parents and developing them as advocates for their children’s rights.

This study explored the participants’ perceptions of their experience in an early childhood Latino parent education program and the implications for their parental role in their children’s education.

My research questions were:

²Pseudonyms are used here for all names, including the organization, program and all individuals.

1. What are the participants' perceptions of their experience in an early childhood Latino parent education program?
2. What impact has this program had on their perceptions of their parenting role in their children's education?

Findings illustrate that parent's perceptions are highly influenced by their social context and by the experience of life they bring to the learning environment. The safe space created by the interaction and relationships, on the one hand, between facilitators and participants, and on the other hand, among the group members, allows for a deep sharing that makes them experience the course as a transformative learning experience. Focusing on two of the participants, the study illustrates the impact the program had both on their perceptions about their parenting role and early childhood education, and how they transitioned from self-doubt and fear to self-confidence and determination.

In the following chapter, I am going to analyze existing literature about different aspects of parental involvement connecting with adult education as a path to promote parental involvement. Chapter III develops the theoretical framework and the methodology applied to this study, and gives a detailed explanation of the program and participants before entering into the thematic findings in Chapter IV. Chapter V introduces the discussion, and Chapter VI offers the final conclusions.

CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Promoting parental involvement in schools as a positive avenue towards academic success and positive educational outcomes is an ongoing policy priority. Four broad themes are evident in the scholarship. In this chapter, I will discuss parent involvement generally; Latino parent involvement specifically, including some aspects related to immigrant families; Latino parent involvement in early childhood; and finally, motivators and barriers to Latino parental involvement. The last section about adult education addresses the potential of community-based organizations promoting parental involvement. The study draws on transformative learning and popular education as the theoretical framework that I will explain in chapter III.

Parental Involvement: Types and Perspectives

Even though there is a great deal of research about parental involvement, it is a dynamic phenomenon whose definition and understanding is still evolving. Some scholars point out that defining “good parenting” through a list of activities, such as being members of and participating in Parent Teacher Associations, volunteering, or attending back-to-school nights, is responsible for the loss of meaning of that term (Olivos, 2006, as cited in Larrotta & Yamamura, 2011, p. 75). These authors consider that “these forms of involvement make multiple assumptions—for example, that parents understand the U.S. educational system and can volunteer time and resources. They cater to middle-class, two-parent families and usually require parents to be fluent in English” (p. 75). The model does not include the reality of family diversity.

Epstein (2001) sees parental involvement as a partnership between families and schools and distinguishes three perspectives concerning their mutual responsibilities: (a) separate responsibilities; (b) shared responsibilities; and (c) sequential responsibilities. According to

Epstein, each of these perspectives underlines different assumptions. The separate responsibilities' perspective assumes that the role and goals of parents and teachers are different and can be achieved more successfully when they act independently. The second perspective assumes that schools and families share a responsibility that can be better fulfilled in coordination and cooperation. Finally, the third perspective assumes that the responsibility for the development of children in early childhood rests primarily with the parents, while teachers take up the responsibility for children's education after they enter kindergarten.

From the perspective of shared responsibility and partnership, Epstein develops a model of parental involvement that defines six dimensions in which schools can aid families so they can better support the work of schools: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, involving parents in decision-making processes at school, and collaborating with the community (1992, as cited in Epstein, 2001, pp. 43-44). I argue that this approach is mainly based on the needs of the school and on its own understanding of parental involvement from that perspective.

The growing diversity, new conceptualizations about power and participation, and the demands of parents (López, 2001) have resulted in a broadening of the understanding of parental involvement that takes into account cultural perspectives and values (Soltero, 2011), such as the "value of hard work" (López, 2001, p. 416).

This expanded and culturally-responsive perspective includes a new understanding of both the relationship between parents and schools as well as home-based activities. López, Scribner, and Mahitivanichcha (2001), in their study of effective school parental involvement

programs, addressed to the Latino migrant population³, define involvement as “promoting the educational success of migrant students through a concerted effort at meeting the multiple needs of migrant families” (p. 281). From this perspective, parental involvement is not focused on the activities done by parents for the school but on the response of schools to parents, in order to help parents meet their needs. This shift in school-based involvement leads to another shift in “home involvement.” It is not the educational activities done at home by parents, but the engagement of teachers visiting migrant families and meeting them where they are (López et al., 2001).

Perez Carreón, Drake, and Barton (2005) extend the understanding of parental involvement to the “*presence* of parents in their children’s schooling, regardless of whether that presence is in a formal school space or in more personal, informal spaces, including spaces created by parents themselves” (p. 466, emphasis in the original). It is an understanding that takes into account parents’ worldviews and the influence that their beliefs have on their parenting.

A further step to a more critical perspective about parental involvement is represented by Olivos, Ochoa, and Jiménez-Castellanos (2011) who adopt the term “parent engagement” in opposition to “parent involvement.” They understand “parent involvement” as a “passive, one-way connection” that only benefits the school, while the responsibility of student failure is placed on the family (p. 7). In contrast, “parent engagement” is an “active, two-way connection” that expresses the mutual process school and parents assume to transform the school and the

³Within the Latino population there are different categories; one of them is immigrants, as a specific and differentiated group. Sometimes, these categories get conflated, but should be addressed as separate populations.

community, and to benefit the students and their families (p. 7). In this model, parents become critical partners whose participation goes beyond their accommodation to a school's requests. This participation has the potential to challenge and improve the school. From a transformative learning and popular education perspective, the process of parents and schools becoming mutually engaged in the transformation of the school and community will demand that teachers and schools relinquish their power and that parents assume the value of their knowledge and experience and attain empowerment to participate.

Summarizing the evolution of parental involvement perspectives, it has evolved from a "deficit home intervention model approach" emergent in the 1960s, to a "language and socialization difference model" predominant during the 1970s and early 80s, to an empowerment and participatory model in the late 1980s through the present (Shepard & Rose, 1995, as cited in Montero-Sieburth, 2011, p. 163).

Focusing on Latino parents' experiences, the literature review presents contrasting views about their involvement.

Latino Parental Involvement

Some scholars argue that Latino parents are not involved at the same rate as many White, middle-class parents (Chavkin, 1993; Moles, 1993; Comer, 1986, as cited in López, 2001); others illustrate how they are already involved, "though they may not be 'involved' in traditionally sanctioned ways" (López, 2001, p. 420). The question is more complex than it seems because of the great diversity among Latinos.

Though united by a common language, Hispanics in the U.S. are very diverse in socio-economic status, race, age, country of origin, the nature and timing of their immigration, and the degree of their acculturation (Nicolau and Ramos, 1990). Haycock and Duany (1991) stated that differences among Hispanic subgroups in communication styles and socialization practices might be greater than the overall differences between Hispanics and non-Hispanics. Such diversity within the Hispanic population can add to the

difficulties in developing strategies to increase meaningful parental involvement with their children's schools. (Smith, Stern, & Shatrova, 2008, p. 8)

Focusing on Mexican-American, low-income families, Concha Delgado-Gaitan (1992) contests the school oriented "deficit hypothesis" and assumption of parents "unconcerned about education" (Dunn, 1987, as cited in Delgado-Gaitan, 1992, p. 496). She affirms that Mexican-American parents are involved in the education and well-being of their children by creating a learning environment at home (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992). López (2001) calls attention to the life lessons taught by parents as a way to encourage educational success. In his research, Mr. Padilla takes his son to work to demonstrate the "value of hard work" (p. 427), with a triple meaning: "work as a lesson in life, work to teach children the value of school, and work to learn life skills" (p. 428). Similarly, Delgado-Gaitan (1992) shows how Latino parents teach children to be self-sufficient and problem-solvers, both of which are key to educational success although not often recognized by teachers in Latino children. The risk is that parents and children internalize uncritically "cultural assumptions" from the educational system (Mezirow, 1978, p. 104) that will need to be challenged by parents in order to get alternative perspectives of themselves and their children. Yet, Latino parental involvement in early childhood remains insufficiently explored.

Latino Parental Involvement in Early Childhood

There are few studies on parental involvement in early childhood that examine exclusively the Latino population (Durand, 2011). Some of these studies are based on the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS-K) and focus on the relationship between Latino parents and schools following Epstein's framework (Durand, 2011).

The national Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework⁴ (2011), focusing on parental involvement to improve the readiness of children up to age eight, defines eight areas of positive outcomes when there is a thoroughly familial engagement. These areas are: “family well-being, positive parent-child relationships, families as lifelong educators, families as learners, family engagement in transition, family connections to peers and community, and families as advocates and leaders” (p. 5).

McWayne, Melzi, Schick, Kennedy, and Mundt (2013) have conducted mixed-methods research with Latino Head Start parents to address the lack of a culturally contextualized model to understand Latino family engagement of preschool children. Through qualitative focus groups with parents, 27 concepts emerged to define their engagement. The authors grouped these concepts into two variables: the first relates to developmental skills parents want to develop in their children, subdivided into life skills and school readiness skills; and the second relates to responsibilities and behaviors parents need to display in order to develop those skills in their children. Responsibilities and behaviors among parents included school-focused activities, home-focused activities, basic needs, and self-improvement. From an emic approach, the authors then mapped out a culturally multidimensional engagement model they call the “Parental Engagement of Families from Latino Backgrounds” (PELF) based on four dimensions:

⁴Head Start is a federal program promoted by the Office of the Administration for Children and Families with the aim of increasing the school readiness for pre-school children from low income families “by enhancing their cognitive, social and emotional development” (Office of Head Start [OHS], 2013). This federal program traces its origins back to the era of President Lyndon Johnson, and his War on Poverty legislation in 1964, and it was based on research about the effects of poverty and its impact on education (see ACH, 2013).

1. Foundational education (social interactions, academic knowledge, family's culture, giving time, and creating a positive learning environment at home);
2. Supplemental education (enrolling children in extra-curricular activities and taking them to community places to learn);
3. School participation, and
4. Future-oriented teaching (motivating their children to reflect about their future, and becoming someone).

Some authors point to an apparent paradox between the low levels of involvement of Latino parents in their children's schools and their care about their children's education (Smith, Stern, & Shatrova, 2008). These deficit perspectives are viewed in relationship to a traditional narrow list of activities expected of parents by schools. An emancipatory process could be triggered if Latino parents were able to free themselves from the expectations of the schools that may constrict their self-perceptions as parents and influence their beliefs and attitudes (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). As we will see, this paradox can be better understood when we look at the different motivators and barriers that Latino parent's encounter.

Motivators and Barriers to Latino Parental Involvement

The decision of parents to be involved, how to be involved, and what to be involved in, can occur "in both explicit and implicit ways" (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997, p. 5). Explicit ways refers to when they actively take the initiative to be involved, and implicit refers to when they respond to demands they receive from schools.

The main factors influencing parents getting involved, how they get involved, or how they do not get involved are: (a) personal psychological beliefs, (e.g. the belief that parents should not interfere in the teacher's role); (b) contextual motivators of involvement, (e.g. the

perception of being welcomed and invited to participate); and (c) perceptions of life-context variables such as knowledge and skills, time, and energy (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997, as cited in Walker et al., 2011, p. 412). These factors may both enable and discourage participation.

Concerning the barriers, Smith et al. (2008) point to language as the most common because in the majority of schools teachers do not speak Spanish, and there is a scarcity of interpreters. Another significant barrier is the low socioeconomic status that places an inordinate demand on the time and energy of parents. Other factors are: parent's level of education (Floyd, 1998, as cited in Smith et al., 2008) that, for example, prevents parents from helping their children with academic affairs; and immigration status (Smith et al., 2008) that usually makes undocumented parents more reluctant to participate and to advocate for their children's rights with formal social institutions such as schools. Probably the most subtle barrier comes from both the attitudes of school officials as well as class and racial-based stereotypes that prevent them from treating parents as partners (Becher, 1986, as cited in López, 2001).

Taking into account the personal beliefs parents hold and the contextual factors and barriers they encounter, I argue that there is still a long way towards reaching a type of transformation that consists of "not only structural change in the individual's way of seeing himself or herself and the world, but also structural in the social world that provides the context for the individual's life" (Cranton, 2006, p. 45). Social actors at federal, national, and local levels, such as departments of education, public school districts, and schools themselves, have the power to create the conditions needed to break down factors and barriers that prevent parents from school participation.

In addition to helping parents deal with their own personal belief systems and potential barriers to exercise an active role in the education of their children, educational programs

customized for Latino parents in community non-formal settings can become an essential path to foster their involvement.

Adult Education: A Path to Fostering Latino Parental Involvement

Adult education is a large umbrella that encompasses multiple situations as a response to the needs of the adult learners (Rachal, 1989), and it includes a large group of terms: adult education, continuing education, lifelong learning, adult basic education, etc. (Courtney, 1989).

Verner and Booth (1962) provide a definition of adult education that focuses on its character as systematic and planned activity, when they state that “whatever the form, content, duration, physical planning, or sponsorship, an activity is identified as adult education when it is part of a systemic, planned, instructional program for adults” (as cited in Courtney, 1989, p. 18). This definition does not include all aspects of adult learning, as we will see. Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) define adult education as “a process whereby persons whose major social roles are characteristic of adult status undertake systematic and sustained learning activities for the purpose of bringing about changes in knowledge, attitudes, values or skills” (as cited in Courtney, 1989, p. 17). These authors focus on four aspects: (a) who the adult learner is, (b) the character of a “process”, (c) the type of activities, recognizing as Verner and Booth (1962), that they must be systematic; and (d) the change that the training wants to bring to the person. The idea of change underpins adult education and brings the debate to the surface about whether the aims of adult education are growth and development or liberation.

The definition of adult education, according to Courtney (1989), is more ideological than conceptual and it will remain an ambiguous term. “What matters is how it is defined in a particular context and for a particular purpose” (p. 23).

In a postmodern world, characterized by fragmentation and diversity, new alliances and interactions, new educational spaces appear that blur the borders between formal settings and life (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Coombs, Prosser, and Ahmed (1973) distinguish between formal, non-formal, and informal learning. *Formal learning* takes place in institutionalized educational settings and tends to lead to diplomas or degrees, or qualifies learners for the next level of schooling. *Non-formal learning* is offered by a large array of groups, such as community organizations, churches, associations, etc.; it is organized and systematic but isn't institutionalized like formal education. *Informal learning* occurs in the day-to-day life of the individual (as cited in Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Some literature recognizes that a non-formal educational program offered to minority groups by community organizations, which takes into account the cultural, social, and economic values of this particular community in its design, will be more successful in attendance than other formal educational settings for adults (Morgan, 1981, as cited in Briscoe & Roscoe, 1989). There are outstanding examples of community-based organizations that promote Latino parental involvement through different types of educational initiatives. One of them is the "Parent Mentor Program," offered by community organizations in partnership with schools, which trains parents to assist teachers in grades pre-K-3. Parents receive training⁵ before entering the classroom and during the school year. This training for parents' leadership and collaboration with schools gives them an insider understanding of the school system and of children's needs. In turn, parents become personally more engaged in their own children's education and become community resources (LSNA, n.d.).

⁵ By training, I refer to educational sessions within a non-formal system, such as the one implemented by a grass-root organization. In Spanish, the term commonly used is "formación."

In this type of adult program, the role of the adult educator is critically important. Campbell (1977) distinguishes three main characteristics they should embody: (a) the faith in the potential of each learner; (b) the expertise in some skills, such as leading groups; and (c) the openness to understand each adult learner's context (as cited in Courtney, 1989). To generate transformative learning, under Freire's and Mezirow's lenses, the educator will need to be able to engage participants in a process of consciousness raising and critical reflection.

In sum, the literature shows that there has been an evolution in the understanding of parental involvement from a home-based model to a more empowering and participatory model. Focusing on Latino parental involvement there are distinct approaches, ranging from a deficit perspective that sees Latino parents less engaged than White middle-class parents, to a more critical and cultural perspective that affirms new ways of involvement of Latino parents. The involvement of Latino parents in the education of their children is particularly crucial in the early stages of life (from newborn to five years old). Studies based on the national Head Start Program showed that parents develop their engagement in four basic dimensions: foundational education, supplemental education, school participation and future-oriented teaching. The decision of parents to be involved or not (or *how* to be involved) depends on one hand on personal and contextual factors, and on other hand, on barriers to participation. One particular barrier is language. Finally, non-formal programs of adult education for parents are an important strategy to promote their involvement in the education of their children. The role of the facilitators of these kinds of adult education programs is crucial for fostering transformative learning.

In the following chapter I will analyze the dual theoretical framework used in this study: transformative learning and popular education (mainly known as critical pedagogy in the U.S.), along with the methodological approach for this research.

CHAPTER III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH DESIGN

To succeed in involving Latino parents of young children in a new cultural context (i.e., the U.S. and its educational system) demands a transformative process to challenge parents' assumptions about their role as educators and to replace those assumptions with new ways of thinking and acting. In Latin America, popular education is shaped by a particular contextualized theoretical framework that focuses on lived experience, helping participants to pose problems that connect with their daily lives, thus providing a focus for critical examination of social relations and processes. It defines education more broadly than formal schooling, and situates it solidly in community, both with regard to space/place, and relational processes.

Methodologically, my study is a case study of the experience and transformation of parents in *Creating Futures*, and draws on qualitative research methods.

Conceptual/Theoretical framework

Transformative learning is a theory linked to emancipatory education that views learning as a process by which adult persons become aware of what assumptions are leading their lives (Mezirow and Associates 1990; Mezirow & Taylor, 2009; Cranton, 2006). It is a central idea in the field of adult learning.

Mezirow (1990; 2009) defines transformative learning as the process to challenge the presuppositions and assumptions that influence the individual's meaning perspective about themselves and the world, and guide his/her ways of thinking, feeling and acting. By meaning perspective, he understands "the structure of assumptions that constitute a frame of reference for interpreting the meaning of an experience" (1990, p. xvi). He adds that assumptions and meaning perspectives usually have been acquired uncritically during childhood. The goal is to replace

this old scheme of assumptions and meaning with those that are more “inclusive, discriminating, permeable, and integrative of experience,” (1990, p. 14; see also, Cranton, 2006) and that might be able to provide new principles for interpreting reality and dealing with new experiences in a broader perspective. This process of raising one’s consciousness is reached by critical self-reflection (Cranton, 1994) and seeks to uncover the validity of personal and social norms and views, and the consequences of holding them (Gravett & Pettersen, 2009).

Transformative learning does not occur if it only involves cognitive reasoning; it must shift in the decision to act according to new points of view (Mezirow, 1990). While there is still a debate in the literature about whether transformative learning focuses only on individual change or includes social change, some authors recognize that transformative learning can integrate both perspectives (Brookfield, 2000, as cited in Cranton, 2006).

Transformative learning fits particularly well with the research study herein because it involves adult participants learning in a program which seeks to foster parental involvement in early childhood education in the U.S. The participants in this program are Latino immigrant parents.⁶ They have often been maligned as being uninvolved by some literature that has a deficit-oriented perspective. Transformative learning implies a process of challenging sociocultural distortions in meaning making perspectives acquired in the process of socialization “by the uncritical acceptance of another’s values” (Mezirow, 1990, p. 14). For example, some Latino parents have internalized an understanding of “respect” towards teachers that in practice prevents them from interacting with teachers in a mutual relationship which can limit the benefits for their children in school contexts.

⁶Even though the program doesn’t explicitly recruit immigrant participants, the participant parents are Latino immigrants.

Popular Education is the name used in Latin America to refer to Paulo Freire's (1990) pedagogy. In the West (global North), it is linked to social change education or social justice education and is often labeled as "critical pedagogy" (Choules, 2007). According to Giroux and McLaren (1994), Paulo Freire's important conceptual themes are valuable in North America even for educators who do not know Freire's work. In fact, critical pedagogy draws on Freire's notion of popular education and one of its common objectives "to empower the powerless and transform existing social inequalities and injustices" (McLaren, 1989, p. 160). Popular education and critical pedagogy belong to a common family of "radical pedagogy," "emancipatory pedagogy," "transformative" theory (as called respectively by Gore, Lather and Rezai-Rashti, cited by Miskovic and Hoop, 2006, p. 269). These forms of education aim to break up particular, historically established systems of oppression through the practice of teaching and learning (Miskovic & Hope, 2006). The goal is societal change (transformation) integral to individuals and collective transformational learning and action. This approach recognizes power relations and structures of inequality as integral.

Amidst the core concepts of popular education are humanization, critical awareness, ("conscientiçao"), dialogue, and empowerment. According to Paulo Freire (1990), the issue of humanization has always existed, but now it becomes a greater concern because its existence leads to the recognition of dehumanization, which is a "distortion of the vocation of becoming more fully human" (p. 28). Both the oppressed and the oppressors are dehumanized, yet in different ways. The oppressed are dehumanized by injustice, exploitation, and violence; they must liberate themselves as well as the oppressors. In order to achieve this goal, Freire creates a

pedagogy rooted in “critical awareness” (“conscientiçao”⁷) that challenges traditional education—banking education—where teachers possess the knowledge and students are considered empty slates or vessels. By contrast, his proposed pedagogy is problem-posing and essentially political, aiming to understand the economic, social and cultural causes of oppression, and challenging the status quo of an unequal society. The basis is dialogue, a dialogue which is based on reflection and action, and built through “generative themes,” that is to say, themes present in current situations of people’s lives which represent their view and position in the world and can unfold into new issues and a more critical understanding of the structures of oppression. The process of popular education, being focused as it is on groups rather than individuals and linked to social action (Crowther, 2013; see also Choules, 2007), leads to the empowerment of persons *and* communities.

Popular education promotes community empowerment by increasing individuals’ and communities’ awareness of their capacity and providing a framework and strategies through which participants can identify and resolve problems. (Wiggins, Johnson, Avila, Farquhar, Michael, Rios, & López, 2009, p. 11). Even though there are differences between Freire’s context (he worked in Brazil and other countries in the Global South) and the current context in the U.S., Hipolito-Delgado and Lee (2007) recognize that there are oppressed communities in the U.S. that “are created and are maintained by racism, classism, homophobia, and ableism —

⁷*Conscientiçao* is difficult to translate from Brazilian Portuguese to English. Its meaning is richer and deeper than “critical awareness” or “critical consciousness” although these are the usual terms used in translation. Choules (2007) defines “conscientiçao” as a process of critical analysis that raises awareness about a social, economic, and political situation that leads to a transformative action.

discrimination based on ability status—” (Prilleltensky, 2003, as cited in Hipolito-Delgado & Lee, 2007, p. 327). Whereas some scholars apply popular education to a diversity of settings from non-dominant groups, such as high school students (Brown, 2011) or Latino and African-American communities in the health care field (Wiggins et al., 2009), others uphold its application to dominant social groups in Western countries (Choules, 2007). In any case, the use of a popular education in Western countries needs to be contextualized and adjusted as some educators in the U.S. (Evans, Evans & Kennedy, 1987, as cited in Choules, 2007), as well as Freire himself, demanded, as part of a critical contribution to the popular education movement (Choules, 2007).

Freire (1990) includes among his reflections the relationship between the parent and child in the home, and how it mirrors the cultural conditions of the social structure. This is especially important to take into account in early childhood programs in order to engage Latino parents in authentic dialogue concerning their children’s growth and learning (Durand, 2011).

Transformative learning and popular education share in common the priority of raising awareness through a process of dialogue. The participants in the program “Creating Futures” are Latino immigrants facing situations of discrimination and oppression; therefore, both frameworks are useful for the study because they seek an emancipatory process. Through the program, the participants are engaged in a process within which they question their understanding of assumptions about their parenting role and relationship with schools, leading them to new ways of thinking and acting. The program uses popular education as a pedagogical methodology, focusing on their daily lived experiences and aiming to raise consciousness about

their context in order to develop a critical citizenship⁸ that is mainly expressed through their relationship with the school, teachers, and public institutions involved in the education of their children. The research methodology that fits with this study is case study as I will describe below.

Methodology

“A way of seeing is always a way of not seeing” (Burke, 1935, as cited in Schram, 2006, p. 92). This quotation illustrates the significance of the choice of one methodological approach instead of another. It means that we look at reality through a lens that will allow us to focus on some aspects and to forget or not see others. In the words of Schram (2006), “your decision to commit yourself to or associate yourself with a particular research approach reflects the potential you believe to be gained from that perspective.” (p. 92)

This study follows a qualitative case study methodology that is defined by Yin (2003) as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). The study focuses on the transformative processes parents experience during and after their participation in the Creating Futures program. Because the parents’ experiences and perspectives are central to the study, a qualitative approach enables the collection of rich, nuanced data. Quantitative research approaches would not allow for a deep understanding of the construct I am trying to explain.

Case studies can be intrinsic or instrumental (Stake, 1995); exploratory, explanatory, or descriptive; and of a single case or multiple cases (Yin, 2003). This is a single case study

⁸By citizenship, I mean a style of life that enables people to be engaged in building democratic spaces and advocating for political, economic, social, and cultural rights for everyone.

focused on the transformative processes parents experience as well as an exploratory and intrinsic one, because I want to learn specifically about the Latino immigrant parent participants in the program. Methods of data collection used in this case study include observation of class sessions; interviews of parents, facilitators, and the coordinator; a focus group with parent participants; and document analysis.

Site and Participant Selection

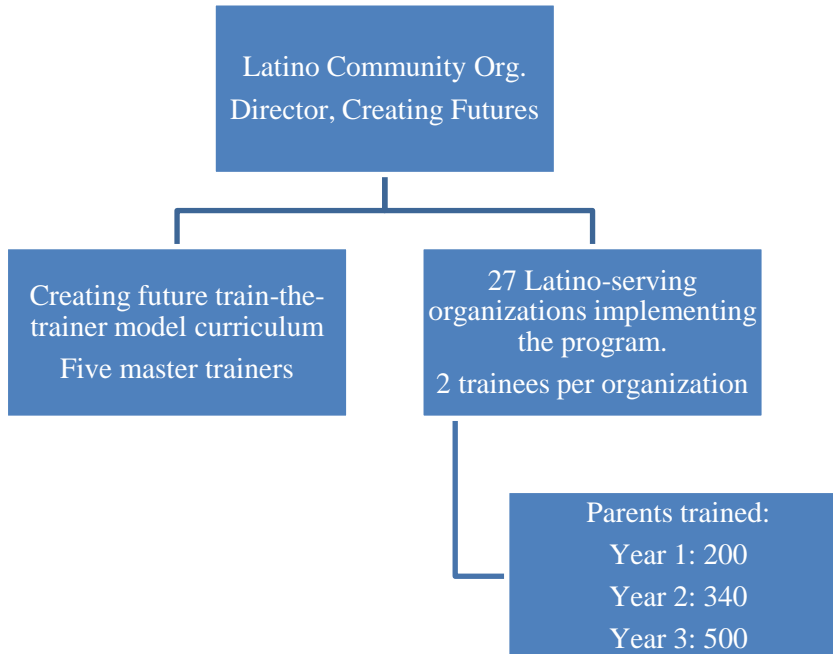
Fortunada Neighborhood is a community agency based in Middleton, a big Midwestern city in the United States that works to empower other smaller organizations and communities, and to raise the voices of residents, especially youth and immigrant families, to develop their leadership, in order to create and maintain diverse, safe, and affordable neighborhoods. It offers a large array of programs in education, early childhood development, immigration, affordable housing, industrial retention and jobs, health and open space, and youth. Among other strategies, it provides a culturally relevant parent engagement program, “Creating Futures.” This program is run at the national, state, and local levels.

For a better comprehension of the scope of the program, I will start by explaining its origin and expansion nationwide, based on information from the program web page, and follow with explanations on how the program is organized at the state level, and finally, I will focus on the local level.

The program Creating Futures was started in 2007 on the east coast and is run by a non-profit organization, Helping Families, as a parent leadership training program in Spanish by and for Latino parents with children 0-5 years of age. Creating Futures uses popular education (according to their website) and is informed by evidence-based research on the outcomes of the program conducted by a state university. The aim of the program is to reduce the cognitive gap

that Latino children face when they start kindergarten in order to guarantee better opportunities for the future. Since its inception, the program has reached more than 22,000 families in 31 states and Puerto Rico. In an effort to prove the effectiveness of the program, the same university developed a 15-minute multiple choice pre-and-post survey to measure the participants' knowledge of children's early learning, social skills, language and literacy, school preparation, and advocacy, and their parenting skills and confidence before and after their participation in the program. This survey was administered to participants who started in August 2010 and finished in March 2011.

The Creating Futures curriculum came to the state where Middleton is located in 2010. The Latino Community Organization (LCO) is the non-profit organization at the state level in charge of coordinating the program and training local Latino-serving organizations. According to the program's director, this program involves 27 Latino-serving organizations. It trains two facilitators from each of its member organizations who implement the training with 20 Spanish-speaking parents at their respective program sites. As a result, more than 1,000 Latino parents received the curriculum by the end of 2013, equipping them with knowledge and tools to support their children in three areas —academics, social and emotional development, and health. The organizations are spread throughout the city and metropolitan area. The structure of the program is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Program Structure

At the local level I focused the case study on one of these 27 organizations, specifically the one called “Fortunada Neighborhood”, because it is a multi-issue community organization with vast experience working with the Latino population, including immigrants, using Freirean popular education. It also expressed a great interest in a qualitative study to better comprehend the transformation experienced by parents and caregivers, and the organization was easily accessible by public transportation. Within this organization, the program includes one coordinator and involves several facilitators, immigrant Latino mothers, who have received training from LCO. The program is research-based⁹ and culturally sensitive.

The program consists of ten weekly sessions dealing with child development, health, education, advocacy, and social change in family, school, and community. It follows a popular

⁹ The state university that I refer to on the previous page conducted a study prior to setting up the program.

education methodology and seeks the transformation of parents as the first teachers of their children. The goal of the program is to improve the educational outcomes of Latino children, starting with early childhood programs, by fostering the abilities and trust of parents in themselves and developing them as advocates of their children's rights.

The participants in the program were 14 parents and caregivers, 13 women and one man. All the women were mothers of children under five years of age, and the man is a grandfather. Ten of them are from Mexico, two were from Guatemala, one is from Nicaragua, and one was born in the USA of Mexican parents. Most of them have lived in the United States anywhere from three to 14 years, except for one who has lived here for 20 years and another one who has lived here for 40 years. Their ages ranged from 21 to 64 years old, with the average being 31 (excluding the 64 year old; the average would be 34 if we include the 64 year old). All of them were married or living with a partner, except one young single mother who lived with her mother and was a student in an undergraduate program.

The participants' educational level varied: four had some primary level education, seven had completed secondary school, two had some level of university studies and one was a university graduate. More than half of the participants had been raised in rural areas where in general, the access to education and resources is less.

The group of participants, regardless of their socio-cultural background and educational level, in the U.S. shared common characteristics of low socio-economic status, living in areas of a big city where gangs, drugs, and violence are prevalent. Ten out of the 13 women were housewives and took care of their children and only two of them held part-time temporary jobs, one involved with office cleaning and the other with cosmetology. All of them kept their small children at home under their personal care. The two who worked and the one single mother who

studied left their children with other relatives such as grandparents, aunts, sisters, or husband during the time when they were away from home. The only male participant was a retired grandfather who took care of his grandchildren. The average number of children by household, among the participants, was two.

While parents received their training in a completely separate room, the children who were not registered in pre-school or day care programs, were offered a specific day-care program. There were 13 children from four months of age to four years old, who throughout the duration of the program, started socializing and, according to their age, received instruction from tutors.

Recruitment and Informed Consent

I obtained access to the organization through the coordinator of the program. The criteria to select participants were: parents of children less than five years old and first generation immigrants. The rationale for the last criterion is that they have a more recent understanding of the U.S. school system, and they may experience more challenges in becoming involved in the education of their children in ways expected in U.S. society.

I met with the participants during the first session, just to introduce myself, because I had not yet received the approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB; see Appendix A for the subsequent approval). As soon as the approval was received, I obtained informed consent from all of them to be participants in the research study and to be recorded. This included the authorization for the observations, focus group, and interviews. The four facilitators and the coordinator also agreed to be participants in the study. All the informed consent forms were provided in Spanish, except the one for the coordinator, which was in English.

In sum, all participants (parents or care-givers, facilitators and coordinator) received information about the study which included the voluntary nature of participation, issues related to confidentiality, and ethical principles of research (Moustakas, 1994), before becoming involved in the research.

Methods of Data Collection

Method “commonly denotes a specific procedure, tool, or technique used by the researcher to generate and analyze data” (Schram, 2006, p. 43). This section explains how I collected and organized the data.

The study includes collection of data through multiple methods and sources of information (Creswell, 2013) in order to ensure triangulation and that the perspectives of parents or care-givers, and the coordinator and two facilitators, are taken into account.

Observations

The observation is a method of data collection used to better understand the behavior of participants and the context of the case study (Mulhall, 2003). Initially, in my case, it was foreseen to participate in the ten sessions of training –for two hours each (totaling 20 hours). As I mentioned, when I received the approval of the IRB and the informed consent of the Spanish version, the fourth session was already taking place. Besides, session 10 was to be focused on the graduation ceremony and held at a different scheduled time impossible for me to attend. Therefore, I have observed six sessions out of ten. In the first session, before training was started, I introduced myself to the group and said that as soon as I had the approval of DePaul University, I would join the sessions full time. I thought that showing up in the middle of the program could be quite disturbing and would prevent me from creating the trust I wanted to build with the participants.

I observed the parents or caregivers in order to see the process they followed towards new understandings and behaviors about the role of parents as educators. I paid particular attention to when they were arriving, how they related to each other and with the facilitators, what their level of participation and types of insights; which emotions they expressed or I inferred about the topics they were sharing; and what assumptions and attitudes they seemed to have. I also observed the facilitators in order to determine how they influenced the process of unfolding assumptions, attitudes towards the participants, and the climate they created in the group (see Appendix B:Observational Protocol). I also used the observations as an overriding opportunity to create trust with the participants and to understand in a holistic way their background and current conditions of life.

According to Patton (2002), the extent of participation as viewed on a continuum from immersion (participatory) to complete separation (non-participatory) can change over time. In the majority of the sessions, I acted as non-participant observer. In order to help the training progress and whenever it was helpful for an in-depth comprehension of the process I acted as a participant observer. For example, I participated in small groups organized to reflect on a subject, and also in a general discussion to give a personal opinion. It was my intention to become more approachable to the group and not to be seen as an outsider.

I took hand-written notes during each session I observed, and I also recorded the sessions in order to get more accuracy about the exchange that took place. On the same day, after each observation, I expanded the hand-written notes on the computer into coherent notes with as much detailed description as possible. These typed field notes constituted the observational data.

Focus groups

A focus group is “a research discussion group conducted by a moderator and designed to create a free-flowing conversation about one or more issues related to a general topic” (Edmunds, 1999, p. 130). The rationale to use focus groups was that I wanted to be able to see participants’ interaction as part of a group when thinking about and responding to questions, to get an in-depth understanding of their perceptions, attitudes and ideas, and to ensure the triangulation of data with other sources of data collection.

At the seventh session, I announced the focus groups to parents and I proposed two different schedule times asking them to voluntarily sign up according to their availability. The decision was to hold it after the ninth session, on Wednesday, May 21, for several reasons. The first reason was that the eight persons interested on that day were those who appeared to be very involved in the training, and I was very much interested in their participation in the focus group. The second reason was that the facilitators in charge of the children, while their parents were in the session, were already there and the playground was already set up. The last reason was that we had permission to stay in the location where we were only until May 21 and to request an extension could involve more bureaucratic procedures and the risk of not having a place to meet. The date was also chosen quite early because when children finish school, parents are usually no longer available for a group meeting. I communicated the date of the focus group the week before it was scheduled.

The focus group was initially shaped with the participation of eight parents in mind, but the same day, some parents who had not signed up asked permission to stay, and I granted their request. The rationale was that I thought it would be better to accept them, even if that made the group larger, since I knew that some of them would not be actively participating. The focus group

lasted almost one and a half hours and there were 13 parents present. I welcomed them, thanked them for their participation in the group, and we then engaged in a conversation about their perceptions concerning their experience in the program (see Appendix C: Focus Group Guide). The language used was Spanish.

Interviews

Kahn and Cannell (1957) describe interviewing as “a conversation with a purpose” (as cited in Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 101). Kvale (1983) notes that:

It [an Interview] is 1) centered on the interviewee’s life-world; 2) seeks to understand the meaning of phenomena in his life-world; it is 3) qualitative, 4) descriptive; and 5) specific; it is 6) presuppositionless; it is 7) focused on certain themes; it is open for 8) ambiguities, and 9) changes; it depends upon the 10) sensitivity of the interviewer; it takes place in 11) an interpersonal interaction, and it may be 12) a positive experience. (p. 174).

I conducted a total of 11 in-depth interviews: one interview with six parents, one interview with four facilitators, and one interview with the coordinator (see Appendices D, E, and F: Interview Guides for Parents, Facilitators, and the Coordinator, respectively).

I reached out to the parents through telephone or e-mail. Initially I contacted eight parents, but three of them did not show up after two attempts to schedule interviews, and so I got in touch with another mother, totaling six parents. I conducted the interviews with four parents, individually, at the location of the organization; one mother invited me to go to her home and I met the last one at a park. I interviewed the facilitators and the coordinator in the location of the organization. The interviews lasted from about forty minutes to almost two and a half hours. The selection of the eight parents took into account: the degree and quality of participation in the program (based on my observations); variety in demographic features such as sex, age, time residing in the U.S.; differences in parenting/caregiving experience (e.g., those who had more

children or elder children and those who had only one child or smaller children): and experience with the educational system.

I conducted the interviews with the parents five weeks after the end of the program in order to bring distance from the impressions of the course and to really appreciate which were the deeper thoughts, feelings, and to grasp some of the actions they could have put in place not only during the program, but after it. The rationale for holding the interviews after the focus group was to go in-depth into the insights presented in the focus group and to get a deeper understanding from parents' experience.

I also interviewed four facilitators and one coordinator in order to get their perspective as experts of the program and persons that implement it. The interviews with the facilitators focused on their experience as trainers, aspects of the training that enhanced or detracted from the goals of the program, and transformations they saw parents had experienced. Finally, the interview with the coordinator sought to have a broader perspective about the program, the role of the facilitators and potential impact on parents' assumptions about their role and early childhood education as a result of the training.

The interviews were semi-structured, based on open-ended questions and conducted face-to-face. I audio-recorded and transcribed them (Creswell, 2013). I conducted all the interviews with parents and facilitators in Spanish, and the interview with the coordinator in English, taking into account each participant's language preference. I only translated into English the chunks of data in Spanish that were used in write-ups, as both I and my thesis chair are bilingual. I present them verbatim in this thesis in both languages so readers can see the translations. The process of transcribing and translating is not "a *merely technical task*; both entail judgment and interpretation" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 110, emphasis in the original). Translating is a

more complex process that involves “more subtle issues of connotation and meaning” (p. 111). Since my Spanish was learned in Spain and the participants’ Spanish was learned in South/Central America, I was very mindful to capture differences in the translations.

Document analysis

Before the program began, in order for me to better understand it and be able to compare the plan with its implementation, I collected and examined documents and videos about the program, including a brochure about the program; a report about the national evaluation of the program; their mission statement, and the goals and principles of the program; the curriculum, materials and educational resources used to run the program; two videos to be used in two of the sessions; and webpages of the local, state, and national organizations.

After the training, I reviewed all these documents and videos and added new ones, such as the results of the focus groups held by an external evaluator of the program with three different prior groups of parents; the participants’ evaluations of the sessions; prior and post surveys of the participants and participants’ demographic data that was collected by the organization. I examined all these documents and videos in order for me to organize the focus group and prepare the interviews. I also used them during the drafting of my thesis to analyze the transferability of the study. I obtained the documents mainly through the coordinator of the program.

Informal interviews

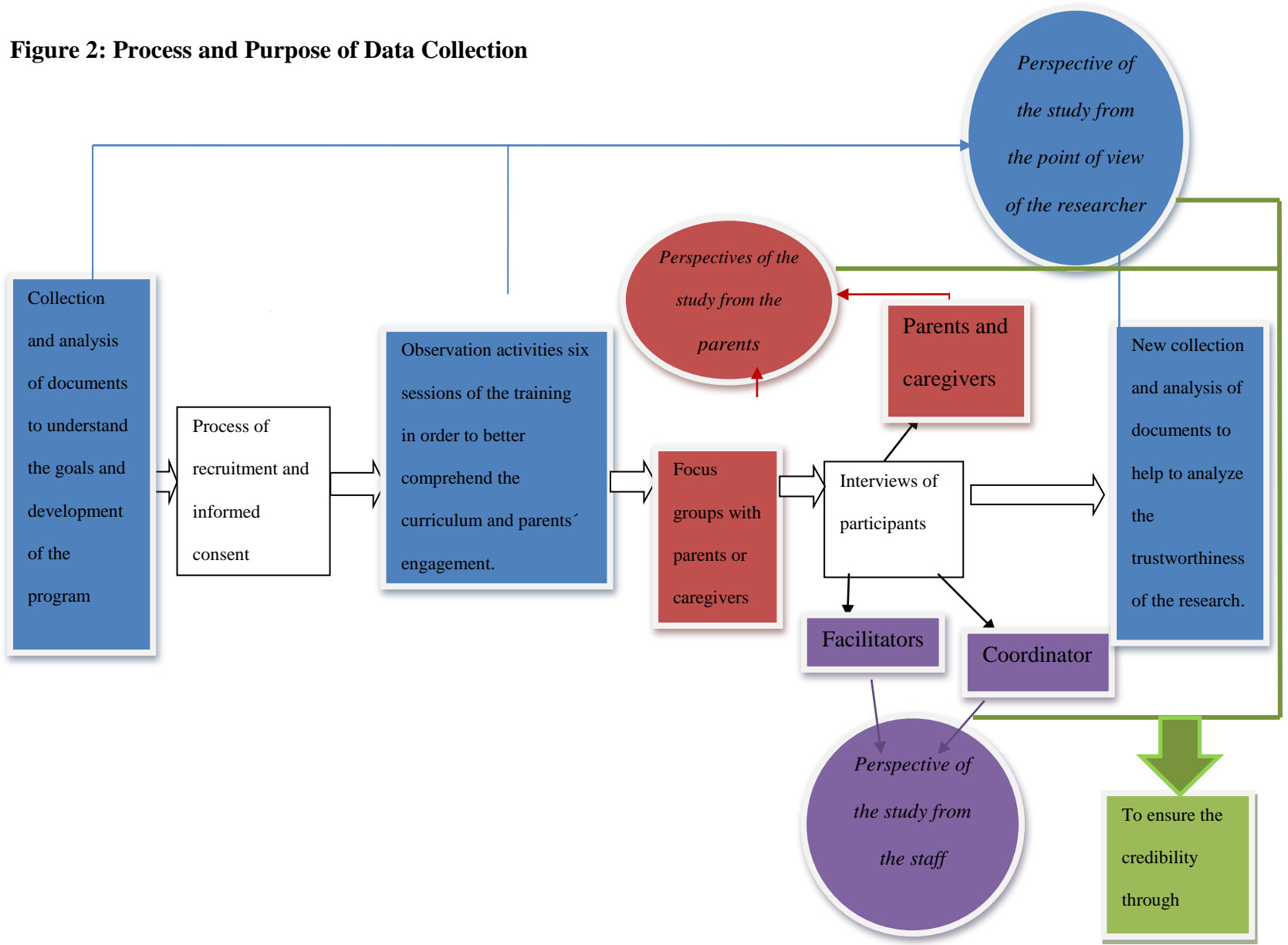
I conducted informal conversations with nine of the eleven participants who had been interviewed in depth in order to member check, that is to say, to know whether the analysis resonated with the participants (Merriam, 1998).

Table 1: Data Collection

<i>Methods</i>	<i>Sources</i>
Observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 observations: ten sessions of two hours of the training.
Focus Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 13 parents or care-givers
Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 parents or care-givers (the same in the focus groups) • 4 facilitators • 1 coordinator
Collection and Analysis of Documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brochure about the program. • Report about the national evaluation of the program based on the multiple-choice-pre-and-post surveys (not the raw data). • Mission statement, goals, and principles of the program. • Curriculum, materials and educational resources used to run the program. • 2 Videos used as educational resources. • Webpages of the organization. • Webpages of the state and the national organizations running the program. • Results of three focus groups of parents submitted by an external evaluator of the program. • Participants' evaluations of the sessions. • Pre- and post-surveys of the participants. • Demographic data of the participants.
Informal conversations for member checking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 short interviews with five parents out of six who had been interviewed, three out of four facilitators and the coordinator, to discuss the emerging analysis.

Figure 2 shows the trajectory and purpose of the collection of data.

Figure 2: Process and Purpose of Data Collection



Analysis of Data

“Qualitative analysis transforms data into findings. No formula exists for that transformation” (Patton, 2002, p. 432). It is the research purpose that will guide the analysis of data and the audience to which the findings are addressed (Patton, 2002). The distinction between data collection and data analysis is not clear cut (Patton, 2002). For example, if a new issue arises in the data –and is recognized in the analytical process– a subsequent interview can include questions about that issue.

I started my analysis of the observational, focus group, interview, and documentary data, by highlighting words or short sentences, in order to code them and to find patterns. Coding is “how you define what the data you are analyzing are (sic) about ... is a way of indexing or categorizing the text in order to establish a framework of thematic ideas about it” (Gibbs, 2007, p. 38). So, I began by a process of inductively assigning a label—a word or phrase—that I thought could capture the meaning of a passage (Rubin and Rubin, 2012). As Merriam (1998) states “coding occurs at two levels –identifying information about the data and interpretive constructs related to analysis” (p. 164). I first used descriptive codes in order to be closer to the “self-understanding” of the words of the interviewees (Kvale, 1983, p. 181). Later, through analytical reflection, I defined some themes and subthemes. Themes “offer explanations of why something happened, what something means, or how the interviewee feels about the matter” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 194). I selected as themes those that could give a better explanation to the research questions.

Limitations of the Study

The most significant limitation of the study was the beginning of the observations in the fourth session, which occurred because of the delayed IRB approval of the informed consent in

Spanish. The three first sessions were crucial for three main reasons: first, to better comprehend the prior understanding that parents held concerning their experience of their role as parents and educators; second, to set up the main concepts of the program and the exchange about their daily practices and activities about delicate topics concerning communication, positive discipline, family values, etc.; finally, to see the initial steps of the constitution of the group and the interaction among participants. I observed informally during the first and the third week, but I did not keep field notes because I did not have IRB approval or informed consent yet.

Another limitation has been not interviewing the silent participants. I thought that those who had been more actively involved could provide deeper insights, because of a high degree of interaction with other participants. I realize that not having interviewed any of the silent participants overlooks the fact that they were in the training and they could have provided other types of insights about the impact of the program on their lives.

Researcher's Positionality

Despite the fact that I don't identify myself as Latina, (I am a Caucasian European, from Catalan origin, multilingual in Catalan, Spanish, French, and English), through my professional background with a Spanish non-profit organization, I have been widely exposed to Latin American environments concerned with social justice issues.

Since my arrival in Chicago, I have been in touch with immigrant communities, especially from Mexico, through volunteer work in an organization that provides English as a Second Language (ESL) and General Educational Development (GED) preparation in order to help adults prepare to take examinations.

I see "Latino parental involvement" as a question of social justice for three main reasons: (1) the inequality of the public resources devoted to minority students is disproportionately

inferior to that of Caucasian, middle-class students (Darling-Hammond as cited in Eferakorko, 2006) in the U.S.; (2) the negative (deficit) lens and stereotypical approaches used in some literature and programming, which do not sufficiently take into account a culturally-sensitive perspective; and finally, (3) the need to hear and give voice to parents themselves instead of the most common analysis which is usually from the perspective of the school. I firmly believe in the potential of education, and especially of adult education, to improve the life of people.

Because I am from Spain, many Mexicans (and Latin Americans generally) perceive me as someone with a different ethnicity, accent, culture, and education, which requires that I bridge the gap between us, building trust, closeness, and egalitarian relationships. I am confident that to adopt an attitude of respect, listening and understanding of their situation, as well as displaying myself not as an outsider but as part of the group, were key factors in being accepted.

Ethical Issues

The importance of considering ethical issues in qualitative research is essential (Christians, 2000; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Fine, Weis, Weseen and Wong, 2000, as cited in Maxwell, 2009).

I took the ethical aspects into account throughout the study, from beginning to end. A central issue has been to keep the confidentiality of the individuals involved in the program through the use of pseudonyms and changing or omitting any personally-identifying details. Confidentiality has also been taken into account by talking about the context in a way that does not reveal the location or identity of participants. All data have been kept in a secure location (password protected electronic documents, and all other materials in a locked cabinet, for which only I have the key). I have not reported back to the organizations anything learned from or

about individual participants. I provided a short report to the program based on aggregated data, written in a way that did not reveal the identity of any participants.

Focus groups are often places where confidentiality can be breached because each participant knows who the other participants are and they hear what each other says. Researchers cannot guarantee that they will not “talk” to others outside the group (thus breaching confidentiality). I started the focus group, however, by explaining the importance of confidentiality and not breaching the confidentiality of others.

I also avoided gathering data on issues that might place the participants in situations of risk. In the interviews with the participants, for example, I avoided any questions that would concern their legal status.

Quality and Rigor

Lincoln and Guba (1985) provide four criteria for determining the trustworthiness of research (as cited in Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013): Credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

Credibility is concerned with the fit between the participants’ perspectives and understanding and the researcher’s representations of it. In this research study, I ensured credibility through prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, as cited in Houghton et al., 2013), and triangulation of sources and methods of data (Denzin, 1978, as cited in Mathison, 1988)¹⁰. I also used “thick description” (Geertz, 1994) in

¹⁰Denzin (1978) distinguishes four types of triangulation: (a) data source triangulation, (b) investigator triangulation, (c) theory triangulation, and (d) methods triangulation (as cited in Mathison, 1988).

order to allow readers to see the data clearly and determine for themselves whether the representation is credible.

Dependability is in qualitative research what reliability is in quantitative research. It refers to the stability of the data (Graneheim and Lundman, 2004; Tobin and Begley, 2004; Shah and Corley, 2006; and Rolfe, 2006, as cited in Houghton et al., 2013). It is concerned with the process. In the study, this criterion was achieved by keeping an audit trail, that is to say, by highlighting the decisions made throughout the process of the research in order to provide the reader with a rationale for methodological and interpretive judgments. In addition, I kept a reflective diary about the decisions I made throughout the research process (Houghton et al., 2013). Using thick description, I also ensured dependability.

The audit trail and reflective diary also ensure the criterion of *confirmability*, which refers to the neutrality and accuracy of the data (Tobin & Begley, 2004, as cited in Houghton et al., 2013) and focuses on the relationships among the “assertions, findings, interpretations” so readers can see that they are not merely from the inquirer’s imagination (Schwant, 2001, pp. 258-259). Using thick description enhances confirmability as well.

Finally, the criterion of *transferability* shows how the findings can be transferred to other settings. I fulfilled this criterion through “thick description” enabling readers to determine for themselves whether the findings of this study might also pertain to settings with which they are familiar.

I used two additional strategies: member checking and peer review (Merriam, 1988). I practiced member checking through short informal interviews (conversations) near the end when I was working out the analytical points, in order to check with parents, facilitators and the coordinator how the analysis resonated with what they understood about the program and their

experience with it. Concerning peer review, I asked .colleagues to comment on coding and on the emerging findings (Merriam, 1998). Both strategies provided more credibility to the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, as cited in Houghton et al., 2013).

Before presenting the findings of this research, I explain in a greater detail the program and the participants.

The Program

Creating futures´ program, according to its documentation, seeks as a general goal to improve the outcomes of the Latino children through giving their parents the ability and self-confidence to become strong and powerful defenders of their children´s rights. In order to reach this general goal, the program targets Latino parents with children less than five years of age, aiming to foster their leadership and advocacy skills. It is based on four main principles that are the following: (a) parents are the first and most important teachers of their children; (b) parents will be better prepared to guide the healthy development of their children if they acquire the necessary tools, resources and knowledge; (c) when parents know how the public systems that impact their children work they gain self-confidence and are able to advocate for their children; (d) and all parents have the right and the responsibility to participate in their communities in order to give their children the same opportunities to succeed in their future as other children.

The program is implemented through ten sessions that meet weekly for ten weeks. First session focuses on the concepts of “parents as the first teachers” and “home as the first school.” The emphasis is placed on the importance of parents in the involvement and leadership of the education of their children. The second session focuses on deepening the parents´ role as leaders of their home working through family values, communication, positive discipline and the design of a family plan to guide their daily life and goals. The third session focuses on knowing

children's developmental stages in different areas (cognitive, gross and fine motor skills, language and socio-emotional skills) and resources and services of the community addressed to special needs. The fourth session focuses on the development of the language and the role parents can play to develop it, discussing also about bilingualism. The fifth session focuses on the importance of reading to children at an early stage of life and the use of community resources such as public libraries. Session six emphasizes the importance of balanced nutrition and physical exercise in order to promote healthy habits. It presents some local, state or national good practices on healthy nutrition. The seventh session continues working on health issues, this time focusing on the socio-emotional well-being and how parents can promote healthy socio-emotional development of their children. Session eight introduces parents to the importance and benefits of early childhood education, selection of a program, and communication with an early childhood educational provider. Session nine focuses on the rights and obligations of parents within the public educational system and on abilities of leadership and advocacy. The last session is devoted to the celebration of their completion of the program where parent participants testify about the positive changes experienced at their homes, children's schools and community. (The goals of each session are specified in Appendix G: Goals of Creating Futures' sessions).

The process of conveying the content and reaching the goals of each session is done through a culturally sensitive curriculum that uses the Spanish language, popular sayings, role-playing activities and music from the Latino culture. This popular education orientation links individual life experiences with social context and creates horizontal relationships among participants and facilitators. The facilitators use cognitive resources such as power point presentations and DVDs about the topic, statistics, and case studies, as well as portfolios with materials and references about it. The facilitators also use different sorts of group dynamics to

awaken the emotional aspects of the topic by using images or bringing objects such as small children's shoes, and role playing with characters that reflect the different attitudes about the subject. Interaction, practice and evaluation are also part of the process, with interaction being one of the main strategies to break down the sense of isolation and promote transformative learning through relationships as will become clear in the findings.

At the same time that parents were receiving training, a day-care service was provided for their children. In this day-care service children learned activities appropriate for their age, socialized with other children, and some of them started using English for first time. Children were fostering their cognitive, socio-emotional, language, and fine and gross motor skills' development, doing activities simultaneously with their parents' sessions.

The program depends on external funding and according to the requirements of the grants it should include at least 45 parents in the training sessions.

Participants

There were fourteen parent participants. *Christine* is a young mother of a one two-year-old son. She is quite concerned about her child because he does not want to eat and he often hits other children. She is able to explain things in such a funny way that she makes everyone laugh. *Sara* is a more experienced mother, with two children, who shows a great interest in self-development and the development of her family. She feels quite anxious about the fact that it is the first time she is being separated from her two-year-old son. However, when she speaks she displays wisdom and prudence.

Cecilia has a higher educational level that is reflected in the way she speaks and the authority she exhibits within the group. Through different programs of Parent Mentors, she has acquired a great deal of experience of involvement in schools which enriches the group. She is

the mother of two children, five and seven years old. *Manuela* displays a strong character and talkative nature which, despite her limited educational level, allow her to participate actively and be serious and also to share funny situations that cause others to pop out laughing. She is the mother of five children.

Eva does not speak very often, but when she speaks, everyone listens to her attentively. She is a woman with a great deal of energy and a strong determination to help her three children be successful, even at the cost of postponing her own dream of becoming a teacher. She is the president of the bilingual committee of the school and is very knowledgeable about the public educational system. *Rebecca* is a young mother with a small daughter, 18 months old. She arrived in the U.S. as a teenager and completed high school here. She is sensitive and creative and worships her daughter. *Ximena* is also a young mother of two children that are six years old and one year old. She also arrived as a teenager and completed high school in the U.S. She seems smart and speaks with great assertiveness and speed. She has been involved in the school in different programs and seems to also have a good deal of knowledge about the public educational system.

José is the only man of the group. He is 64 years old and came to the program because he was concerned about his four year old granddaughter who does not speak yet. He has been in the U.S. for 40 years. He does not speak very often, but with his life experience, he influences the others when he does. *Alberta* has four children and a limited educational level. She is quiet most of the time, smiling attentively while others speak. *Antonia* is the mother of three children. She arrived in the U.S. ten years ago and has a limited educational level. She does not intervene very often, but when she does, she seems to be emotionally distressed.

Mercedes arrived in the U.S. from Mexico, 12 years ago. She is the mother of three children; the youngest one is in the day-care service, and she seems to be very attentive to him. She does not actively participate in the discussions. *Norma* is the mother of two children, six and two-years-old. She arrived in the U.S. seven years ago, and she expresses her love for flowers and gardens that she communicates to her elder daughter. She always arrives together with *Teresa*. *Teresa* is also the mother of two children, one two year old boy and one six year old daughter. She has been in the United States for only three years. In one of the sessions, everyone made a book for their children. *Teresa* titled her book, “Children Chefs,” because her daughter loves cooking and surprising her parents by preparing meals. Finally, *Pam* is the youngest. She is a single mother, twenty one years old, who is studying in college and has a four month old baby. She was born in the U.S. of Mexican parents. Table 2 summarizes parent participants’ data.

Table 2: Parent Participants.

Parent Participants	Time in the U.S.	Children (Ages)	Educational Attainment	Origin
Christine	8 years	1 (2 y.o.)	Secondary	Rural area
Sara	14years	2 (9 & 2 y.o.)	Secondary and job training	Rural area
Cecilia	8 years	2 (7 & 5 y.o.)	Higher education	Urban area
Manuela	11 years	5 (11, 8, 7, 6 & 3 y.o.).	Some primary	Rural area
Eva	20 years	3 (11, 9 & 3 y.o.)	Secondary	Rural area
Rebecca	8 years	1 (1 ½ y.o.)	Secondary	Rural area
Ximena	12 years	2 (6 & 1 y.o.)	Secondary	Urban area
José	40 years	1 granddaughter (4 y.o.).	Some primary	Rural area
Alberta	7 years	4 (16, 14, 7 & 4 y.o.)	Some primary	Rural area
Antonia	10 years	3 (12, 8 & 2 y.o.)	Some primary	Rural area
Mercedes	12 years.	3 (11, 9 & 1½ y.o.).	Secondary	Rural area
Norma	7 years	2 (6 & 2 y.o.)	Secondary	Rural area
Teresa	3 years	2 (6 & 2 y.o.)	Some higher education	Urban area
Pamela	Born in the U.S.	1 (4 mo.)	Some higher education	Urban area

Sophia is the coordinator of the program and encourages the facilitators and rewards their involvement and skillfulness. Her interaction with parents is sensitive and welcoming. She is Puerto Rican, born and raised in the U.S., and she speaks Spanish fluently, even though she feels more comfortable speaking English. The main facilitators of the program are Martina and Emma, although two others are also involved, Esther and Alba.

Martina embodies, as facilitator, the character she represents in the role-playing activity that is used during the sessions: she is positive, enthusiastic, funny, and witty. She arrived in the U.S. 14 years ago and has been involved with the organization for three years. She has two young children. *Emma* brings the seriousness of the data, and the research-based evidence about the topic. She combines her expertise with a friendly and close relationship with the participants. She has one daughter. She has been working with the organization for seven years.

Esther is a great cheerleader who sings and plays the guitar; these are also skills that she uses in the sessions. She has a long experience in Latin America and the U.S. as a popular educator. She substitutes for the facilitators when they are not able to be in the sessions. *Alba* has been one of the facilitators of the children, and she witnesses the changes children experience in the relationships among themselves and with their parents, as well as some of the parents' changes towards their children when they talk with her at the beginning and at the end of each session. Table 3 summarizes some of the features concerning the staff.

Table 3: Staff Participants.

Staff Participants	Time in the U.S.	Experience with the Organization
Sophia (coordinator)	Born in the U.S.	11 years
Esther (facilitator)	24 years	10 years
Martina (facilitator)	14 years	3 years
Emma (facilitator)	17 years	7 years
Alba (facilitator)	22 years	3 years

In the following chapter, I present the findings.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

The involvement of parents in the education of their children, as we have seen in the literature review, is recognized as an important factor for the development of the children and their future opportunities in life. However, there are few studies that take into account the perspective of Latino immigrant parents with children under five years old and their understanding of their involvement, particularly through non-formal educational programs. Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore the participants' perceptions of their experience in an early childhood immigrant Latino parent education program and the impact on their perceptions in their role as parents. Using transformative learning and popular education as theoretical lenses places the focus on the process parents live and the actions they engage in.

The findings are presented in three main themes, reflecting experiences of life (broadly speaking), learning, and change. The first one concerns *isolation*, as the context of the experience of learning that influences their role as parents and the process of transformative learning. The second one refers to creating a safe *space* for learning as a possibility to become a space for transformation. The last one focuses on *transformation* and the new perceptions participants' gain of their role as parents and concerning the early childhood education of their children. Within each of these three broad themes, subthemes are presented. Table 4 presents schematically the themes and subthemes of the findings.

Table 4: Themes and Subthemes of Findings.

Themes	Subthemes
Isolation as the Context of Parents' Experience:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immigration, language, and culture. • Gender • Urban life: city, gangs, and stress.
Creating a Safe Learning Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uncertainty and validation • Life experience and critical reflection • Relationships
Transformation: New Perceptions as Parents and Early Childhood Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From self-doubt to self-confidence. • From fear to confidence

Isolation as the Context of Parents' Experience

Context reflects the sociocultural and personal factors that affect the process of transformative learning. These factors include the immediate environment of the learning event as well as what the individual brings to the learning situation: a unique context composed of a familial and social history, and an individual orientation, which includes readiness for change, experience, prior stressful life events, and a predisposition for transformative experience. (Taylor, 1997, as cited in Kappel and Daley, 2004, pp. 85-86)

This quote illustrates well why it is important to take into account the context to analyze the experience of the parents, and through which factors it influences the process of transformative learning. The sociocultural aspects are particularly relevant in this case study, namely that parents are immigrants from Latino origin.

I define this context as isolation because it embraces the features that they are living as is evident in the data in a variety of ways. Isolation is a metaphor for the walls raised by different situations that participants suffer in their daily lives, and that affects each one in different forms and intensity. Isolation, as their day-to-day context, is composed by a multilayer of phenomena that shape in a unique form their ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. I group these phenomena

in three categories. The first one refers to immigration, language, and culture; the second one to gender; and the third one to urban life, namely city, gangs, and stress.

Isolation, as a context when referring to the parent's experience, appears in the documentation of the program from the first session to the last one, assuming that parents feel alone. One of the most important messages is the often repeated: "You are not alone." In my observations, the facilitators repeated that message in different moments. Parents, in the sessions and also in the interviews, express their isolation, not exactly using this term, but speaking about separation, enclosure, and loneliness. On the other hand, staff openly used the term "isolated" referring to the situation of parents.

Immigration, language and culture

Immigration is the most common life experience (in addition to parenthood) that almost all of them share: thirteen of them have crossed the border to settle in the U.S.¹¹ The reasons for taking the risk to leave their country are not the same. When I asked Christine what factors influenced her to come to the U.S., we can see that a health issue was the most pressing factor, as she explained to me:

Ay, uno no quiere recordar porque se pone triste. Mi papá murió porque tenía cáncer de próstata y diabetes. Yo tenía diez años, éramos pobres, yo veía cómo mi padre se arrastraba (...) A veces no podía respirar y con cartones de cajas de huevos le echábamos aire en la cara. El acabó muy mal. Era un

Oh, I do not want to think about it because I get sad. My dad died because he had prostate cancer and diabetes. I was ten, we were poor. I saw how my father was crawling (...) Sometimes he could not breathe and we fanned air in his face with egg cartons. He ended up very sick. He was a very

¹¹ One of them is second generation, born in the USA from a Mexican family, as I explained in the demographics.

hombre muy fuerte. Un niño, ver todas esas cosas, se traumatiza (...) En un momento mi mamá se enfermó de diabetes, la misma enfermedad de mi papá. Ahí empezó el trauma, íbamos a perder a mi mamá por lo mismo. Una tía dijo, véngase para acá [a Chicago]. Ella dijo “no me voy a venir sola” y nos venimos. ... Y aquí se curó. Tiene quince años con diabetes, pero está muy bien.

strong man. A child, seeing all these things, is traumatized (...) At one point my mother got sick with diabetes, the same disease as my dad. We felt traumatized. We were going to lose my mom from the same thing. An aunt said, “Come here [to Chicago].” She said “I will not come alone” and we came... And [my mom] was cured. She has been sick with diabetes for fifteen years, but now she is fine.

Cecilia shared with me that she came to the U.S. to start a relationship with the man who would be her husband. In México she was living with her mother, and she enjoyed domestic help. She was working in a bank office and from time to time she’d travel to Acapulco and other tourist-like places. She said:

Yo era clase media. Había estudiado 15 años y trabajado 8 años. Cuando vine me deprimí. Mi vida había cambiado 360 grados (sic). Fue vivir con una persona [mi esposo] con la que estábamos en proceso de conocimiento. No estaba acostumbrada a estar en casa tantas horas, ni a cocinar, ni a limpiar. [En México] yo trabajaba todo el día y llegaba de noche a la casa, y mi mamá me decía: “¿has cenado? Ahí tienes la cena.” Tenía comodidades y servicio en casa. Venir a Middletown fue muy duro.

I was middle class. I had studied for 15 years and worked for eight years. When I arrived I got depressed. My life changed 360 degrees (sic). I was living with a person [my husband]; we were getting to know each other. I was not used to being at home so many hours, or cooking, or cleaning. [In Mexico] I worked all day and came home at night, and my mom told me: “Have you eaten? There's your dinner.” I enjoyed comfort and domestic help at home. Coming to Middletown was very hard.

In the focus group, immigration was also brought up and Cecilia expresses:

Todos tenemos diferentes historias, experiencias, razones por las cuales tomamos la decisión de venir a este país. ... Yo lo hice porque quería darme la oportunidad de hacer mi propia vida, pero me fue duro porque yo era la única que vivía con [mi mamá] y ella está enferma.

We all have different stories, experiences, reasons why we decided to come to this country. ... I did it because I wanted to have the opportunity to make my own life, but it was hard because I was the one who lived with [my mother] and she is sick.

Manuela came to the U.S. because she did not want to hear any more about the U.S., but she wanted to experience it:

Yo me vine para que no me platicaran. Todos llegaban [a Mexico] bien bonitos, bien blanquitos. "Mamá, déjeme ir a Estados Unidos." "¡Ay! Es otro país, es otra lengua." Ya tengo once años. No fue por necesidad.

I came to avoid having them to talk to me about it. All arrived [to Mexico] very pretty, very white. "Mom, let me go to the U.S." "Ay! It is another country, it is another language." I have been here now for 11 years. I didn't come out of necessity.

The case of Manuela illustrates "migration as part of family history" (Chávez, 1992, p. 22). Friends or relatives, who live in the U.S., act as a pull factor because they tell stories about the country when they go back to visit their family.

Norma recognizes the profound pain that immigration can produce in people's lives: "*Todos tenemos nuestra historia y es ¡tan dolorosa para cada uno!*" ("We all have our story, and it is so painful for each one!")

This dramatic experience entails the separation of loved ones such as Antonia expresses: "*Me dolía en el alma dejar a mi mamá.*" ("I grieved in my soul to leave my mom.") Cecilia,

crying, says: “*Yo me tuve que despedir [de mi madre]. Eso me ha dolido mucho, me ha dolido mucho.*” (“I had to say goodbye [to my mother]. That grieved me a lot, it grieved me a lot.”)

The immigration experience implies that they are uprooted from their culture and language and arrive in a new country where their culture and language are ignored. The following exchange among some of the participants expresses the difficulties some face to learn English and also the motivations they have to acquire it, such as not to be denigrated or the most important, when they become parents, for the sake of their children:

Manuela: Once años aquí y no sé inglés. Trabajé en una pollera y no aprendí nada. Mi amiga en un restaurante, aprendió inglés. A mí me da miedo ir a una escuela, con el carácter que tengo me da miedo que si se ríen de mí... Y podría ir a la escuela porque mi marido no quiere que trabaje.

Sara: Hay oportunidades para padres y no vamos. Hay clases gratis y no vamos.

Manuela: Me da miedo (...) yo soy de carácter fuerte y si se ríen me enfrento.

Sara: En estas cosas [aprendiendo inglés] podemos agarrar una motivación. No tienen que humillarme. Luego, cuando uno tiene los hijos... yo me he esforzado en aprender para ayudar a mi hija.

Christine: Yo más por mi niño, iba a inglés. Acabé primero y luego tenía que ir a otro colegio muy lejos. Y volví a

Manuela: Eleven years here and I do not know English. I worked in a chicken factory and I did not learn anything. My friend, in a restaurant, learned English. It makes me afraid to go to school, with the character that I have I'm afraid that if they will laugh at me... I could go to school because my husband does not want me to work.

Sara: There are opportunities for parents and we do not take them. There are free classes and we do not go.

Manuela: I'm afraid. I have a strong character and if they laugh at me I can face it.

Sara: With these things [learning English] you can have motivation. They do not have to humiliate me. Then, when you have children ... I have struggled to learn to help my daughter.

Christine: It's for my son, I was going to learn English. I finished first and then I had to go to another school far away.

repetir [el curso].

*Sara: Yo fui un año a clases.
Es muy bueno. El primer nivel,
es todo el año. El II nivel ya no
fui porque se me hizo difícil,
antes tenían cuidado de niños.*

And I repeated [a grade].

Sara: I went to classes for one year. It's great. The first level is year-round. I did not go to level II because it was difficult for me; before they had childcare.

This lack of knowledge of English and, in a larger sense, of the cultural codes of the new country affects their self-perception and, in a larger sense, their relationships with the broader society. Cecilia explains:

*Fui a “Happy Store”
[ferretería] y había un cartelón
con las fotografías de los
trabajadores: “Yo hablo
español.” Ahora se ve más
[gente hablando español].
Cuando llegué hace nueve años,
me daba miedo hablar con la
gente. Le decía a mi marido:
“tú, pregúntales.” “No,
pregúntales tú.”*

I went to “Happy Store”
[hardware store] and there was a
poster with the picture of the
workers: “I speak Spanish.”
Now you can see more [Spanish
speakers]. When I arrived nine
years ago, I was afraid of talking
with the people. I said to my
husband: “Ask them!” “No, ask
them yourself.”

The need to learn to interpret the cultural codes of the new context is particularly salient, as parents, in their relationships to schools and the educational system. The coordinator of the program emphasizes how these aspects really matter when they start to get in touch with schools because they do not know about the norms and culture of the new country to feel secure enough, especially those who have been in the U.S. for a shorter time: “Our education system is something that many parents are not very familiar with because they are immigrants. They come from Mexico, Guatemala, and other places of the world. I think it can be very intimidating, whether [it] is language or confidence.” Smith, Stern, and Shatrova (2008) confirm this statement

when they recognize, as obstacles to parental involvement, among others, the language barrier and lack of understanding of the operation of the school. Language and cultural understanding are slow to develop in isolation: they require interaction.

Gender

Most of the participants in this study are stay-at-home mothers who take care of their children and their household or, if working, spend a few hours in temporary jobs or voluntary activities. Cecilia explained: “*No trabajo, dedicada a ellos [los hijos] toda la tarde.*” (“I do not work. I am dedicated to them [the children] all afternoon.”) She adds how much she has been enclosed at home, occupied in housekeeping activities:

A veces la rutina enfada, enfada muchísimo. Los dos años que llevamos en esta casita yo también me he encerrado porque hay muchas cosas a hacer en la casa. A mi esposo no le pido nada, él ya trabaja fuera [de casa].

Sometimes the routine is boring, extremely boring. We have been living in this house for two years and I have had to stay home because there are too many things to do at home. I don't ask my husband to do anything, he already works outside [the home].

She volunteers in her children's school, and her husband complains because it is not a paid activity and takes away from her work at home:

“Estás mucho en la escuela, no es un trabajo” ... “Yo estoy aprendiendo, primero el inglés. No me quites eso porque yo voy a seguir allí involucrándome.”

“You spend too much time at school; it is not a job” ... “I'm learning there, primarily English. You can't take it away from me because I will keep getting involved there.”

Manuela repeats several times: “*Mi marido no quiere que trabaje.*” (“My husband doesn't want me to work.”) Sara: “*Yo hace poco terminé [la escuela de] cosmetología y estoy*

empezando mi trabajo.” (“I recently finished cosmetology [school] and I'm starting my work.”)

One of the facilitators, Emma, referring collectively to the profile of the participants says: “*Son mamás que están en casa y no trabajan.*” (“They are mothers who are at home and do not work.”) Alba, another facilitator, bolsters this reality: “*Muchas mamás están en su casa, y no salen, no hablan ni con los vecinos.*” (“A lot of mothers stay at their home, and they do not go out, they do not even talk with their neighbors.”)

With different degrees of autonomy, they depend on their husbands for housing, food, clothes, transportation. Sara explains:

A veces uno es muy dependiente del esposo y eso no está bien. ... Yo no puedo ir a ningún lado porque el marido no me puede llevar. ... Es importante que uno aprenda a ser independiente como mujer.

Sometimes one is very dependent on the husband and that is not right. ... I cannot go anywhere because my husband cannot take me. ... It is important that one learn to be independent as a woman.

Manuela replies: “*Es cierto, eso es lo que yo quiero, a veces uno se siente como inútil.*” (“That’s true, that's what I want, sometimes one feels useless.”) That means that reproducing stereotyped gender relations in a new setting where they don’t have the support of extended family members reinforces isolation and the questioning of their purpose.

Alba and Emma, both facilitators, talk openly about machismo existing in some households. Alba stresses how it affects participation in the program in the sense that, in some cases, women need their husband’s permission to engage in new activities:

Los esposos no las dejan salir. Por machismo, no las dejan. “¿Para qué vas a ir a perder el tiempo [en el programa]?” [Afecta] tanto a personas que han llegado, como a las que ya

Husbands do not allow them to go out. Because of machismo, they do not let them. “Why are you going to waste time [with the program]?” It affects both people who have just arrived,

llevan mucho tiempo. La mujer tiene que pedir permiso al hombre para todo.

and those who have been here a long time. The woman has to ask permission to the man for everything.

Emma describes men as providers of services but not involved in the upbringing of the children and the relationship to schools:

Por el machismo, no es cosa de ellos cuidar a los niños. “Ven [a la escuela] a buscar las notas.” “¡Ay, no!, ve tú.” “No, tú también tienes que estar.” Es difícil a un hombre latino. Son proveedores, no participantes. Hicieron el hijo y tú cuídalo. “Te doy dinero para que coman y tengan un techo.”

Because of machismo, it is not up to them to care for children. “Come [to the school] to receive the grades.” “Oh no, you go.” “No, you have to be there also.” It is difficult for a Latino man. They are providers but not participants. “They made the son, and you take care of him. “I give you money to eat and have a roof.”

Interestingly, the only participants naming “machismo” openly were these two facilitators.

Don¹² José, the only man present in the sessions, recognizes the hard work women endure and how he preferred to work in two jobs rather than to stay at home. Currently, he is retired.

La mujer, cuidar los niños, limpiar la casa, cocinar. Cuando llega [el hombre] se para a comer y ya. ... “Si quieres vamos a trabajar los dos,” me decía mi mujer. “No, mejor yo trabajo, tú te quedas en casa cuidando los niños” Tenemos tres hijos. ... Me dio

Women take care of children, clean house, and do the cooking. When he [the husband] arrives it is just to eat and that’s all. ... “If you want, we can both work,” my wife told me. “No, better I work and you stay at home taking care of the children.” We have three children. ... She gave

¹² Don/Doña is a title applied to men/women, preceding their first name, to express respect due to their age or their social position. They can be abbreviated using D. /Dña.

fuera para trabajar. Llegaba a las 2 [a.m.] y me iba a las 6 [a.m.].

me strength to work. I used to arrive [home] at 2 [am] and I'd leave again at 6 [am].

Nevertheless, Martina, another facilitator, expresses a more positive view of the changes in the relationships between men and women and their responsibility for the children:

Es muy importante que los tiempos han cambiado. Son tiempos y momentos diferentes de cuando D. José hablaba de su mujer. Ahora estamos despertando. Tenemos los mismos derechos. Somos responsables los dos. Antes [había] una perspectiva más machista.

It is very important that times have changed. These are different times and moments from those D. José talked about his wife. We are now waking up. We have the same rights. We are both responsible. Before [it used to be] a male perspective.

Manuela agrees and offers the example of her husband diapering her first daughter and how different it is in the new context of a city than it would be in a rural area.

Es cierto, antes ¿cuándo un hombre cambiaba la pañalera? ¡Se me hace tan bonito! Con mi primera niña, mi esposo estaba ¡tan contento! En un rancho, hasta se le quitó ser hombre. Le retraté [mientras le cambiaba los pañales] de tan satisfecho.

That's true. Before, when did a man change the diaper? To me, it is so nice! With my first daughter, my husband was so happy! On a ranch, he would lose his manhood. I took a picture of him [while he was changing diapers], he looked so satisfied.

My observations also reflect a much more nuanced perspective, and how some of the participants have already reached a greater equality within gender roles and are advancing in different degrees towards the co-responsibility of both father and mother in the upbringing and involvement in the education of their children. Manuela explains that even though she was available to take her daughter to the doctor, it is her husband who will do it: "*Ahora a la una*

[p.m.] se va a ir con la niña al doctor (...). Yo podía llegar y pasar por mi niña. No, no lo hice.”

(“Now at one [p.m.] he is going to go with my daughter to the doctor... I could go and pick my daughter up. No, I did not.” She feels proud of introducing a change in gender relations with her husband and that he is assuming responsibility in the upbringing of their children. Another participant, Ximena, also illustrates the strategy she uses to involve her husband in activities related to their children’s school:

Uno puede alentarlos pero si ellos no quieren... [expresa resignación] Yo trato, con las calificaciones de los niños, de agarrar la última cita cuando él ya está en casa. Si no quiere ir es otra cosa. Gracias a Dios, a esta horita sí. Pero hay que guiarlos, alentarlos.

You can encourage them but if they do not want to... [She expresses resignation]. When there is the delivery of the grades, I try to request the latest appointment when he is at home. If he does not want to go, that’s a different matter. Thank God, he goes. But you have to guide them and encourage them.

The most outstanding example is Sara when she shares how her husband cooperates with her in taking care of their children:

Mi esposo tiene dos trabajos, mañana y por la tarde. Muchas veces llega a la noche y ya los niños están dormidos. Se despiertan y “¡papi!, ¡papi!”, y papi ya se ha ido. No es fácil. Le digo, “descansa.” “No, me llevo mis niños al parque. Yo necesito estar también con ellos.” Yo [la madre] trabajo unas horas. Cuando él está en el trabajo yo los cuido [los niños], él llega y yo me voy. No los damos a cuidar [a otras personas]. Es responsabilidad de los dos. Él también quiere hacerlo

My husband has two jobs, morning and evening. Many times he arrives at night and the kids are already asleep. They wake up and, “daddy! daddy!”, And daddy has already gone. It's not easy. I say to him, “rest”. “No, I take my kids to the park. I also need to be with them.” I[mother] am working some hours. When he is at work, I take care of [the children]; he comes and I leave. We do not leave them to [someone else’s] care. It is the responsibility of both of us. He also wants to do

[alternarse en el cuidado de los niños.]

it [to alternate taking care of the children.]

Sara expresses the sensitivity of her husband towards his children. To have long working hours is not an excuse anymore to not be attentive to his children's well-being and allowing her wife to be the only one to be in charge of them.

Some of the female participants have already moved towards a more autonomous life such as learning to drive and getting small jobs to be more economically independent.

All of these examples illustrate small changes towards more egalitarian gender relations among Latino/a men and women of low socio-economic status and immigrant origin, especially concerning equal responsibilities towards children. For some of these women who start working and being more autonomous in their daily lives, this is also an opportunity to create new connections and break down the isolation that their status as immigrants and their life in an urban context entails.

Urban life: City, gangs, and stress.

All the participants live in a large, urban city, a situation that is striking for half of them who come from rural areas or small towns. Kappel and Daley (2004) describe well how the urban context is the environment that fashions people's lives; it determines options for transportation, often increases the time to commute, provides for particular job opportunities, and makes people feel the anonymity of not being important and known. In a big city, people spend more time in transit than being with friends, in contrast to what occurs in smaller communities where friends and family are nearby and distances are short. It leads to a more individualistic style of life and to isolation.

Esther, a facilitator, recognizes that one of the motivations for some parents to enroll in the program may be that they feel alone and want to meet other people: “*Se siente solo y quiere reunirse con esa gente, ver que hay ahí*” (“He or she feels alone and wants to gather with other people, to see what happens there.”) It is a way for them to escape from the anonymity of a big city. The coordinator of the program, Sophia, also states: “They are very isolated, don’t trust, this is why we want them to create their own social network.” One of the participants in the focus groups clearly states that she wanted to socialize with parents. “*Socializar con padres, que socialice con otros niños, informarme de qué está pasando a mi alrededor*” (“Socialize with parents that he [his son] socializes with other children, to be informed about what is happening around me.”) Another participant, Christine, shares that one of the reasons she does not visit the library regularly is that she needs to take the bus with her two-year-old child and she does not like that.

The big contrast with their prior life is highlighted in this account of Sara referring to how she learned from her family and community in the rural area in which she used to live:

[Contar] Historias de lo antes, lo hacíamos más cuando en el pueblo se iba la luz. Salíamos al patio contemplando las estrellas y contándonos historias. Es cuando hablábamos más unos con otros, antes. De donde soy es un pueblo y nos contaban historias y ahí pasábamos un buen rato.

We [told] more old stories when, in the village, the light was gone. We went to the patio to contemplate the stars and tell stories. Before, it is when we spoke more to each other. I am from a village and they told us stories and spent a great deal of time there.

This quote reflects also the importance of oral tradition and popular culture in her learning process.

The difference between rural and urban areas is quite universal and reflected in the participants' learning experience. José relates the difficulty he experienced learning English compared to those immigrants coming from the capital.

Si está uno en D.F. México, si viene con la secundaria, aunque no estudió inglés ya aprende en tres meses. Si viene del cerro, qué va a aprender. Yo fui a la escuela [en Middletown] y tenía mucho tiempo aprendiendo [el inglés] y venían de la capital y en tres meses ya hablaban inglés.

If one comes from D.F.¹³ in Mexico and has a secondary education, although he did not study English, he learns in three months. Coming from the hills, what is he going to learn? I went to school and had a hard time learning [English] and those from the capital in three months they already spoke English.

In fact, these quotes reveal as well the different access to education that they had in rural areas in Mexico. Emma reinforces this disparity when she says:

Estoy de padre mentor. La maestra dijo que los niños que vienen de la ciudad están más capacitados para aprender inglés que de pueblos. Aún ahora en México, la educación en zona rural es distinta que en zona urbana.

I am a parent mentor. The teacher said that children who come from the city are more able to learn English than those coming from small towns. Even now in Mexico, education in rural areas is different than in urban areas.

According to Sara, people coming from rural areas are more timid because of the difference they perceive of their upbringing and education.

The extremely cold weather in this Midwestern U.S. city, during half of the year, comes to aggravate the isolation, as Cecilia explains when she shares with the other participants the story she has written for her children during the session:

¹³ DF stands for Distrito Federal [Federal District]; it is the capital of México, much like DC is the capital of the US. In spoken Spanish it is referred to by its acronym: DF.

Estamos en un país con tanto frío y no queremos irnos pronto de este clima. Esta imagen [un trineo] representa la participación en actividades sin importar el clima. Yo en particular no salgo mucho con este clima. Quisiera cambiar, no tener tanto temor por el miedo que no se enfermen [los niños].

We are in a country that is so cold and we do not want to leave this climate soon. This image [sled] represents the participation in activities no matter what the weather is. I especially do not get out much in this weather. I would like to change, not having so much fear that they may get sick [the children.]

Emma, the facilitator, also recognizes the impact of the weather in the up-bringing of the children:

Los niños en esta ciudad casi siempre están encerrados por el clima (...) En México...un clima todo el año con el calorcito...la crianza es mucha la diferencia.

Children in this city are almost always inside because of the weather. In Mexico...with the warm weather all year round...parenting is much different.

They live in poor areas where gangs, violence, and security issues keep them and their children away from the street, staying in the security of their homes. They talked about security issues in one of the sessions I observed:

Cecilia: Nos invitaron a una fiesta infantil el año pasado. Cuando estábamos llegando a la fiestecita, estaban gangueros dándose de palazos y dieron a una joven que no estaba en el grupo. Nos llevamos tal susto que ni pudimos estar a gusto en la fiesta. Ningún lugar es seguro.

Cecilia: We were invited to a children's party last year. When we were arriving to the little party there were some gang members beating one another with blades. They hit a girl who was not in the group. We were so upset that we could not enjoy the party. No place is safe.

Christine: Yo fui al parque hace quince días. Estábamos ahí, de repente me dijo mi primita: "Corre, ya vienen los

Christine: I went to the park two weeks ago. While there, suddenly my cousin said: "Run, gang members are already coming." We started running to

gangueros.” Nos echamos a correr para la entrada y no venía un carrito bien chiquito deportivo e íbamos a la muerte, porque allí venían y no sabíamos qué hacer. Yo no sabía qué hacer. A veces uno no sabe cómo actuar. Pues me echo a correr como loca. Yo me asusté mucho y corrí, corrí. Se lo dije a mi tía y ella me decía. “No seas tonta, cuando veas eso Chris, tírate al suelo y tapa al niño.”

Martina: Cuando uno está en esas situaciones es un poquito difícil pensar. A veces vas a entrenamientos, pero cuando te pasa a ti es diferente.

Ximena: Una vez, con mi esposo, íbamos a casa, veníamos llegando del parque; vi a un hombre con una pistola y empezó a disparar. Mi esposo reaccionó rápido y dimos media vuelta. Yo tal vez me hubiera quedado parada.

the entrance and they were arriving with a small sport car. We risked dying, because they were arriving and we did not know what to do. I did not know what to do. Sometimes you do not know how to act. I ran like crazy. I got really scared and ran, ran. I told my aunt and she told me: “Chris don’t be silly, when you see this [situation], lie down, and cover the child.”

Martina: When you're in those situations is a little difficult to think. Sometimes you go to practices, but when it happens to you it's different.

Ximena: Once coming home from the park with my husband; I saw a man with a gun who started shooting. My husband reacted quickly and turned around. I might have been paralyzed.

Cecilia expresses that the burglary she suffered at home is an additional factor to isolate herself and her children, and to experience the insecurity of not knowing the rules of the country.

Una vez nos robaron en el apartamento. Me volví temerosa. No estoy en mi país, no conozco la situación, no abrir la puerta. Eso le hace a uno encerrarse.

Once we were robbed in the apartment. I became fearful. I am not in my country, I do not know the situation, do not open the door. That makes one become enclosed.

Eva, another of the participants, in the interview, shares with me how environmental violence is present in the education she wants to give to her children. She refers to a conversation with her teenage daughter, whom she alerts against the violence:

“Tienes que tener responsabilidad. Si yo te dejas así [haciendo lo que quieras], mira cuánta violencia hay en Middletown. Los chicos son pandilleros, drogadictos, gangueros. No quiero esa vida para ti. Yo trato de educarte lo mejor, por eso voy a esos programas, para que seas mejor que nosotros.”

“You have to take responsibility. If I allow you [to do what you want], look at how much violence there is in Middletown. The boys are gang members and drug addicts. I do not want that life for you. I try to educate you the best, this is why I go to those programs, so that you become better than us.”

Economic hardship and different kinds of problems make their life stressful and exhausting. Emma shares: *“Todo son problemas: no tenemos trabajo, la economía, no tenemos para la renta.”* (“All are problems: we have no work, the economy, we have no [money] for the rent.”) Martina adds: *“Cuando no tenemos dinero nos ponemos más agresivos.”* (“When we have no money, we become more aggressive.”) In the focus group, Cecilia recognizes: *“Las cosas no salen como las planeamos. Los fines de semana son estresantes, no sólo los niños, también el esposo.”* (“Things do not go as we planned. Weekends are stressful, not only children, also the husband.”)

All these factors influence the children negatively, as Emma explains:

Los factores externos también afectan a los niños. No somos psicólogas, pero el instinto te hace decir: ¿por qué ellos [los niños] van a pagar [por] mis frustraciones? ... Les afecta... la preocupación, la actitud que tenemos.

External factors also affect children. We are not psychologists, but instinctively we say: why should [children] suffer for my frustrations? ... They are affected by ...our concerns, by the attitude we have.

During the observations, some participants recognize that when they are stressed they lose their temper more easily, shout at their children and say things that later they regret and seek forgiveness.

These life experiences portray the isolation they live and affect their self-perception and confidence, as well as the search for help, a change in their role as parents. As Esther, a facilitator, illustrates: *“El simple hecho de que asistan al programa, que se muestren interesados, rellenen una solicitud, que sepan van a estar tantas semanas, es indicativo de alguien que (...) trae una pregunta.”* ("The simple act of attending the program, of showing interest in it, completing an application, knowing that they will have to attend many weeks' shows that (...) they have a questioning.")

As we have seen, the isolation theme appears quite strong in the comments of the experience of the different parents, using terms such as separation, loneliness, boredom, shyness, fears, lack of language skills and awareness of other cultural settings with different codes of conduct that they are not familiar with. All these feelings reinforce this sense of isolation and create a disorienting dilemma.

In the next section, I am going to develop further the theme of space, specifically creating a safe learning space as a space of transformation where the parents bring their experience of life to build and reconstruct meaning through their relationships with others.

Creating a Safe Learning Space

When parents arrived at the training sessions, they brought with them the expectation to learn and the experience of different types of disorienting dilemmas¹⁴ that some of them clearly expressed. From this *uncertainty* they sought *validation* to their experience, and their life experiences became central to the process of *critical reflection* and dialogue, engaging in learning through relationships.

Uncertainty and validation

The participants in the program are exposed to different types of events that challenge them. For some of them, it is still immigration and the uncertainty about the new cultural context that is challenging; they do not know what to do or how to educate their children, if whether what they are doing is correct or not. To others, the responsibility of parenting is the event that produces perplexity. Christine, for example, feels that she does not have a “handbook” about how to raise and educate her child. For others, Sara, for example, faces the decision to start the school early and she experiences great anxiety at being separated so early from her child. For still others, it is the fact of perceiving more or less consciously that there might be a problem with the child and they need to seek for help: “she doesn’t talk,” says one of the participants referring to a four year old granddaughter. These different dilemmas produce in the participants an uncertainty which leads them to enroll in the program.

When they arrive to the sessions, according to Emma, a facilitator, they have their thoughts about what it means to be parents with the responsibility to educate their children, and they need to be affirmed of the value of what they are doing and their role as parents. Martina also recognizes:

¹⁴ Drawing on Mezirow (1978), Brookfield, (1987), and Cranton (2006), as I will examine, I use “disorienting dilemma” as a challenging life experience – positive or negative- that triggers participants’ decision to enroll into the program.

Las veo con dudas, con muchas cuestiones, no tenemos un manual sobre cómo ser papá. [Piensan] "Me van a ayudar con esta duda que tengo con mi hijo." Los veo con ganas de ser ayudados.

I see them with doubts, with many issues. We do not have a manual about how to be a parent. [They think] "I will be helped with this question I have with my son." I see them wanting to be helped.

In the focus group, Ximena shares that she wanted to learn to be a "better parent." Cecilia in her interview said: "*No se nos enseña a ser papás. Estando sola, seguía por el sentido común*" ("We are not taught to be parents. Being alone, I followed my common sense. ") These attempts to be confirmed in their parental role are a way of seeking validation of their meaning structure (Kappel & Doley, 2004), that is to say, about their belief system, values, and assumptions about what it means to be parents in the sociocultural, geographical, and economic context where they are living. In this sense, their life experience is a basis for their reflection during the sessions.

Mezirow (1978) defines "dilemmas of adult life" as "those that cannot be resolved by the usual way we handle problems that is, by simply learning more about them or learning how to cope with them more effectively" (p. 101). It is what we can call a life crisis and in spite of the fact that they are commonplace, they challenge our assumptions and demand a change in our lives. Taylor (1997) defines it as an "acute internal/external personal crisis (p. 45)." Both definitions seem to focus on negative and more or less dramatic events such as a death of a significant relationship, unemployment, divorce, etc.

However, we also see a broadening in the understanding of a disorienting dilemma that triggers the transformation process. Brookfield (1987) includes among these events also positive experiences and feelings that lead to new reflections, insights, and perspectives. Clark talks about "integrating circumstances" that are "indefinite periods in which the persons consciously or

unconsciously searches (*sic*) for something which is missing in their life; when they find this missing peace, the transformation process is catalyzed” (1991a, 1993 as cited in Taylor, 1997, p. 45). Pope found the trigger event “more like an unfolding evolution rather than a response to a crisis” (1996, as cited in Taylor, 1997, p. 45). Cranton (2006) states that any encounter that produces an unexpected or contradictory point of view can stimulate a critical reflection. This encounter “can come through a book, a discussion with a friend, an unusual or tragic event, a change in work context, or a sudden insight.” Findings confirm this broader perspective where parents experience not necessarily a negative event, but a challenging one that leads them to a process of self and critical reflection.

Life experience as central to the participants’ critical reflection

For the participants in the program, the learning sessions have been organized around content areas concerning child development, education, health, and advocacy. It’s through dialogue and the sharing of the life experience that a process of learning has been engaged and to some extent transformative perspectives have been initiated.

I observed, in various sessions that videos, case studies, documentation, group teams, and plays elicited the connection with family background and individual experience which enabled the unfolding of the struggles, pains, thoughts, fears, hopes, and values with which they are living. Norma shares: “Mi familia no estaba muy unida... Yo no quiero eso para mis hijos.” (“My family was not united... I don’t want that for my children.”)

The importance of sharing their lives and seeing that they have common problems strengthen them to be more active in advocating for their children, as Martina recognizes:

Se sienten más poderosos, más confiados, para abogar por sus niños. Hay otras personas que tienen los mismos problemas

They feel more powerful, more confident, to advocate for their children. There are others who have the same problems as I

que yo. Tenemos similitudes, nos ayudamos. No están solos, otros papás pasan por lo mismo; no están solos.

have. We have similarities, we help each other. They are not alone, other parents are going through the same thing; they are not alone.

Sara recognizes that the program has helped her more than another one she completed in the past, and the reason she gives is because of the sharing of problems with others:

[Me ayudó escuchar] la opinión de los demás, ver que los otros también tienen problemas. A veces nos negamos a ver que tenemos problemas, y sí, sí hay.

[It helped me to hear] the opinion of others, to see that others also have problems. Sometimes we refuse to see that we have problems, and yes, we do have.

Eva shares the significance of the program and recognizes the meaningfulness of learning from others' experience:

Ha significado mucho porque hemos aprendido de otras personas... personas con problemas más grandes que nosotros. Nos podemos ayudar, no económicamente, pero moralmente...Al finalizar el curso sigo tratando a esas personas, las sigo tratando por ejemplo, Don José nos encontramos, nos saludamos, platicamos. Uno al levantarse, ver una sonrisa, levanta el ánimo. Hay problemas en la casa pero tiene que levantar el ánimo por sus hijos. Yo soy una de esas personas que no me gusta demostrar los problemas, los callo y estando con mis hijos se me olvidan y me pongo a colorear. Trato de ser fuerte.

It meant a lot because we've learned from other people... people with bigger problems than ours. We can help each other, not financially, but morally...After completing the course I keep the relationship with these people, for example, Don José, we meet, we greet, and we talk. Getting up, to see a smile, is uplifting. There are problems at home but you have to lift your spirits for your children. I am one of these people who do not like to show my problems, I keep silent, and being with my children I forget my problems and I just start coloring. I try to be strong.

She specifies how the experiences of other parents gave her new insights into her own role as mother:

[Aprendí] A convivir con personas, que no importa la raza ni la edad. Los mayores han pasado por lo que nosotros apenas estamos pasando. Nos dan sus tips. Pe. El Sr. José nos dio su testimonio...el trabajo le quitaba el tiempo. Se dio cuenta que estaba perdiendo a sus hijos. Convivió más con ellos.... Uno no lo aprende en la calle sino en esos programas. Manuela, su modo de hablar la hacía ser una persona fuerte, castigadora con sus hijos; pero no, era dulce, linda con sus hijos. Uno por la apariencia juzga. Nos lo ha enseñado el programa, que se aprende de los mismos padres, no de las personas que están estudiadas. Las experiencias de los padres me han ayudado [a ver] que uno tiene que actuar de manera diferente con los hijos.

[I learned] to live with people regardless of race or age. The elders have gone through what we are just passing. They give us their tips, e.g. Mr. José gave his testimony... the job was absorbing all his time. He realized that he was losing his children. He devoted more time to them.... One does not learn this in the street, but in these programs. Manuela's way of speaking made her to be a strong person, punitive with their children; but no, she was sweet, nice with her children. One judges by appearance. We learned from the program, that we learn from parents themselves, not from people who have studied. The experiences of parents have helped me [to see] that you have to act differently with the children.

She is pointing to the importance of experiential learning and how this experiential learning is built through interaction and dialogue with others, who do not necessarily have knowledge from formal education, but the knowledge of life. This insight aligns with popular education, the methodology the facilitators use during the sessions and that Martina explains as follows:

Educación popular es la aprendida de la vida, de la experiencia. Habla de nuestra experiencia, no de que leí veinte mil libros y vengo a dar este

Popular education is learned from life experience. It speaks of our experience, it is not that I read twenty thousand books and I come to give this course, but it is to

curso, sino intercambio de nuestra experiencia: cómo ha funcionado para mí y qué puedo tomar de los otros. Enseñarnos unos a otros lo que sabemos con el tiempo y con nuestra experiencia.

share our experience: how it has worked for me and what I take from others. It is to teach one another what we know over time and through our experience.

Choules (2007) remembers how popular education's origin is found in the lived experience of working in Latin America with groups who have no access to resources and power and that in the context of the Western countries the most common terminology is critical pedagogy. Both stem from experiential learning and create transformative perspectives that are intended to lead to social change.

Martina recognizes the evolution some participants have made. She says, referring to a person who used to talk a lot and disrupt the others:

Sí, al principio, teníamos personas que no están respetando los turnos. Tenemos personas que con el paso del tiempo, de leer los acuerdos para una mejor comunicación y llevarnos mejor, ya todo fue más calmado. [Hubo] cambios en papás que ya no hablaban tanto, más positiva, que ya empezaron a compartir cosas más nutridas, más positivas con [sic] su vida.

Yes, at first, we had people who did not respect the speaking time of the others. We had people who got calmer over time, because of reading the agreements for better communication and getting along better. [There were] changes in parents who no longer spoke so much, being more positive, and who began to share more nourished, more positive things with their life.

The sharing of their life experience triggers their critical reflection what is necessary to produce transformative learning (Mezirow, 1978, 1990, 1991; Cranton, 2006; Taylor, 1997; Brookfield, 1987; Mezirow & Taylor, 2009). Nevertheless, when referring to “critical” reflection, Mezirow has been criticized by an over-rational approach and future empirical studies

have included in this understanding of “critical reflection” that leads to transformative learning, intuition, other ways of knowing, and empathy (Taylor, 1997). Even more, Taylor in his study about the learning process of intercultural competency and perspective transformation provided findings indicating that “a perspective transformation could occur in some individuals without critical reflection, such that ‘meaning structures may become altered outside the participants’ focal awareness” (1993, as cited in Taylor, 1997, p. 48). This “nonreflective orientation” functions without questioning their values and assumptions but responds “trusting their reaction of direct apprehension, sensory understanding, and thoughtful action to a particular challenge” (Taylor, 1997, p. 48). This expansion of transformative learning increases the possibilities of this process to occur especially in cases where age, educational level or very introverted and insecure personalities do not make it easy and it particularly applies to some of the participants. Their testimonies also shed light on the importance of the relationships to promote transformative learning.

Relationships

One of the major challenges that the program faces is to keep the attention of parents in order for them to continue participating in the training. The coordinator, Sophia, recognizes that: “Once a parent comes twice [he/she] is hooked. The issue is to make parents come, to make the commitment. Most parents are hungry to be with other parents.... Some parents want more because they are engaged. They have the formula: they learn from each other. Using popular education is that: all we have is our expertise and we need to share it.” Martina says:

Fue muy bonito ver cómo el grupo creció. Empezamos con 8 y terminamos con 14. Como facilitadora fue increíble ver cómo fue creciendo el grupo.

It was very nice to see how the group grew. We started with eight and finished with 14. As facilitator, I was amazed to see how the group grew.

Robertson (1996) illustrates through some examples the image of an exemplary adult educator that he summarizes in a helping relationship with the learner, based on trust, care, and dialogue.

The participants in the interviews highlighted how they perceived the facilitators and the relationships they were able to build as well as the climate they created of a safe space, confidence, deep listening, fun, and enjoyment. José says: “*Me gustó cómo enseñaron...Le enseñaban uno a escuchar... y que todo se quedaba allí, que puede uno hablar; de otro modo, ¿cómo se va uno a desenvolver? Me gustaba como hablaban las maestras.*” (“I liked how they taught ... they taught one to listen ... and everything was kept there, so that one can speak; otherwise, how is one to handle it? I liked how the teachers spoke.”)

Sara also shares about the impact facilitators had on helping the group to think differently and to integrate other perspectives. She refers to a role play among three characters that the facilitators played: María Tomorrow, Norma Negative, and Patricia Positive reflecting the three possible attitudes concerning the upbringing of the children:

Nos hacen pensar diferente. Cuando ellas actuaban, no queremos darnos cuenta, es la realidad, lo que uno hace. Eso lo vivimos y no lo queremos ver. Es lo que estamos pasando. Yo invité a personas: “no, es que es muy temprano; a esa hora mi niña está dormida”. No queremos ver a los lados, qué oportunidades hay para ayudar a los niños. Esto nos hace ver, mi punto de vista es que puedo ver las cosas de manera distinta.

They help us to think differently. When they acted out things, we did not want to realize it but it is reality, it is what one does. We live that and we do not want to see. It is what we are going through. I invited people: “No, it is very early; at that time my child is asleep.” We do not want to see the sides, what opportunities there are to help children. This makes us see, my view is that I see things differently.

Christine talks about the facilitators and the help she received from them:

Todas las señoras son una bendición. Ellas dan su tiempo, dejando sus casas, para darlo

All the ladies are a blessing. They give their time, leaving their homes to give to others who are in

para otros que están más necesitados, para podernos enseñar. Todas me ayudaron, en lo personal a mí. Yo pienso que porque me veían desorientada. Yo me sentía en confianza, eran unas personas muy abiertas a diferentes opiniones. Yo miré que muchas de ellas ya tenían más hijos. Yo era mi primer bebé. Yo no sabía muchas cosas, pero ellas tenían mucha experiencia y me daban algún consejo.

need, to teach us. All of them helped me, personally. I think because I looked disoriented. I felt confident. They were very open to different opinions. I saw that many of them already had more children. For me it was my first baby. I did not know many things, but they had a lot of experience and gave me some advice.

Rebecca recognizes: “*Me sentía contenta porque me sentía en confianza. Las muchachas que nos dieron el curso nos dieron esa confianza.*” (“I was happy because I felt confident. The girls who presented the course gave us confidence.”) Eva defines one of the facilitators as someone who: “*Brinda mucha confianza, amistad, comprensiva*” (“[She] gives a lot of confidence, friendship, understanding”), and the other as one person who: “*Le gusta ayudar.*” (“[She] likes to help.”) Cecilia describes the facilitators as mothers with the gift to teach: “*esas mamás eran las líderes del programa.... No tendrán tantos años pero tienen el don o la vocación [para enseñar].... Yo las conocía por padre mentor*” (“Those moms were the leaders of the program They did not have many years but they do have the gift or vocation [to teach]. I knew them as a parent mentor.”)

Some of these testimonies point to the profile of the facilitators. They were also mothers with older children, with a good knowledge about the school system through the program of Parent Mentors. In my observations, I saw how they also shared from their common identity as immigrant Latinos. These characteristics made them especially able to understand mothers’ experiences and to share their own experience, accordingly, with the popular education understanding that breaks hierarchies among learners and teachers/facilitators and promotes

learning and a validation of meanings that emerges from the sharing of all of them. Esther, a facilitator, recognizes:

El programa por la estructura, filosofía y lo que buscamos los facilitadores estar promoviendo, conocido como educación popular, trata de fortalecer al hecho de que cada persona ya trae mucho conocimiento, ya sea por su familia, tradiciones, la propia educación. Creo que la reflexión muy pronta que se empieza a dar: “Ah, yo ya sabía esto, yo ya practicaba esto, yo ya me parecía que esto era importante.” Como se promueve que compartan las cosas que ya están funcionando en sus casas, [padres] empiezan a ver el fortalecimiento: “yo ya tengo un conocimiento que puedo compartir con otros y mis compañeros traen otros conocimientos que me parecen muy prácticos, muy buenos. El simple hecho de estar compartiéndolos ya nos está nutriendo.”

The program structure, philosophy and what as facilitators we want to be promoting, known as popular education, seeks to strengthen the fact that every person brings a lot of knowledge, either by his family, traditions, or education itself. I think the very early reflection that begins to give: “Ah, I knew this, I was already practicing this, I looked and this was important.” Since we foster their sharing things that are already working at home, [parents] begin to see the strengthening: “I already have a knowledge that I can share with others and my colleagues bring other skills that seem to me very practical, very good. The simple act of sharing them is already nourishing us.”

And she continues expanding on the understanding that facilitators have about how knowledge is produced. It is something produced by everyone:

La educación no es de arriba para abajo, no es algo que uno es el experto; no hay nadie que tenga la propiedad del conocimiento. El conocimiento está por todos lados; hay que compartirlo y quitarle el sentido de propiedad privada piramidal de los sistemas educativos, y compartir...el conocimiento que ya está inserto en cada familia.

Education is not up and down, it is not something that one is the expert on; no one has the ownership of knowledge. Knowledge is everywhere; we must share it and take away the sense of private ownership of the pyramidal educational systems, and share the knowledge that is already embedded in each family.

Ludwig (1994) confirms that effective adult educators are “empathetic, caring” (as cited in Taylor, 1997, p. 50). Pierce (1986) adds that they are authentic, sincere, and demonstrate a high degree of integrity (as cited in Taylor, 1997, p. 50). Ideal learning conditions promote a sense of safety, openness, and trust (Matusicky, 1982, Ludwig, 1994, Pierce, 1986 as cited in Taylor, 1997, p. 50). Adult educators are able to expand a person’s perspective, promoting self-awareness among the participants, watching for the emotional, experiential and cognitive elements of the learning process (Pierce, 1986, as cited in Taylor, p. 51).

In addition to the positive role of the facilitators, the participants emphasize the relationships created among them. This is particularly important because, as Goldstein asserts, relational factors aid in the co-construction of the intellect, and “affect, volition, and relationships are as critical as cognitive factors in the learning process” (1999, as cited in Kappel & Daley, 2004, p. 92). I argue that this affect and volition explains why they keep attending the program and brings new parents to it after the first session.

In the focus group, Ximena shares that the course has been “increíble,” (“amazing”) and she explains:

*Uno viene con ganas de aprender,
pero cuando uno se va de aquí
¡tanto que se lleva! no sólo de lo
que nos enseñan, sino de lo que
han compartido las
personas... Todas venimos,
compartimos, aprendimos unas de
las otras.*

One comes willing to learn, but
when you leave, you take so much
with you! Not only from what has
been taught, but from what people
have shared... We all came, shared
and learned from each other.

Norma shares a sense of completion and pride: “*Todas terminamos, nadie nos rendimos.*” (“We all finished, no one gave up.”) Teresa stresses the emotional aspects: “*Rompí con la rutina de mi vida, me comencé a reír, a llorar, todo.*” (“I broke the routine of my life, I started laughing,

crying, everything.") Cecilia focuses on the communication and group dynamics: "*La importancia de la comunicación. Tuvimos la oportunidad de trabajar en equipo, es importante y, a veces, es lo más difícil.*" ("[I highlight] the importance of communication. We had the opportunity to work in groups that is important and, at times, is the most difficult.") Christine advocates for another course: "*Nos llevamos tan bien, que ya queremos otro.*" ("We get along so well that we want another.") In the interview, she says:

Los compañeros... me divertía mucho con ellos. Cada uno tenía sus ideas. Cada uno venimos de diferentes partes del mundo. ...Todo es un aprendizaje, y los compañeros cada quien tenía sus opiniones.

Fellow classmates...I really enjoyed them. Each one had their ideas. Each came from different parts of the world... Everything is a learning experience, and the companions each had their own views.

Rebecca emphasizes the affective learning she lived:

Salí de mi rutina. Me sirvió mucho, me divertí mucho. Llegué a mi casa contenta de lo que habíamos vivido. Sacábamos cosas que traíamos o cosas que no sabía. Allí aprendí muchas cosas.

I got out of my routine. It helped me a lot, I had fun. I arrived home glad about what we had lived. We shared things we brought or things I did not know. There, I learned a lot of things.

Eva, in the interview, also explains the great value that the program had because of the feeling of equality, respect and freedom to talk openly:

Me he sentido fascinada. Todas las personas nos tratamos como adultos. Lloramos, reímos, nos contamos nuestros problemas, nadie se burlaba de nadie. No porque eras esto u otro, no porque eres de una raza o de otra, todos fuimos iguales. Fue un ambiente bien hermoso que no se puede ver en otro lugar.

I have been fascinated. Everyone treated us as adults. We cried, we laughed, we shared our problems, and no one made fun of anyone. Regardless of who we were one race or another, we were all equal. It was a rather beautiful environment that cannot be seen elsewhere.

Cecilia expresses how she feels regarding the climate of freedom to express her own feelings:

A mí me gusta participar. Me gusta ser escuchada. Uno podía expresar lo que sentía. A las demás mamás no las conocía, sólo a Eva y Ximena. Uno podía compartir lo que uno sentía.

I like to participate. I like to be heard. One could express how he or she felt. I did not know other mothers, only Eva and Ximena. You could share what you felt.

Cochrane (1981) states that “it is in and through the disclosure of one’s self to another that meaning develops and is enhanced” (as cited in Kappel & Daley, 2004, p. 85), and through this dialogue the validation of meaning is possible, as I mentioned.

Through my observations, I also witnessed how these nurturing and helping relationships among both facilitators and group members created a climate of a safe space, confidence, deep listening, fun, and enjoyment. Plays, such as bingo, memories of family experiences, celebrations of feasts, such as Mother’s Day, and raffles contributed to it.

This learning environment makes it possible to promote a space where they are able to raise their own “voice” and express who they are, what they think, how they understand their role as parents and how they practice it (Dirkx, 2012), and by this process, make meaning and build new meanings from this experience. To give “voice” is particularly important in the case study, as they are mainly a group of women, who are silenced in U.S. society.

This voice is particularly powerful in those participants who took the risk to disclose themselves and to allow me, as observer and interviewer, to share in the experience they were living and the type of transformation in which they were engaged.

Transformation: New Perceptions as Parents and Early Childhood Education

Before entering into the experience of two of the participants, I want to offer a general presentation of the new perceptions of parents about their role. From the curriculum of the ten sessions, it appears that parents most important roles are: (1) to be the first teachers of their children, and (2) to be the leaders and advocates of their children's rights.

According to my observations, the first role is well developed through the awareness of parents about the developmental stages of their children and the importance of talking and reading, socio-emotional well-being, and doing activities to prepare for kindergarten that are worked on in different sessions.

Esther, one facilitator, explains to me in the interview, the meaning of being the first teachers for their children:

Es la columna vertebral del programa. ... Busca romper un paradigma muy fuerte: la escuela es la que va a enseñar. "Ya que vayan a la escuela, ya aprenderán." El maestro es el que enseña. "¡Yo!, ¿qué puedo enseñar? ¡Yo!, ¿qué voy a enseñar yo?, ni siquiera tengo educación. Yo no tengo más que primer grado, yo no pude ir a la escuela, mis padres tampoco eran educados." Es romper el paradigma, es decir, que el conocimiento es propiedad privada y esa propiedad privada la tiene el colegio y solo el que ha asistido al colegio lo tiene. Todo ser humano ha aprendido a salir adelante y en ese salir adelante ha desarrollado una serie de habilidades que le conviene enseñar a sus hijos. ... Si además de eso ellos van

It is the backbone of the program. ...It seeks to break a strong paradigm: that the school is going to be the one to teach. "When they go to school, they will learn." The teacher is the one who teaches. "Me! What can I teach? Me! What am I going to teach if I am not educated? I only studied first grade! I could not go to school, and my parents were not educated." It is to break the paradigm that knowledge is a private property and that private property belongs only to school and to those who have attended school. Every human being has learned to go forward and this involves teaching your child skills that you have learned...Even though they are going to learn from others at school, it's good, but there are

a ir a aprender otras en la escuela, qué bueno, pero de por sí ya hay muchas cosas que le puedo enseñar y debo transmitir. Es empezar a romper un paradigma de pasividad de yo me tengo que esperar a que me den la educación. ... Vincula la aspiración eterna de un padre de que un hijo viva mejor y romper el paradigma de que alguien tiene el conocimiento, si no que yo tengo mi conocimiento. Y a quién más le va a importar mis hijos que a mí. ... “El hecho de que tú hablas un poco más que tus hijos, ya tienes más vocabulario, que tal que se lo vas transmitiendo.” [Es] reconocer que ellos tienen lenguaje, aprendizaje.

already many things that I can also teach and convey [to them]. It is starting to break a paradigm of passivity whereby I have to wait until I receive an education.... It links the eternal aspiration of a father that [his] son lives better and breaks the paradigm that someone [different] has the knowledge, [instead of] I have my knowledge. And who is going to be more concerned for my children than I am? The fact that you are able to speak a bit more than your children, and have more vocabulary, enables you to communicate [that knowledge.] [It is to] recognize that they [parents] have language and learning.

Concerning the second role as leaders of their homes and advocates of their children's rights, I will analyze these two aspects separately. From my observations, participants recognize their role as leaders of their home, but, as a group of women, they question the division of gender and claim a common responsibility as parents for both father and mother. Concerning being “advocates” of their children's rights, according to my observations, they have internalized that “if they do not fight for their children” no one else will do it for them, because they are the ones who love their children the most. The program assumes that if parents are better informed of the public educational system and their rights and responsibilities, they will be able to participate if they receive the tools to do it. Indeed they become aware of the power of information, they discuss their rights and responsibilities and they get informed about the process of complaint and

solution. They also receive a directory of resources that gives them the opportunity to link with services of the community and to seek assistance. To become advocates, however, as some mothers have witnessed, is a long process that started by being volunteers and later “parents’ mentors.” In this sense, the program creates the foundation for parents without experience of advocating to be aware of this possibility that can improve the future of their children.

From a holistic understanding of transformative learning that deemphasizes the rational aspect to focus on the emotional aspects of learning through relationships (Kappel & Daley, 2004), we have seen throughout this chapter, that the participants have experienced some elements of the process of transformative learning: dilemma, critical reflection, and dialogue. To deepen analyzing this process, I will focus on the specific transformative processes in two of the participants: Christine and Sara, both of whom assert from self-doubt and fear to confidence. Their processes include not only dilemma and critical-reflection interwoven with dialogue, but also the actions they take.

From self-doubt as mother to self-confidence, understanding, and determination

Christine is a twenty-five year old mother, from Mexican origin. She is the mother of a young boy, two year sold. As a child, when her mother migrated to the United States, she lived with her grandparents of whom she has very good memories:

*Me cuidaron muy bien, lo
más que ellos podían, y le
doy gracias a Dios por
haberme dejado en buenas
manos*

I was looked after very well,
as much as they could, and I
thank God for keeping me in
good hands.

Her father died when she was ten years old and at that time her mother went back to Mexico. She migrated to the United States when she was 17 years old, with her mother¹⁵ and other relatives when her mother was diagnosed with diabetes and they had no means to provide for her health in her place of origin. She works cleaning offices from 5 a.m. to 9 a.m. and sometimes she works some additional hours in the afternoons. Despite trying to learn English she does not speak it yet. “*Yo no aprendí y no se me pega el lenguaje.*” (“I did not learn it; the language did not stick with me.”)

She studied secondary education and she used to get good grades and read a lot, as she tells:

Mi abuelito leía mucho y cuando ya no veía me ponía a leer a mí. Yo llevaba buenos grados en la escuela, porque ellos me exigían. Si como niña lo único que hacía era estudiar, “pues hazlo bien, todo lo que hagas en tu vida, hazlo bien.” Yo le echaba muchas ganas y trataba de ser lo mejor que podía. ... Yo estudié [en México] hasta la secundaria, la de un año para los mayores, le llaman “casa de cultura,” que les enseñan en un año a los adultos para que puedan trabajar.... Empecé a trabajar a los 14 años porque mi abuelita era viejita y se lastimó sus rodillas y ya no podía ir a planchar.

My grandfather read a lot and when he could not see any more he made me read [to him]. I had good grades in school, because they [my grandparents] were very demanding with me. If as a child all I did was study, “then do it right, all you do in life, do it right.” I really made an effort and I tried to be the best that I could.... I studied up to high school [in Mexico], the one for adults that is one year long, they call it “home of culture.” They teach adults in one year so they can work ... I started working at age 14 because my grandmother was an old woman and she hurt her knee and could no longer iron.

¹⁵Her parents divorced and her mother emigrated to the U.S. When her father got sick, her mother went back to Mexico.

However, even though she has finished her secondary studies she perceives herself as not well prepared, not educated enough, and this assumption has a strong influence on how she experiences her role as mother.

She identifies herself as “a new mother.” She feels that she is disoriented, and that she does not know how to raise her child. She makes the comparison to Mexico where the upbringing is very different:

En México uno lo crían diferente. Uno quiere castigar: “ahora te vas a parar ahí, no vas a moverte.” Nunca he pensado en golpearle o no darle de comer, eso es algo extremo. Es un niño de dos años y a veces no entiende. Su razonamiento no es como el mío. Yo quería que él me hiciera caso y si no le iba a castigar, por ejemplo, la televisión [no viéndola].

In Mexico one is raised differently. One wants to punish: “now you are going to stand there, you are not going to move.” I’ve never thought of hitting or not feeding, that’s a bit extreme. It is a two-year-old child and sometimes he does not understand. His reasoning is not like mine. I wanted him to do what I wanted, if not I would punish him, for example, television [not watching it].

She used to be very strict with him, and her expectations were exaggerated about how the child should act.

Yo quería que hiciera cosas grandes: “dime las vocales, si no me las dices...” quería jalarle las orejas.

I wanted him to do great things: “Name the vowels, if you do not tell me...” I wanted to pull his ears.

She refers to how in different moments, she thinks she did not make a good decision by having a baby: “*Creo que no tuve en buen tiempo a mi bebé...Hubiera esperado un poco.*” (“I don’t think that I had my baby at the right time... I wish I had waited a little.”) She assumes that her lack of knowledge was the basis of a wrong decision: “*Uno no está bien, no tiene buenas ideas, cuando no te instruyes puedes... tener malas decisiones.*” (“One is not right, does not have

good ideas, when you haven't educated yourself... you can make bad decisions.") She has internalized the extended cultural assumption that only those with credentials and education are people who know more and better. The experience of life is devalued, sometimes denigrated by themselves or others.

She suffers from an illness that diminishes her energy that is needed to take care of her child:

"Me duele el cuerpo. No, tengo que salir de esto, porque si no me voy a morir" ... Yo estaba mal...yo quería dormir... "Yo tengo mi hijo chiquito, tengo que salir por él." Mi esposo, a veces me dice: "Christine tú eres huevona." Ojalá Dios no te dé una enfermedad como yo tengo, porque no aguantas.'

"My body hurts. No, I have to get out of this, otherwise I'm going to die" ... I was sick... I wanted to sleep ... "I have my tiny son; I have to overcome it for him." My husband sometimes tells me: "Christine you are lazy." "May God not give you a disease like I have, because you cannot stand it."

The economic hardship she suffers influences her character as well as her relationship with her son:

A los 17 años me vine y aquí es más difícil... [En México] si tú trabajas tienes para comer, para vestir....Aquí tienes que pagar renta, tus obligaciones son más, y es más estresante tu vida porque tienes que sacar para la renta; la comida hay instituciones donde puedes pedirla. Te vuelves más enojón, más huraño, no confías en la gente y te encierras en un círculo... Uno tiene tantos problemas que lo refleja en sus hijos.... Así es como había vivido los últimos 9 años, hasta este cursito que me cambió.

When I was 17 years-old, I came and here it is more difficult ... [In Mexico] if you work you have enough to eat, to clothe yourself ... Here, you have to pay rent, you have more obligations and your life is more stressful because you have to save money for rent; for food there are institutions where you can ask for assistance. You become more irritable and more aloof, you do not trust people and you get closed up in a small circle... You have so many problems that you take them out on your children. ... That's how I lived the last nine years, until this short course that changed me.

When I asked her to summarize what the program meant to her, she said:

Ese curso es excelente para cambiar uno de persona. ... Yo, ¡ya he cambiado!...en la manera de pensar, de actuar, de sentir. Todo.

This course is excellent for changing a person. ... I've already changed! ... In the way of thinking, acting, feeling. Everything.

Christine was very touched by the first session of the program, when it referred to the role of parents as first teachers of their children, and the home, the first school; the facilitators use the popular saying: “*De tal palo tal astilla.*” (“Like father, like son.”) This saying means that children will be like their parents, even though, in the philosophy of the program, parents have the possibility of making things better for their children. The first insight she got is that she wanted her son to have better educational opportunities than she had:

Yo no pude estudiar más, tal vez no soy muy educada. No quiero que mi hijo sea “de tal palo tal astilla,” sino no será muy educado. Quiero que sea mejor, para que haya una diferencia, porque estamos en otro tiempo, ya no es como antes. Si mi hijo no es educado, igual se pierde.

I could not study more; maybe I'm not very educated. I do not want my son to be “like father like son,” but rather to be educated. I want him to be better, so that there is a difference, because we are in another time, it's not like before. If my child is not educated, he can get lost.

Her reflection throughout the program was that: “*Para que mi hijo sea mejor yo tengo que cambiar.*” (“In order for my son to be better I have to change.”) She incorporates a vision for the future, the improvement of her child, with implications in the present, her own parenting style. The need she experiences to change her parenting style is possible because of all the sharing throughout the sessions, which confirms the social nature of transformative learning, as this quotation illustrates:

A perspective is transformed by the resolution of a dilemma through exposure to alternative perspectives and participation in critical discourse with others to verify one's new reality. Transformative learning is not a private affair involving information processing; it is interactive and intersubjective from start to finish." (Mezirow, 1990, p. 364)

One of the most important mechanisms to transform the initial perspectives is "perspective taking," that is to say, taking the perspective of others (Mezirow, 1978, p. 104). The perspectives Christine is taking are those of the program. First, she is aware that she needs to take care of her wellness in order to provide her child with the well-being he also needs in his educational environment: "*Yo tengo que estar bien para que mi hijo esté bien.*" ("I have to be well in order for my child to be well.")

Second, she is enacting being the "first teacher of her child" which for her now entails devoting quality time to him, reading to him in a more interactive way, adjusting her own language: "*Aprendí a hablar en su idioma, en el "idioma" que a él le gusta*" ("I learned to speak his language, the "language" that he prefers.") She also devotes more time to playing with her child, to understanding his rhythm; and she has made a personal commitment towards herself: to follow her own instruction through reading. Therefore she is able to engage in a form of self-directed learning.

Third, she is developing a sense of discipline that is more empathetic, more patient. She expresses:

A veces uno se estanca, o se clava en una idea. Yo le decía a mi mamá: "yo vengo del trabajo bien cansada. Mira que estoy enferma y llego y... mira el niño hizo puros males"... En el programa me he sentido aliviada. Cálmate, hay modos. No vas a querer un niño como en el ejército: a la orden.

Sometimes one gets stuck, or he or she is stuck on an idea. I said to my mother: "I'm coming from work really tired. Look, I'm sick and I arrive and... see the child did bad things"... In the program I felt relieved. Calm down, there are ways. You're not going to want a child to be like in the army: to be ordered around.

She completely internalizes the image of the small shoes of a baby that the facilitators brought to the sessions to indicate how important it is for parents to put themselves in the shoes of the baby, to empathize with him/her.

El programa me enseñó que mi bebé es mi bebé y yo tengo que darle su tiempo. Yo [necesito] entender que él es un bebé y yo no le puedo presionar. Una vez llevaron los zapatitos del bebé y, [nos dijeron] “ponte en su lugar.” Desde ahí se quedó en mi cabeza de que no le voy a presionar más de lo que él no puede, porque es una exageración. Ha significado mucho porque controlé mi temperamento. Yo antes tenía ideas muy erróneas... Ahora, no. Mi hijo tiene su tiempo, tengo que esperar, tengo que ser paciente, por amor a él. Yo no quiero que él me tenga miedo.

The program taught me that my baby is my baby and I have to give him time. I [need to] understand that he is a baby and I cannot push him. Once they brought the baby booties and [we were told] “put yourself in his place.” From there it stayed in my head that I will not push him beyond his limits, because it is too much. It has meant a lot to me because I can now control my temper. I used to have very wrong ideas ... Not now. My son needs his time, and I have to wait and be patient for love of him. I do not want him to be afraid of me.

Her child noticed these changes in her way of acting and is approaching her more than he used to do before:

El niño no se acercaba a mí porque me tenía miedo. Ahora se me acerca y me dice: “¡Ay mami, te quiero mucho!” Antes solo era con su abuelita. Ahora él se acerca mucho y me dice:” mami yo te quiero mucho, y yo le digo: yo más.” No tenía quien me explicara. Uno ahora vive en otros tiempos.

The child did not approach me because he was afraid of me. Now he approaches me and says: “Oh Mommy, I love you!” Before it was only with his grandmother. Now he is very close to me and says “mommy I love you,” and I say to him: “I love you more.” I had no one to explain this to me. We now live in different times.

She also sees her change of perspective in the way she relates to others. Before she was more aggressive, now she has shifted into being more tolerant, respectful, and peaceful. She

gives an example related to how she would react in case her child would suffer from being the victim of bullying at the school:

Si a mi hijo le hicieran bullying, primeramente iría a la maestra; no encararía a la mamá. Si la maestra no hace nada, [iría] a la principal (sic.) Si la principal no hace nada [iría] a gente más alta. ...Que uno lo crie con amor y otro lo lastime, no puede ser. No hay modo de que lo permitas. En otros tiempos, hubiera ido a ver a la mujer y le hubiera dicho: “o calmas a tu hijo o tú o yo nos arreglamos,” aunque fuera más grande que yo; pero ¿qué ejemplo le hubiera dado a mi hijo? Violencia más violencia.

If my son suffered from bullying, first I would go to the teacher; I would not face the mother. If the teacher wouldn't do anything, [I would go to] the principal. If the principal wouldn't do anything [I would go] to a higher authority. If I bring him up with love I cannot tolerate that others hurt him. There is no way to allow this. In the past, I would have faced the woman and I would have said to her: “Try to calm your child down or I will fight with you,” even if she was bigger than I am; but what example would I be giving to my son? Violence and more violence.

She feels relieved to now understand how to act and she has changed her self-perception.

Before she used to feel depressed, now she feels very good:

Yo ahora me siento muy bien. Voy a clases de natación y le enseñé [a su hijo] Y él aprendió. Ya sabe nadar algo. Ya sirvo para algo.

Now, I feel great. I'm going to swimming lessons and I taught him [her son] and he learned. He already knows how to swim a little. Now I'm useful for something.

She has developed a sense of self-confidence and recognizes her own self-worth in her new role as a mother. She's able to teach her son, not only to swim, but also the values she learned in the program.

A ser tolerante, a ser respetuosa con las personas.... Eso le enseñó a mi hijo.... Eso aprendí. Todos somos diferentes. Y a compartir y convivir: Yo antes me encerraba en el mundo de mi mamá, mi tía, mis primos, mi tío, mi bebé y mi

To be tolerant, to be respectful to people... That is what I teach my child... This is what I learned. We are all different. And to share and live together: Before I was enclosed in the world of my mom, my aunt, my cousins, my uncle,

esposo. Ahora me he abierto. Ahora este grupo de personas [se refiere a los participantes en el programa] está aceptando lo que digo: pues vamos a hablar.

my baby, and my husband. Now I am open. Now this group of people [referring to the participants in the program] is accepting what I say, so let's talk.

She discovers her own power, her ability to speak and to experience that she is heard by others and this insight makes her decide to be more involved, actively participating in the sessions and speaking out.

According to Mezirow (1978), the change of meaning perspective can lead to a developmental process of maturity that helps people integrate more open, permeable, and better justified perspectives, providing criteria to make more informed judgments, developing a sense of agency or control over our own life and giving a clearer meaning and sense of direction to our lives (see also Cranton, 2006).

Christine recognizes that: *“En el programa me enseñaron que hay que mirar al frente... Yo tengo esa ansiedad de que sí se puede.”* (“The program taught me that you have to look forward. I have this anxiety that ‘yes you can.’”) For her, the future is to see her son at the university, and she knows this is the direction she wants to take. She defined the steps she should follow to provide her son with the education she wants for him:

Que tome clases extras de matemáticas, inglés, irle enseñando lo más que se pueda, con clases extras, que hay en las escuelas públicas, gratis, para que aprendan más. Y ahorrar dinero, para que aunque sea a centavito le pueda llegar. En eso me puedo ir ayudando [a ahorrar]. Un niño puede ser muy inteligente, pero si no hay dinero, ¡pues dónde! Las universidades cuestan dinero.

To take extra courses in math, in English; teaching him as much as possible, with extra classes from public schools, free, in order to learn more. And to save money, so that even if it is penny by penny I can pay for it. That I can do it to help me [to save]. A child may be very intelligent, but if there is no money, then what! Universities cost money.

In sum, Christine's process reflects what Mezirow (1997) states:

A significant personal transformation involving subjective reframing, that is, transforming one's own frame of reference, often occurs in response to a disorienting dilemma through a three part process: critical reflection on one's assumptions, discourse to validate the critically reflective insight, and action. The action depends upon the nature of the dilemma. (p. 60.)

Christine's depression, illness, and new cultural and socioeconomic context stress her and enclose her in a narrow circle of the most significant family relationships. These dilemmas lead her to assume that she is ill-prepared to live her identity as a "new mother." She thinks she has no knowledge because she has not studied enough, she does not understand her child's needs and reactions, and she overemphasizes discipline that is understood as following mother's instructions. Being in the program, through the dialogue with other participants and facilitators, she starts to re-examine these assumptions. She displays readiness to change by engaging in this dialogue with others and with herself during the course.

A new Christine emerges with a change in her self-perception. She is more confident about herself as a mother and feels more knowledgeable about the developing stages of her child and his needs. She is more powerful, experiencing that she has a voice that is heard by others and has the power to change herself and her children:

*Yo soy mi primera ayuda...si
tienes un problema tienes que
ayudarte a tí misma. Tomé las
riendas, sino te hundes.*

I am my first helper... if you have
a problem you have to help
yourself. I took the reins; if not,
you sink.

She feels relieved, happy, more relaxed, and demonstrates a new social and emotional well-being towards herself. Moved by the love she experiences for her child, the strongest motivation for her change, she exercises new parenting skills as I mentioned.

She recognizes that this is a process that it is not only ten weeks (the length of the sessions), but that she needs to be sustained by keeping connected with others and places where she can ask for help, so that she feels she is not alone.

Uno dice, "Ah son diez semanitas, eso no es nada." No, no, no, si escuchamos, tenerlo adentro, ponerlo en práctica. Yo lo voy a practicar con mi hijo lo más que pueda, y cuando no pueda, pedir ayuda, porque no estoy sola. Hay muchos lugares en que me pueden ayudar.

You say, "Ah they are ten short weeks, that's nothing." No, no, no, if we listen, internalize it, and put it into practice. I'm going to practice with my son as much as I can, and when I cannot I'm going to ask for help because I am not alone. There are many places where they can help me.

This need to sustain the changes sheds light on the most common nature of transformation that is more often a function of time or a developmental process rather than sudden (Cranton, 2006). Even the "trigger events" or dilemmas usually extend over a period of time more than being a peak moment (Taylor, 2000a, 2000b, as cited in Cranton, 2006), as it is in the case of Christine. This understanding of transformation demands from the organization that implements the program to create pathways and systematic gateways with other programs, services, institutions, communities, to maintain connectedness and transformation.

Table five presents Christine's experience of transformation. It shows a process from her first thoughts and the meaning ascribed to her personal experience, overpassing her initial disorienting dilemmas¹⁶, to a new meaning as mother. This leads her to new actions.

¹⁶ Scholars give different meanings to "disorienting dilemma", as I mentioned in page 66. In this case study, I use "disorienting dilemma" as a challenging life experience (see footnote 14).

Table 5: Christine’s Experience of Transformation

Original Meaning to Her Personal Experience as Mother	Disorienting Dilemmas or Challenging Life Experiences	New Meaning through Critical Reflection and Dialogue	Actions
<p>I am not well. I have no energy to be with my child.</p> <p>I am not educated. I do not know how to educate my child.</p>	<p>Depression</p> <p>Illness</p> <p>New cultural and socio-economical context due to immigration.</p> <p>isolation</p>	<p>If I take into account my well-being I will be able to help my child.</p> <p>I am able to learn and I want to continue educating myself.</p>	<p>Developing sense of power and confidence. Personal wellness and trust in her ability to teach her child; and she does it.</p> <p>Self-directed learning</p>
<p>I don’t understand my two- year-old son.</p>		<p>I can understand my child by empathizing with him: “poniéndome en sus zapatos” (“putting myself in his shoes,”) and being her first teacher.</p>	<p>Changing her relationship to her child: From a more authoritarian to a more authoritative relationship. Patience giving time of “quality”.</p>
			<p>Clear future expectations: the will to help his child to arrive at university and steps for doing it.</p>

Adapted from Kappel and Daley (2004).

From fear to early childhood education to confidence

Sara is a thirty-five years old woman from a rural Mexican origin. She is the mother of a nine-year-old girl and a two-year-old boy. She studied secondary education and migrated to the U.S. 14 years ago. She used to be a housewife who took care of her children. She also volunteered at the school, when her daughter was smaller, an experience which gave her better knowledge about the school system:

Yo me quedaba a ver como trabajaba la maestra. Si uno no va no se entera. Algunas maestras les gritan cosas bien feas a los niños.

I stayed to see how the teacher was working. If you do not go, you do not know. Some teachers yell ugly things at the children.

Recently, she finished her studies in cosmetology; she is now working some hours.

Therefore, she's alternating with her husband taking care of their children, specially the little one who does not go to any day-care or early childhood program.

The perspective of bringing her child to an external childhood program produced in her a great anxiety related to separation and fear about the reaction of her child. In "Creating Futures," parents were in the sessions of the program, while in a separate room, some persons were taking care of the children. This space for children was in fact an early childhood laboratory program that helped them to socialize and to develop new skills and English language vocabulary.

During the sessions, some parents shared the external pressures they had experienced from some relatives or acquaintances who blamed them for bringing small children to an educational program. This is a cultural assumption that some parents hold about early childhood education. It is based upon two different beliefs. The first one is that a mother who does not personally take care of her small children dismisses or neglects them. The second is that children will have time to learn when they start kindergarten. The coordinator of the program, Sophia, recognizes that some parents "don't understand how important it is to send children to school."

When I interviewed Sara about the significance of the program, in her view, the first thing she shared with me was related to her three-year-old son.

El niño ha perdido el miedo para ir a la escuela. Ya está como listo. "Yo ya no tengo miedo," dice. "Yo estoy contento, porque yo ya no voy a llorar."

The child has lost the fear of going to school. It seems that he is already prepared. "I do not have fear," he says. "I'm happy because I'm not going to cry."

She recognizes the positive impact of the program:

Asistir a estos programas nos ayuda como personas, a que uno puede pensar diferente, ver la vida de otra manera. Vemos sólo el centro pero no los lados.

To attend these programs helps us. It helps as people: that we may think differently, and see life differently. We see only the center but not other sides.

In this quotation she talks about an expansion of perspective that has been possible because of the dialogue with the other group members, as I mentioned, and her own self-reflection. One unexpected insight she shares in the interview with me refers to the exchange that occurred in the second session about their family memories and family life background. After that sharing, she started to analyze her own childhood and to realize that she did not enjoy it because she started assuming responsibilities as an adult:

Después yo empecé a analizar lo que nos preguntaron y mi infancia. No disfruté tanto de lo que fue mi niñez. Yo fui la segunda [hija] y había siete, cinco más después de mí. Mi mamá nos hacía obligación [cuidar de los hermanos más pequeños]. “Yo estoy ocupada, tú carga el niño.” Yo no disfruté mi niñez. Era una responsabilidad que no es mi responsabilidad. Ahora yo, no me gustaría que me hija dijera: ‘no disfruté de mi niñez, mi mamá no estuvo conmigo, no me leyó un cuento.’ Yo quiero que mi hija tenga recuerdos bonitos de mí....Mi mamá, cuando yo me casé y me fui de la casa, ella lloró. Mi mamá me dijo llorando: “¡Ay hija, yo sé que tú, tal vez te hice responsable de algo que no era tu responsabilidad!” Lo reconoció. Yo desde los diez años empecé a

Then I started to think about what they had asked and about my childhood. I did not enjoy so much my childhood. I was the second [daughter] and we were seven, five more after me. My mom made it an obligation [to take care of our younger siblings]. ‘I am busy, you carry the child.’ I did not enjoy my childhood. It was a responsibility that is not my responsibility. Now, I would not want my daughter to say: “I did not enjoy my childhood. My mom was not with me. She did not read me a story.” I want my daughter to have good memories of me.... My mom cried when I got married and left home. My mom told me crying: “Oh daughter, I know that maybe I made you responsible for something that was not your responsibility!” She recognized it. Me, since I was ten-years old I

hacer tortillas, a cocinar, a cargar a mis hermanos. Si ella tenía un bebé chiquito, me decía “pásate con el otro.” Todo eso era algo que uno lo sabe, pero cuando uno va allí y lo escucha, ya uno va a ser diferente. No va a pasar lo que mi casa.

started making tortillas, cooking, carrying my siblings. If she had a tiny baby, she said to me, “take the other.” All this was something one knows, but when you go there and listen to it, one will be different. It will not happen like that in my home.

An experience of life that is well known, suddenly takes a deeper level of awareness. It is what Freire (1990) calls “critical consciousness” and Mezirow “meaning perspective” (Mezirow, 1978) that leads to a personal liberation and change¹⁷. In the case of Sara, her decision is that she wants a different childhood for her daughter, that she can enjoy it:

A mi hija le digo: “Tú disfruta tu niñez, vive tu niñez, no quieras ser grande”. Cuando dice: “quiero usar tacones” [le digo] Tú eres niña, disfruta tu niñez, usa zapatos de niña. Todo eso va a llegar”.

I say to my daughter: “Enjoy your childhood, live your childhood, do not want to be grown up.” When she says: “I want to wear heels” [I tell her] “You are a girl, enjoy your childhood, wear girls’ shoes. All that will come.”

She states that the program has helped her to reflect on the well-being of her family and to improve it: “A mí me ha ayudado mucho a estar mejor como familia.” (“To me, it has helped me to be better as a family.”) She has involved her husband: “De todo lo que aprendimos allí platicaba con mi esposo. Ya ves que podemos mejorar.” (“I talked with my husband about all we learned. You see that we can improve.”) She has better communication with her husband who now respects her authority towards the children.

¹⁷For Freire (1990) the development of conscientization or critical awareness is a prerequisite for personal and social change. In the case of Mezirow (1978), social change depends on the issue to which meaning perspective is referred.

Cuando le decía [a mi hija]: “no vamos a ir al parque hoy,” y él [mi marido] le decía: “sí vamos a ir, hija.” Ella decía: “Mira mi papá sí me va a llevar.” [Yo] le decía: “Eso no está bien, si yo digo algo tienes que respetarme para que ella aprenda que si digo algo eso se va a hacer.” ”Es el día que descanso y puedo estar con ellos” [respondía su marido]. “Entonces me lo dices a mí, y yo se lo digo a ella. Explicarle yo, no que tú me quites la autoridad.” Hablamos más, nos entendemos más. Ahora mi esposo dice: “se va a hacer lo que tú mamá dice.”

When I told [my daughter]: “We will not go to the park today,” and he [my husband] said to her: “Yeah, we are going to go, daughter.” She said: “You see, my dad is going to take me.” [I] said to him: “That’s not right, if I say something you have to respect me in order for her to learn that if I say something that is the way it is going to be.” “It is the day that I can rest and be with them” [her husband answered]. “Then you tell me, and I will tell her. I have to explain that to her, instead of you taking away my authority.” We talk more, we understand each other more. Now my husband says: “We are going to do what your mom says.”

Concerning her children, she invests more time in learning activities with them:

Pasar un buen rato con ellos jugando con sus juguetes, leyendo. Antes no era mucho lo que hacía, pero ahora sé que les puede ayudar en el futuro. Si ellos se desenvuelven en la lectura se van a interesar por aprender. Porque si yo no los motivo a que lean, pues ellos pienso van perdiendo el interés de la escuela.

To have a good time with them playing with their toys, reading. Before, I did not do that so much, but now I know that it can help them in the future. If they thrive in reading they will be interested in learning. If I do not motivate them to read, I think they will lose their interest in school.

She also has changed her relationship with them, displaying great respect and a listening attitude towards the child’s own ways of thinking and decisions:

Ir allá [al programa] me ha ayudado a cómo hablar con ellos, y levantarles el ánimo... Siempre darles la confianza, escucharles, qué piensan ellos y apoyarles en lo que vayan decidiendo. Ellos

To go there [to the program] it has helped me to know how to talk to them and lift their spirits ... To always give them confidence, listen to them, what they think, and to support them in the

pueden pensar de una manera y uno de otra. Aprender a escucharlos.

decisions they are making. They may think one way or another. To learn to listen to [the children].

Referring to the context of the U.S., she is aware that there is a great difference between Mexico and the U.S. and she realizes that here school readiness starts in early childhood. She knows the difference between those children who have gone to early childhood education programs and those who have not: “Cuando un niño no ha ido [a programas pre-escolares], el niño no sabe agarrar una crayola.” (“When a child has not gone [to prekindergarten programs], the child cannot grasp a pencil.”)

Esther, one of the facilitators, stresses the cultural change concerning the early childhood education:

La importancia de la existencia de pre-escolar va siendo más notoria en un determinado tipo de civilizaciones, en un entorno más urbano, contemporáneo distinto a una forma más tradicional y de otro tipo de tradiciones donde la enseñanza se da muy fuertemente en la familia porque hay un contexto de una familia extendida de diferentes edades. Familias más cercanas donde la educación, para que los niños se preparen para la vida, se están dando allí. Pero eso no es cierto en este contexto de estas familias que migraron, que están muy aisladas, a veces solo la pareja, o solo la madre sola, no hay grandes relaciones sociales. Se hace más abismal que ese niño aprenda cosas, más agregado con otra cultura, el lenguaje, el nuevo lenguaje o segundo lenguaje, la exigencia del nivel de lectura a determinada edad. Exigencias de

The importance of the existence of pre-school is more significant in a certain type of civilization, in a contemporary urban setting, more than in a traditional form and other [cultural] traditions where education is very central to the family, an extended family of all ages. Families are closer and education for life is taking place there. But that's not true in this context of these migrant families, who are very isolated, sometimes just a couple, or just the mother alone, where there are not a lot of social relations. It becomes more burdensome that child may learn things, even more aggregated to another culture, the language, the new language or second language, and a reading level requirement of a certain age. These demands are specific to this country.

este país en específico.

The transformation of the mother is also fueled by the impact of the socialization of the child in the day-care service, provided simultaneously by the program, and his own transformation. In the focus group, Cecilia, one of the participants, referring to the simultaneous learning settings (for parents and children) offered by the program, says:

Es un doble aprendizaje. Los niños se capacitan con personas que ya tienen la experiencia. Y nosotros, como papás, estamos aprendiendo a valorarnos, a reconocer todo lo que somos capaces de hacer por nosotros y por nuestros hijos.

It is double learning. Children are trained with people who already have experience. And we as parents are learning to value ourselves, to recognize all that we are capable of doing for ourselves and for our children.

Sara, during the interview, displays this double experience in the sense that the loss of her son's fears towards the school has translated into a greater confidence in her towards the school.

“Sí mami, yo no tengo miedo porque ya tuve a mis maestras. Sí mami, yo tengo que ir a la escuela, es importante...” [Habla] como si fuera una persona grande. A su tío le pregunta: “¿Tú por qué no vas a la escuela? Porque ya soy grande. No tío, es importante. Yo tengo que ir porque tengo que aprender.” Yo me siento más segura de mi hijo porque sé que él perdió el miedo (a la escuela)... Ya no me preocupo tanto de que vaya a la escuela. Muchos me han dicho: “Está bien chiquito, no lo metas” porque va a cumplir tres años. Pero yo siento que le va a ayudar más.

“Yes mom, I am not afraid anymore, because I had my teachers. Yes Mommy, I have to go to school, it is important” ... [He talks] like an old person. He asks his uncle: “Why do you not go to school?” “Because I'm grown up.” “No uncle, it's important. I have to go because I have to learn.” I feel more confident about my son because I know he has lost the fear (to go to school) ... I do not worry so much about him going to school. Many have told me: “He is really little, don't send him to school,” because he is three years old. But I feel that it will help him more.

The move from fear to confidence in mother and child has made it possible for Sara to make the decision to enroll her son in an early childhood Head Start program, after the “Creating Futures” program ends.

She also talks about the following up and the need to be supported by more programs like this one. Her motivation is for the sake of the whole family:

Si hubiera más programas yo me tomaría el tiempo para ir, siempre que sea para el bien de todos, porque esto incluye toda la familia.

If there were more programs I would take the time to go, it is for the good of all, because it includes the whole family.

In table six we can see Sara’s experience of transformation.

Table 6: Sara’s Experience of Transformation

Original Meaning of her Personal Experience about ECE	Disorienting Dilemma or Challenging Life Experience	New Meaning through Critical Reflection and Dialogue	Actions
My child is afraid of going to an Early Childhood (EC) program	The fear to enroll her child in an EC program	My child has lost the fear to be in an EC program	Enrollment in an EC program of Head Start
My child and I will suffer from the separation.			Both mother and child feel confident

Adapted from Kappel & Daley (2004).

In sum, the findings illustrate that the migration of Latino parents to the U.S. entails the separation of their families and the experience of being uprooted from their language and their culture. As a group of women (except for one man), mostly stay-at-home mothers taking care of the house and their children, they experience few or no relationships other than their family,

depending on their husbands for their basic needs and feeling challenged -some of them- by the new cultural context of the U.S. to develop more autonomous and egalitarian relationships with their husbands. They live in a big city, characterized by anonymity and large distances, in contrast to the rural areas, from which more than half of them come, and where there is a great deal of interaction with others. They live in neighborhoods where gangs, violence, and security issues keep them and their children away from the street. Economic hardship also makes their life stressful. This context depicts a picture of isolation that their enrollment in the program breaks down by offering them a safe learning space where they are able to reflect upon their uncertainties about their parental role. The sharing of their problems and experiences fosters their learning and self-reflection. This dialogue is made possible because of the nurturing and helping relationships among both the participants and the educators, leading to a process of transformation that is exemplified by the experience of two of the mothers.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Findings show how parents' context is brought to the sessions which provided a particular confident and safe space of learning which led to a transformation of their perceptions about their role as parents and their understanding of early childhood education. These transformations were illustrated in more depth focusing on two of the mothers. In this chapter, I am going to analyze the importance of context for the learning experience that is creating common challenges to participants; later I will analyze the centrality of life experience; then, the role of educators in promoting learning through emotions; and finally, the transformation as elements of a process that are completely imbricated and interwoven.

Importance of the Context: Common Challenges

I argued earlier that isolation is a metaphor of the contextual experience of participants. I understand by context, the sociocultural and personal factors (see Taylor, 1997) that participants bring to the learning environment, nurturing their learning experience. The isolation theme, in the case of parents, emerges throughout the program, without being named explicitly as "isolation" as I explained in chapter IV. Isolation is experienced through personal and sociocultural factors such as being immigrants and mostly housewives, the lack of knowledge of English language and cultural codes, and life in an urban city where insecurity, gangs, and stress keep them and their children enclosed in their homes.

Findings have illustrated that, in a different cultural context from which they were raised the U.S., except for one person¹⁸- parents experience the need to better understand their role and

¹⁸ She is a young single mother who has been educated in their family cultural values from immigrant parents of Mexican origin.

what they have to do to foster their children's development and education according to the new context they have chosen to live in. This situation connects with what Jacobson (1996) expresses about the transition towards new ways of understanding and acting: "Because a new culture takes them outside familiar meaning systems, individuals... find themselves in situations where familiar ways of interpreting and acting are not reliable, yet others' ways of interpreting and acting are not fully accessible" (p. 16).

The new cultural context, in fact, is challenging the meaning they ascribe to their parenting role and some of their parenting practices, which is expressed during their participation in the program and the search for being "better parents." During the program, parents realize their different cultural understanding of discipline, early childhood education, and expectations for and relationship to the school system.

Parent participants express that one of the most striking aspects of the program was to learn how to treat their children and to develop the empathy to put themselves in their children's shoes. These changes were also possible because of a new cognitive understanding of the stages of development of children. The new understanding and practice of a positive discipline increases their loving relationship to their child, as one of the effects that the American Academy of Pediatrics identifies with an effective discipline (n.d., as cited in Kretchmar-Hendricks, 2005). Nevertheless, parents' changes are not uniform: they range from continuity in an authoritative parenting style and positive discipline; to an improvement being more patient, having better management of their negative emotions, and a more peaceful resolution of conflicts; to a completely new way of acting shifting from an authoritarian style to an authoritative parenting style. An authoritarian parenting style is characterized by a very detached, demanding, and less warm relationship with children, whereas authoritative parenting style refers to positive control

and active reinforcement of children by parents (Baumrind, 1971). Parent's changes depend on different features such as their family background (positive experience or reaction to negative experience led them to a more authoritative style by their own); and self-learning through involvement in schools or in different programs that have brought about these changes little by little.

According to the literature review, Latino children's preschool attendance is the lowest in the U.S. "Between 2009 and 2011, 63 percent of Latino children didn't attend preschool compared with 50 percent of non-Hispanic white children" (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013, p. 15). Parent participants enrolling in the program have already overcome most of the barriers others parents perceive in the participation to these type of programs which want to involve them in the early education of their children. Some parents express the pressures they have received from other family members or friends who perceive these programs as a waste of time for parents and not worthwhile for children who attend the day-care. Beyond their initial positive disposition towards early childhood education (ECE), demonstrated by their presence in the program, other negative feelings such as fear –as the example one of the participants illustrated in the findings- are still present concerning ECE. The stance parents hold towards early childhood education is modified by several factors. The first one is the knowledge of the developmental stages of children that leads them to recognize the need to start teaching their children as soon as they are born. The second one is the fact of seeing the changes their own children have experienced in the two and a half months of the sessions that take parents give great value to day-care services. The findings have illustrated the inner process undergone by one of the mothers that leads her to decide to enroll her child in an early childhood program.

Concerning expectations and relationships to the school system, respect is one of the most important cultural values that parents embody. When asked about their expectations from school and teachers, they highlighted that they expected teachers to treat their children well. In turn, they teach their children to respect teachers and other children. In the program, they learnt about their rights and obligations as parents and the importance of advocating for their children's rights. In this sense, findings show that, even though becoming advocates is a long-term process, they are ready to challenge the school if it does not respect their children's rights. This awareness links to a more critical and participatory understanding of parental involvement (see: Olivos, Ochoa, & Jiménez-Castellanos, 2011).

Beside sociocultural factors, their personal histories particularly related to gender also influenced their parenting practices. While some facilitators see mothers and women dominated by "machismo," needing to ask for permission to participate in the program and doing outreach activities, another facilitator and I, mainly through the observations, see a more nuanced perspective. Some women initiate the first steps towards a greater level of autonomy, such as learning to drive or starting to work, and shared responsibility in the upbringing of children, involving their husbands in taking care of their children. These new perspectives are coherent with the majority views, among the Latino population, of greater equality among couple, where both share work and help take care of children (78 percent), opposite to 18 percent who support traditional arrangements where the man is the main financial provider and the wife takes care of the house and the children exclusively, according to a Pew Research Center study (2014).

Findings contribute to the adult learning literature that emphasizes the greater importance of context to understanding the learning experience of adults, as a critical factor in the process of transformative learning (Taylor, 1997; Kappel & Daley, 2004). The case study also contributes

to the recognition of the structural dimensions of the social context to which Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) refer:

The importance of context is not just that it is interactive with one's learning. There are structural dimensions to our social context, often unseen and unacknowledged, that subtly affects learning. This aspect of context recognizes that our society has become highly multicultural and diverse, and that political and economic conditions often shape the learning experience. ... We are beginning to recognize that it is important to know the backgrounds and experiences of our learners not only as individual learners but also as members of social and culturally constructed groups such as women and men; poor, middle-class, and rich; black, white, and brown. (pp. 430-431))

In this case study, participants identify themselves as belonging to the same cultural group which is reinforced by a culturally sensitive curriculum based upon the respect of their values, language, and worldviews, and the use of culturally relevant resources. Parents share their experiences and problems that are recognized by the group as common to all of them. The progressive knowledge of their family background, style of life, understanding and practices of their parenting and gender roles are particularly salient, as some of the examples I mentioned illustrate, and contribute to their learning experience.

In sum, the sociocultural and personal factors that participants bring as context to the learning experience foster their transformative learning creating new meanings about their parenting role and the importance of early childhood education. The creation of new meanings links to the sharing of life experience as I will analyze in the next section.

“Get Ahead on Life”: The Centrality of Life Experience

This study has illustrated how life experience is central to the sharing and to the participants' recognition of the “learning” they have acquired. It is through the stories of life they offer each other that they recognize a learning experience has occurred, as we have seen in some of the quotations in Chapter IV, “which further supports the premise that transformative learning

is a socially grounded rather than a solitary activity” (Taylor, 1997, as cited in Kappel and Daley, 2004, p. 86).

However, the understanding of the experience of life as a factor of the learning process in adult learners differs in the literature review. According to Kolb’s experiential learning model, learning begins and ends with experience. This approach is criticized by Jacobson, as remaining “an internal individual process” (1984, as cited in Jacobson, 1996, p. 21). Jarvis expands Kolb’s work and sees experience as foundational for learning: “all learning begins with experience,” even though he recognizes that experience has the “potential” to produce learning, but not all experiences translate into learning (1987a, 1987b, Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Miller and Boud emphasize that learning “can only occur if the experience of the learner is engaged at some level” (1996, as cited in Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 226).

Following an approach based upon the “situated nature” of experience in learning, Bateson (1994) uses the image of the “double helix,” meaning that “we continually recycle our past experiences.” She believes that we “encounter familiar issues within an unfamiliar environment” such as “examining our life experiences through the framework of other cultures can provide powerful learning experiences” and encourage “spiral learning” (1994, as cited in Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 227). This is what findings illustrate in this case through the change in gender roles and how some mothers are gaining greater autonomy and fathers are willing to be involved in the upbringing and the education of their children.

Usher, Bryant, and Johnston (1997) also follow an approach of situated and contextual nature of experience. Nevertheless, they differ from Jarvis, who despite recognizing experience as a contextual frame from learning, focuses on an “individualized self” who reflects on his/her experience. Usher, Bryant, and Johnston see the self as “a culturally and historically variable

category” and view experience as “something to be read or interpreted... with no final, definitive meaning” (as cited in Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 228). In the case study, through the program, participants recognized that their experience as parents is valuable. They felt empowered to break from the paradigm that only those with high educational credentials are able to educate their children. They acknowledged that their language, their belief system, their family values, their strength and courage to cross a border, and to raise a family, are rich assets to convey to their children, giving them the opportunity of being bilingual, and feeling proud of their cultural heritage.

The group of parents was diverse in age and number of years in the U.S., parenting experience, and knowledge of the school system. This intragroup diversity brought depth and richness to the sharing of their experience. However, the self-disclosure entails a risk: the risk to talk, to express their own views, ways of acting, and to expose oneself to the critiques, ridicule, and incomprehension of others. It is through the interaction of the participants and the sharing of their life experiences that participants recognized they have learned the most. This process connects with the social constructivist view of the construction of knowledge that it “posits that knowledge is ‘constructed when individuals engage socially in talk and activity about shared problems or tasks’” (Driver, Asoka, Leach, Mortimer & Scott (1994) as cited in Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 262). It is also coherent with Mezirow’s transformative learning approach focused upon individual and social construction of meaning (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 263). From a Freirean perspective, I argue that it is an exercise of naming the world (1990), that is to say, sharing “common problems” and parental experience among the participants enhances a new understanding and ways of acting towards their own children. This enhancement has been possible, in large part, because of the role of educators, as I will analyze in the next section.

The Role of Educators: Linking Emotions and Learning

The findings illustrate how the role of educators and the interaction among participants have built a space where relationships became the pathway to learn and to be allowed to express and live strong positive emotions such as, feeling safe, confident, secure, happy, amused, interested, and proud.

Facilitators were able to promote these strong positive emotions that kept the participants interceded in pursuing the training. In addition, they used to start the sessions with a question that connected with parents' past or present family experience and the feelings they had about the topic. This process dynamic helped some parents to express their emotions openly, whereas others used their body language. The role of emotions that the facilitators used as an important learning resource has been underlined by scholars. Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) point to the powerful role of emotions in adult learning and the interrelationship between learning and emotion. Jarvis suggests that "emotions can have a considerable effect on the way we think, on motivation and on beliefs, attitudes and values (2006, as cited in Dirkx, 2008, p. 11). Some scholars expand the rational and cognitive emphasis of Mezirow (1991) and recognize emotions as an alternative way of knowing and the "centrality of emotional processes in the expansion of consciousness and integration of personality, key dynamics of their view of transformative learning" (Boyd, 1991; Boyd & Myers, 1998; Dirkx 2001, 2006 as cited in Dirkx, 2008).

In addition, Chapter IV illustrates that the role of the educators breaks down traditional asymmetrical relationships of power between teachers and students based upon the knowledge the former hold against the latter (Freire, 1990).

Beyond the role of educators, findings emphasize the learning process encouraged by the interaction among group members. These findings illustrate the popular education principle that knowledge, in this case about parenting practices and educational systems, can be produced by parents themselves (Freire, 1990), and their “voice” can be heard, as I mentioned (see: Dirkx, 2012).

In sum, we see in this case study that educators use emotions as a primordial way of promoting alternative ways of knowing leading to transformation as I will analyze in the next section.

Transformation

The findings illustrate through in-depth analysis of two of the participants, Christine and Sara, the transformation in their assumptions about their parenting role and the early childhood education. It is a change in their perceptions, in one of the participants, about her self-as-mother that gives new meaning to her role and a sense of power about how to educate her child. This is particularly important because as Deslandes and Bertrand (2005) state, “parents need to understand their roles because that understanding identifies the activities that they believe necessary and part of their responsibilities as parents” (p. 165). In the second participant, the change of perceptions relates to her understanding about the early childhood education that she does not see as frightening anymore.

Both focus on the “individual consciousness” (Freire, 1990), in what seems to back Mezirow’s statement that (1990) “we must begin with individual perspective transformations before social transformations can succeed” (p. 363) and give reason to his critics about the emphasis on individual over social change (Welton, 1995, as cited in Gunnlaugson, 2007).

I argue that even though the transformation Christine and Sara experience seems to be more individual than social, it has the potential for social change. First, they have involved their family members in their change, sharing their learning experience with them and introducing new patterns of relationships with their husbands, children, and other family members that may have consequences in the long term, as we have seen in the findings. Second, they become strongly aware of a “sense of connectedness,” to which Ochoa, Olivos, and Jiménez-Castellanos (2011) refer. These authors define this “sense of connectedness” as the first level of a transformative parent engagement process focused on parent-school relationships. I argue, that this sense of connectedness can be applied not only to the relationships with the school but it can extend and include different types of community organizations and services with which parents can relate in their daily activity and engagement.

In sum, parent participants, as members of the same cultural group, even with their uniqueness and diversity, living in a new cultural context, share common worldviews and face common challenges in their transition to a new context. Through the program, parents share the personal and sociocultural factors that challenge them and lead them to new ways of understanding and acting as parents. Among these new ways of acting and understanding are those concerning the positive discipline towards children, the importance of early childhood education, a more critical relationship to the school system, and the first steps to more autonomous gender relationships in some of the mothers. The risk to share their experience and offer the testimony of who they are and how they live their parenting role in a new culture connects with the literature review that recognizes the spiral learning that is produced examining their own life under the lens of a new culture, and the dynamic cultural and historical nature of the self, that makes people continuously seek meaning and transformation. In this case study,

educators play a significant role bringing in emotions with learning, as an alternative way of knowing and leading to transformation. The transformation-process of two mother participants exemplifies that beyond personal transformation, it is the potential for social transformation through the involvement of other family members and its effects on the long term, and the sense of connectedness to social organizations and community services.

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

The purpose of the study was to explore the participants' perceptions of their experience in an early childhood Latino parent education program and the implications for their parental role in their children's education.

In this chapter, I restate the research questions and draw some conclusions about them, explain the contributions to the literature review, then outline the implications of the study for educational practice and policy, and finally suggest areas of further research.

The first research question of the study was about what the participants' perceptions were of their experience in an early childhood Latino parent education program. The participants perceived the program as a meaningful learning experience that helps them to improve as persons and parents and helps their children to socialize and grow. They valued the positive emotions they lived in each session, of joy, amusement, fun, and happiness as strong motivations to keep going to the weekly sessions. They described the sharing of others' experience and the relationships, created by the facilitators and among the group members, as the main source of learning. They recognized that the program fostered their reflection, most of the time connecting with personal past experiences, others with their current family situation and context and that this process was decisive to produce in them positive changes in their role of parents as educators and in their perceptions of the early childhood education.

The second question was about the impact this program had on their perceptions of their parenting role in their children's education. This impact had common threads but also unique ways of living it, because of the richness of the group in terms of intergenerationality (with ages ranging from 21 to 64 years old) and diversity concerning prior experience with schools, ranging

from parents with older children who were already engaged in the school as volunteers, mentor parents, advocacy committees to first time mothers with no experience within the school system.

In general, parents integrated the role of first teachers of their children as a responsibility to foster the development of their children as soon as they are born or even from the womb. They assumed themselves to be the leaders of their home identifying themselves as the model for their children. This implies not only the importance to educate providing academic learning, but how to educate through values, with positive discipline, patience, tolerance, dialogue, and giving quality time to their children. They became aware of their rights and responsibilities towards the school and understood that they are the ones in a better position to advocate for their children's rights. They acquired some practical tools to use in the school to advocate for their children. Some of the mothers have already had a long experience advocating and, with their testimonies during the sessions, they introduced the others to the intricacies of the school system.

In order to get an in-depth understanding, I took as examples two of the participants, one illustrating the changes in her perception of her role as educator, and the other, changes in perception concerning the early childhood education.

In the first case, Christine described a transformation in her ways of thinking, feeling, and acting as a mother in charge of the education of her only child. This led her to a personal awareness about the need to improve her own wellness in order to provide her child with the well-being he also needs. She integrated the perspective of the program about the importance of being the first teacher of her child, not as an "indoctrination"—against which Mezirow (1978) warns—but as something that resonated with her internal beliefs and pushed her to devote more time, and a quality time, that for her meant to be really present to her child time with regard to reading, playing, learning new vocabulary, etc. She recognized that she was adjusting to the

development stages and needs of her child, and changing her perspective in understanding discipline. She was evolving from a more authoritarian style to a more authoritative style, and the image that opened this change was “to see the small shoes of a baby” and to develop the empathy to “put herself in the baby’s shoes.” The stronger motivation to change her style was the love she experiences for her child. She expressed a new sense of connectedness with the organization that was implementing the program and felt she was not alone anymore because now she could ask for help.

In the second case, Sara experienced some powerful insights about her role as mother and particularly the importance of allowing her daughter to experience childhood, not stealing it by charging her with adult responsibilities, as was the case with her when she had to take care of her younger siblings starting at age ten. She also recognized the change within the family, through an improved communication and respect from her husband of her authority as mother. But the most meaningful transformation was concerning her fears about early childhood education. She recognized, through the transformation her little son had experienced in the daycare service associated with the training course, the importance of enrolling him in an early childhood program. Thus, she made the decision to enroll her son in an early childhood program.

Overall, the study succeeded in exploring the perceptions of parents and focused on two of them to reach a deeper understanding of the implications of these perceptions in their role as parents. The perceptions of parents were highly dependent on their context, their experience of life, and the social climate of the “classroom” that allowed a freer and deeper sharing. The diversity of the group in terms of age and connection to the school system was part of these prior experiences that made possible a more enriching learning experience.

The study displays three different implications for the scholarship concerning transformative learning, adult education, and parental involvement.

First, the study sheds light on the role of context, experience of life, emotions, and learning through relationships in learning experiences as a potential for transformation. It contributes to the research that expands Mezirow's original theory of transformative learning, bringing context as a key factor for the construction of meaning (Taylor, 1997) and the role of emotions as other ways of knowing beyond rationality (Boyd, 1991, Boyd & Mayers, 1998, Dirkx, 2001, as cited in Dirkx, 2008).

Second, the study illustrates how the non-formal adult education, provided by a community organization, is a preeminent space for responding to the needs of marginalized and minority adult learners. It also provides parents with the tools for effective interaction with their environment and opening channels to transition from individual change towards social change, through their engagement in the school and in advocacy for their children.

Third, the study gives voice to the parents, mostly mothers, to express their own understanding of parental involvement. Through their participation in the program, they are already embodying their involvement in the well-being and education of their children, starting from the first years of their lives, and breaking down stereotypes of some scholarship about the lack of involvement of Latino parents in the education of their children.

Concerning the implications of the study for educational practice and policy, the program was initially foreseen for 45 parents; however, I argue that achieving a transformative process is hardly dependent on the size of the group. The study shows how the small group and the creation of a safe space where participants can share their experience and emotions have been crucial factors to the transformative learning occurred. In addition, the two hours of weekly sessions

proved to be a short time to finish all the activities or to promote group work. It would be even harder in a big group. Thus, the size of the group for a non-formal educational program that seeks transformative learning for participants is critical.

The study illustrates some of the changes parents experience; however transformation is a long process that needs to be sustained and demands that educators implement follow-up activities to support parents in new ways of understanding and acting they have acquired through the training. Consequently, it demands from organizations providing non-formal educational programs for adults, that they create pathways and systematic gateways with other programs, services, institutions, communities, to ensure connectedness and transformation.

Grass-root organizations depend on external funds to provide educational opportunities for adult learners from minority groups. Latino parental involvement in the education of their children is seen as a crucial issue that affects the future of the children and the country. In this sense, policy makers and private funders should provide the funds needed to support these types of programs.

The role of educators is always crucial to the learning experience, even more so in short-term non-formal educational programs seeking the transformation of adult learners into agents of change in their families, schools, and communities. Even though a lot has been written about the ideal conditions of learning and the characteristics of a model adult educator, in the case of facilitators who are members of the community, further research is needed about the possibility of promoting transformative learning by those educators who are not familiar conceptually with the theory, but whose experience can illustrate the transformations Mezirow and others talk about.

Further research is also needed to look for strategies in non-formal education to help people who are more withdrawn or shy to articulate their own experiences, especially women with low educational levels.

Finally, a longitudinal study that follows parents over time could bring new insights about the type of transformation and its durability as well as the conditions needed to sustain these changes.

Overall, Latino immigrant parental involvement in the education of their children is not only the responsibility of parents but of social actors, including policy-makers, administrators, principals, and teachers to change the conditions of the school system in order to open spaces for meaningful participation in conditions of equality and justice, in a concerted effort with parents. Changing the structural dimensions and power relationships among schools and parents is a long process. Through “Creating Futures,” parent participants in a non-formal educational program targeting Latino immigrant parents with children under five, start experiencing their own power to transform themselves and their families, and their potential for challenging schools to serve the best interests of all children. These are promising steps towards a more cohesive and inclusive society.

Appendix A. INSTITUTIONAL BOARD REVIEW APPROVAL

DEPAUL UNIVERSITY



Office of Research Services
Institutional Review Board
1 East Jackson Boulevard
Chicago, Illinois 60604-2201
312-362-7593
Fax: 312-362-7574

Research Involving Human Subjects
NOTICE OF INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD ACTION

To: Carmen Aragonés, Graduate Student, College of Education

Date: March 31, 2014

Re: Research Protocol # CA031214EDU
"Immigrant Latino Parental Involvement Experiences"

Please review the following important information about the review of your proposed research activity.

Review Details

This submission is an initial submission. Your research project meets the criteria for Expedited review under 45 CFR 45 CFR 46.110 under the following categories.

"(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes."

"(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies."

Approval Details

Your research was originally reviewed on March 20, 2014 and revisions were requested. The revisions you submitted on March 26, 2014 were reviewed and approved on March 31, 2014.

Approval Period: March 31, 2014-March 30, 2015

Approved Consent, Parent/Guardian Permission, or Assent Materials:

- 1) Adult Consent-Parents, version 3/24/2014 (attached)
- 2) Adult Consent- Staff, version 03/24/2014 (attached)

Other approved study documents:

- 1) Recruitment scripts, inside the IRB application version 3/26/2014

Number of approved participants: 37 Total

You should not exceed this total number of subjects without prospectively submitting an amendment to the IRB requesting an increase in subject number.

Funding Source: 1) None

Appendix B. OBSERVATIONAL PROTOCOL

I observed the activity during six out of the ten sessions of the training at the location where this training was done and I observed the parents and the facilitators. Hand-written notes were taken during each class observed as well as recordings. On the same day, after each observation, I expanded the hand-written notes on the computer into coherent notes with as much detailed description as possible. These typed field notes were the observational data.

Example of elements I observed, include:

- Attendance at the session and justification of absences.
- Explanation of the goals of each session, if this has been clearly explained.
- Reaction of participants to the session plan.
- Type and frequency of parents’ participation in the training.
- Themes, issues or problems raised spontaneously by parents or caregivers.
- Possible resistance of parents to involvement in the session.
- Changes expressed by parents in their understanding or their behavior as parents as educators.
- Transformations expressed by parents in their relationships with schools¹⁹
- Tools, resources, persons, services and means identified by parents as ways of supporting them in their role as educators.

The template I used for the observation activity is the following:

Day:

Participants:

Time	Description of the session	Inferences	Coding

Columns one and two were used for hand-written notes... Later, I typed this template, and I completed columns three and four.

¹⁹I use school as a generic term that can include all type of services: day-care, pre-school, and kindergarten.

Appendix C. FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

<u>ROL EN LA EDUCACIÓN DE SUS HIJOS</u>	<u>ROLE IN YOUR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION</u>
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Como mamás y cuidadores, ¿cuál es su papel en la educación de sus hijos/nietos?2. ¿Qué valores les parecen más importantes transmitir a sus hijos?3. ¿Qué sueñan para sus hijos/hijas?	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1 As mothers and caregivers, what is your role in the education of your children / grandchildren?2 What values do you think are the most important to convey to your children?3 What do you dream for your sons / daughters?
<p><u>EXPECTATIVAS:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Antes de iniciar el programa ¿qué esperaban de su participación en el programa?2. Cuáles de estas expectativas se han cumplido. ¿Qué lo ha hecho posible?	<p><u>EXPECTATIONS:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1 Before starting the program, what did you expect from your participation in the program?2 Which of these expectations have been met? What has made it possible?
<p><u>SESIONES:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. ¿Qué les han parecido las sesiones?2. ¿Qué han aprendido?3. ¿Cómo se han sentido?4. ¿Qué actividades les han gustado más? ¿Por qué?5. ¿Qué ha sido lo mejor del programa? ¿Hay algo que cambiaría?6. ¿Qué han aprendido unos de otros?	<p><u>SESSIONS:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1 What were the sessions like?2 What have you learned?3 How have you felt?4 What activities have you liked the most? Why?5 What was the best of the program? Is there anything you would have changed?6 What have you learned from each other?
<p><u>IMPACTO DE LAS SESIONES</u></p> <p>Durante el desarrollo de las sesiones,</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. ¿Qué han descubierto de nuevo acerca	<p><u>IMPACT OF THE SESSIONS</u></p> <p>During the development of the sessions,</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What have you rediscovered about your role as mothers, or care-giver in the education of your children?

<p>de su papel como mamás o cuidador, en la educación de sus hijos?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">2. ¿Han introducido algún cambio en la relación con sus hijos, su esposo, el maestro/a o la comunidad?3. ¿Se han abierto nuevas aspiraciones para el futuro de sus hijos?4. ¿Qué planes o pasos van a seguir para hacer realidad estas aspiraciones/sueños para el futuro de sus hijos?5. ¿Qué medios necesitan para mantener estos planes o pasos? ¿Qué ayudas?	<ol style="list-style-type: none">2. Have you made any changes in the relationship with your children, your husband, the teacher, the community?3. Do you have new aspirations for the future of your children?4. What plans or steps will you follow to realize these aspirations / dreams for the future of your children?5. What means do you need to keep these plans or steps? What type of support?
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Appendix D. INTERVIEW GUIDE – Parents

<p><u>Objetivos:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Profundizar en las percepciones individuales que los padres han tenido acerca de la participación en el programa.2. Identificar cómo entienden los padres su rol en la educación de sus hijos.3. Reconocer y describir el impacto que el programa ha producido en la comprensión de su rol como padres en la educación de sus hijos. <p><u>Dimensión: Percepción del programa</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Dígame tres palabras que mejor definan lo que ha supuesto el curso para usted.2. ¿Cómo se ha sentido durante las sesiones? ¿Por qué?3. ¿Qué reflexiones se ha hecho a sí misma a lo largo de las sesiones?4. ¿Qué le han aportado las facilitadoras? ¿Y los demás participantes de las sesiones? <p><u>Dimensión: Rol de padres como educadores</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. ¿Para usted qué significa educar a sus hijos?2. ¿Qué es lo que más recuerda de la educación que usted recibió de sus padres?3. Antes del programa, ¿Cuáles eran sus sueños para el futuro de sus hijos?4. ¿Cómo se describiría a sí mismo/a como	<p><u>Objectives:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. To deepen on the individual perceptions that parents have about their participation in the program.2. To identify how parents understand their role in the education of their children.3. To recognize and describe the impact of the program in the understanding of their role as parents in the education of their children. <p><u>Dimension: Perception of the program</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Tell me three words that best define what the program has done for you.2. How did you feel during the sessions? Why?3. What reflections did you make throughout the sessions?4. What have the facilitators contributed to you?5. What have other participants contributed to you during the sessions? <p><u>Dimension: Role of parents as educators</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What does to educate your children mean to you?2. What do you remember the most about the education you received from your parents?3. Before the program, what were your dreams for the future of your children?
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<p>cuidador/educador de sus hijos/nietos?</p> <p>5. El programa les hablaba de ser “los primeros maestros de sus hijos”, ¿qué significa para usted?</p> <p>6. ¿Cómo es su relación con la maestra/centro donde acuden sus niños? Si no van a la escuela todavía, ¿qué le pediría a la maestra/o? ¿y a la escuela?</p> <p>7. ¿Qué lengua utiliza con sus hijos? Y en la escuela, ¿los niños en qué programa están?</p>	<p>4. How would you describe yourself as a caregiver / educator of your children / grandchildren?</p> <p>5. The program spoke about your being "the first teachers of your children," what does it mean for you?</p> <p>6. How is your relationship with the teacher / center where your children attend? If they do not go to school yet, what do you expect from the teacher? And the school?</p> <p>7. What language do you use with your children? And in the school, what program are your children enrolled in?</p>
<p><u>Dimensión: Impacto del curso en su percepción de su rol como padres.</u></p>	<p><u>Dimension: Impact of the course on their perception of their role as parents</u></p>
<p>1. ¿Qué ha aprendido en el programa?</p> <p>2. ¿En qué ha cambiado su manera de relacionarse con sus hijos/as o la escuela?</p> <p>3. Desde que terminaron las sesiones ¿ha tomado alguna decisión en relación a la educación de sus hijos? ¿O está considerando tomar alguna decisión?</p> <p>4. Después del programa, ¿Ha cambiado en algo cómo visualiza el futuro para sus hijos? ¿Qué pasos necesita poner en práctica para lograrlo?</p> <p>5. ¿Qué medios necesita usted como madre/abuelo para sentirse apoyada en su rol como educador/a de sus hijos?</p>	<p>1. What have you learned in the program?</p> <p>2. How has it changed your way to interact with your sons / daughters; or school?</p> <p>3. Since the end of the sessions, have you made any decision regarding the education of your children? Or are you considering making any decision?</p> <p>4. After the program, is there any change in the way you visualize the future for your children? What steps do you need to implement to achieve it?</p> <p>5. What means do you need as a mother/grandfather to feel sustained in your role as an educator of your children?</p>

<u>Dimensión Personal: Datos personales y demográficos</u>	<u>Personal Dimension: Personal data and demographics</u>
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Número de hijos, edad y escuela/centro o nivel educativo2. Tipo de escuela o centro que atienden. Y si no atienden ¿cuáles son los motivos?3. Tipo de familia.4. ¿Cuál es su profesión? ¿Trabaja o es ama de casa?5. ¿Cuál es su nivel educativo?6. ¿De qué país es? y ¿de qué zona?7. ¿Cuántos años lleva viviendo en USA?	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Number of children, age, and school / center or education level2. Type of school or center they are attending. If they do not attend any school, what are the reasons?3. Type of family4. ¿What is your profession? Do you work or are you housewife?5. What is your educational level?6. What country are you from? And what region?7. How many years have you been living in the USA?

Appendix E. INTERVIEW GUIDE – Facilitators

1. ¿Por qué quiso usted participar como facilitadora del programa?
 2. Los padres cuando empiezan en el programa ¿cómo percibe usted que entienden su papel como educadores?
 3. Los padres ¿qué perciben acerca del programa? ¿Qué piensan? ¿Qué sienten?
 4. ¿Qué significa que los padres son los primeros maestros de sus hijos y la casa la primera escuela?
 5. ¿Cuáles son las fortalezas del programa?
 6. ¿Qué impacto tiene el programa en la percepción que los padres tienen sobre su rol como educadores? (Aspectos clave: cambios a nivel personal: auto-percepción, conciencia crítica, actitudes y habilidades; cambios en el significado del rol de padres, el uso de la lengua, disciplina, bienestar de la familia, percepción de la importancia de los programas pre-escolares; cambios en su comportamiento: participación en las sesiones, tipo de interacciones, involucramiento en la familia, escuela y comunidad.)
 7. El programa utiliza la metodología de “Educación Popular” ¿Qué entiende usted por educación popular? ¿Qué aspectos destacaría como más importantes de la educación popular? ¿Qué experiencia tiene como facilitadora de “educación popular” y
1. Why did you decide to participate as a facilitator of the program?
 2. When parents started at the program, how did you perceive their understanding of their role as educators?
 3. What do parents perceive about the program? What do they think about it; How do they feel?
 4. What does it mean that parents are the first teachers of their children and home is the first school?
 5. What are the strengths of the program?
 6. What impact does the program have on parents’ perceptions about their role as educators? (Key issues: changes at a personal level: self-perception, critical awareness, attitudes, and skills; changes in the significance of the role of parents, the use of language, discipline, family well-being , importance of pre-school programs; changes in their behavior: participation in the sessions, type of interactions, involvement in the family, school, and community.)
 7. The program uses the methodology of "Popular Education" What do you mean by popular education? What aspects would you emphasize as most important of popular education? What is your experience as a facilitator of "popular education" and adult education?

educación de adultos?

8. Para usted personalmente ¿qué significa estar involucrada en la educación de sus hijos?

9. ¿Qué retos presenta el programa? ¿Cree que es necesario algún cambio?

10. ¿Cómo se puede seguir apoyando a los padres que han hecho la formación para sostener sus esfuerzos?

8. For you personally, what does it mean to be involved in the education of your children?

9. What are the challenges of the program? Would you change something?

10. How is it possible to continue giving support to parents who have followed the training in order to sustain their efforts?

Appendix F. INTERVIEW GUIDE – Coordinator

1. Expectations: What are your expectations of the program?
2. Program: What is the rationale for the program?
3. Facilitators: What are the criteria for selection of the facilitators?
 - Background. Prior training and experience.
 - Engagement with the organization.
4. Parental involvement in early childhood education. How does the program understand parental involvement in early childhood education?
5. Popular Education: How do you understand Popular Education? How it is applied to the program?
6. Immigrant families: What are the issues and challenges that immigrant parents face? How does the program adjust to immigrant parents? What are the patterns of mobility of immigrant families in the program?
7. Parents: Why do parents decide to participate in the program?
8. When they arrive, how do parents understand their role as their children's educators?
9. What do you think are the perceptions parents get from the program? What do they think about, what do they feel?
10. What does it mean that parents are the first teachers and that home is the first school?
11. What are the strengths of the program?
12. What is the impact of the program on the perception parents have about their role as educators? Key aspects: changes at personal level: self-perception, critical awareness, attitudes, skills; changes in meanings about the role of parents, the use of language (bilingualism), discipline, well-being of the family; perception about the importance of the pre-school programs; changes in their behavior: participation in the program, type of interactions, family involvement, community, school, advocacy, etc.
13. What are the challenges of the program? Are there areas do you think need change?
14. Support to parents. What type of supports does the organization provide to parents to sustain the impact of the program?

Appendix G. GOALS of CREATING FUTURES' SESSIONS

Session one:

1. Develop trust and confidence with the facilitators of the program in a friendly and welcoming atmosphere.
2. Know each other: their names, their families, and the goals they hold for their children.
3. Reflect on their own experiences as children and explore how this affects them as parents.
4. Strengthen their knowledge about their rights and responsibilities as parents.
5. Become aware that the path to college for their children starts when they are very little.
6. Understand the training's objectives and content.

Session two:

1. Contribute to the comprehensive growth of their family to develop new abilities and attitudes based on their family values
2. Explore and evaluate daily practices that allow them to maintain their family vision and mission.
3. Understand that good communication is fundamental to family unity, and get to know the concept, styles and techniques for improving communication.
4. Learn that practicing positive discipline will teach their children to develop responsible, healthy and acceptable behavior, which promotes self-respect and respect for others.
5. Develop a family action plan with concrete goals in order to effect positive change in their home and achieve their dreams.

Session three:

1. Become informed about the different states of their children's development, particularly age-appropriate physical and cognitive expectations.
2. Learn about and practice activities that help promote healthy child development according to ages and stages of their own children's development.
3. Discover existing resources and services in their community for the early detection, intervention and/or treatment of special needs for children.

Session four:

1. Gain knowledge about their children's language development, specifically the different stages and appropriate expectations for their age, while recognizing that every child is unique and goes through an individual process to learn how to talk.
2. Recognize that their role as parents is crucial to the language development of their children, particularly in providing emotional security and linguistic stimulation.
3. Learn about the importance of singing and playing in supporting language.

4. Gain awareness about the importance of reading during the early years of a child's life that gives the foundation for reaching grade level reading proficiency and achieving academic success.
5. Learn about bilingualism, discussing both its benefits and myths.
6. Learn about different resources and services available in their community that can help address areas of concern if they identify potential problems in their children's language development.

Session five:

1. Become familiar with the valuable resources available at their local library, such as free access to books, activities and services.
2. Learn how to apply for a library card.
3. Know how to choose books that are age-appropriate for their child, and develop strategies for reading to their children through a variety of interactive activities.
4. Gain awareness on the importance of reading to their child at an early age where the foundation is formed that can lead to reading at grade level and reaching academic success.
5. Learn about the eligibility requirements and how to apply for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) when filling their federal income taxes.

Session six:

1. Reflect on their role in the physical well-being of their children, specifically the responsibility to make healthy decisions related to nutrition and exercise.
2. Become aware of the importance of a balanced nutrition by providing adequate serving size portions needed to maintain a healthy body.
3. Promote strategies to support healthy family nutrition and establish exercise routines to help prevent diseases or lessen their impact.
4. Learn how to advocate for the physical well-being of their children.
5. Learn about available local and state resources and health programs if eligible, how to enroll and access these programs.

Session seven:

1. To understand how emotional well-being is part of an overall state of well-being.
2. Understand that parents must begin by taking care of their own mental and emotional well-being to care for that of their child's.
3. Share concepts and ideas of child socio-emotional development.
4. Understand healthy child socio-emotional development and areas of concern.
5. Understand that children learn how to love and respect themselves, and self-regulate their emotions through their parents' love and respect.
6. Learn to promote a child's healthy socio-emotional development through daily activities.

Session eight:

1. Understand that choosing a child care or early education program is an important decision in their child's life.
2. Know how to choose a quality preschool and child care program in their community.
3. Know how to communicate with a child care provider or an early education teacher.
4. Learn that by encouraging and supporting learning experiences and modeling behavior that values education, their children will develop a positive attitude towards school.
5. Identify activities that will help prepare their child succeed in school.
6. Have an understanding of preschool educational standards that will help them collaborate more effectively with their child's school and provide a better quality of education for their child.

Session nine:

1. Increase their leadership and advocacy skills to problem solving and overcome challenges.
2. Through activities, parents will practice their public education – related rights and responsibilities.
3. Understand how to use the recommended complaint process when they seek to solve a problem relevant to their child's school.
4. Learn the importance of civic participation, including the right to vote.

Session 10:

1. Reflect on their accomplishments throughout the training.
2. Be recognized for their commitment and participation in the program.
3. Receive a certificate for their participation.
4. Celebrate their accomplishments with their families and children.

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