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## The Lived Experiences Of Latinx Parents And Their Perception Of Bilingual Programs: A Phenomenological Reflection

Manuel O. Adrianzen  
*National Louis University*

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THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

**The Lived Experiences of Latinx Parents and their Perception of Bilingual Programs: A  
Phenomenological Reflection**

Manuel O Adrianzén

Dissertation

National Louis University

December 2021

THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS AND THEIR PERCEPTION OF BILINGUAL PROGRAMS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL REFLECTION

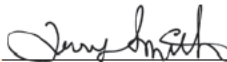
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Manuel O. Adrianzén  
Teaching & Learning: Reading, Language, & Literacy

Approved:



Chair/Co-Chair, Dissertation Committee



Member, Dissertation Committee



Dean's Representative



Director, Doctoral Programs



Dean, National College of Education

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Date Approved

# THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....	vi
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Statement of the problem.....	3
Language.....	7
Research Purpose and Questions.....	9
Significance of the Study.....	10
Key Terms Definitions.....	11
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	12
Theoretical Framework.....	13
Sociocultural Theory.....	13
Critical Theory.....	15
History of Bilingual Education.....	16
History of Bilingual Education in Illinois.....	22
Bilingual Programs.....	24
Transitional Bilingual Programs.....	25
Transitional Bilingual Programs of Instruction.....	26
Dual Language Programs.....	26
One-Way Dual Language Program.....	26
Two-Way Dual Language Program.....	26
Latino Parental Involvement.....	27
The Case for and Against Bilingual Education.....	29
Parent Reasons for Choosing Bilingual Education.....	33
Summary.....	34

# THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY.....	36
Research Design.....	36
Context of the Study.....	40
Participants.....	42
Positionality of the Researcher.....	43
Ethical Considerations.....	46
Data Collection.....	48
Methods.....	48
Survey.....	48
Focus Group.....	49
Interview.....	50
Document Review.....	51
Data Analysis.....	52
Data Validation.....	53
Summary.....	54
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS & DISCUSSION.....	55
The neighborhood.....	55
Parents.....	57
Data collection settings.....	63
The Challenge of Focus Groups.....	64
Interviews/Conversations.....	66
Document Review.....	68
Findings.....	68
Themes.....	72
Multiple Experiences.....	72
Fear/Anxiousness of the uncertain.....	73
Hope for things to come & brighter future.....	79

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

Drivers of motivation.....	81
Social Networks: Understanding the new landscape.....	85
Linguistic & Cultural Pride.....	87
Resilient Spirits.....	90
Summary.....	92
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS.....	94
Reflections.....	92
Practical Implications.....	98
Implications for Schools.....	98
Implications for Practitioners.....	99
Implications for School Leaders.....	100
Research Implications.....	101
Limitations.....	102
Conclusion.....	103
REFERENCES.....	105
APPENDIX A.....	117
APPENDIX B.....	119
APPENDIX C.....	121

# THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

## ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is two-fold. First, to better understand and capture the lived experiences of Latinx parents as they navigate the registration/enrollment process at the school and select a language program for their Pre-kindergarten child. Second, to understand what lived experiences influence their perception about bilingual education programs. Using Van Manen's (2016) concept of human sciences and phenomenology, data was collected through the use of conversational interviews. The responses provided by the parents and school clerk revealed five themes, fear & anxiousness, hope for things to come & for a brighter future, use of social networks to understand the new landscape, linguistic and cultural pride, and resilient spirits. Implications for schools, school leaders, school practitioners and research implications are discussed.

# THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

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# THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

## CHAPTER ONE

### **Introduction**

I began writing this chapter a while ago before the COVID 19 pandemic hit the country and the world. Our school community has gone through a lot and this experience has allowed me to see the pain, the tears of many of our families. But I have also seen their resiliency, fortitude in spirit and the will to do what is best for their children and their families. The school I lead is in the west side of a large Midwestern city, a low income, high-crime neighborhood, and each morning for the past twelve years as I drive through this neighborhood with its countless potholes and neglected streets, I wonder why the city does not address the needs of this community as it should. A neighborhood of families who work hard and want the best for their children, a neighborhood of children who have tremendous potential, many of whom are native Spanish speakers eager to come to school and learn. As the principal of one of the schools located in the middle of this neighborhood, my goal is to provide all students with the tools they need to become successful learners, to support them and help them develop to their fullest potential. While my focus is on all children, I am particularly interested in our English Language Learners (ELLs) population since there is substantial research suggesting that language minority students are more prone to drop out of school compared to other groups (Crawford, 2000).

Furthermore, the constant attacks on bilingual education make these students more susceptible to disparate treatment (Macedo, 2006). As I think about this issue, I cannot help but think about the unfairness of how monies are distributed across schools and the thin resources schools like ours have. I wonder if this would be acceptable for people living in an affluent neighborhood. I also wonder if the powers making the decisions to “patch” the streets in this neighborhood with cheap material that after two days are once again in need of repair, would do the same streets of affluent neighborhoods. Similarly, I wonder about the

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

decisions we make when it comes to how we approach the academic achievement gap that continues to persist between Latinx and White students. What should a bilingual program or approach for best addressing the needs of our students look like? How should we as educators think about the students and parents who are considered language minority? How have I thought about the parents at our school and my relationship with them? How have I viewed them as they make the decision to place their children in one language program versus the other? Have I been understanding and supportive once parents make the decision? Does my strong leaning to choosing a Dual language education program for their children create a power struggle between myself and the parents? Do they believe I overstep my boundaries and infringe in their rights as parents?

As I reflect on these imposed questions, I turn to the existing research about bilingualism and bilingual education. Baker (2017: 2), suggests that addressing bilingual education begins with definitional issues. Baker (2017), argues that it would not be accurate that “since a bicycle has two wheels, and a binocular is for two eyes, it would seem that bilingualism is about two languages and multilingualism is about three or more languages.” Baker (2017) claims that defining bilingualism as having two wheels is a simplistic way of looking at the “ownership of two or more languages” (p.2).

Acquiring a new language is not as simple as it may appear, thus, Garcia’s (2009), metaphor of understanding bilingualism as a “moon buggy” resonates with me. Garcia (2009) argues that we must see bilingualism as an all-terrain vehicle, with different legs that extend and contract to ground itself in the ridges and craters of the surface.” Garcia (2009) posits that “communication among human beings, and especially children speaking different languages, or among children speaking one language and the teacher speaking the other, these features are particularly salient. A bicycle would not just do for this terrain.” (p. 8). While most educators and researcher alike agree that educating ELL students can be challenging,

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

this metaphor captures my own understanding of the complexities of being identified as an ELL in the United States. Children bring with them funds of knowledge that have been imparted at home and must be explored in the classrooms.

As we continue to research ways to effectively provide instruction to Latinx students, there is also a need to pause and reflect how school leaders, teachers, and school personnel interact and communicate with Latinx parents and the larger community. A significant factor that may be unconsciously set aside is the experiences of Latinx parents as they navigate the process of registration/enrollment for their pre-kindergarten child and factors may influence their perception about bilingual education programs.

### **Statement of the Problem**

There are well established reasons why Latinx students continue not to perform academically; issues such as language proficiency (Cummins, 1979; 1999; Orfield, 2005); poverty and “trauma linked to immigration and/or pre-immigrant experiences lived by these children (Genesee, 2015: 3); standardized testing (Abedi, 2008; Abedi & Dietel, 2004; Abedi & Levine, 2013; Au, 2009; Kohn, 2000; Altshuler & Shmautz, 2006); and socio-economic status (Garcia, 2009; Genesee, 2015). In my long experience of working with ELL students, one factor I also believe plays a role is the placement of students at the parent’s request in classrooms where the instruction is only in English. Parents have the right to refuse their children be placed in a bilingual classroom where the students receive native language instruction for most of the day and 40 minutes of English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction. Despite the vast research suggesting that native language instruction will support the acquisition of English (e.g., August, McCardle & Shanahan, 2014; August & Shanahan, 2006; Collier, 1995; Cummins 1981; Genesee, 2010; Genesee et al., 2006; Hakuta, 1990; Lindholm-Leary & Genesee, 2010; Snow, 1990) many Latinx parents choose to enroll their children in classrooms where the instruction is only in English. Every school that has a

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

transitional bilingual program must have an English Language Program Teacher (ELPT) whose tasks include monitoring, assessing students and informing parents of their options in the bilingual programs available for their child. When a parent chooses to place their child in an English only classroom, efforts are made to attempt to persuade parents in informal conversations about the importance of having their child enrolled in a bilingual classroom. In the twelve years that I have been working at this school, I have had the opportunity to have various conversations with parents who chose not to enroll their children in the bilingual program; however, parents were reluctant to explain the reasons for their decision. I must speak of my preference here, since I am bilingual, and my life experiences have shaped my belief that anyone could benefit from learning a second language. While growing up and attending school in Peru, I had taken very basic English and while my experience of learning English was a matter of survival or what Baker & Wright (2017) termed Circumstantial Bilingualism, it turned into a matter of furthering my own education as I found myself trying to fit into my new societal and cultural context.

My desire for strong and well-funded bilingual programs in our schools is based on solid research that clearly suggests that using the native language for instruction has multiple benefits for ELL students. Bilingual education continues to be a challenge for the Public Educational System in the United States.

The English Program Teacher (ELPT) formerly known as the Bilingual Coordinator requires that they are abreast and knowledgeable of the bilingual programs in the school. Based on the Home Language Survey (HLS) the ELPT teacher engages parents in a conversation after the registration process to acknowledge their decision about the language program they have selected for their child. While I can participate in these conversations, I have done so only three times in the span of my time at the school. I have engaged with parents during these informal conversations and tried to probe on the reason or reasons they

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

choose one language program over the other with little results. It is interesting to note that parents tend to be short in their responses and simply respond with “I don’t want them in a bilingual program.” Or “I want my child to learn English.” Through some of these conversations I have learned that taking a listening stance is the best course as the conversations may create an imbalance of power situation and that has never been my purpose. I find this phenomenon enormously fascinating. Parents who are monolingual in Spanish choose an English language program for their children.

As a school leader, I have wondered and questioned why parents select one language program over the other and have conflicting thoughts about the reasons parents provide for their decision. I have the tendency to believe there is more to these decisions parents make. I am too quick to pass judgment on our parents and to the point that I have questioned and dismiss their decision. I want to tell them that they are ignoring the solid research on bilingual education and the benefits of being bilingual. I have not paid attention to this trend and dismissed this phenomenon as important. When I decided to shift the programming of our school and moved to offer a Dual Language Program for our students and community, I decided to begin working closely with parents who enroll their children in a Pre-Kindergarten classroom and the language program they chose for their child.

I agree with the research that points to some of the reasons Latinx parents and parents from other cultures choose to enroll their children in bilingual programs. Bilingual education has many benefits, such as cognitive benefits, economic benefits, and social cultural benefits (Garcia, 2006). Children entering bilingual programs at an early age could benefit even more. And while educators or researchers may know that it is also as important to understand the factors that may influence the decision of Latinx parents to choose to register/enroll their Pre-Kindergarten children in bilingual programs such as Dual-language programs, or transitional bilingual programs. What factors influence or shape Latinx parents beliefs that choosing one

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

language program over the other will support or fast track their children's English development and acquisition?

In a study describing parents' decisions about bilingual programs models (i.e., Transitional bilingual, structured English immersion, and mainstream English), Amaral (2001) found that 57.1% of parents who chose a monolingual English classroom "did so because they felt their child was stronger in English than Spanish." Additionally, 21.4% felt that their child would learn more English in those classrooms. This study aligns with some of the responses of the parents at the school I lead. Parents tell us that their "children speak English and not Spanish." The Latinx Parents' voice needs to be added to the research so that it provides teachers, school administrators, teachers, and other stakeholders a better understanding of how Latinx parents navigate the registration/enrollment process and select a language program for their pre-kindergarten child. I believe that this is of great importance as it will provide a window into what may influence Latinx parents' perception of bilingual education programs and how they engage and interact with school personnel.

Parents have the right to ensure that their children are educated in an environment that they believe will benefit them. Parents also have the right to either register/enroll or not register/enroll and withdraw their children from a bilingual program and place them in a monolingual classroom where only English is used as the medium for instruction. But, as a school leader, and strong proponent of bilingual programs in schools, the issue of moving children from a bilingual classroom environment to a monolingual classroom environment makes me wonder how the parent's decision will affect the learning of their child. I positioned myself as a firm supporter of bilingual education, and as an advocate for the students and the parents who would like their children to learn in a bilingual environment. But I am also cognizant that not every Latinx parent would want the same for their child.

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

The school district has established ways in which parents can engage with the school. There are several committees such as the Local School Council (LSC) whose role is to select a principal for the school, monitor the school budget, and evaluate the school principal. Also, the Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) oversees advising the school principal in issues relating to Title I programs in school. Finally, there is the Bilingual Advisory committee (BAC); parents in this committee are charged with advising the principal and community in all matters related to the Bilingual programs at the school.

A ‘variety’ of programs are provided for parents at the district level. Programs such as, parent universities with the purpose of supporting parents and developing skills such as computer literacy, English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, and GED classes. These are some of the efforts made by the school district to get parents involved in the process and in the education of their children. Despite these efforts, there are many issues in how school funding inequities continue to persist in our society, affecting students who live in property poor neighborhoods. This unequal distribution of resources is detrimental to individual schools depending on where they are located within the district (e.g., affluent neighborhood, low socio-economic neighborhood, etc.). This is important because as the school leader, I am charged with ensuring that the monies the school receives are spent on the resources that every child and parent needs to be successful. During budgeting season, I engage parents from the LSC committee whose charge is to oversee the schools’ budget and present my proposals to move the school forward. Historically, when school districts lose funding, bilingual education programs are negatively impacted. These losses can take the form of cuts to teaching positions and other resources that are key to the education of all children but explicitly to the education of linguistic minority children.

### **Language**

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

Language can be viewed through different paradigms; whether linguistic, critical perspective or a sociocultural perspective; language is key to guide individuals' interactions and how they create meaning based on those exchanges. My focus on language in this paper is from a power relations perspective. The forms in which language is used to describe a group of people, their language and culture may influence and affect the actions and thoughts of others. The way language is used in the everyday discourse at schools when school personnel communicate and interact with students, parents, and the community about school programs may have inadvertent consequences. As I have previously stated, I am an advocate for strong and well-funded bilingual programs in schools. I view the phenomenon of how language is used as a potential for an unbalance of power between Latinx parents and the way schools interact with them. The way that language is used when school personnel communicate with parents when discussing a language program for their children during the process of registration/enrollment may also create an unbalance of power. Unfortunately, there is pervasive evidence suggesting that in schools where minority children attend, a persistent deficit belief is held about Latinx parents and their interest in the education of their children (Delgado-Gaitan, 2012).

Hall (2001) argues that the way language is used in discourse influences the 'practice' of humans while navigating relations in society (p.72). The subtle messages we send to our Latinx parents and students through our interactions about the language programs during registration/enrollment may have negative unintended consequences. As a school leader, building relationships with parents and children is a critical part of leading a school. What message are they receiving from me and the staff I lead? Am I being dismissive of the decisions they make for their child? These are some of the questions I carry with me and feel the need to address if I intend to empower the parents and students I serve.



## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

Van Manen (2016) asserts that educators engaging in human science research must do so guided by pedagogical standards. My position as the school leader demands that I engage in social interactions with students, parents, and community members about the education of their children. I cannot help but to wonder if parents perceive our relationship under a power lens, where they see me as a symbol of the oppressing system and as Freire argues (1985) “a struggle for meaning and a struggle for power relations” (L, 77) Thus, I believe it is important to better understand and capture what are some of the factors that may influence the perception (s) of Latinx parents as they make the decision to register/enroll their Pre-Kindergarten students in a bilingual or monolingual program. What is their experience like? What goes through their minds as they navigate the process of registration/enrollment at the school? Is it a common experience for all of them? What experiences have they had in their lives that may influence their decision of choosing a language program over the other, or do they already have made that decision before arriving to school? Have they had any prior opportunities to engage in the registration/enrollment process in another school, city, state or is this their first time? How did they experience that process?

### **Purpose of the Study**

The aim of this study is two-fold. First, to better understand and capture the lived experiences of our Latinx parents as they navigate the registration/enrollment process at the school and select a language program for their Pre-kindergarten child. Second, is to understand what lived experiences influence their perception about bilingual education programs.

These are the research questions that guide this study:

1. What are the lived experiences of Latinx parents as they navigate the process of school registration/enrollment for their Pre-Kindergarten student?

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

- a. What lived experiences help Latinx parents inform their decision and what are those factors influencing that decision?
- b. What do parents think the impact the language program (Spanish or English) selected will have on their child's language acquisition/development? Do parents believe it is the fastest route? The best route?
- c. What experiences have parents had in their own lives that helps them understand the differences between bilingual education programs and monolingual education programs?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant because despite the vast amount of research supporting bilingual education programs and the success of students in school, (e.g., Cummins, 1989; Escamilla, & Medina, 1993; Hakuta, 1986) there is scarce research acknowledging the lived experiences of Latinx parents and how those lived experiences may influence their decision to choose a language program for their Pre-Kindergarten children as they navigate the registration/enrollment process. It is critical that the research knowledge is expanded to incorporate the perceptions and perspectives of Latinx parents whose voices are often silenced by the rhetoric and the push for English only instruction proponents. There is also a need to resist the persistent accountability and punishing policies that school districts implement around the country. In our current political times where there is a pervasive negative and cruel narrative against the immigrant population and other communities of color, the voice of Latinx parents is muffled and silenced. This becomes a source of disempowerment and may prevent Latinx parents from getting involved in the school. The significance of this study lies also in the value that it will provide me by engaging in pedagogical reflection of my relationship with parents and their children (Van Manen, 2016).

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

It is important to better understand and capture the lived experiences of Latinx parents as they navigate the school registration/enrollment process in a language program for their pre-kindergarten student and what lived experiences may influence the way they perceive bilingual education programs. This is an area that needs attention because as literacy leaders, advocating for Latinx parents and their children must be a school-wide effort involving the school leader, teacher, and community members. Latinx parents who may be new to the education system in the US may feel powerless and not understood. Empowering parents to be full partners with the school is what I consider, the main goal of school leadership. My hope was that this study provides school personnel and school leaders with useful and important information as they listen and support the community they serve. Secondly, my hope was that through the process of learning about the lived experiences of Latinx parents I would be able to engage in pedagogical reflection and attempted to grasp the essence of the experiences that these parents live when deciding what language program to choose for their children. I also hoped to learn about their perceptions about bilingual education programs.

### **Key Terms Definitions**

- Bilingualism the ability of an individual to use two languages. The use of two languages within a community (Baker, 2011).
- English Language Learner a label for students who are non-native speakers of English and are in the process of attaining proficiency in English. Sometimes shortened to English Learner (EL) (Baker, 2011).
- Hispanic/Latino a member of an ethnic group that traces its roots to 20 Spanish-speaking nations from Latin America and Spain itself (but not Portugal or Portuguese-speaking Brazil).

CHAPTER TWO

**Literature Review**

There is agreement among researchers that the academic achievement of Latinx students continues to lag compared to that of their white counterparts and they have the highest school dropout rate compared to other students (Hill & Torres, 2004). While this persistent phenomenon continues to exist, it is one that needs to be addressed systematically and not using one size fits all solutions. While there are abundant studies documenting the benefits of bilingual education and the reasons parents choose these programs over English only programs, (Craig, B. A. 1996; Gill, Lee, S. K. 1999; Monzo, L. D. 2005; Santos, S. L. 1985; Ramos, F. 2007; Lopez, M. M. 2013), and a body of research investigating the experiences of other cultures in the United States and the world (Gill, D. 2013; Shin, F. H. & Lee, B. V. 1996; Lao, C. 2010; Young, R. L. & MyLuong, T. T. 1999), there needs to be more emphasis in trying to understand the lived experiences of Latinx parents as they navigate the registration/enrollment process at schools and what lived experiences may influence their perceptions of bilingual education.

The purpose of this literature review is to describe bilingual education programs in the United States and how the history of bilingualism may intersect/influence the decisions Latinx parents make for their children. I attempt to highlight the most important points and issues around bilingual education such as the negative perception on Latinx parent involvement in the schooling of their children, and language learning as a source of racial discrimination. I emphasize how language as used in schools reproduces the discourse of the dominant culture. I also review studies on the Latinx parents' perception or perspectives about bilingual education programs.

Education is a political act (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2011), and this is more evident when we speak of bilingual education. I positioned myself using a Transformational

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

Worldview, as this worldview “needs to be intertwined with politics and a political change agenda to confront social oppression at whatever levels it occurs (Creswell, 2018). It is my belief that to better understand the daily experiences of Latinx parents regarding their decision about which language program to enroll their Pre-Kindergarten student and their perceptions of bilingual education program calls for the use of a critical and sociocultural lens. The organization of this literature review is historical in nature.

### **Theoretical Framework of the Study**

Two theories; Sociocultural and Critical theory will be discussed as they both align with the context of the study, and I argue it provides a window to better understand the lived experiences of Latinx parents make when selecting a language program during school registration/enrollment and what lived experiences may influence their perception of bilingual education programs.

### **Sociocultural Theory**

It is well known that sociocultural theory has its genesis in the work of Vygotsky (1978). Wertsch (1985) advocated for a theme approach to understanding Vygotsky’s theoretical framework. He suggested three themes: “a reliance on a genetic or developmental method; the claim that higher mental processes in the individual have their origin in social processes; and the claim that mental processes can be understood only if we understand the tools and signs that mediate them”(p.14-15). Sociocultural theory is an approach where social interaction plays a key role in cognitive development and language plays a central role (Vygotsky, 1978). Sociocultural theory also advocates that all learning happens within a social context and with the support of “more knowledgeable others” (Vygotsky 1978; Nieto, 2018). Sociocultural theory allows for an examination of how language can have an impact on our behavior and modify our thinking (Vygotsky, 1978; Corson, 1993).

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

For many parents, arriving to discuss the enrollment options for their children in the school system may be a common phenomenon. But for some Latinx parents, engaging with school personnel may not simply be an exchange of social interaction where the meaning of the words spoken may trigger a reaction in the mind of the individuals involved. From a sociocultural perspective the context and previous experiences of the individuals involved may cause a change of attitude. Language from a sociocultural perspective intersects with power relations as individuals attempt to make meaning of their daily interactions.

As a school leader, my daily interactions with children and adults are guided by language and meaning. School leaders must be cognizant of the impact the spoken words have, when interacting with parents and trying to advocate for the education of their children. This is especially critical when discussing with parents the registration/enrollment process and the choice parents make about a language program for their children. Language is a powerful tool that requires tact but also an understanding of how the concept of the Zone of Proximal development can be accessed when interacting with other human beings.

The Zone of Proximal development (ZPD) is another concept central to Vygotsky's theory of learning and social interaction. Vygotsky defined the ZPD as "the difference between what a person can achieve when acting alone and what the same person can accomplish when acting with support from someone else and/or cultural artifacts" (Lantolf, 2000). While this concept is generally applied when we think of child-teacher, I argue that this concept can be extended to interactions with adults in a teaching situation and during a social interaction using language as a tool to mediate the thinking of another human being.

Another central concept to sociocultural theory is that of mediation. Lantolf (2000) argues that "the human mind is mediated" using tools and activity that allows us to change the world and the circumstances we live in. It is of the essence to understand how the sociocultural practices of Latinx parents, and their lived experiences may influence the

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

practices they bring to school in the form of Funds of Knowledge (Moll, L.C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzales, N. 1992). Many Latinx parents use language as a tool to mediate and influence the thinking of their children in the form of ‘consejos’ or nurturing advice to provide support to them in the school setting (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994).

### **Critical Theory**

Critical theory originates in the Frankfurt School to attempt to explain why “the socialist revolution prophesied by Marx in the mid-nineteenth century did not occur as expected” (Agger, 1991). The concept of ‘liberation’ as argued by the Frankfurt thinkers that “inculcating obedience and discipline contradict people’s objective interest in liberation” (Agger, 1991). The concept of liberation in education is seen in the writings of Freire (1970, 1985) where he clearly suggests that “every educational practice implies a theoretical stance on the educator’s part. This stance in turn implies sometimes more, sometimes less, explicitly an interpretation of man and the world” (Location 628 of 2714). Every practitioner takes a specific stance when working with Latinx bilingual students. School personnel also take a stance in the interactions with parents and their children. Freire (1970), a significant figure in the development of critical literacy theory, argued that the current educational theory that guides the school’s system has suppressed critical questions in relations to knowledge, power, and domination. Macedo (2006) posits that “Bilingual education, in this sense, must be seen as medium that constitutes and affirms the historical and existential moments of lived culture” (p. 131). If parents are critical to the success of their child’s education why does it seem that the structures that are in place in schools undermine the involvement of the same parents who are supposed to support their child’s education?

Using a critical lens as part of understanding the lived experiences of Latinx parents make when registering/enrolling their pre-kindergarten child in a bilingual program will help administrators, teachers, and school personnel to provide information that advances and

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

promotes the liberation in education their children deserve in the public education system.

This is critical for any parent and becomes instrumental for Latinx immigrant parents who must attempt to navigate the educational system in the U.S.

Freire (1985) argues for a liberation theology that is rooted in the struggle of the masses of people who strive to improve and find meaning to their lives that is linked to a “philosophy of hope” where possibilities are endless. Freire (1985) suggested that education should move beyond the notion of schooling and viewed as sites where education takes place; and must be viewed as a place “where men and women both produce and are the product of specific social and pedagogical relations.” Giroux (2011) building on the work of Freire, argues that educators must develop a critical pedagogy that goes beyond viewing education only as a vehicle to gain employment and basic skills but an education that enables the individual to govern themselves, and wield the power to change their own destinies.

Acknowledging the struggles of our parents, children, and members of our school community brings me to a humble realization of my position as a school leader. This gives me hope that as I improve my own understanding on the lived experiences of Latinx parents as they navigate the registration/enrollment process at the school and choose a language program for their children, will also improve the education of our students.

### **History of Bilingual Education in the United States**

I cannot write about the history of bilingual education without writing about my own story about my development as a bilingual being. I immigrated to this country in early 1980s and found out the hard way the best and the worst of how the politics of language can have either a positive or negative effect in how human beings see themselves in their new adopted society. While living in a western state, I found out that bilingual services were non-existent in my brother’s and sister’s school, so they were left to “swim and sink.” There was little support for them as they acquired English. In a blog post Sink and Swim: The American



## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

Attitude Toward English Learners, Wong argues that while the issue of educating linguistically diverse students is complex, there is plenty of research suggesting that the implementation of programs (i.e., Dual-Language programs), and the importance of native language instruction are necessary steps to attempt to support this population of students in our public schools. Crawford (1999) claims that “immigrant children were more likely to sink than swim in English-Language classrooms (p.11). While I had already graduated from high school in my native country of Peru, my older sister and my younger brother had not, and needed to attend high school. During their schooling in 1980s my brother and sister struggled mainly with the speaking of the language, however, they stayed afloat and were able to swim and successfully graduated with the support of the family, friends. But certainly not with the support of the educational system. This was one of my first realities in my trajectory to learn to speak English. It was challenging and took me a few years, but I finally learned to speak, read, and write in English. Thus, this topic brings a convincing passion into my current work as a school principal. It is impossible to speak about the history of bilingualism without discussing the history of language policy in the United States. A review of the history of bilingualism in the United States is warranted.

For many Americans, the phenomenon of bilingualism may be reserved for other parts of the world, but for numerous societies around the world, the concept of bilingualism is the norm and bilingualism among world societies has existed since ‘the beginning of language in human history’ (Grosjean, 1982: 1). Kloss (1977) argues that the U.S. has had a language orientation that promotes the inclusion of other languages in its society and has been one of tolerance (In Wiley & Korne, 2014: 1). But as Wiley (2014) suggests, Kloss failed to address the ‘dominant monolingual ideology’ existing during these times. Furthermore, the idea of tolerance was mainly true for languages such as German and other European languages since these languages were spoken by migrants arriving to the U. S. during this period. This cannot

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

be said of indigenous languages. Ovando (2003), argues that it may be true that the U.S. has had a “libertarian linguistic tradition”, but its policies have encouraged linguistic and cultural assimilation and have often served as “surrogates for racist, classist, and religious prejudices” (p.2). This is evident as we see various states such as California, Arizona, Massachusetts, developing policies that repress linguistically diverse populations in the United States.

According to Ovando (2003), the history of bilingual education in the United States has gone through various changes based on social, political, historical, and economic contexts (See also, Gándara & Escamilla, 2017; Crawford, 1999). Garcia & Sung (2018) argue that “The demands to provide Latinx children bilingual education in the United States did not start during the passage of the 1968 BEA. Its roots have a much longer history born of war, conquest, and resistance. Based on the work of Kloss (1977/1998), Wiley & Korne (2014), I will provide a timeline describing the language policy in the United States.

*15<sup>th</sup> century (1400s).* During this period approximately 250 to 1000 Native American languages were spoken in the U.S. (Crawford, 1999; Ovando, 2003; Wiley, 2014).

*The Permissive Period -18<sup>th</sup> century to 19<sup>th</sup> century (1700s to 1880s).* During this period, Ovando (2003) asserts that “there were large numbers of immigrant communities that promoted their language, religion and cultural loyalties.” It is important to note that while immigrant communities were ‘promoting’ their cultures, this is all they knew, and it was a great opportunity for the promotion of bilingualism/multiculturalism. During the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, some form of bilingual or non-English instruction was taking place in different states, including German, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, Dutch, Polish, Italian, Czech, French, and Spanish. During this period also many states passed laws authorizing bilingual education including Illinois. Ovando also cautions that while this period was considered ‘permissive,’ the education system was not “set up to actively promote bilingualism.”

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

*The Restrictive Period (1880s to 1960s)* or what Crawford (1999) termed “The Rise of Language Restrictionism” (p.27) is considered a period where “a number of repressive policies appeared, but for very different reasons” (Ovando, 2003). Efforts to commit “cultural genocide and civilize” Native Americans marked this period. This explains why many indigenous languages in North America have disappeared and currently there is an effort to revive, maintain those languages. The American Protective Association which promoted English-only school laws was established (Ovando, 2003; see also Crawford, 1999; Wiley, 2014). Other laws became established such as the “Naturalization Act of 1906” mandating that immigrants speak English before becoming naturalized citizens. Ovando (2003) argues that during this time the immigrants arriving to the United States came from “southern, eastern, and central Europe and there was a concern from the already established descendants that threaten their “linguistic, cultural, and ideologies.” This is what really the founders of the nation had in mind, to create a “country with a unified history, with unified traditions, and with common language” (Ovando, 2003:2). This is what Macedo (2006) argues, that the idea of a ‘common culture’ only serves to spread the dominant ideology and repress the language, culture found in the United States. Crawford (1999), notes that following the Spanish-American war, “the U.S. government-imposed English as the medium in instruction in its colonies of Puerto Rico, Hawaii, and the Philippines.” It is my opinion that it was evident that during this period anti-immigrant sentiment began to grow in the United States; the goal was not to continue the ‘tradition’ of bilingualism but to limit the use of other languages and create an unbalanced of power relations in the new American society and strengthen the language of the dominant culture which has always been English. While the concept of repressing languages is not American, there were other countries around the world either promoting or repressing the use of another language also (Grosjean, 1982: 2).

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

*The Opportunist Period (1960s – 1980s)* It was after World War II that the United States realized their “inadequacies in foreign-language instruction” The subject of language, math, and science were essential, thus, becoming “high priority in the national defense agenda during the cold war.: (Ovando, 2003). The launching of the Sputnik on October 4, 1957, caused alarm in the United States and led to the creation of the National Education Act in 1958 (Ovando, 2003). The first primary goals of this act were to “raise the level of foreign-language education in the United States” (Ovando, 2003). I argue that while this was a noble goal, it was one that was developed because of the need to compete economically and militarily with other countries and not because the government wanted to promote bilingualism in the United States. The 1964 Civil Rights Act marked a change in how the United States dealt with minorities. The Rights Act, also led to the development of the Office for Civil rights (Ovando, 2003). The 1965 Immigration Act also known as the “Hart-Celler immigration Bill” eliminated the national origins quota; causing many Asians and Latin American to arrive in the United States (Center for Immigration Studies, 1995). This was a great change as it is known that the United States benefits from immigration because it not only fuels the economy but creates a diverse society.

Ovando (2003), argues that “the rebirth of bilingual education in the United States, owes a great debt to Fidel Castro’s Cuban revolution of 1959, where a “relative privileged minority: Cubans who fled to Miami established a full-fledged bilingual program” at Coral Way Elementary where classes were given in Spanish and English. This program was a success as students were advancing in reading and math (Crawford, 1999). Unfortunately, the program focus was changed by the government from an enrichment program designed to develop fluency in two languages to an intervention program. The program now placed emphasis of supporting underprivileged students overcome their handicap of not speaking English. (Crawford, 1999).

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

Despite the advances in bilingual education, the prevalent notion that Latinx students must learn English first to be considered educated, ignores the knowledge these students bring to school. In my opinion, the current political environment and persistent attacks on bilingual education that equates the learning of English with knowledge that is valued, is worrisome. I believe, this is detrimental to our Latinx students and their families as it promotes linguistic superiority and undermines their language and culture.

The 1968 Bilingual Education Act (Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act) was passed into law (Ovando 2003; Wiley, 2014; Crawford, 1999). The goal of this act was designed “to monitor the education of English language learners through mother-tongued and English education” (Ovando, 2003, Wiley, 2014; Crawford, 1999).

The Supreme Courts’ decision in *Lau vs Nichols* (U.S. 5637) in 1974; *Castaneda vs Pickard* in 1981 were critical to the survival of bilingual education during this period. In a critical review of the Bilingual Education Act of 1968, Garcia & Sung (2018) argue that “The demands to provide Latinx children bilingual education in the United States did not start during the passage of the 1968 BEA. Its roots have a much longer history born of war, conquest, and resistance” (p.319). This issue was not exclusive of the United States, this was occurring in other parts of the world also. One example is in Peru, where during the 1970s, efforts were made by the military government in Peru to revive Quechua, the language spoken by the ancient Inca culture. Spanish is the language of power in Peru. There is a negative attitude toward Quechua by most people in Peru, despite its being considered an official language in parts of Peru. I liken this phenomenon to the concept of ‘language as a problem ‘orientation (Ruiz, 1999) and prevents the Quechua language to take its rightful place as the national language in Peru. The efforts of the government to implement bilingual programs in Peru have been at best sporadic (Saroli, 2001).

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

*The Dismissive Period (1980s-Present)*. This period is marked by the efforts to mount attacks on bilingual education during the 1980s (Ovando, 2003, Wiley, 2014; Crawford, 1999). Presidents Reagan and Bush contributed to the negative rhetoric around bilingual education during the 1980s and continuing during the 1990s. During these periods there was a substantial “shift in funds allocated to promote English-only programs” (Ovando, 2003; Wiley, 2014; Crawford, 1999). Notwithstanding the evidence suggesting that quality bilingual programs promote academic success, with “the added bonus that students become bilingual” policies weakening bilingual programs were prevalent (Ovando, 2003). It is important to understand the history of bilingual education in the U.S. because it provides educators, policy makers, and parents with context on the development of bilingual programs. I am a firm advocate for stronger laws and policies that protect bilingual education and bilingual programs because it reflects the diversity in our society and schools. I argue that the idea that schools are embracing bilingualism is naïve at best, since government institutions including schools, unintentionally continue to perpetuate the idea of “deceptive ideological mechanisms” (Macedo, 2006, p.12).

### **History of Bilingual Education in Illinois**

The definitions of linguistically diverse students have shifted through the years in Illinois. Labels such as Limited English Proficient (LEP), English Language Learner (ELL) and currently, English Learner (EL). I have chosen in this paper to use the term ELL. The many definition changes of linguistically diverse students and the history of education for immigrant populations in Illinois goes back to the 1800s. My focus centers in reviewing the history of bilingual education for Latinx students in Illinois and in particular Chicago. This is a history that has undergone many changes and faced a variety of obstacles. During the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Illinois was one of several states where bilingual or non-English instruction was provided in German, Swedish, Norwegian, and Danish. Thus, there is

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

a history of accommodating other languages in the schooling of children. There was a surge of Italian, Greek, Polish, and Jewish immigrants settling in Chicago; “prompting increased xenophobia and Americanization campaigns” (Sakash, 2005). However, German was the dominant language during this time in rural communities but also in Chicago (Ramsey, 2009). Ramsey (2009) recounts that “Cook County Superintendent A. G. Lane complained about the country districts where Germans have the control of the schools. Moreover, “Lane noted, that the rural Germans maintained the mother tongue in the schools “but neglect the English” (P. 283). German began to lose its status once Chicago began to merge with “surrounding districts” (Ramsey, 2009, P. 284).

As in many states around the country, schools became the ideal place to socialize the new immigrant and 'integrate them to the 'American culture.' In 1889 the Edward Law was enacted requiring all “parochial and public schools to use English as the sole language for instruction” (Sakash, 2005). However, this law was repealed in 1893 but as in other parts of the United States, English ‘gain momentum.’ According to Sakash (2005) bilingual education took root in Chicago between 1968 and 1973 as the state developed the Transitional Bilingual Program in 1976. Despite the support for bilingual education in Chicago, Latino students continued to lag. Thus, in 1971, the United States Commission on Civil rights issued one of six alarming reports on the conditions of education for Latino student in the Southwest (Martinez, 1975). Feeling that the Latinx population in Chicago was being left out “demanded attention to its problems, resulting in the appointment by the Illinois State Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights of a subcommittee to develop a project focusing on Latino problem in Chicago” (Martinez, 1975, p. 990). Some of the findings made by this committee included the fact during this period, “90% of the Latino students in Chicago Public Schools were being denied equal educational opportunity and the placement of Latino children in classes for mentally handicapped “(Martinez, 1975, p. 995).

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

One of the criticisms of this committee was that while the Transitional Bilingual Program (TBP) was established in Chicago, the program was viewed as a way of assimilating students into the dominant culture. While the TBP is additive in nature, the ideology behind the program is assimilationist.

Currently, other bilingual programs such as Dual Language Programs, whether two-way bilingual or one-way bilingual, are being promoted in Illinois and in many school districts across the country. There is increasing evidence that dual language programs continue to have positive academic results for minority students and also for white students enrolled in these programs (Thomas, & Collier, 2002; Marian, Shook, & Schroeder, 2013).

As of 2016, “The percent of ELL students in the United States was 9.6 percent or over 4.9 million students with the majority of students speaking Spanish (3,790,949 total) ([https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator\\_cgf.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgf.asp)). In 2010, Illinois boasted of 183,522 ELL students, with 159,983 students categorized as dominant in Spanish (Latino Policy Forum, 2013). Despite the setbacks, and resistance to bilingual education, Illinois was the first state in 2010 to pass legislation requiring Pre-School sites that houses 20 or more emergent bilinguals to offer home language instruction (Hadi-Tabasumm & Gutierrez, 2017). However, not everyone agreed to the new rules and opposed its implementation even before the new rules were approved (Zehr, 2010). The number of Latinx students continues to increase, thus, pushing schools to rethink their programs to be able to educate these students. While much progress has been made in Illinois and in the Chicago Public Schools around bilingual education and the education of Latinx students, there is more to be done to ensure that these students have a successful experience in the Public-School System.

### **Bilingual Programs**

There may exist confusion or misconceptions about the goals of bilingual education if parents are not afforded nor understand the type of bilingual programs that may be available



## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

for their children or if the schools provide an incomplete description of these programs. Thus, a brief description of each program being offered to parents of ELL students in Illinois is warranted to understand the context in which these parents must make their decision. Table 1.1 provides a simple overview of the program goals.

*Table 1.1*

Types of Bilingual Program	Goal	Bilingualism
Transitional Bilingual	Monolingualism	Subtractive
Submersion	Monolingualism	Subtractive
ESL – Pull Out	Monolingualism	Subtractive
ESL – Push in	Monolingualism	Subtractive
One-Way Dual Language	Bilingualism	Additive
Two-Way Dual Language	Bilingualism	Additive

*Table adopted from Educating Emergent Bilinguals Garcia & Klein 2018*

**Transitional Bilingual Programs (TBE)** TBE programs must provide instruction in both the home language of students and in English in the core subject areas (language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies), as well as instruction in English as a second language (ESL). TBE services must also include instruction on the history of the student’s or the parent’s native land and the United States (ISBE).

Baker (2011) argues that TBE programs “aims to shift the child from the home, minority language to the dominant, majority language. Social and cultural assimilation into the language majority is the underlying aim.” Genesse (1999) suggests that TBE programs “is the most common form of bilingual education for English language learners in the United States” (p.18). Garcia (2009) argues that this type of bilingual program “promotes a subtractive type of bilingualism” (P. 115). Furthermore, Garcia (2009) suggests that in a subtractive perspective, ‘language shift to the more powerful language of instruction’ (P.116).

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

**Transitional Programs of Instruction (TPI)** TPI programs must include instruction or other assistance in a student's home language to the extent necessary as determined by the student's level of English proficiency. TPI services may include, but are not limited to, instruction in ESL, language arts in the student's home language, and history of the student's native land and the United States. This type of programs currently allows schools to use ESL services when there are less than 20 ELL students in the building and/or there is more than one language other than English spoken by students (i.e., Spanish, Arabic, and Chinese).

**Dual Language Programs-** This is an additive bilingual and bicultural program. Two approaches to Dual Language Programs. These definitions are given in the district where the school is located.

**One-Way Dual Language Programs-** serves student who share the same linguistic and cultural background and qualify for bilingual services through a TBE program. This program follows the 80-20 model. Literacy and academic content instruction are conducted through both English and the partner language as reflected in the grade level DLE Curriculum Alignment Plan (CA). (Dual Language Education Program Handbook, 2019). Thomas & Collier (2012) assert that "the distinction between one-way and two-way programs originated with Stern in 1963" (p. 25).

**Two-Way Dual Language Programs-** serves students who speak a language other than English who are or were initially identifies as ELs who are entitled to TBE language services form the partner language alongside English proficient students for whom the partner language is a foreign language and may include heritage speakers with varying degrees of proficiency in the partner language and students with high levels of proficiency in the two

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

languages (English and the partner language) (Dual Language Education Program Handbook, 2019).

Thomas & Collier (2012) argue that the research for these types of programs overwhelmingly support the implementation of the Dual-Language models. They recorded some of the benefits of the Dual Language (DL) classrooms when compared to English as a second language (ESL) or to mainstream English classrooms. These benefits include, “English learners in DL score significantly higher on state tests as well as norm-referenced tests than in ESL-only programs; English Learners in DL master much more of the curriculum, academically and linguistically, than English Learners in ESL-only programs and student overall attendance is better in DL programs” (pp. 1-3). This is clearly aligned with the research on parental attitudes toward bilingualism In DL programs (Craig, B. 2013; Lopez, M. M., 2013).

### **Latinx Parental Involvement**

During these years in my role as a school principal I have heard the words of parents and specifically Latinx parents who during our meetings stand up and talk about how “we need to get involved and we need to support our children.” While I agree with these sentiments, I am not sure how much I have done to ensure that this becomes a reality in our school. Schools’ systems across the United States have developed programs to involve parents and there is no argument that parent involvement is critical to the success of a student in school (Epstein, J. & Salinas, K. C. 2004; Hill & Torres, 2004; Suarez-Orozco, C., & Suarez-Orozco, M., 1995). National policies have been developed with the goal of increasing parent involvement especially parents who have been disenfranchised due to low economic status, language bias and limited education (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). Epstein & Salinas (2004) argued that “A well-organized parent partnership program starts with an action team for partnerships made up of teachers, administrators, parents, and community partners the action

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

team is linked to the school council or school improvement team” (P.12). They further suggest that this ‘Action team’ will “yield many benefits for schools and their students” (P.12).

This is true with all families from all walks of life, a school team dedicated to partnering with parents and students is crucial to the continued success of every student in the educational system. This is also true for Latinx families who unfortunately have had a negative reaction from educators across the country. However, Quiocho and Daoud (2008) set out to ‘dispel some of the myths’ held by schools when it comes to Latinx parent involvement. In a qualitative study, they argued that Teachers held negative perceptions of Latinx parents. However, the study results suggested that Latinx parents had high expectations of their children’s academic achievement and wanted to be more involved in their education but felt excluded from the school community” (P.255). They also suggested that “Latinx parent involvement should be customized to specific families and their community and to the specialized schooling needs of their children” (P. 258). It is important that we address the misconceptions that educators may have regarding the involvement of Latinx parents in the education of their children and build a bridge between the school and Latinx parents as they want to be active participants in the education of their children.

Delgado-Gaitan (2004) argues that to involve Latinx parents in schools, it is imperative that educators understand the different factors that may prevent them from participating in school; these factors may include lack of knowledge of the educational system, negative schooling experiences, and language barriers. It is important to note that one size fits all program does not always work in every community. (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004) asserts that context is as critical to understand the needs of each community that serves Latinx students and their families; this is an important, as it also point to the heterogeneity and the richness of the Latinx culture. Colegrove & Krause (2017) in a study of mathematics

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

and curriculum instruction, argued that the lack of or little communication between the school and the Latinx parents can create a misconception or misunderstanding about the interest they have for the education of their children. Colegrove & Krause (2017), highlight the “need to create a bridge” between the families. In another study, Gitelman (2010) sought to answer whether the participation of Spanish speaking parents in a parent resource group increased parent involvement. She compared school-related attitudes and activities of Spanish-speaking parents who participated in the Parent Resource Person Group training workshop with those parents who did not receive the training. Gitelman found that the Spanish-speaking parents who participated in the training, valued being involved in their children’s education. The study also found that given the training in the skills to navigate an unfamiliar school system, provided parents the ability to overcome barriers that prevent them from getting involved.

### **The Case for and Against Bilingual Education**

Stritikus and Garcia (2005) argue that “Bilingual education is not, and has never been, a neutral process.” I tend to agree with this premise since in my own experience as classroom teacher, and currently, as a school principal I find myself finding ways to fight for resources for our school and how those resources will support our instructional programs as it pertains to bilingual services. Crawford (1999) suggests that the phenomenon of bilingual education brings out strong feelings that lead to issues of political power and social status that are far removed from the classroom and that Bilingualism in America is a forgotten legacy.” Thus, proponents of English-only programs, consistently undermine the need for bilingual education programs so it perpetuates the lie of a “common culture” Macedo (2006). One of the arguments against bilingual education were those made by Chavez & Amselle (1997); they argued that bilingual education had no sound research and that most studies supporting bilingual education “were so flawed that they do not meet the minimum methodological standards” (p. 102). Another claim Chavez & Amselle (1997) make is that “parents of

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

Hispanic students, overwhelmingly ranked learning to read, write and speak in English as their number one priority” (p. 104). The authors of the study do not mention whether parents want their children to learn the new language while losing their native language nor revealed the reasons parents chose these rankings. Porter (1997) argues that “the current population of limited-English students is being treated in ways that earlier immigrant groups were not. The politically righteous assumption is that these students cannot learn English quickly and must be taught all their subjects in their native language for three to seven years while having English Language introduced gradually.” Advocates of English-only fail to understand that learning a language is a complex endeavor and not a linear one. While this comment is dangerous, it also lacks the support of research as it has been demonstrated by Cummins that “everyday conversational language could take up to two years, and that the “more complex language needed to cope with the curriculum could take five to seven years. Hakuta (2000) found that “English oral proficiency may take three to five years, while English proficiency needed for academic success may take four to seven years” (Baker, 2017). My own life experiences as a second language learner, a schoolteacher and currently a school leader confirms the fact that students may struggle with academic language longer than with the social language of daily life.

I believe that placing young children whose first language is not English in an all English classroom without native language support is not pedagogically sound. This placement may ignore the child’s native language resources and her cultural needs. Baker (2017) argues that “These consistent findings make it clear that calls for just one-year of English immersion schooling for immigrant children to acquire English are unrealistic and damaging” (p. 161). In 1979, Bethell used the argument of the U.S. as a ‘melting pot’ to present a case against bilingual education and the fact that the government wasted millions of dollars to support the idea of bilingual education. Macedo (2006: 43) warns that viewing the

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

U.S. as a melting pot is to allow the dominant cultural group to ‘consolidate its cultural hegemony.’ Unfortunately, this concept of American society as a ‘melting pot’ continues to permeate our society and promotes a sense of not belonging for linguistically diverse students and families. Porter (1996) is an advocate for the English-only movement in the United States who claims that “Bilingual education advocates consistently oversell the importance of native-language instruction.” After making this comment, Porter argues that this may be important at the initial stages of learning English, but the teacher should move to reduce the use of the native language as the students “learns” the new language. This is contrary to research highlighting the importance of using native-language instruction in the classroom (Collier, 1995; Snow, 1990; Hakuta, 1990; Cummins 1981).

Celebrating the diversity of our students in our schools and in the larger society should be one of the goals of education. However, in 1986, California was on the first states “to declare English their state’s official language” (Crawford, 1999). Proposition 63 may have had unintended consequences for bilingual education, since before its passing, California had one of the strongest bilingual programs in the U.S. (Crawford, 1999). Crawford (1999) traces the roots of the English only movement back to 1983 as “offshoot of the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), a Washington, D.C. based lobby that advocates for tighter restriction on immigration” (p.64). According to Crawford (1999) the English only movement has one “simple message: our common language is threatened by the mindless drift toward a bilingual society” (pp. 64-65). Crawford (1999) argued that Gerda Bikales, the former executive director of the movement asserted that, “In this nation of immigrants, the English language has been our social glue not just a bond, but the bond that has held us together and allowed us to resolve our differences” (p.65). Macedo (2006) calls the position of the English only movement, “A pedagogy of exclusion that views the learning of English as education itself” (p.126). Macedo (2006) also argues that the education of non-

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

English speaking students should not be “reduced to issues of language, but rests on a full understanding of the ideological elements that generate and sustain linguistic, racial, and sex discrimination” (p.126). As educators, we must be cognizant of our biases and beliefs and not make the mistake of referring to our students as ‘language learners’ only. We need to see them using a funds of knowledge lens (Moll, L.C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzales, N. 1992) that will allow us to see their fullness of their abilities in the world.

School leaders, and practitioners must keep in mind that educating the whole child includes the language repertoire students bring to school. Thus, Macedo (2006) calls for educators “to develop, as Henry Giroux has suggested, “a politics and pedagogy around a new language capable of acknowledging the multiple, contradictory, and complex subject positions people occupy within different social, cultural, and economic locations” (p.126). The question for school leaders is how they ensure that the staff in a school setting reflects an understanding of people’s experiences that allows them to feel valued. In 1998, California once again was in the spotlight, this time with voter passing of proposition 227 basically eliminating bilingual programs in California. Proposition 227 “called for a transitional program of Structured English Immersion (SEI) that would normally not exceed 1 year and then students would be mainstreamed in the classrooms where the language of instruction was only English” (Monzo, 2010). However, on November 8, 2016, Proposition 58 the California Multilingual Education Act of 2016 was introduced by Senator, Ricardo Lara and passed successfully by 73.5 percent of voters in California.

Since the implementation of the No Child Left behind Act (NCLB) (2001), there continues to be a prevalent discourse around the “need” to hold ELL students and schools accountable and in turn this has shaped how schools respond to the academic and language needs of ELL students. This issue continues to be a source of educational and political disagreement among educators, communities, students, and policy makers. In all the political



## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

rhetoric around how to best determine and measure the academic progress of ELLs. However, the main constituents are left out of this discourse, the students, and parents.

### **Parents Reasons for Choosing Bilingual Programs**

There are several studies that seek to understand the reasons and attitudes of Latinx parents about bilingual education and bilingual program. In a study conducted in a small city in Texas on the reasons why five mothers chose to enroll their children in a two-way immersion program (TWI), Lopez (2013) captured three main reasons; value and benefits of bilingualism; future benefits and opportunities; and the importance of maintaining bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural competencies. This is consistent with other findings when parents give the reasons of enrolling their children in bilingual programs whether they are transitional, or Dual-Language programs; but Lopez (2013) asserts that “Parents from different backgrounds may have some different reasons for choosing to enroll their children in TWI programs” (p.223). While these studies point to the many benefits that bilingual education has in the educational trajectory of a student, some parents continue to refuse the bilingual services provided to them in the school system.

Amaral’s (2001) study about “Parent’s decisions about bilingual program models” in California, comparing the choice parents made between three programs available for parents (Mainstream English classrooms, Structured English Immersion Programs, and Transitional Bilingual classrooms). She surveyed parents with different levels of education. Those who had a high school diploma, had an advanced education, and were school dropouts. She found that 61.5% of all parents choosing a bilingual program held a high school diploma. 52.1% of parents choosing a Structured English Immersion Program (SEI) more often had completed high school. Parents with advanced education chose bilingual programs more often than SEI and mainstream programs while the less educated chose mainstream programs more often than bilingual or SEI programs (p.227) Thus, arriving to the conclusion that the level of

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

education played a role in whether the parents placed their children in “bilingual programs where home language support was available” (p.235). Amaral (2001) also found that “The longer the parent lived in the United States, the more inclined they are to place their children in programs with little or no English support” (p. 235). Amaral (2001) also found that these parents placed their children in “settings that mirrored the language pattern used at home” (p.235). This study points to the critical need of ensuring that schools provide accurate information about all the programs available for these families.

### **Summary**

Bilingual programs in the United States have a long, rich history that includes periods of political assaults during times of economic stress in the country. The constant negative language used toward students and their families enrolled in these programs create a hostile environment where children’s native language is devalued, and students are perceived as low performing. While some progress has been made toward addressing issues of inequity and dehumanization, the persistent deficit view of Latinx children and families continues to permeate our society. As Macedo (2003) asserts, “the American monolingualism is part and parcel of an assimilationist ideology that decimated the American indigenous languages as well as the many languages brought to this shore by various waves of immigrants. As the mainstream culture felt threatened by the presence of multiple languages, which were perceived as competing with English, the reaction by the launch periodic assaults on languages other than English” (p. 23).

Thus, empowering Latinx children, and their families to search for the meaning in their daily experiences when they engage with educational institutions such as schools and other governmental entities is critical. Unfortunately, there continues to be scarce research on how to best empower and make Latinx parents true partners in the decisions schools make for

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

their children. It is imperative to further the research efforts and focus on how to best serve this population if we are to provide Latinx parents and their children an equitable education.

### **Chapter Three:**

#### **Methodology**

The aim of this study is two-fold. First, to better understand and capture the lived experiences of our Latinx parents as they navigate the registration/enrollment process at the school and select a language program for their Pre-kindergarten child. Second, is to understand what lived experiences may influence their perception about bilingual education programs.

These are the research questions that guide this study:

1. What are the lived experiences of Latinx parents as they navigate the process of school registration/enrollment for their Pre-Kindergarten student?
  - a. What lived experiences help Latinx parents inform their decision what are those factors influencing that decision?
  - b. What do parents think the impact the language program (Spanish or English) chosen will have on their child's language acquisition/development? Do parents believe it is the fastest route? The best route?
  - c. What experiences have parents had in their own lives that helps them understand the differences between the bilingual education programs and monolingual education programs?

#### **Research Design**

Using a qualitative and an emergent design allowed me to “explore and understand the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2018). I believe that this was the right approach since in my role as a school principal, my desire is to seek to understand the community I serve. In my own search for the meaning in my role as a principal, I have attempted to understand why adults make certain decisions that could have or perceived as tremendous impact in their lives and that of their children. As a former

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

teacher and currently in the role of school principal, I see myself not only as impacting the lives of children but that of the adults and find it necessary to touch their minds and souls with every encounter and interaction I have with them. This study provided critical information and acknowledged the voices of those who often feel silenced and do not have a role in how schools function, but I believe it provided important information for those of us who work with children and engage with their parents in daily interactions. As an instructional school leader interested in the lived experiences of Latinx parents as they engage in daily interactions with the school and its personnel one area that is aligned to my study is that of parents registering/enrolling their children in a Pre-Kindergarten language program. Another interest is what lived experiences of Latinx parents may influence their perception of bilingual education programs. I believe phenomenology is the best-suited philosophy and methodology for this study since I am interested in parents' lived experiences.

A phenomenological approach to inquiry allowed for an accurate “description of the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by the participants” (Creswell, 2018). It is my hope to provide an ‘accurate’ description but also an interpretation that helps to better understand and capture the lived experiences of Latinx parents and the nuances and factor(s) they take into consideration before deciding whether to enroll their pre-kindergarten student in a bilingual or monolingual language program and how their lived experiences may influence the way they view or perceive bilingual education. The hope is that this information will provide school leaders and school personnel with what the researcher deems critical information on how to support Latinx parent’s decisions. What lived experiences have these parents have that may influence their perception about bilingual programs and English programs? What factors do they take into consideration before they make this registration/enrollment decision? Do they have an opinion or perceive a program

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

better than the other one? What is that opinion based on? Since “perception is regarded as the primary source of knowledge, and the source cannot be doubted” (Moustakas, 1994 P. 52), then, this study is critical in adding to the field on how best to inform school leaders and school personnel to better serve Latinx parents, their children, and the community at large.

Phenomenology provides educators and scholars with an approach to inquiry that is sound with the art and science of educating but also providing a framework of the importance of understanding the lived experiences of human beings. One of the goals of phenomenological research is to allow the researcher to see the ‘humanness’ of another being as they contemplate their lived experiences. There are two main schools of phenomenology, descriptive and Interpretive or (Hermeneutic). Scholars and researchers identify Edmund Husserl as the main force of descriptive phenomenology while Heidegger a former student of Husserl who disagreed with some of Husserl’s ideas about “how phenomenology could guide meaningful inquiry” is identified with the interpretive or hermeneutic tradition (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Husserl proposed that any “experience as perceived by human consciousness has value and should be an object of scientific study” (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Furthermore, Husserl’s’ efforts to develop rigor in the study of human science suggested that a “scientific approach was necessary to bring out the essential components of the lived experiences specific to a group of people” (Lopez & Willis, 2004 P.727). One essential concept to Husserlian tradition is that the researcher must ignore ‘all prior knowledge to grasp the essential lived experiences of those being study or ‘bracketing’ (Lopez & Willis, 2004) while Heidegger suggested that suppressing or eliminating prior knowledge of an experience is not plausible. This study will be guided by Van Manen’s tradition of hermeneutic phenomenological approach to human science research.

Van Manen (2016) suggests that when educators engage in human research in education, it should be “guided by pedagogical standards” He argues that this is important as

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

it provides educators with the ability to reflect “on the lived experiences and practical actions of everyday life with the intent to increase one’s thoughtfulness and practical resourcefulness or tact” (p.4). Reflecting not so much on the intent but also on the impact that our interactions have when dealing with other human beings when one is in a position of power is critical to the job of the principal as we attempt to build bridges and strengthen relationships with the community. The actions that we take as leaders of a school while working with parents, students, teachers, and community members is an integral part in understanding the lived experiences of the parents participating in this study.

Van Manen (2016) suggests that while phenomenology may not offer us a concrete theory to ‘explain or control the world’; it may provide with sensitive ‘insights that brings us in more direct contact with the world’ (p.9). Van Manen (2016) claims that “research is a caring act” (p. 5). As a school principal caring about the people, one serves is a motivating factor to find out in more depth what Latinx parents experience and how their lived experiences when they need to register/enroll their children in a school and make the critical decision of choosing a language program in Pre-Kindergarten. Van Manen (2016) also argues that while ‘love’ is not a theory, having a pedagogical compass to guide our interactions with other human beings is critical to the work of an educator. The work of principals does not only need to draw from leadership theories as they interact with parents, children, and those in the community, but also from listening to their constituents and their lived experiences and consider those elements to guide them while supporting the educational decisions parents make for their children.

I chose to guide this study using Van Manen’s perspective of human science and the use of pedagogical standards to reflect on the daily interactions with the students, parents, and stakeholders; since as a school principal I ask teachers to engage in sound pedagogy when providing instruction and when interacting with their students. I believe that using a

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

pedagogical lens as I engage with parents and the community will allow me a window to the ‘humanness’ of my role while understanding their lived experiences and what lived experiences may influence the way Latinx parents perceive bilingual education programs. A hermeneutic phenomenological study will also allow me to attempt to enter the world of the parents as they make crucial educational decisions for their children and as they navigate the process of registering/enrolling them in the educational system in the US.

Van Manen (2016) suggests six research activities; (1) turning to the nature of lived experience; (2) investigating experiences as we live it; (3) reflecting on essential themes; (4) the art of writing and re-writing; (5) maintaining a strong and oriented relation to lived experience; (6) balancing the research context by considering parts and the whole (pp.30-34).

### **Context of the Study**

The school is in a large Midwestern city and currently has a population of more than 600 students. 86.1% are Latinx students and 11.8% African American students, the other 3% are considered other. 91% of the student body qualifies for free and reduced lunch and the school has scarce resources. Nearly 40% of the students are considered English Language Learners (ELLs) and are enrolled in the transitional bilingual program. This is a vibrant community that despite the lack of resources around the community, it thrives on the willingness of people to make it a better place to live.

There is one supermarket around the community where the school is located, and people can shop for healthy choices of food. There are various corner stores that surround the neighborhood where alcohol and unhealthy foods such as potato chips, sodas, sugary drinks, and other products that are not considered part of a healthy diet are in abundance. There are vibrant small restaurants around the perimeter of the neighborhood, a park with a soccer field, basketball court and a fieldhouse across the street from the school where you see children running around, playing basketball, soccer or just simply running around. During the spring



## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

and summer season it is a lively community that despite the challenges continues to strive. Every April, the school partners with a city government office to volunteer to clean up the streets that surround the school and the neighborhood. People who live here try to make this community a nice place to live and do take pride of their neighborhood.

Unfortunately, the neighborhood is also plagued by gang's factions that are constantly at war competing for the drug market. There are shootings nearby the school, individuals who stand in the corners looking to make a drug sale or "defend" their territory. At times, it becomes a hostile environment that prevents our students and families from enjoying a nice walk around the park. Families can face dangerous situations as they walk their students to school. The school has made efforts to partner with neighborhood organizations, the police department, and the park district to alleviate some of the problems and has shown to be a smart strategy as together we engage the community to combat the violence that continues to plague the school and its surroundings.

The school boasts of a full time transitional bilingual program and a newly established One-Way Dual Language Program. According to the school's district bilingual handbook (2017), a full-time transitional bilingual program is "where the language of instruction in the content area is in English instruction in all core subjects and those required by law or by the district; Instruction in the language arts in the student's home language; Instruction in the history and culture of the students or of their parents and in the history and culture of the United States.

The school district accountability system categorizes its schools in different levels based on the results of the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) assessments and other metrics that are not the focus of this paper. The NWEA is an adaptive assessment that measures growth and attainment in reading and math. Students from 2 to 8<sup>th</sup> grade take this assessment, which is also used for grade promotion in 3, 6 and 8<sup>th</sup> grades. The scores in

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

second grade are used for the purposes of determining whether these students are at grade level in comparison with students nationally and are used as one measure of school ranking and progress. The school district utilizes a ranking system of “5 levels” to rank its schools. Level 3 being the lowest level, level 2, level 2+, level 1, and level 1+ being the highest level. While I will not discuss the many flaws and what I perceive are injustices that this ranking system may bring upon a neighborhood school, it is critical to note that I believe the metrics should be revised because they are inadequate and focused on punishing schools, students. Thus, impacting all members of that respective community. Securing resources for our teachers and students continues to be a priority for me and the LSC of the school. Every year, providing materials for our teachers and partnering with outside organizations to make up for the lack of resources is at the forefront of the work as a school leader. Our school is considered a level 1 school boasting of one of the highest levels based on the district ratings. There are other pervasive issues facing our ELL students and their parents, such as racial discrimination, deficit held beliefs from school practitioners, the pressure of “learning English” and the pervasive push for standardized testing.

### **Participants**

One of my goals as a school leader, is to build and strengthen relationships with all stakeholders in the building and with the extended community. I believe that visiting students’ homes and taking a stroll around the neighborhood provides me with an opportunity to understand and strengthen my relationship with the students and parents. My goal has always been and remains focused on building stronger relationships with parents to better serve their children. As I believe that the interactions I have with parents and other members of the community, serves to improve the education of our students.

Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti (2006) assert in their premise of Funds of Knowledge that “People are competent, they have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

knowledge” (ix-x). Thus, integrating my own life experiences with that of the parents will allow me to approach this work with the utmost respect for their own lived experiences and understand what experiences may influence their perception or perspective about the education of their children and the language programs they choose.

I engaged nine Latinx parents who have gone through the enrollment process for their children in Pre-Kindergarten classroom and selected a language program, bilingual (Spanish-English) or monolingual (English only) for their child. Six of these parents are new to the school. Two of them have had previous experiences with the enrollment/registration process at other schools and four of them were new to the process of registration/enrollment. To ensure that parents felt at ease and comfortable, I requested to meet with them at a place of their choice, their own homes, school, library, or fieldhouse at the park across the street from the school. I also recruited the school’s registration/enrollment clerk to provide with insight in her interactions with parents as they navigate the registration/enrollment process and choose a language program for their children.

### **Positionality of Researcher**

My life experiences have shaped what I now believe about language and bilingual education. I grew up in a humble home in Lima, Peru with four sisters and two brothers and I clearly remember my mother coming home from a long day at work asking us if we had completed our homework. As tired as she was, my mother would always either play an educational record or spend time reading to us. My mother always emphasized the importance of education and learning; she would tell us that education was the key to successful lives. She instilled in us the curiosity of learning and she would sacrifice long hours at work to ensure that we received the best education possible. We began taking English classes as my mother’s dream was to migrate to the United States, so she paid for

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

expensive English lessons for us in Peru. I did not learn much English in Peru, only the basic communication phrases such as “can I go to the bathroom, please?” Or “how are you?”

When my mother decided to leave Peru and migrate to the United States, we stayed back in Peru to finish school as we knew someday, she would bring us with her. In 1981, we arrived in Denver, Colorado with my three sisters and my younger brother where we established ourselves; my older brother and sister stayed back in Peru. I found myself in a new country trying to navigate the new culture and the new language. As I tried to survive my new reality, my lived experiences, such as communicating in the new language and my interactions with people led me to want to learn more about the concept of bilingualism. The ugly face of racism made its appearance during this period in our lives and my resolve to become a better, learned human being intensified.

My mother has always been a source of strength and support in my life and the lives of my brothers and sisters. She would listen to us as she knew in her maternal wisdom the struggle of learning a new language and her unconditional love towards us that made the pains easier to withstand. Feeling different because of my accent was something that I struggle, especially when people belittled you as you spoke. As I continued to learn about the new language and culture, my language skills became stronger as I never gave up trying to sound clearer when I spoke in my efforts to fit in. I found myself in a as I witnessed and lived the horrible effects of being a ‘minority’ in the United States. My struggle to improve my life in a new land was overwhelming at times; working different jobs while going to school to learn English. The constant daily experiences being a brown man with an accent made me sadly realize that I was now part of the ‘struggling minority.’ I always felt the need to try to prove that I am where I am because I was smart and had an education. The strong family support and always a thirst to learn more placed me in a better position to be where I am now.

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

In my space as a former bilingual teacher, and currently as a school principal, I understand the struggle of our students and parents who come with dreams of making a new life in a new land. This has reinforced my desire to learn more about how the lived experiences of our Latinx parents may influence how they perceive and interact with the school personnel including myself as they begin their journey to becoming bilingual. However, I also understood that there is an imbalance that is evident from the position I hold. Three parents participated in the focus group and while two of the parents were receptive to the focus group, one of the parents was hostile and spent most of the time during the focus group interrupting other parents. I proceeded to stop the focus group as it became frustrating for me and the other parents. Throughout the study I remained professional and proceeded carefully and with empathy as I worked with the parents. Parents were kind and welcoming and it is evident that they have their own view about the topics discussed.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) argue that “discussions of critical research tend to highlight three major interrelated issues in considering the relationship the researcher has with participants: Insider/outsider issues; Positionality issues; and, as a result of both of these intersecting factors, the importance of researcher reflexivity.” (p.63). I am an insider because I am an immigrant who had to learn the language and the culture, I found myself in. My lived experiences may not have had the same trajectory as the parents at the school, but they are similar in that language is the common denominator. I am an outsider because as the school leader I hold a position of power, a power given to me by the organization I work for, and by the parents, community members, and teachers who have placed their trust in me. A trust that I take very seriously as we work together to make the school a place our students and parents deserve. I am an outsider because while I interact with our parents and their children in school events and community events, I have not shared with them nor have they shared with me some of their “lived experiences” (Van Manen, 2016).

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

Van Manen (2016) argues that no two experiences may feel the same for everyone, thus, it is critical to understand that while the parents and I may share a common experience we may look at it with a different lens (p. xii). I am aware that at times I have not taken the time to listen to the parent's perspectives or acknowledge their perceptions. It is important to note that I believe I meet both factors; as the school leader, I have built relationships with parents and understand how I can have access to them, while the title of School Principal positions me in a 'power relation' with the parents.

### **Ethical Considerations**

I provided parents with a letter of informed consent that acknowledged their flexibility to withdraw from the study at any time. The letter of consent informed parents that they have the right not to answer questions that they did not feel comfortable answering without any penalty. Understanding that parents' may wish their answers to remain anonymous I provided them with an Informed Consent Observation Interview form that acknowledged the anonymity of their responses and their identities. All forms were translated to Spanish if parents preferred to have the forms in Spanish. I also informed parents that the information given to me always remains kept in my possession in a desk with a key at home. I provided participating parents with a brief description of the purpose of my study. While I did not foresee any risks to the participants, whether they were physical, emotional, social, political, or economic; I was aware that the parents participating in this study may feel that the risk exists. I communicated successfully to them that there were no risks to them, their children in the school. Parents unfortunately, may have had the perception that something may happen to their child should they break the "Status Quo" and the balance of power between school and community.

One of the benefits of the study is to include the voices of parents who must go through the process of deciding whether to enroll their child in a bilingual program or a

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

monolingual program. This study provides school personnel, teachers, and school leaders such as me with information that may not be evident but necessary when Latinx parents begin the registration/enrollment process for their children. It also provides a better understanding of the lived experiences of these parents as they make the decision of choosing a language program for their children and how the schools may be able to support those decisions with reliable information. This study provides a space for listening to the voices of Latinx parents as they engage with school personnel and provides an opportunity to hear their voices. This information will guide the transformation of the school and ensure that it is a place where their children receive a high-quality education, and the parents are seen as valued members of this partnership and most importantly allowed me to see their humanness.

I ensured parents that any notes taken during the focus group interview will be kept in my possession in a secured placed and will not be shared with anyone but only with the identified participants for accuracy purposes. Parents have had the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any stage of the process if they would like to stop participating. I have spent 12 years building relationships with this community and I believe that they trust my judgment to do what is best for them as that has always been my intention. However, I informed and requested their permission to record our conversations and assured them that their identities were kept confidential. I asked parents to choose the site for the focus group interview such as someone's' home, restaurant, community center or the school. However, the pandemic prevented me from meeting with all parents face to face and used the Google meet platform instead. While I have briefly highlighted some ethical concerns and how I addressed them, Fontana and Prokos (2007) raise the issue of the researcher's involvement with the "group under study" (p.78). As I have discussed, I understand my position of power in the relationship between myself and the parents, however, I acknowledged and recognized this factor while communicating with the parents. Edwards and Mauthner (2002) assert that

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

instead of ‘ignoring or blurring the power positions, ethical practices’ one must acknowledge that position and be brought to the front (as in Fontanas & Prokos, 2007).

### **Data Collection**

I planned to survey approximately 54 parents as this was the projected membership at the time, I began collecting the data. However, due to the COVID 19 pandemic the projected enrollment dropped and only 19 families enrolled their children in the pre-kindergarten classrooms. I planned to send the survey to the 19 parents who had an email address in record. The survey consisted of 5 to 10 questions that asked parents to describe their experience of making the decision to either enroll or refuse the bilingual program and their perception about bilingual education. What compass did they use to make this decision? Why did they make the decision they made? What information did they use to help them make that decision? Did they speak with a neighbor or a family member? Did they have a previous experience making this decision? Did the school play any role in their decision? Once I had received the survey back, I planned to recruit six to seven parents to participate in a focus group and then in individual interviews. I also planned to interview the school’s registration clerk since she may have had valuable information about the registration/enrollment process for our Latinx parents and insight into the parents’ thinking while deciding which language program to choose. The survey was not sent to the parents as most of them did not use or had email accounts that were monitored by them. This is a common phenomenon at the school and district level. Parents argue that they never receive the emails with surveys or information the district sends them if they have children registered/enrolled in the system. This issue has become more evident as we work through the pandemic.

### **Methods**

#### *Survey*



## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

The purpose of sending a survey to all 19 parents in the pre-k classrooms was to gather information on the number of parents who would be willing to participate in the study. A survey is a tool that is used to ‘collect information from or about people to describe, compare, or explain their knowledge, attitudes, and behavior’ (Fink, 2003). As Fink suggests, a survey allows the ‘surveyor to collect information directly by asking people to answer to questions, or indirectly, by reviewing written oral, and visual records of people’s thoughts and actions” (p.2). I had chosen to send this survey with the goal of reviewing the responses to further gather interest in parents who would like to participate in this study and engage them in a group interview; but also collect important information from the parents such as number of children in the school, and whether is the first-time enrolling children in school.

### *Focus Group*

Focus group provided me with the ability to balance the power/relationship and the opportunity for participants to co-construct meaning with the researcher (Wilkinson, 1998). I recruited 4 parents for the focus group to conduct interviews individually with their approval. I used unstructured/informal interview protocol during the focus group, parents were asked to share their perceptions about the topic and expand on their answers given during the focus group as to provide them with the opportunity to clarify or to make further comments.

The use of focus group as a method to bring about the perception, opinions, and/or attitudes from people has increased in recent years (Wilson, 1997). Focus group was popularized in market research because it was viewed to collect information at a reasonable cost (Wilson, 1997). However, Wilkinson (1998) argues that group interviews or focus groups provide a platform to ‘explore issues that are relevant to the person-in-context.’ This is an important argument as Wilkinson asserts that “feminists social scientists have expressed many concerns, about the ethical issues involved in one-to-one interviewing, particularly in relation to potentially exploitative nature of the interaction in which the researcher controls

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

the proceedings, regulates the conversation, reveals minimal personal information, and imposes her own framework of meaning upon participants” (p.114) These are important points to address since the researcher remains in control of the interviewing process and these concerns do not disappear only because a focus group is being conducted as Wilkinson further asserts. There is no doubt that while this may be accurate, the interviewer must be mindful and provide the interviewees the freedom and the flexibility to respond in a manner that is free of bias and provide them with the ease to share freely what is in their minds as they attempt to answer the questions provided by me.

Unequivocally, issues of power and control do arise during an interview also; however, it is to the benefit of the interview to engage the participants in a human conversation rather than see them as ‘subjects’ of a research project. I asked parents for their permission to record our conversations and assured them that their identities were kept confidential. I also asked parents their preference of the site for the focus group interview such as someone’s’ home, restaurant or at a neutral place.

### *Interview*

After my attempt to conduct a focus group, I extended an invitation to the participants who would be willing to engage in a one-to-one interview. My main goal for the one-on-one interview was to further explore the participants’ answers in a place where they may feel safe to share their answers or share further details regarding their lived experience. But also, to engage in what Van Manen (2016) calls a conversation relation, a collaborative process in which the researcher engages with the interview in a ‘true conversation’. The interview has a long tradition in society and continues to be “one of the most powerful ways in which we try to understand our fellow humans (Fontana & Prokos, 2007). The interview is a common tool that is used by different fields to extract what is believed to be accurate and believable responses to the questions given (Fontana & Prokos, 2007). I used a combination of semi-

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

structured and conversation because as Fontana & Prokos (2007) assert “can provide greater breadth than do other types, given its qualitative nature.” The hope is that by using this type of interview will engage the participant in reflecting and sharing their experience as they lived them. Van Manen (2016) claims that in hermeneutic phenomenological human science the interview performs very specific purposes, first to explore and gather “experiential and narrative material that can provide the researcher with a richer and deeper understanding of the human phenomenon under study and to develop a conversational relation with the interviewee to go back to her and discuss the meaning of the experience (p.66). Van Manen (2016) suggests that too many times, first time researchers may engage in interviews that are unfocused and provide unnecessary information not related to the question, thus, he cautions that “before embarking on a busy interview schedule one needs to be oriented to one’s question or notion in such a strong manner that one does not get easily carried away with interviews that go everywhere and nowhere” (p.67). Fontana and Prokos (2007) assert that because the interview involves human beings, “extreme care must be taken to avoid any harm to them” (p. 77).

### *Document review*

While observation and interviewing are collection strategies to gather specific data that addresses the research questions, documents and artifacts can also serve as sources of data in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). One of my goals in reviewing the Home Language Survey (HLS) was to collect information regarding the language spoken at home and to determine how many of the parents participating in the study provided answers that indicated more than one language spoken at home and the choice of the program enrollment. I believe this was important as I engaged with parents in a focus group and on one-to-one interview to further understand their rationale for their decisions. I believe that as I interacted with the parents, I stood pedagogically focused on their children because the two

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

are inseparable. As Van Manen (2016) suggests, as educators we must “stand pedagogically in life” (p. 138). While the work the work of a school leader is to continue to build the human bridge and create that space to ensure that the relationship between parent, child, and educator is based on sound and humane pedagogy.

### **Data Analysis**

A pervasive issue for researchers, specifically, first time researchers is what to do with the data collected (Wolcott, 1994). This is a crucial point that needs to be at the forefront as I begin my ‘analyses’ of the data collected. I agree with Miles and Huberman (1994) that a researcher must make their ‘preferences clear’ and how their understanding of the world shapes how they interpret it, specifically the social constructs that may be ‘invisible to the eye’ (p. 4). Perhaps, the reasons of why Latinx parents make the decisions around enrollment/registration seem to be obvious especially when given the benefits of one language program over the other, parents still have their preferences and make that choice for their children. I have developed my own opinions and assuming that there are other forces at play that drives parents ‘decisions. My positioning to the phenomenon is focused on the experiences parents have when navigating the registration/enrollment process at the school, as they select a language program for their pre-kindergarten child and what experiences may influence their perceptions of bilingual education programs. This I believe, will inform me how to best support and understand the decision parents make.

Wolcott (1994) suggests three ways of ‘doing something with data’ (p.10) that is ‘staying close to the data originally recorded; expand and extend beyond a purely descriptive account and thirdly, making sense through interpretation of the data.’ Guided by Van Manen’s (2016) concept of hermeneutic phenomenological reflection (p.77). I analyzed the data several times as given during the interviews using Van Manen’s (2016) three prong

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

approach to uncovering themes; (1) the holistic or sententious approach; (2) the selective or highlighting approach; (3) the detailed or line-by-line approach (pp. 92-92).

Van Manen (2016) also cautions us that “all recollections of experiences” whichever form has been used to collect this data, “are already transformations of those experiences” (p.54).

### **Data Validation**

I used interviews, focus group and document review to better understand the registration/enrollment decisions Latinx parents make and their perceptions about bilingual education programs. These different data sources were used to ensure the qualitative validity of the study. Creswell (2018) asserts that Qualitative Validity “means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the finding by employing certain procedures” (p. 199) in the process. I utilized triangulation of the data to ensure the accuracy of meaning and validating the findings. Triangulation is the use of “Different data sources by examining evidence from the sources and using it to build a coherent justification for themes. If themes are established based on converging several sources of data or perspectives from participants, then this process can be claimed as adding to the validity of the study” (Creswell, 2018, p. 200). I engaged the parents by sharing the transcripts and looking or reading their responses and included them in the process of validation as this practice ensured the accuracy of their responses. I provided the parents an opportunity to “check in” by engaging them in ‘collaborative hermeneutic conversations’ (Van Manen, 2016, p.99). This process served me to be cautious about the limits of my own interpretation of people’s daily experiences (Van Manen, 2016). It was my strong desire that this study provided school leaders and school personnel a space to reflect and to better understand the lived experiences of Latinx parents as they navigate the registration/enrollment process and choose a language program for their

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

Pre-Kindergarten child and what every day experiences may influence their perceptions of bilingual education programs.

### **Summary**

As a school leader, one of my roles is implementing policy that impacts how we educate our students and serve our community. The many challenges that our Latinx population face such as the lack of economic resources, access to better opportunities due to language barriers. This may also be due to their lack of knowledge on how the systems work in the US. The Latinx population is heterogeneous and brings with them many funds of knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2006) that must be leveraged in the daily interactions and relationships with school personnel. These funds of knowledge must also be used to bridge the divide that may exist between the parents and school personnel. It is critical that school leaders guide the work in their schools of supporting Latinx parents and their children. School leaders must change the negative narrative that is targeted against Latinx families and their children. If school leaders do not try and attempt to better understand why our Latinx parents make the choices they make around language programs, then, we will not be able to address the needs of our students. I believe this information can be used to begin the process of strengthening our schools and make the registration/enrollment process for our Latinx parents a positive and informative experience. I also believe that by establishing a positive experience for our parents will in turn provide positive outcomes for our Latinx students.

## **Chapter 4:**

### **Findings and Discussion**

I gathered data for a period of five months from October 2020 to March of 2021. This chapter represents the presentation of the information collected based on a focus group, semi-structured interviews, my own journaling, and documents gathered from the school.

In this chapter, I provided an in-depth description of the community in which most of the families live. As I have stated before, I have been serving this community for the past 13 years and I have grown fond of what makes this place what it is and how it continues to strive. Furthermore, I have grown fond of the people that make up this community. I provided a brief synopsis of every mother/father interviewed as each interviewee had their own story and the perceptions about the questions asked. Finally, I describe and discuss several themes that emerged during the interviews. I also discuss my interactions with the parents and the school clerk during this process.

#### **The Neighborhood**

In Chapter 3, I provided a brief description of the community where these families reside and where the school is located; a striving neighborhood that despite the negative image of its location within the city is quite resilient. The small soccer field, basketball court and playground fill with children and families as the first signal of spring arrives. You can observe people running around the soccer field and groups of parents walking as they attempt to leave behind the boredom of winter and the pandemic that plagues the entire city, country, and world. The houses or apartment buildings vary in design. Some of the two floor apartment buildings can be shared by two or three families where you can see up to eleven people living together. Some houses and buildings are not well taken care of by landlords and need much repair. Many of our families can afford the rent due to their resiliency and social networks. Unfortunately, the school has steadily been losing student membership due to the

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

increasing price of rents and families not able to afford them. There is a garden about 1 block south of the school. It is supposed to be a community garden that brings the residents of the community together as they work hard to beautify the area where many children and families walk toward the school and during the spring and summer you can observe families enjoying that space.

This is a striving and proud neighborhood. You can observe young people playing in the soccer field where our own students and staff have played soccer games. The basketball courts and the playgrounds that are in front of the school full of young people playing hoops and mothers with their little ones enjoying the playground. The neighborhood has access to clinics, restaurants, and other convenience stores. There is a church building facing the east side of the school that recently sold was transferred to another organization to give way to a new boxing club that provides a place where young people can exercise and get academic tutoring. The park district that manages the park across the school on the north side of the school provides much needed programs for the children in the neighborhood. It also maintains a strong partnership with the school to serve the community. Some of our parent meetings or potlucks take place in the parks' fieldhouse.

The school is located in between two main streets that run north and south, in the east, a busy street that unfortunately is a source for drug sales and prostitution. The community has worked alongside with the police department and other organizations for many years to rid of this problem and as the adage goes, change takes time. One the best things that has happened in my tenure at the school has been the installation of lights in this corner and a traffic light that allows parents and students to cross the street in a safely manner. There are also small stores such as the dollar stores and a gas station with a Dunkin Donuts where the children hang out before arriving to school to enjoy some coffee or a hot chocolate and donuts. A new Aldis food market recently opened, but it can be inaccessible as some families walk awhile to



## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

get there. Some of the families prefer the “carniceria” that is located on the north side a few blocks from the school. Liquor stores are easily found and have become another headache in the neighborhood. As I write this paper, a week ago there was a shooting right in front of the main entrance of the school that began in the corner of the school due to a minor accident when someone pulled a gun on the other driver and began shooting at the other driver. The individual who was shot was able to get back in his car and drive off as the police arrived and as always seems to be the case nothing changes. Life continues and people go about their business seeing little change in the way these things are handled at the city level. This is the reality of many of our students and parents who must walk these streets to and from school and around the community. However, this does not stop them from coming to school, and attempting to live a normal life as they enjoy the amenities that surround the neighborhood. The school is an active partner with different neighborhood organization that are trying to make a change and improve the lives of the people residing here. The families we serve are hardworking people. Many of them are “essential workers” who have no choice but to go to work. Many of our parents must risk their own health to survive as they provide for their families, as they take the long trips sometimes outside the city either in carpools or in public transportation to arrive at their jobs. During this pandemic, some of our students have lost family members, mothers, fathers, uncles, aunts, grandmothers, and grandfathers and as I reflect in my own experiences in the neighborhood, our students and families continue to demonstrate a resilient spirit.

### **Parents**

I interviewed nine parents who have a child enrolled in the pre-kindergarten classrooms at the school. Three of the parents have experienced the registration/enrollment process at the school before, while for four of them, it was the first time registering their children at this school and two of them have had experience with a different school in the

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

district but was the first time enrolling their pre-kindergarten child at this school. I also interviewed the school clerk who is also a parent and in charge of registration/enrollment at the school who was born in Mexico and is fully bilingual. The nationalities of the parents are Puerto Rican, Mexican, and Mexican American. Eight of them were born outside the United States and one of them was born in the U.S. The name of each parent has been changed to protect their identity. I provided a brief description of each of the parents interviewed and the school clerk which is summarized in table 4.1.

### **Mrs. Francisca**

Mrs. Francisca was part of the focus group and graciously agreed to meet with me for the interview after having an interesting experience in the focus group. Mrs. Francisca was born in Mexico and migrated to the United States when she was 17 years old. She is married with four boys who one is currently in high school, and three in elementary school. During the process of the interview, Mrs. Francisca revealed that she was moving out of the neighborhood because they could not afford the rent anymore and her brother-in-law bought a house in the south side of the city and was willing to rent them the basement. She requested to keep her child enrolled at the school because she believes that it is the best place for her children.

### **Mrs. Guadama and Mr. Guadama**

I interviewed Mrs. Guadama who began the interview sitting comfortably on her couch in her living room. Mrs. Guadama was born in Mexico and arrived in the United States 19 years ago. She is 38 years old and is new to the school but not new to the process of enrolling her children in a public school. As I began the interview, Mrs. Guadama appeared to be relaxed despite the sounds of a dog barking, and children playing in the background. When she proudly told me that she was born in Mexico, we had a pleasant exchange as I shared my trips to some beautiful cities in Mexico, while serving in the United States Navy.

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

She smiled as I shared that experience with her, and we dug into the interview. Mrs. G seemed to be very comfortable answering the questions and engaging in conversation with me as she seemed to be relaxed as her body language. One of her daughters appeared on camera and I said hello while waving at her and she responded in kind by waving and saying, “that is Mr. A, the principal” Having the child say that warmed my heart and gave me a feeling of happiness. As I proceeded with the interview and asked the question about what she believed the benefits of bilingual education programs were, and as she began to answer the question, she began to what I interpreted as stumbling and I overheard a male voice in the background, answering the question. At that moment I asked Mrs. G if that was her husband and asked her to please have him join us.

Mr. Guadama sat next to his wife and placed his arm around her. When I asked him where he was born, he proudly said “I was born in Michoacán to be more specific. They arrived together 19 years ago and are the proud parents of four children, one in high school, one in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, one in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and one in Pre-K. Mom stays home with children while the father works at a factory trying to forge ahead in the middle of the pandemic and the hostile political environment which we live in right now.

### **Mrs. Gama**

Mrs. Gama was born in Mexico and came to the United States when she was three years old and while her native language is Spanish, she is also fluent in the English language as she attended elementary and some high school in the city when she arrived. Mrs. Gama expressed that she is a new parent in the community and has two children enrolled at school. One child in 4th grade and her 4-year-old enrolled in the dual language prekindergarten classroom. Mrs. Gama spoke about how thankful she was that her father decided to bring her to the U.S. at such young age in search of better life for her and her mother. She proudly spoke of her family as a source of strength and reliability. During the one-on-one interview,

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

Mrs. Gama expressed that though she lives outside the boundaries of the school, she had heard that it is a good school to educate their children and decide to apply for enrollment.

Mrs. Gama also participated in the focus group.

### **Mrs. Velazquez**

Mrs. Velazquez is native of Puerto Rico and has 3 children in school. Her native language is Spanish, but she learned a little bit of English while going to school in Puerto Rico as is practiced in schools there. She currently has one 9-year-old in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, a 4-year-old in pre-Kinder. Mrs. Velazquez is new to the school community and while she did not share much of her personal information, she shared some information about her experiences with the school that require attention and understanding. Mrs. Velazquez also chose not to have the camera on while she was being interviewed but was willing to engage in the interview to the best of her ability as she stated “espero poder ayudarlo con su proyecto.” (I hope to help you with your project). Mrs. Velazquez is a single mother who works during the hours of the day and has a challenging time participating in school events. She stated that her dad picks up the children from school while she works.

### **Mrs. Java**

Mrs. Java was born in the US and had the opportunity to attend elementary school in the same large midwestern city and a Dual Language Program. Mrs. Java was able to use her Spanish to get Spanish credits in high school. She has two children one who is enrolled in the Pre-Kindergarten Dual Language program and another student who is the English program.

When asked why she did not enroll her other child in a dual language program she stated,

“So unfortunately, the dual language program wasn't available at the time. The program started last year, which is why he was not placed in the dual language program. If it would have been available to Carlos, I would totally have put him in the dual language program. So, it was the only thing. And at home I know because I am the bilingual

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

coordinator at my school. So, for the home language survey, I only marked that he speaks English because that is mainly what he knows. He does not know any Spanish like my other child. So, but she got into a language.” Thus, given the choice this parent would have enrolled her other child in the Dual-Language program, but, since she is knowledgeable about how the system works, she decided to write no in the Home Language Survey for his son as she believes the transitional bilingual program is quite different than the dual language program. Another interesting fact about Mrs. Java is that her husband graduated from the school I lead.

### **Mrs. Amada**

Mrs. Amada was born in Mexico. She is married with four children one who is already enrolled in his first year of college, one who is a junior in High school, one who is in 6<sup>th</sup> grade and one who is in the pre-kindergarten dual language program at the school. Her husband works in a factory, and she stays home with the children and supplements their income by making art crafts and sells them to make ends meet. Mrs. Amada arrived with her husband when they were around 19 years old from Mexico City. She acknowledges that learning English was a challenge since her husband and her spent most of their time working to support their young family. Mrs. Amada has been living in the same neighborhood for the past 22 years. Mrs. Amada has been a vocal participant during parent meetings and two years ago she became involved in the Local School Council (LSC) and serves as its vice-president. The LSC as mentioned in chapter 1 also oversees the school budget and performs the evaluation of the school principal.

### **Mr. Robino**

Mr. Robino was born in Mexico. He is married with two children one in second grade and one 4-year-old who is enrolled in the English Pre-Kindergarten classroom. Mr. Robino is an advocate for his children as the second grade has been identified as a diverse learner. He

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

works long hours at a factory, from early in the morning to late afternoon but makes great efforts to be involved in his children's education. During this pandemic, Mrs. Robino has come to school to exchange Ipads for her children and was always concern with remote learning as she felt her children were not getting the best education possible in this mode of delivery. Mrs. Robino always expressed her concerns about the school and the teachers and Mr. Robino would bring those concerns to me. Mr. Robino was also part of the focus group.

### **Gaby**

Gaby, who asked to be referred by her real name, is the school clerk in charge of registration/enrollment at the school. She was born in Mexico 38 years ago and arrived at the United States when she was 14 years old. She completed her 8<sup>th</sup> grade at midwestern large urban school and also high school. Gaby was brought to the U.S. by her dad who had spent most of his life living in a city located in the west coast of the country. Gaby states that all her family lives here in the U.S. "My mom, aunts, grandparents they all live here, so I really have spent little time in Mexico." She is a proud mother of 3 children ages 19, 14, and 8. Gaby stated that the oldest child can read, write, and speak in Spanish while the 14-year-old is able to speak a little Spanish while the youngest son is having difficulty learning Spanish. She says that "He is having a hard time producing the language even though we speak Spanish at home but for him has been very difficult, but we continue practicing with him." Gaby has been working at the school for over 10 years. She started as a bus monitor and then moved into a security position and now currently as a school clerk. Gaby claims that "I wanted to learn everything, I really like working here and three years ago I began helping in the office and since then I have been learning all about registration, records keeping, and learning other administrative tasks" She is currently the Bilingual school clerk in charge of registering students and ensuring that parents receive the paperwork and necessary information to register their children at school. She is also in charge of ensuring that Pre-

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

Kindergarten parents receive all the information they need as the application process goes through central office. Gaby has great personal aspirations such as going back to school and studying law. She is currently applying to various law firms to begin her work as a clerk and embark herself into a new career.

*Table 4.1*

*Participant demographic information*

Mrs. Francisca	Mrs. Java	Mr. Robino	Mrs. Gama	Mrs. Amada	Mrs. Velazquez	Mrs. and Mr. Guadama	Gaby
Born- Mexico Age- 40 Homemaker	Born - U.S. Age -25 Teacher	Born- Mexico Age 39 employed	Born-Mexico Age- 3 employed	Born- Mexico Age 41 Works from home	Born-Puerto Rico Age 38 employed	Born- Mexico Age-32 Both employed	Born-Mexico Age-38 clerk

### Data Collection Settings

Focus group, interviews, and document review were used to answer the research questions. I hoped to meet with parents face to face to engage in a focus group and individual interviews. However, during the study, COVID 19 happened, and we found ourselves living in a middle of a pandemic that has affected the U.S. and the entire world. Our community has been tremendously affected with the deaths of some of our parents, and sickness of many of their family members. There is no doubt that the Latinx population is one of the cultural groups most impacted by the pandemic and has brought tremendous fear to our families.

This is an emergent design study, and one characteristic of emergent design is that as new issues arise during the process of the research, the investigator must remain flexible and adapt as new ideas, thoughts or findings arise (Creswell, 2018, p.182). In the process of collecting data, I remained flexible as my goal of meeting with parents face to face dissipated because they were afraid to meet in person. Despite my efforts to modify the form of our meetings such as wearing face masks, arranging the seats following the health guidelines of 6 feet or

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

more, parents declined to meet face to face. I completely understood their decision. However, parents were willing to still meet with me for the focus group via the Google meet platform. I proposed to use the zoom platform, but parents felt more comfortable using Google meet as they were more familiar with this platform and accustomed to it since they have been supporting their children at school and meeting with their teachers as they attend remote learning.

### **The Challenge of Focus Groups**

I cannot emphasize how challenging it was for me to have sent the surveys to gather interest for the focus group and have parents respond. In my mind I thought the survey was very simple to complete but perhaps I miscalculated how challenging it became for most of our parents. After not receiving any surveys back, I decided to make personal phone calls using my personal cell phone to the 19 parents who had a child enrolled in Pre-Kindergarten and after a couple of weeks I was able to enlist four parents who were willing to participate in the focus group. Parents expressed the main reason for not responding to the survey was that they really do not check those emails or do not use email to communicate. Three out the eight parents (Mrs. Francisca, Mrs., Java, and Mrs. Amada) did use email to communicate with me after they provided consent for the interview. Mrs. Francisca was part of the focus group along with Mr. Robino and Mrs. Gama. We were supposed to have another parent join us, but she never arrived or logged in.

Mrs. Francisca was first to arrive, and I noticed that she was in a room with the door closed. She was sitting and was well dressed in a nice outfit as if going to a job interview. I was impressed with her demeanor, and while we waited for the other participants to arrive, we made small talk and she asked me about the school and how we were dealing with the pandemic. We waited approximately seven minutes for everyone else to arrive to begin the focus group. Mrs. Gama arrived next and then Mr. Robino and the last parent unfortunately



## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

never made it. I began by reading the consent form that I had send to them and asked them if they had any questions and were still interested in participating. They all responded in the affirmative. The focus group was performed in the middle of the COVID 19 pandemic and hindered the opportunity of having these parents face to face. I was able to notice that Mrs. Gama was driving because I could hear traffic and could hear her placing an order at a fast-food restaurant (Researcher's journal).

Two of the parents who were willing to participate in the focus group did not expect to be interrupted nor contradicted as they responded to my questions. Unfortunately, when I directed a question to one of the other parents, Mr. Robino interrupted to criticize the school, administration and not allowing the other parents to participate. There was a point where I had to weigh in and asked Mr. Robino to allow the other parents to finish responding the question. I assured him that he would have an opportunity to respond to the question. Mr. Robino continued with his negativity toward the topic, the school and continued to interrupt the other parents.

Unfortunately, despite my efforts to keep him focused on the questions he continued to focus on other issues. I decided to end the focus group as it was not productive and that is when I noticed that Mrs. Gama had either hung up or was disconnected and did not get her back. I thanked all the parents for engaging in the focus group. Mr. Robino left the call and I asked Mrs. Francisca if she would be willing to participate in a one-on-one interview to which she agreed. Three weeks after the focus group, I was able to meet with Mr. Robino in the school as he stopped by to have his child's school issued IPAD looked at. Mr. Robino was gracious to spend some time with me for a one-on-one interview.

At first, I was not sure what to make of Mr. Robino and his actions during the focus group. My first reaction was to challenge his disposition for not allowing the other parents to speak. However, as I reflected in his responses, and attitude, I realized that the issue of

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

bilingual education programs and the choice for his children brought out strong emotions and strong opinions. He talked about his long hours at work and the fact that he is advocating for his children at school is admirable.

### **Interviews/Conversations**

I conducted nine interviews or conversations with nine parents and while nine interviews were conducted, I reported on eight as per the request of one the parents the data provided to me was not used for the study. The right of any parent to withdraw from the study was stipulated in the letter of consent shared with the parents and clerk. This parent chose to exercise her rights. The goal was to meet face-to-face conversation with the parents and while only one of the interviews was face-to-face the rest of the interviews with the parents were done through google meet. Parents expressed more confidence in using the google meets platform since they were familiar with it as they supported their children and communicated with the teacher. Through the interview I was able to enter these parent's home and they made me feel welcome despite the complexities and issues that come with technology, parents were understanding and flexible while I conducted the interview. It is important to note that this was the reality in collecting data in the middle of a pandemic and while I felt that by not being with them in person, the human connection was being lost, parents made me realize that everything was going to be alright.

As stated in chapter 3, I used a semi-structured format for the interviews. This allowed me the opportunity to ask questions such as, what is your opinion of the registration/enrollment process at the school? Why? Tell us one thing you would like the school to change about the enrollment process? When I found that the answers from the parents and the clerk were too short, I proceeded to further engage them in a conversation by using phrases such as, could you please tell me a little bit more about that or what made you feel that way? Did anyone press you to change your mind? I found this to be productive as

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

parents and clerk added more details to their responses. This in turn, also helped me strike a conversational tone with them.

After completing all the interviews, I used Sonix, an online automated transcription platform that allows for translation to English since almost all, but one interview was performed in English. The rest were done in Spanish. Sonix provides a report with a level of confidence in terms of the accuracy of translation and words based on the quality of the audio. For example, confidence level of translation is 83.53%, very confident 3871 words, fairly confident 608 words and slightly confident 155 words. I used the following steps to obtain the transcripts. First, I uploaded the audio tapes to the Sonix platform. I then listened to each interview with the transcript provided by Sonix for accuracy and made corrections or adjustments, as necessary. I performed this step as many times as possible to ensure accuracy. After completing the transcripts clean up, I shared the transcripts via email or read them to the parent and clerk. Four parents engaged with me in having them either read the transcript or had me emailed to them. While not every parent wanted the transcripts to be read to them when I did read it to them, they kindly stated “no me recuerdo todo lo que dije director, pero si estoy de acuerdo y confio en usted.” (I do not really remember everything I said principal, but I agree and trust you). I thanked the parents for their trust but later as I reflected on the words “I agree and trust you” I felt a sense of tremendous responsibility for the well-being of the parents supporting my study and the parents I serve. Trust, is a compelling word as defined by the Merriam-Webster online dictionary; “assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something.” Van Manen (2016) asserts that “phenomenological research has, as its ultimate aim, the fulfillment of our human nature: to become more fully who we are” (p.12). As I reflected on this word, I thought about the power relationship first, before taking them at their word and realizing that these parents have placed tremendous confidence on me and how I report their words put forth.

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

### **Document Review**

One of my goals in reviewing the Home Language Survey (HLS) was to collect information regarding the language spoken at home and to determine how many of the parents participating in the study provided answers that indicated more than one language spoken at home and the choice of the program enrollment. I believe this is important as I engage with parents in a group and one to one interview to further understand their rationale as they engaged in that process of filling out the paperwork that would be part of the process of registering/enrolling their child in language program.

After examining the HLS, I found that all parents but one participating in this study chose two languages spoken at home, Spanish and English. I do not believe that they had a full understanding on the implications of their responses except one parent who understood how the system worked and the implications of her response. The HLS is without controversy as some people believe that through its use, schools are overzealous in identifying ELLs (Zehr, 2010; Bailey, & Kelly, 2011). However, this continues to be an effective way to quickly identify ELLs.

### **Findings**

As a school leader, I have been interested in the life experiences of our Latinx parents as they navigate the registration/enrollment process at a school and select a language program for their pre-kindergarten child. Another interest of mine has been how the everyday experiences of Latinx parents may influence their perception about bilingual education programs.

I am a Peruvian immigrant and can relate to the struggles of these parents and the education of their children. Through my years as a schoolteacher, I tried to empower my Latinx students by instilling in them the need to feel pride of their heritage and most importantly their bilingualism if they spoke two languages. I made sure that they knew that

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

being Latinx is not simply a matter of being proud but also a matter of having access to better opportunities in life. Furthermore, I made sure that they understood that they did not live in a neutral or color-blind society and one of the ways to overcome the racial disparity that exists in our schools and society was to engage with the world.

As discussed in the literature review of this study, the phenomenon of bilingual education is one that cannot be divorced from the political and economic struggles of the Latinx community in the history of the U.S. Issues of discrimination and linguistic superiority have been used as tools to discourage bilingualism (Crawford, 1999, Macedo, 2006, Nieto, 2017). The concept of a ‘common culture’ has been used to “develop mechanisms that prevent us from fully participating in it” (Macedo, 2006). Under the disguise of ‘national cohesion’ English- the language of the dominant culture is leveraged against the Latinx communities to silence their voices and maintain their “oppression” (Freire, 1970). I believe this is a pervasive issue in our society that continues to be manufactured by people in power to maintain the status quo and ensure the privileges of the dominant culture.

Van Manen (2016) argues that “all phenomenological science research efforts are really explorations into the structures of the lifeworld, the lived world as experiences in everyday situations and relations” (p.101). The purpose of the questions in the study were to ascertain the lived experiences of the adults our school serves and the lived experiences that may influence their perceptions of bilingual education programs. In my position as a school leader, it is crucial to reflect on the actions and decisions I make on behalf of ‘*other people’s children*’ (Delpit, 1995) and the relations I have with them. Van Manen (2016) argues that phenomenology is not simply a philosophy but “it is also the source for questioning the meaning of life as we live it and the nature of responsibility of personal actions and decisions” (p.13). In my opinion, acting responsibly with ‘tact and thoughtfulness’ (Van Manen, 2016) is the essence of a leader. The questions that guide this study were:

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

1. What are the lived experiences of Latinx parents as they navigate the process of school registration/enrollment for their Pre-Kindergarten child? Followed by sub questions that may allow me to ascertain their experiences with bilingual education.
  - a. What lived experiences help Latinx parents inform their decision and what are those factors influencing that decision?
  - b. What do parents think the impact the language program (Spanish or English) chosen will have on their child's language acquisition/development? Do parents believe it is the fastest route? The best route?
  - c. What experiences have parents had in their own lives that helps them understand the differences between the bilingual education programs and monolingual programs?

I searched the interviews for key words, sentences, and phrases that allowed me to find patterns across the interviews based on the responses provided by the parents and clerk. I engaged the parents including the clerk to discuss some of the themes that I discovered based on their responses. I found that this process was one which the parents and clerk appreciated, as it provided them with an opportunity to provide more insight into their responses and to provide validity to the themes discovered. For example, as I discussed the themes with Mrs. Amada, she added a sentence that struck a chord as a school leader. Mrs. Amada was referring to the school when she stated that “Uno se siente ansioso, y a veces uno se siente como si uno no existiera durante las reuniones. Lo tratan como si uno no perteneciera en la escuela.” “You feel anxious, and sometimes you feel like you do not belong to the school community.”

When I asked her to clarify what she meant by that statement and what was it that made her feel that way, she told me that “Especialmente durante las reuniones, siempre todo es

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

ingles primero y después si se acuerdan nos hablan en español.” (Especially during the meetings, everything is always in English and if they remember they speak to us in Spanish

My first reaction when I heard that answer was that of surprise. I felt a sense of defensiveness because I was not expecting that answer. Mrs. Amada expressed her disappointment with the school as we continue to do business as usual by always speaking English first and then Spanish, despite being a Dual-Language School. I noticed her nervousness as she answered my question, but she did anyway, and I was glad for it, because I believe it will help me improve how we conduct business at the school (Researcher’s journal). I reassured Mrs. Amada that I sincerely welcomed her candor when answering the question and I truly appreciated her willingness and courage to speak her truth.

After carefully looking at the responses from the parents and the clerk I organized the responses into themes. The main question, *what are the lived experiences of Latinx parents as they navigate the process of school registration/enrollment for their Pre-Kindergarten student?* Sought to gather the experiences of Latinx parents as they navigate the registration/enrollment process at a school and their selection of a language program based on those experiences. I believe the sub questions are interrelated and connected to the main question to provide a deeper understanding of some of the factors and nuances that may influence how parents perceive bilingual education programs. As I searched for the meaning of Latinx parents’ thoughts, beliefs about the phenomenon of registration/enrollment and looked into their perceptions of bilingual programs, the use of a phenomenological approach provided me the space to *gain a deeper understanding* of their everyday experiences (Van Manen 2016, p.9).

### **Themes**

According to Van Manen (2016) the goal of phenomenological reflection is to “grasp the essential meaning of something” (p.77). Attempting to understand how Latinx parents

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

experience the phenomenon of registration/enrollment and selecting a language program at the school and what those experiences feel like for them must continue to be at the forefront of being a school leader. Van Manen (2016) argues that themes are (1) the experience of focus, of meaning, of point; (2) as best a simplification of the lived experience (3) not objects one encounters at certain points or moments in a text. And (4) theme is the form of capturing the phenomenon one tries to understand. Van Manen (2016) suggests that themes are what anchors our desire and need to make sense of the lived experiences of other human beings (p. 88). As discussed in chapter 3, I conducted several rounds of analysis using Van Manen's approach to uncovering for themes. While I searched for commonalities and in what concepts to "anchor" the parents and clerk's responses to the interview questions, it is important to note that these themes may not fully reveal the "deep meaning, the full mystery, the enigmatic aspect of the experiential meaning of a notion" (Van Manen, 2016 p. 88).

### **Multiple Experiences**

Van Manen (2016) argues that two human beings may not experience a phenomenon the same way. (p.9). As is evident by the themes I have chosen to discuss based on the parents' responses, the parents' experiences were different as they navigated the process of registration/enrollment to select a language program for their child and their perspectives on bilingual education programs. While three of the parents expressed comfort with their ability of selecting a language during the process of registration/enrollment, other parents did not feel the same way. For some parents this is the first time they engaged in this process. Three parents had previous experience with the system and five were new to process here at the school.

In the next section, I introduce the responses from the interviews with parents and the school clerk. I present the responses inside a table in the language spoken by the parents and the school clerk. I have chosen to place the responses in the language they were provided to



## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

me during the interviews. If the response was given in Spanish, the English translation is in the adjacent box. If the response was given in English, there is only entry as that was the language spoken by the parents. I chose to do this as to acknowledge and respect the language the parents and clerk used during the interviews as I believe it preserves their voices. The figure below shows the connection of the themes based on participant responses.

*Figure 5.1*

*Themes*



### **Fear/anxiousness of the uncertain**

While the process of registration/enrollment for parents of school aged children may be a common phenomenon, they may not experience it the same way. Below are a sample of the responses of the parents including the clerk of how our Latinx parents experienced this process that for some of them demonstrate that concept of fear/anxiousness generating a sense of uncertainty that can be debilitating for any human being.

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

<p>Bueno, sí, las cosas han cambiado porque uno está más consciente, con más temor. Si este presidente que nos cansa sigue en la presidencia. Lo hace a uno pensar que puede pasar políticamente. ¿Que debe uno compartir con la escuela? ¿Le da a uno inseguridad como padre, uno se pone a pensar que le puede pasar a uno? Y si le pasa algo a uno le va a afectar a los hijos.</p>	<p>Well, yes, things have changed because you feel more self-conscious, more fearful. If this president who is exhausting us is still in the presidency, makes you wonder then what might happen to one politically. What information should you share with the school? Then it gives you insecurity as a father, you start thinking What can happen to you? And if anything happens to you then it is going to affect our children.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Mr. Guadama</p>
<p>Yo no quería poner a mi hija en ese programa, pero me sentí como presionada y la escuela me hizo cambiar mi decisión, y claro me sentí como que no tenía opción, pero ahora veo las consecuencias con mi hija. La veo que se confunde mucho y la quisiera cambiar al otro programa.</p>	<p>I did not want place my child in that program, but I felt like the school made me change my mind, and I was scared because the school made me feel like I had no choice and I feel I see the consequences with my child now. She seems to be confused. I would like to switch her to the other program.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Ms. Velazquez</p>
<p>No, las escuelas siempre están tratando de cambiarles a uno la decisión y quieren decirle a uno que decisión tomar. Eso no puede ser, nos quieren asustar y eso nos hacer sentir ansiosos sobre todo el proceso. No es correcto, ellos son nuestros hijos.</p>	<p>Schools are always trying to change a parent's mind and they want to tell us what program to choose for our child. That cannot be, they want to scare us, so makes us feel anxious about the whole process. It is not right; they are our children.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Mr. Robino</p>
<p>No a veces es muy frustrante porque uno no entiende el idioma y cuando no hay una persona que le hablan en su idioma uno se siente ansiosa llenando tanta información y en los tiempos que vivimos hoy uno nunca sabe</p>	<p>Sometimes is very frustrating when you do not understand the language and they do not have anyone who speaks your language you feel anxious filling out so much information and, in the times, we are living in you never know what can happen</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Mrs. Guadama</p>
<p>Después también nos dejan saber que no, que ellos quieren que sus hijos solamente hablen inglés. Puedes notar en los padres que algunos se sienten minoría si es que hablan el idioma español, obviamente por el área donde ellos residen y probablemente un 80 por ciento son hispanos. Se habla el idioma español y son considerados minoría. Entonces eso probablemente los hace sentir que de preferencia quieren hablar solamente inglés para que sus hijos no se sientan discriminados.</p>	<p>Then they also let us know that no, that they want their children to only speak English. You may notice in parents that some feel minority if they speak the Spanish language, obviously in the area where they reside and probably 80 percent are Hispanic. The Spanish language is spoken, and they are considered a minority. So that probably makes them feel that they prefer to speak only English so that their children do not feel discriminated against.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Gaby</p>
<p>porque cuando yo metí la aplicación me dijeron que iba a ver padres aplicando a la escuela y me decían que pusiera otras escuelas y yo no quería me dijeron que iba a</p>	<p>because when I put the application, I was told I was going to see other parents applying to the school and they told me to put other schools and I did not want to have</p>

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

<p>niños en espera donde y yo no quería porque yo ya tenía otros hijos allí y quería que mi último hijo vaya ahí. No, no y se iba hacer muy difícil llevar a un niño a diferente escuela. Pero después me llamo la secretaria y me dijo que si lo iban a aceptar en esta escuela La Secretaría ha sido muy amable y yo con esa escuela me ha gustado la secretaria. Me ha gustado los maestros.</p>	<p>to take my other kid to another school I already had other kids there and I wanted my last child to go there. No, no and it was going to be very difficult to take a child to different school. But then secretary called me, and she told me that they were going to accept my child at this school the secretaria has been very kind and I like the school I liked the secretary. I liked the teachers. Mrs. Francisca</p>
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I noticed that while parents experienced a sense of fear and anxiousness, each one of them used a different lens. For Mr. Guadama was the fear of being deported and his answers reflect the political times and regrettably the sentiment of many people who live in the U.S. Mr. Guadama did not state it, nor did he have to, I saw his demeanor in the screen going from one of assertiveness and joy to one of deep thought and sadness. There was no doubt he was terrified in thinking that if something happens to him, then what would happen to his children and his wife. He expressed anxiousness about the amount of information he needed to provide to the school. I attempted to reassure him that the information he provided to the school during the process of registration/enrollment is confidential and no one would get their hands on that unless he gave us his permission. In spite my reassurance, Mr. Guadama's concern goes beyond the process of registration/enrollment and illuminates the issue of immigration and the treatment of people like Mr. Guadama and his family who are seeking a better life. This issue has a direct impact in our schools as school leaders and practitioners interact with parents and their children.

During this time, many of our political leaders, including the president of the United States were adamant to undermine all immigrants specifically the Latinx community. The criminalization of the immigrant community in the U.S. is not a new phenomenon and it goes back to decades of labeling immigrants as 'criminals.' Thus, when former president Trump referred to Mexican people as "criminals, and rapists" he was echoing a destructive racist

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

narrative that sadly has characterized the issue of immigration in the U.S. (Abrego, Coleman, Martinez, Menjivar, & Slack, 2017). This is the reality for many of our Latinx immigrant parents who arrived in this country to improve their lives causing unnecessary fear in our communities.

In Mr. Robino's response, I saw his frustration toward the school system causing him to feel anxious as he was determined to let me know that it was not right what the parents go through in the process of registration/enrollment. I have had other interactions with Mr. Robino and find him to be at times aggressive when he believes the school is infringing in his rights as parents. Regardless of how he feels about the school, we have an opportunity to continue to provide his children with a high-quality education that respects his language wishes. I noticed his passion, and forceful response when I asked him why he selected the monolingual program for his child. Mr. Robino stated that it was his right to do so, and they children needed to learn English. While I may respectfully disagree with the premise of his argument, I understood his unwavering stance in ensuring that the school provides instruction to his child in English. Mr. Robino did not mention anything about Spanish which I found interesting since that is the primary language spoken at home by him and Mrs. Robino. This interest let me to think about what Freire (1970) "The oppressed at a certain moment of their existential experience, adopt an attitude of "adhesion" to the oppressor" (Location 555).

Fear is 'defined as intense emotion that is characterized by rapid heartbeat and other physiological changes' and while psychology makes a distinction between fear and anxiety, both terms are used interchangeably (APA 2020). I believe that this fear takes different forms as expressed by our parents and the school clerk. While a parent reported fear in the form of anxiousness, another parent reported the fear of not having legal status in the country and the amount of information they should disclose to the school. Gaby, the school clerk suggested that the parents' fear comes from a lack of information about the registration/enrollment

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

process. A 2003 study on the Parent's lack of understanding of their children's bilingual education program at a school district, revealed that "a miniscule number of parents are familiar with the practices and policies in place at their children's school about bilingual education programs" (p.333). Gaby suggested that to counter parents' fear and anxiousness and make the process of registration/enrollment smoother for our Latinx parents is by providing them with more information.

Mrs. Guadama shared a previous experience with another school in the city and stated

<p>No tuve opción. No me quisieron dar esa opción. Me hubiera gustado. yo quería (programa bilingüe) desde mi primer hijo, pero no me los quisieron dejar los primeros porque les hacían exámenes y decían que hablaban bien el inglés y no necesitaban el español, aunque yo no hablaba demasiado el inglés. De todos modos, fue muy difícil, mucha ansiedad para mí ayudarles, tareas y todo eso, pero no tuve esa opción. Entonces todos ellos estuvieron en inglés.</p>	<p>I had no choice. They did not want to give me that option. I wish I had the chance. I wanted (bilingual program) for my first child, but they did not want to leave me the first ones because they took an exam and said they spoke English well and did not need Spanish, even though I did not speak English too much. Anyway, it was very difficult a lot of anxiety for me to help them, with their work and all that, but I did not have that choice. So, they were all in English.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Mrs. Guadama</p>
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Mrs. Guadama used the words "very difficult", "I did not have choice" and "no options." Her frustration was evident as she shared her experience at the other school. Furthermore, she felt helpless because she believed she had no options. There was no need to ask Mrs. Guadama how this experience made her feel. At this moment, she was sitting by herself, and her husband had not joined her yet. She tilted her head as to help her recall this experience and began using her hands as she was narrating her story. I believe that this is a clear example of this school exercising its power acting as 'oppressor' (Freire, 1970) against the wishes of this parent and negating her and her children the opportunity to registering them in a bilingual program.

This theme gives insight in how some of our Latinx parents experienced the process of enrollment/registration process for their pre-kindergarten student as they select a language

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

program. To the ordinary person, this fear or anxiousness may seem unwarranted. However, I appreciate the sincerity and willingness of our parents to be vulnerable as they reflected on the meaning to this experience.

For two of our parents the process of registration/enrollment at the school was not challenging nor difficult as their responses indicate. They believe that they understood how the school system works.

	<p>Yeah, so I am kind of biased because I know. So yeah. I mean, I could have chosen to put my daughter and my other child at both because, like I said, my husband and I both speak Spanish at home. But knowing that how the process is that if I were to put another language other than English, he would have been placed in a bilingual program.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Mrs. Java</p>
<p>A mi experiencia fue fácil para aplicar fue fácil. Es que yo creo como yo vine aquí chiquita y tuve la oportunidad de crecer aquí yo entendía el sistema</p>	<p>My experience it was easy to apply it was easy. It is just that I think because I came here as a little girl, and I had the opportunity to grow up here I understood the system</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Mrs. Gama</p>

These two parents projected confidence when responding to the question of registration. Mrs. Gama attributed it to attending school once she arrived at the U.S. Mrs. Gama spoke of the advantage of being here since she was a child and learning the way the school system works. For Mrs. Java was her ability to navigate the system by not responding “yes” in the HLS under the section “Other language spoken at home.” Mrs. Java had a solid understanding of the bilingual programs in the city. When I asked Mrs. Java, if she felt that the schools should do more to work with the parents in the community. She responded by stating, it is not about saturating parents with more information but about the type of information we provide them to make those decisions about bilingual programs. Mrs. Java said that this should not just be done during the registration/enrollment process but prior to parents arriving to school. This, of course requires school outreach to the community in large.

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

I believe that my questions about the experience of registration/enrollment process at school helped parents recall more than just the process of registration and choosing a language program for their child. It brought about feelings of fear and anxiety that have been evident in the experiences of many immigrant families in this country.

### Hope for things to come & a brighter future

The notions of hope and motivation came through as I looked into the responses parents provided during the interview. Below are some of the responses that I found relevant to this theme.

<p>Me siento mucho mejor ya que lo tengo a mis hijos en programas bilingües porque los puedo ayudar con la tarea y algunos maestros hablan español y tengo esperanza que mis hijos van a salir bien.</p>	<p>I feel so much better since I was able to place my child in a bilingual program because I can help them with the homework and some of the teachers speak Spanish and I am hopeful that my children will be succeed.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Mrs. Guadama</p>
	<p>You want the best for your child, you always want them to be better than you. As a parent, you know what you went thru in school, and you do not want your children to go through the same and I believe that placing your child in a bilingual program will provide them with that advantage. I want them to keep their bilingualism and those experiences because unfortunately, it gets lost through the generations.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Mrs. Java</p>
<p>Bueno, la mayoría de la gente que tenemos sí son mexicanos. Tenemos gente de Guatemala, de Honduras, Puerto Rico, de diferentes lugares del mundo. Pero su percepción si nuevamente su idioma natal de ellos es el español y quieren que se les ayude a sus hijos a mantener el idioma y a enseñarles inglés</p>	<p>Well, most of the people we have are Mexicans. We have people from Guatemala, from Honduras, Puerto Rico, from different parts of the world. But their perception is if their native language again is Spanish, they want their children to be helped to maintain the language and teach them English.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Gaby</p>
<p>Para mí sí, yo creo que los niños que aprenden en los idiomas aprenden mejor y más rápido. Como yo le dije antes, yo puedo hablar en español e inglés igual porque mis padres me pusieron en un programa bilingüe cuando llegue a este país.</p>	<p>For me, yes, I think that children that learn in both languages learn better and faster. As I have told you before, I can speak in Spanish and English the same because my parents placed me in a bilingual program when I arrived in this country.</p>

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

	Mrs. Gama
Tengo tres hijos pequeños y yo quiero que ellos puedan tener más suerte que uno. Yo trabajo para ellos para que puedan estudiar y para mí, tienen que aprender el inglés más rápido. Pero a veces las escuelas nos hacen que cambiar nuestra decisión. Pero si, yo creo que es más rápido el programa en ingles	I have three young children and I want them to have more luck than me. I work for them so they can study and for me, they have to learn English faster. However, sometimes schools make us change our decision. Yes, I think the English program is faster Mrs. Velazquez
Mi hijo ahora me dice, mama ya entiendo porque me dices que hable español, yo veo a mis amigos y ellos no pueden tomar ciertas clases porque no son bilingües como yo. Si me ayuda porque yo sí puedo tomar esas clases.	My son tells me, mom now I understand why you tell me to speak Spanish, I see my friends and they cannot take certain classes because they are not bilingual like me. It helps me because I can take those classes. Mrs. Francisca
	I see the difference between my daughter and son and how she helps him with the Spanish. She feels happy when she is able to help her brother pronounce words he cannot. Mrs. Java
Para mi pequeño hijo se le hace mucho más difícil hablar el español, a pesar de que le hablamos solo en español en la casa, él siempre nos contesta en ingles	For my youngest son speaking Spanish is challenging despite the fact we speak to him only in Spanish, he responds to us in English Gaby

From a psychological perspective, hope is defined as “the expectation that one will have positive experiences or that a potentially threatening or negative situation will not occur or will ultimately result in a favorable state of affairs. Hope has been described in the psychological literature in various ways, including as a character strength; an emotion; a component of motivation that is critical to goal attainment; a mechanism that facilitates coping with loss, illness, and other significant stresses; or an integrated combination of these features” (APA, 2021). While this definition may allow flexibility to interpret what our parents feel, it does not communicate the fullness of the hope our parents feel.

I think that for our parents, hope is the essence of the expectations and love they have for their child. Most of our Latinx parents who participated in this study, have high hopes and high expectations for their child. They believe that by placing their children in a bilingual



## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

program will not only have a positive impact in their lives but will give them an advantage in how they lead their lives. Hope is the essence of being a parent who longs for their child to achieve the best and a force that does not vanish throughout time. If hope is a component of motivation with the focus on attaining a specific goal. Thus, parents believe that their children will have better opportunities later on in life. Gaby believes that parents hope their children are able to maintain their native language. Mr. Robino strongly felt that selecting the English program for his child will provide him an advantage to learn English faster if his child focuses only in one language. I am amazed at how these parents sustain that hope despite the challenging and unpleasant situations the Latinx community faces.

It is reasonable to believe that parents have hope for their children in spite of the language program they select for them. Van Manen (2016) argues that there is a “pedagogic relation” between parent and child that exists from the very beginning (p. 147). Thus, it is natural that this relationship brings about a hope that comes with the love between a parent and a child. Hope is about looking toward the future. Lazarus, (1999) argued that hope is a mechanism against despair and a mechanism for survival in the midst of our unpleasant circumstances. The past few years have been extremely difficult for the Latinx community as discussed earlier. They have been impacted and experienced difficult tribulations in the forms of human loss and economic loss. Many of our Latinx families lost their jobs, were targeted psychologically and emotionally by the leaders of own government including the president of the United States. However, they were still determined to hope for a better future and outcome for their children and their families as it is with hope that they exist in the world. In the next paragraph, I will discuss the theme of motivation as I interpret it based on the parent and the clerks’ responses.

### **Drivers of Motivation**

Como yo les digo a los hijos sean buenos y si pueden hablar los dos idiomas ellos	As I tell my children they need to be good and if they can speak both languages they
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## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

<p>pueden ayudar a otra gente que necesita ayuda. Yo quiero que mis hijos crezcan y que sean buenos con otra gente. Ya ve ahora que vivimos en este tiempo donde nos andan discriminando y si ellos pueden hablar más de dos idiomas es mucho mejor pueden ayudar a más gente. (Long pause)- Les digo a mis hijos hay que echarle ganas.</p>	<p>can help other people who need help. I want my kids to grow up and be good to other people. You see now that we live in this time where we are being discriminated against all the time. If they learn to speak more than two languages then can help more people. (Long pause)- I tell my children you have to give it all you have got Mrs. Francisca</p>
	<p>My son being in the bilingual program in the sense that he learns his two languages from a young age so that when he is older, he has that option of finding a good job. Mrs. Gama</p>
<p>No, yo creo que ellos se tienen que enfocar en un solo idioma, los niños se confunden y para que hacerlos pasar por eso, si después van a tener que hablar en inglés solamente</p>	<p>No, I do not believe that I believe that they need to focus in one language only. The children will get confused and why make them go through that if at the end they will need to speak English Mr. Robino</p>
<p>Para mi pequeño hijo se le hace mucho más difícil hablar el español, a pesar de que le hablamos solo en español en la casa, él siempre nos contesta en inglés</p>	<p>For my youngest son speaking Spanish is challenging despite the fact we speak to him only in Spanish, he responds to us in English Gaby</p>

There are different factors that motivates parents to select one language program over the other. There are two phenomenon that are found in their responses and how they view their reasons for selecting one program over the other. It is apparent that parents motivate their children to succeed whether is through bilingualism or monolingualism using different forms. Such as the parent’s life experiences, and economic advantages.

Motivation as defined by our parents and based in their responses is the force that allows parents to engage in motivational conversations with their children through the use of “consejos” or advise (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994). The word “consejos” or advised as used in the Spanish language has a depth that transcends its English translation. Consejos (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994) are more than a simple talk for their children to do well in school and in life. Consejos carry with it a sense of resistance and emotional support. When parents discussed their experiences, they did so with a sense of motivation that could be seen through the

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

flames of their struggle. Parents spoke of how they take every opportunity to communicate to their children the importance of being successful. It is a motivation that drives and sustains their cycles of hope.

It is my opinion that the Latinx parents lived experiences motivates them to select a language program. Parents spoke of their children having success in life. This tells me that our parents have a deep desire to ensure that their children do not go through what they have gone through. They believe that ensuring their bilingualism will provide them with those tools. Parents want their children to be able to navigate the constructs of two cultures. Mrs. Francisca spoke of her children being able to navigate “both cultures in school with their friends” and home. She also spoke of the children being able to “help other people” and her continued support for them to learn more than two languages. As she stated “I tell them that they need to learn more than two languages so that they can help other people. But there is more to her answer and in the same sentence she spoke of discrimination and her motivation for her children to help others. I believe that her drive is focused on ensuring her children become kind human beings by using different languages as their strength. Mrs. Francisca also mentioned how sometimes people look at her when she asks for help using her English; “they look at me as if I had a cara de nopalote” which implies that the person is uneducated or lacking in taste. Nopal is a plant that is usually associated with Mexico. Thus, when Mrs. Francisca utters those words, she is regrettably expressing her sadness and deep frustration how she is being treated as a human being. I noticed that I became upset when she gave me her response because I noticed that she was struggling to continue. I suggested she took her time but her response was “le digo a mis hijos, hay que echarles ganas.” I tell my children “You’ve got to give it all you got.” I believe Mrs. Francisca exemplifies how she uses her life experiences to motivate her children and ensure their success but also that they do not experience what they are experiencing in their daily lives.

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

I believe that another motivation factor for those parents who selected a bilingual program is that of practical economics. Seven out of eight parents said that being bilingual is a benefit for the job market. Our parents' motivation to place their children in bilingual programs because of the economic benefits align to the research. In a study highlighting the benefits of a Dual-language program, Sandra R. Schechter, Diane Sharken-Taboada & Robert Bayley (1996), found that one of the reasons parents gave for enrolling their children in a Dual-language program is to provide them with an advantage in a highly competitive job market.

It was interesting to note that Mr. Robino did not feel the same way as he stated that "No importa si hablan inglés o español, siempre les van a pagar menos, asi que yo no veo eel beneficio." (It does not matter whether my child speaks English or Spanish, they are always going to pay them less, so I do not see the benefits of being bilingual). I can only think about how Mr. Robino spoke about the long hours he works at the factory and perhaps he beliefs that by accelerating his child's learning of English will provide him with that advantage. Mr. Robino submitted a letter to the school in which he clearly and emphatically states that "I want my child to learn only in English to avoid any emotional and social distress in his learning."

I have presented the hopes and motivations based on the responses provided by the parents. I believe their hope is grounded in a deeper sense than a simple dream. Thus, they contribute and give meaning to that hope by supporting them with homework and other school activities. Most of these parents believe that by selecting a Dual-language program will ease their learning of English, thus, making that hope a reality. School leaders, and teachers will do well to tap into the Latinx parents funds of knowledge (González, N.; Moll, L. C., & Amanti, C., 2006) to sustain the hope and motivation of our Latinx parents and students in the school.

**Utilizing Social Networks: Understanding the new landscape**

I have witnessed the resourcefulness that Latinx parents bring to our schools and their determination that will assist them in how to adjust to their new reality. For these families with school aged children, finding out about how schools work in the U.S. is critical and they make it a priority. One way of achieving this is through their interactions with their social networks.

A social network is defined as “The relatively organized set of relationships that an individual or group has with others, including types and methods of communication, patterns of liking and disliking, and the strength of interpersonal connections” (APA 2020). Using a sociocultural perspective, the tools that we use in the form of language to engage with neighbors, extended family members, the television news, and newspapers will mediate how they think about their new landscape. Parents responses included other forms of social networks in the neighborhood that are used by these families to find support include healthcare clinic, neighborhood organizations that provides them with information about housing. Below are some of the responses that surfaced during the interviews. I believe these are some of the factors may influence the way they think about bilingual education programs in general.

<p>Sí, he tenido en alguna ocasión alguna conversación con alguien que de hecho optó por no ponerlo o sea lo puso en el programa un tiempo. Y como en la niña hablaban más el inglés que el español, sintieron que la niña estaba perdida totalmente en la clase. Así que la cambiaron.</p>	<p>Yes, I have had some conversations with other parents who chose not to put their child on the bilingual program, so she placed her on it for a while. And because the girl spoke English more than Spanish, they felt that the girl was totally lost in class, so she changed her.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Mrs. Amada</p>
<p>Me gusta mantenerme informada, así que yo veo las noticias en español, pero también hablo con otra gente en el vecindario, y me ayuda a entender. Yo no hago todo lo que me dicen, pero me ayuda.</p>	<p>I love to be informed, so I watch the news in Spanish, but I also talk with other people in the neighborhood, and it helps me understand. I do not do everything they tell me, but it helps.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Mrs. Francisca</p>
<p>Si, uno habla con los compañeros en el trabajo y mi niño tiene dificultades de</p>	<p>Yes, I speak with my friends at work and because my child has a learning disability,</p>

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

<p>aprendizaje, me dicen que no lo confunda y que aprenda un idioma no más y escogimos inglés, y el doctor también dijo que lo mismo un idioma solamente.</p>	<p>they tell me not to confuse him and put him to learn one language, so we choose English, and my doctor told me the same only one language.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Mr. Robino</p>
<p>Puedes notar en los padres que algunos se sienten minoría si es que hablan el idioma español, obviamente por el área donde ellos residen y probablemente un 80 por ciento son hispanos. Se habla el idioma español y son considerados minoría. Entonces eso probablemente los hace sentir que de preferencia quieren hablar solamente inglés para que sus hijos no se sientan discriminados.</p>	<p>You may notice in parents that some feel minority if they speak the Spanish language, obviously in the area where they reside and probably 80 percent are Hispanic. The Spanish language is spoken, and they are considered a minority. So that probably makes them feel inferior and they prefer to speak only English so that their children do not feel discriminated against.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Gaby</p>
	<p>Yeah, so I am kind of biased because I know. So yeah. I mean, I could have chosen to put my daughter and my other child at both because, like I said, my husband and I both speak Spanish at home. But knowing that how the process is that if I were to put another language other than English, he would have been placed in a bilingual program.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Mrs. Java</p>
<p>A veces la escuela nos hace cambiar nuestra decisión.</p>	<p>Sometimes schools make us change our decision.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Mrs. Velazquez</p>

Parents discussed how their conversations with either neighbors, or coworkers guided them to form a decision about the bilingual programs at the school. Other parents spoke about watching the news or listening to the radio for information. It is evident that while every parent formed their own opinion, the school also played a role in their decision. I asked parents if they felt pressured by the school and the answer was yes. I believe that their social networks can be powerful source that influences the opinion of our parents including the school. Gaby mentioned that parents feel a sense of pressure as they choose the language programs so as their children are not discriminated against.

The notion of “confusion” was mentioned by three of the parents, Mrs. Amada, Mr. Robino and Mrs. Velazquez. Mr. Robino wrote a letter to the school asking that his child be

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

placed in the English program also as he did not want his child to “Struggle emotionally and socially.” This concept of “Confusion” is how some parents perceive what their children experience as they learn two languages simultaneously and can become a source of misinformation obtained through their social networks. Cioè-Pena’s (2020) study of emergent bilinguals who were labeled disabled measuring whether bilingualism was detrimental for these students, suggested that learning in two languages does not have a negative effect on students’ language skills (p. 259). The concept of “linguistic confusion” is prevalent in schools as educators continue to recommend English only placements for bilingual students who are labeled as disabled. This negatively reinforces the perceptions of bilingualism as a deficit instead of viewing bilingualism as an advantage and a right (Cioè-Pena, 2020).

In summary, the responses provided by the parent highlight the importance of social networks and its role in influencing the minds of our Latinx community. The school plays a critical role in communicating with parents and addresses the question on what factors may influence the choice of language programs. It is evident that the school needs to be the hub in the community that fosters and encourages communication with the parents and the school. I believe that if the school keeps parents informed and involved, some the misinformation that targets our bilingual programs may be dispelled. Misinformation can have tremendous influence on our parents and community.

### **Linguistic & Cultural Pride**

In this section, I focus on the linguistic pride that is deeply felt by all parents including the school clerk and the strong cultural identity that acknowledges a strong connection to their heritage. I believe the responses reveal two interconnected themes. I believe that these two themes occupy the same space in the life of every human being.

Bueno, yo estoy muy orgulloso de mi hijo mayor ahora que está en la secundaria, pero también muy orgulloso que mi pequeña en prekínder este aprendiendo en dos idiomas.	Well, I am very proud of my oldest child who is in high school but also my pre-kinder child who is learning in two languages and that despite that he was never
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## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

<p>El mayor no perdió su idioma a pesar de que no estuvo en un programa bilingüe y oiga eso se maneja en la casa. Claro, no lo habla perfecto, pero yo creo que va a mejorar. Pero cuando hay oportunidad de trabajar en la escuela y en la casa yo creo que es mejor.</p>	<p>enrolled in a bilingual program, he did not lose his Spanish, because we managed that at home. Of course, he does not speak it perfectly, but I think he will get better. But when the school and the parents work together, I think is better</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Mr. Guadama</p>
<p>No sé cómo explicarle, pero uno se siente a gusto cuando puede ayudar a su hijo.</p>	<p>I do not know how to explain it, but you feel good when you are able to help your child</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Mrs. Guadama</p>
<p>Se me hace un programa muy importante para uno como padre poder ayudarle también en la educación a los hijos y para los hijos también a futuro. Es algo que les ayuda bastante, les abre muchas puertas y para conservar también, pues, la identidad de uno como hispano, mexicano</p>	<p>I believe it is a very important program for anyone. As a parent to be able to help them in their education and for the children also to help them in the future. It is something that helps them a lot, it opens many doors for them and to preserve also, their identity of one as Hispanic, Mexican.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Mrs. Amada</p>
<p>En puerto rico se habla el español y claro que se enseña en inglés, pero nosotros nos comunicamos en español y si mi niña no habla el idioma no va a poder hablar con su abuelo porque nosotros vivimos con el</p>	<p>In Puerto Rico Spanish is spoken and yes, they do teach English, but we communicate in Spanish and if my girl does not speak Spanish, then she will not be able to speak with her grandfather because we live with him</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Mrs. Velazquez</p>
<p>Para mí y para mi esposo es muy importante que nuestros hijos hablen el español, es el idioma de uno y cuando vamos a México, ellos tienen que hablar con la familia y si no hablan español nadie los va a entender</p>	<p>For me and my husband is very important that our sons speak Spanish, is our language and when we travel to Mexico, they have to talk to the family and if they do not speak Spanish no one is going to understand them</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Mrs. Francisca</p>
<p>Hablo inglés. Mi idioma natal es el español y prefiero y es con el que me siento más cómoda para poder expresarme, ya que el inglés es mi segundo idioma y lo utilizo para cuestiones de trabajo, pero mi idioma es el español.</p>	<p>I speak English. My native language is Spanish, and I prefer it because I feel more comfortable when I need to express myself. I use English for work purposes, but my language is Spanish.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Gaby</p>

Nieto (2018) defines culture as dynamic; multifaceted; embedded in context; influenced by social, economic, and political factors; created and socially constructed; learned; and dialectical. The Latinx community is not a homogenous culture. Thus, it is important to understand that cultural identity, while it may have different meanings for the same members of the same cultural group. Nieto (2018) argued, “Culture is a slippery



## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

concept with a myriad of definitions. Language can be used to create an unbalanced of power especially in schools that promote hegemonic language policies (Nieto, 2018).

Nieto (2018) argues, “Language is deeply implicated with culture and an important part of it. As the responses in the interviews revealed seven out of eight parents expressed a strong sense that their native language provides them with a strong sense of pride and of belonging. Mrs. Gama in her role as a parent uses her knowledge of two languages using “consejos” (advise) (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994) to show her linguistic and cultural pride. As I stated before, the word consejos has a deeper and stronger meaning than its counterpart in English. Delgado-Gaitan (1994), argues that through the practice and use of ‘consejos’ Latinx parents are able to ‘instruct their children in schooling matter’ (p. 298) and to their lives.

From a sociocultural perspective, Mrs. Gama utilizes her native language (Spanish) as a tool to influence her child and instill pride and cement the child’s cultural and linguistic identity. Parents who had their children enrolled in a bilingual program expressed pride when they spoke of their ability to help their children because they could understand the language in which the homework was given. I believe that this exemplifies linguistic pride and her use of funds of knowledge to assist her child with her homework and her desire to support her children. Thus, dispelling the myth that is unfortunately held by many teachers and school leaders about the lack of involvement from our Latinx parents (Quiocho and Daoud, 2008).

In a study in Massachusetts where English was used as the only medium for instruction, Kaveh & Sandoval (2020) found that “the monolingual practices of schools, play a significant role in perpetuating the monoglossic societal ideologies and shaping language decisions in bilingual families” (p.379). While progress has been made around the country in terms of promoting bilingualism in schools, much needs to be done to ensure that these programs support the needs of ELL students and their families.

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

I believe that when parents expressed their linguistic pride, they want to also ensure that this pride for their native language is transmitted to their children. Language is part of culture and for these parents is also a source of who they are and their strong cultural identity. As Nieto (2018) argues, culture is more than artifacts, rituals, and traditions. Our parents assert their language as part of their culture and who they are. Schools must honor it. It is my belief that language is culture and culture are language and we must celebrate that our students have the tremendous opportunity to be bicultural and biliterate which are two of the advantages that Lopez (2013) attributes to the benefits of Dual-language programs.

### **Resilient Spirits**

One theme that was consistently present throughout the study was that of resiliency. Eight of the parents were born outside the United States and each one of them arrived at different ages in their journey. One parent was born in the United States and is a second generation Mexican American. In spite of their different journeys, they had one thing in common: a resilient spirit and mindset.

Mrs. Java who was born in the U.S., spoke not of her struggle but that of her parents and how they opened the doors for her by placing her in a Dual-language program. Mrs. Java wishes to do the same for her children. Despite the negative and blatant discourse that is spewed against Latinx and other communities of color, Latinx parents continue to show their resilient indomitable spirit. I offer some phrases expressed by the parents that demonstrate their resiliency for surviving in a society that at times is not welcoming and freely discriminate against them and their children.

Nosotros teníamos 19 años cuando mi esposo y yo llegamos porque desafortunadamente de donde nosotros somos no hay muchas oportunidades porque es un pueblo muy humilde. Entonces para mejorar nuestras vidas, como mi esposo me dijo para tener nuestros hijos y encontrar un buen trabajo	We were 19 years old when I came with my husband because unfortunately where we are from, there was no chance of getting a job because the place we come from is very humble. Then for us to want to better our lives, and as my husband told me then to have our children and find a good job helping our
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## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

y ayudar a nuestros padres, porque ya están mayores y nosotros somos los mayores en la familia.	parents, because they are already very old, and we are the eldest in our families. Mrs. Francisca
	My dad came here to this country and after working hard to save money as he started working and settling here in the U.S., he brought my mom and me. I was 3 years old when I arrived in this city. Mrs. Gama
Uno tiene que tomar riesgos para venir a este país. Pues uno sabe que al menos aquí uno puede trabajar y ganar un poco de dinero para poder vivir y salir adelante.	You must take some risks to come to this country. You know that at least you can work and make a little bit of money to survive and to try to make it. Mr. Guadama
Uno viene de tan lejos para poder trabajar y salir adelante y no es tan fácil cuando uno está sola y con hijos.	You come from so far to work and to try to make it in life and it is not as easy when you are by yourself and with children. Mrs. Velazquez
No uno tiene que darle duro por los hijos. Yo tengo que trabajar como 12 horas al día seis días a la semana y mire yo tengo también que venir aquí a la escuela y pelear para que los hijos sean mejor que uno. Por eso quiero que mis hijos aprendan bien ingles	You must work hard for your children. I work like 12 hours a day six days a week and look at me then I need to come to school and fight to make sure your children are better than you. That is why I want my children to learn English well. Mr. Robino

From a psychological perspective, resiliency is “the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands” (APA, 2020). I have tremendous respect for the way in which these parents allowed me to enter their personal space and share it with me. The statements expressed by the parents not only show their resilience to survive but their fighting spirit to be successful in their new environment.

These are hardworking individuals who are trying their best to navigate multiple spaces and for some of them is more challenging than other. For example, in my opinion, when Mr. Guadama shared his response about “taking risks” to come to the U.S. goes beyond the definition of “difficult or challenging life experiences.” We all have heard of the horrors that many immigrants encounters when they attempt to come to this country. We have been overwhelmed with false and dehumanizing propaganda about how terrible the people

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

crossing the borders searching for a better opportunity are. I cannot fathom the obstacles that many of our immigrant parents have faced and continue to face because of the legal status, the color of their skin and the language they speak. Our parents tell a different a story as for many of them

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I presented and discussed the findings of my research and described the lived experiences of our Latinx parents during the registration/enrollment process at the school and how they view bilingual education programs. The research questions allowed me to find several themes that provided me with an insight to the meaning parents gave to their lived experiences as it relates to questions of my study. I believe that my questions about the experience of registration/enrollment process at school helped parents recall more than just the process of registration and choosing a language program for their child. It brought about feelings of fear and anxiety that have been evident in the experiences of many immigrant families in this country. There is an interconnectedness on the themes explored. The fear and anxiousness that some our parents experience through the process of registration/enrollment spilled into a deeper conversation of the distrust these families feel including the educational institutions. The anxiousness that some of our parents felt when they are denied the basic services for their children speaks volumes of the work schools need to embark on. Hope and motivation cannot exist in a vacuum. When I share the hope of the parents and clerk is not as if they are hoping for something that can be attainable the next day (i.e., I hope I can find the bread I wanted) Their hope for a better future for their children is not an empty vessel in the vast ocean, it is a hope that is full of dreams, passion, and courage. Their motivation is anchored on the hope and actions they take to ensure the realization of becoming both bilingual and bicultural or as is for those two parents acquire English fast. It is a motivation that drives their decision to be participate, and advocate for their children. Our parents are

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

proud of their native language, and they want to make sure that this linguistic pride is shared with their children. When parents shared their place of birth, it was a celebration of their cultural identity. Whether they came from Mexico, Puerto Rico, or the U.S. they provided an insight of how much they wish their children feel the same pride and identify with their culture. I believe that the glue that holds it all together is the theme of resilience. Our parents continue to reveal an unbreakable spirit in spite of their demanding and challenging life situations. Each one of them is fighting their own battles in their lifeworld. Each one of them maintains a steady and unwavering optimism as they navigate a society that is too quick to judge, discriminate, and oppress them because of their accents, and their skin color.

I believe that the individual choices made by each of the parents about their lived experiences adds to the research on the critical need for schools, school leaders and practitioners to develop a critical awareness that transcends theory to address the needs of our Latinx parents and their children in our school.

## Chapter 5:

### Conclusion and Recommendations

The aim of this study was two-fold. First, to better understand and capture the lived experiences of our Latinx parents as they navigate the registration/enrollment process at the school and choose a language program for their Pre-kindergarten child. Second, to understand what lived experiences may influence their perception about bilingual education programs.

These are the research questions that guided this study:

1. What are the lived experiences of Latinx parents as they navigate the process of school registration/enrollment for their Pre-Kindergarten student?
  - a. What lived experiences help Latinx parents inform their decision what are those factors influencing that decision?
  - b. What do parents think the impact the language program (Spanish or English) chosen will have on their child's language acquisition/development? Do parents believe it is the fastest route? The best route?
  - c. What experiences have parents had in their own lives that helps them understand the differences between the bilingual education programs and monolingual education programs?

### Reflections

This study took place in the middle of the COVID 19 pandemic and during political turmoil in the country. There was a president who was focused on creating division by hurling insults to the communities of color and fixated in blaming the immigrant community for the blatant incompetence of his government. During this period, immigrant communities such as the one we serve were vilified and frightened by the careless and despicable rhetoric against our communities. We cannot also forget that in the past five years, Latinx and black

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

parents have had to experience the horrific murders of their young sons and daughters in the hands of law enforcement. The same law enforcement that is supposed to keep us safe.

Despite all these events, parents were exceptionally gracious and agreed to meet with me via Google meet. I was humbled by the way they welcomed me into their homes and willing to support me in this study. I am convinced that they provided me with key and sufficient information to address the questions posed in the study to better understand and capture their individual lived experiences.

My questions asked parents and the clerk to describe their lived experiences in the process of selecting a language program during the registration/enrollment process at school. As parents shared their responses, I believe that parents wanted to share more than just simply answering the question about the process of registration/enrollment and selecting a language program. They had a desire to share their life experiences and how they felt about the whole process of schooling and their current place in a new society. I believe they wanted me to know about their struggles and how the school can support them. Consequently, I believe their responses provided me with a window to their innermost feelings that were triggered by our conversations. The interconnection of the main question and the sub questions were a bridge to the parents' perceptions about bilingual education and perhaps whether they believe that it is a choice they wanted for their child. But it is their own experiences that determine their selection of the language programs. I was able to walk along this bridge with them as they shared the pride they feel for their heritage and desired their children to feel the same way. I was able to catch a glimpse to the *pedagogic hope* (Van Manen 2016) they have for their children. I have learned that our parents are trying to make sense of their situations and that they want to make sure that their children are able to live a life they deserve.

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

I have thought about the parents' lived experiences from the beginning to the end of the study. I have reflected on the words used by the parents, and their willingness to support me in the process of recollecting their lived experiences. I have had conflicting thoughts about my position as a school principal and the tension that exists in what I think is best for their children in regard to their schooling and what the parents think is best for their child. I have heard how their perceptions have become their truths for their lives and their children's.

I have thought about how sometimes unintentionally we have fallen short of providing our parents the space for them to be heard and not feel as second-class citizens as Mrs. Amada stated. How has the school provided these parents with the resources they need to make informed decisions based on robust research about the advantages of bilingualism and biliteracy. I have thought about my interactions with parents and how I stand pedagogically oriented to my role as I discussed the choices they make about the education of their children. Because as the instructional leader of the school, I must remain focused and oriented to the lifeworld of their children (Van Manen, 2016). Thus, the issue of language and how to best support bilingual children creates what I believe is, a delicate tension between the school and our Latinx parents. Before learning with more intimacy about the lived experiences of some of our parents through this research, I saw it necessary for me to speak against what I perceive to be a tragedy in the education of their child. That is, denying them the opportunity to become bilingual. I saw this as an imperative in my role as the school principal without being conscious about the impact of my conversations and actions they had on them and/or their children.

While a delicate tension may exist in how parents view the schooling of their children and how I, as the instructional leader of the school view what is best for their children, this tension creates an opportunity to understand the parents' lived experiences and how the school can support them. Furthermore, after spending time with our parents over the past five



## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

months, I see the tenderness, assertiveness, and love they have for their children. Latinx parents are committed to the success of their children despite what everyone may think. As a school leader, I view this understanding in how I must stand in the world engaging in pedagogical reflection about the parents and the children I serve.

I feel a sense of deep responsibility in my role as the school leader and that every interaction I have with parents and their children must be a chance to highlight and celebrate their humanness. I believe that my role provides me with a great opportunity to help realize their hopes, and dreams these parents have for their children and the well-being of their community. Thus, I must also think about our African American students and their parents and how they can become part of this Dual-Language Program project. There is little research on the effects of dual-language programs in this population. However, there is some research pointing to the positive outcomes of the program for disadvantaged African American students (Haj-Broussard, 2005; Lindholm-Leary & Howard 2008; Thomas & Collier, 2012). This helps me think about the lived experiences the parents and the school clerk have shared with me and expands my thinking about how to ensure the success of our African American students and their families.

There are things that get lost in translation and my humble attempt to describe the passion, and the intensity that our Latinx parents occupy in their lifeworld as parents, wives, husbands, advocates, is beyond words. I will always remain graciously grateful to this community for the opportunity they have given me to serve them and placing their trust on me.

This search for meaning in the lived experiences of the parents I serve, has been both a humbling and a dynamic experience for me. Throughout this study, I have had the opportunity to reflect on the space I occupy in my lifeworld as a school principal, but also as a father. I have had the opportunity to be with these parents at a different level. Listening to

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

their deep concerns about schooling, and their personal struggles. They shared with me their insights of how they exist in this world as parents and that has made me reflect about my own children and the different spaces we occupy.

### **Practical Implications**

There are two implications from this study that align and verify previous research about Latinx parent perceptions about bilingual education and the reasons why Latinx parents register/enroll their children in a bilingual program. One of the implications of the study is the need to continue to fundamentally investigate how the perceptions of Latinx parents about bilingual education programs may influence the decision to register/enroll their children in a language program. Another implication is the increasing need to research the level of responsibility and intervention from the school principal to ensure that Latinx parents have the most current information about bilingual programs. The study focused on the lived experiences of Latinx parents as they navigate the registration/enrollment process and the role the school plays in the decision of choosing a language program for their children, there is a need to investigate the level of responsibility the administration plays in engaging parents in these conversations. This study revealed that the lived experiences of Latinx parents during the registration/enrollment to select a language program for their child are interconnected to those experiences lived in this country and they may influence their perceptions about bilingual education programs. Parents candidly expressed their fears, frustrations, and anxiousness when dealing with the school during the process of registration/enrollment. Parents shared their hopes and motivations for placing their children in a dual-language program. I have offered implications for schools, practitioners, and school leaders.

### **IMPLICATIONS for SCHOOLS**

This study demonstrates that it is imperative that schools continue to support Latinx parents and their children during the school registration/enrollment process. For example, for

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

Mr. Guadama and Mrs. Guadama, discussed their frustration with a previous school who denied them the opportunity to enroll their child in a bilingual program. For Mrs. Velazquez, her frustration of not being heard was evident when she expressed that she felt the school pressed her to choose a bilingual program for her child. I believe that schools must set aside time in the form of enrollment/registration workshops or informative sessions to inform parents of the bilingual programs and the effectiveness of these programs in the school. These informative sessions should include the school leader, teachers, and parent volunteers and their children who are enrolled in a Dual-Language program. The school should also engage parents who have had previous experience with bilingual programs at the school. Second, schools should include and engage the bilingual lead teacher when parents arrive at the school before and inform parents of the programs before committing their child to a language program. If a parent has not attended an informative session, then, the school should make every effort to engage the bilingual lead teacher before parents commit their child to a specific language program. Third, schools must engage all community partners to participate in promoting bilingualism in their sites and the community.

### **IMPLICATIONS for PRACTITIONERS**

There is a critical need for teachers, school leaders, and other school personnel to comprehend how they can influence the perceptions of Latinx parents as they begin the process of registering/enrolling their child in a language program. This study shows that parents are not only guided by what the information they bring with them as I learned throughout the study. For those parents who are first generation immigrants, they rely on various social networks to form an understanding of how their new community structure functions. Mr. Robino relied on his conversations and medical advice to choose a language program for his child. Practitioners must understand that sometimes the information may be misguided. Some of the information these parents gather is based on the same lies that are

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

leveled against bilingual education programs under the guise of “school is for English only” and may negatively influence their decision during the process of registration.

Practitioners and other school personnel including the registration clerk (s) must be knowledgeable and abreast of the most current research on the benefits of bilingual programs. Every practitioner must participate in a continuous and rigorous professional development that highlights effective instructional practices for bilingual students. Every practitioner in schools must engage in equity work that addresses the inequities that favor the dominant culture in the educational system and continues to leave behind students of color, specifically, Latinx students.

### **IMPLICATIONS for SCHOOL LEADERS**

I began this study because I am a strong proponent of bilingual education. As a school leader, I firmly believe that well-funded and supported bilingual programs are the solution to closing the so-called academic achievement gap. I believe that while many Latinx children may struggle at first, this manufactured academic achievement gap continues to reinforce a racist narrative of exclusion and the push for English only in our schools and society. The achievement gap phenomenon dominates the discourse in our schools and higher institutions and opaque the strong evidence in the effectiveness of strong bilingual programs. This phenomenon is also detrimental to our students and communities of color. This study demonstrates the pivotal role of the school leader as a force to improve the experiences of Latinx parents and students in schools. My findings suggest that parents expect the school leader to advocate for their children whether they enroll in the bilingual or monolingual language program. But they want the school leader to be understanding, to create a school where the community celebrates each other as Mrs. Amada stated, “A place where we can celebrate and share our cultures, foods, and songs.” School leaders must continue to advocate for the need to appropriately fund bilingual programs in the city and the state. School leaders

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

must reach out and work with universities partners to support their graduates who have chosen to become teachers to have the knowledge needed on issues of language, race, and equity and be able to address the needs of our linguistic diverse students.

### **Research Implications**

This study focused on the lived experiences of Latinx parents as they navigate the registration/enrollment process and how their lived experiences may influence their perception of bilingual education programs. This is a topic of great interest to me who as the leader of a school in a large Midwestern city, and a second language learner interested in the lived experiences of the parents I serve. One consideration for further is the need to investigate the perceptions of the children at the elementary level about the decision their parents made on their behalf. What do they think about being in a bilingual program or monolingual program? Do students who are in a bilingual program agree with their parents about the reasons why they are enrolled in that program?

Another consideration is to continue to investigate the level of responsibility and role the school principal and the school plays in the choice the parents make for their children. Is every member of the school personnel well informed about the language programs in the school? At what point does the school principal intervene or should the principal intervene in these decisions at all? Considering the impact that language has on the education of linguistically diverse students, another consideration for schools is to ponder how they can engage Latinx parents at every level of their child's education. I believe this goes beyond meeting in committees and celebrations. Schools need to play a bigger part in advocating for the language rights of every linguistically diverse students at the district, state, and national level; while at the same time empowering Latinx parents to remained informed about the decisions begin made on behalf of their children.

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

There exists many studies promoting the effectiveness of bilingual programs that are additive in nature such as the one in Thomas & Collier (2002). Thomas & Collier (2002) analyzed the achievement of students who participated in bilingual education programs and the results suggested the students in the bilingual program outperformed those in a monolingual English program. And while the evidence continues to amount in favor of bilingual education programs such as Dual-Language programs and other bilingual programs that are additive in nature; nothing will change unless the balance of power shifts against those who control the narrative and power. As recently as in February of 2017 congressman King of Iowa, Collins of Georgia, Gohmert, Barletta, and Duncan of South Carolina, and Franks of Arizona, introduced Bill H. R. 997 “English as the Unity Act” to make English the official language. Congressman King of Iowa, one of the sponsors of this bill stated “A common language is the most powerful unifying force known throughout history. We need to encourage assimilation of all legal immigrants in each generation. A nation divided by language cannot pull together as effectively as a people” (<https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/997/text>).

In the lifeworld of many educators and researchers, and in the lifeworld of parents, bilingual education is a positive force for humanity. There are those politicians who use the concept of unity to push their agendas of “linguistic genocide” (Skutnab-Kargas, 2005) that undermines diversity and other cultures. People must preserve the right of using their native language in all settings not just simply at home. Minority-linguistic diverse students must have the right to acquire language without having to lose their own. There is no doubt that Latinx parents must have a choice and choose the language their children should learn in. However, in my opinion, whenever, we buy into or participate in this discourse, we perpetuate the status quo and inadvertently contribute to the decision parents make.

### **Limitations**

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

This study's limitation is to know whether all parents were able to freely disclose what they truly felt about the questions posed. I have known three of the families for the past 13 years including the school clerk who has been at the school for the past 10 years. Six of the parents I had never met before or had any interactions with them. However, this study adds to the literature specifically about the critical need to continue understanding and capturing the lived experiences of Latinx parents in their decision of choosing a language program for their children in Pre-kindergarten and their perceptions on bilingual education programs. Recent studies examining the experiences, perceptions of immigrant high school students (Olivares-Orellana (2020); and the perspectives of Latinx mothers regarding their children who have been labeled with a disability but with no access to bilingual programs Cioè-Peña (2020); confirms the need for more studies like the one presented here.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I have provided a description and interpretation of the lived experiences of Latinx parents as they navigate the process of school registration/enrollment for their pre-kindergarten student and how their lived experiences may influence their perceptions about bilingual education. Through this study, I found that there the propagation of misinformation about bilingual programs continues to be pervasive in our community. This study also allowed me to reflect in the humanity of my role as a school principal and the different spaces I occupy in the lifeworld (Van Manen, 2016). I met new parents to the school and strengthened my relationship with others who have had students enrolled in the school system for a long time. I believe that I have had the opportunity to achieve a different level of trust with these parents and that was one of my goals coming into this study.

As I searched for the meaning of the lived experiences of Latinx parents in the registration/enrollment process and their perceptions about bilingual education programs, I have learned that given the same circumstances, peoples' perceptions vary greatly on their

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

approach to the same phenomenon. Van Manen (2016) argues that “Phenomenology does not problem solve-phenomenological questions are meaning questions. Meaning questions can be better or more deeply understood, so that, on the basis of this understanding I may be able to act more thoughtfully and more tactfully in certain situations” (p.23). I believe that a phenomenological approach has allowed me to enter a space of reflection in the lives of the parents and the children I serve.

Finally, I have learned that when parents place the level of trust, they have placed on me as the school leader, and the level of consent to act on behalf of their children’s education; every decision I continue to make to ensure the success of their children must be made with tact and thoughtfulness. Especially now that we live in a very hostile society that can be indifferent and unfriendly toward them and their children.

The essence of the lived experiences of our Latinx parents reside in their fighting spirit, their ability to defy the odds stacked against them and the infallible love they have for their children. The school building should be a sanctuary where parents, children, and community members feel valued and cared for, but most importantly, a place where we value and understand each other’s humanness.



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# THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

## APPENDIX A Consent Forms

Dear Parent:

You have been invited to take part in a research-study to explore the lived experiences of Latino parents as they go through the process of enrolling their child in a pre-kindergarten school program and their perceptions about the bilingual program.

This research-study project will be conducted by Manuel O Adrianzen, doctoral candidate of the Reading and Language Doctoral Program at National Louis University.

If you agree to be in this research-study, you will be asked to do the following:

1. Agree to participate in a face to face group interview and a one on one final interview that will last approximately 90-120 minutes each, I will ask questions about your background, educational experiences, and bilingual education ideology
2. One on one interview conducted at home, or other social context such as a restaurant, school, etc. The duration of each observation will be approximately 90 minutes in length. I also will engage in the conversation by asking questions too.

Participation in this research-study will take approximate 2 hours over a 3 week period. There are no known risks associated with your participation in this research-study beyond those of everyday life. Although, you will receive no direct financial benefits, this research-study will help us understand the processes of the decisions parents make when deciding a school program for their child and your views on bilingual education.

Participation in this research-study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty. Confidentiality of your research-study records will be strictly maintained by using false names at any presentations or publications based on the study as well as any documentation collected during the course of the research-study. Any information that may further identify you, such as address or place of employment, will be altered. Focus group interviews and one on one interviews will be audio-taped. You may review these tapes and request that all or any portions of the tapes be destroyed. Any notes I take will be secured, either in a locked cabinet (for hand-written notes) or on a password protected computer (for typed notes) for up to 5 years after the completion of this study, at which time I will shred all tapes, transcripts, and notes.

I have explained this research-study to you and answered your initial questions. If you have additional questions or wish to report a research-related problem you may contact me at \_\_\_\_\_, by e-mail at \_\_\_\_\_, you may also contact Sophie Degener at \_\_\_\_\_. For questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the National Louis University's Institutional Research Review Board: Shaunti Knauth; email: \_\_\_\_\_; phone: \_\_\_\_\_; NLU's IRRB is located at National Louis University, 122 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL.

Thank you for your consideration.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

# THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

## APPENDIX A Spanish Consent Forms

Estimada madre de familia:

Usted ha sido invitado a participar en un estudio-investigación para explorar las experiencias de padres/madres latinas durante el proceso de registración en los programas escolares de jardín y su opinión sobre el programa bilingüe.

Este proyecto de investigación-estudio será llevado a cabo por Manuel O Adrianzen, candidato al doctorado del Programa de Doctorado en Lectura y Lenguaje de la Universidad Nacional Louis.

Si usted está de acuerdo en estar en este estudio de investigación, se le pedirá que haga lo siguiente:

1. Acepte participar en una entrevista de grupo cara a cara y una entrevista final que dure aproximadamente 90-120 minutos cada uno, haré preguntas sobre sus antecedentes, experiencias educativas e ideología educativa bilingüe
2. Una entrevista personal con el investigador realizado en casa, u otro contexto social como un restaurante, escuela, etc. La duración de cada observación será de aproximadamente 90 minutos de duración. También participaré en la conversación haciendo preguntas también.

La participación en este estudio-investigación tomará aproximadamente 2 horas durante un período de 3 semanas. No hay riesgos conocidos asociados con su participación en esta investigación-estudio más allá de los de la vida cotidiana. Aunque, usted no recibirá beneficios financieros directos, este estudio de investigación nos ayudará a entender los procesos de las decisiones que los padres toman al decidir un programa escolar para su hijo y sus puntos de vista sobre la educación bilingüe.

La participación en este estudio-investigación es voluntaria. Usted puede negarse a participar o retirarse en cualquier momento sin penalización. La confidencialidad de sus registros de investigación-estudio se mantendrá estrictamente mediante el uso de nombres falsos en cualquier presentación o publicación basada en el estudio, así como cualquier documentación recopilada durante el curso del estudio-investigación. Cualquier información que pueda identificarlo aún más, como la dirección o el lugar de empleo, será alterada. Las entrevistas de grupo de enfoque y una de las entrevistas se grabarán en audio. Puede revisar estas cintas y solicitar que se destruyan todas o cualquier parte de las cintas. Cualquier nota que tome estará asegurada, ya sea en un gabinete cerrado (para notas escritas a mano) o en un ordenador protegido por contraseña (para notas mecanografiadas) hasta 5 años después de la finalización de este estudio, momento en el que destruiré todas las cintas, transcripciones y notas.

Le he explicado este estudio de investigación y respondido a sus preguntas iniciales. Si tiene preguntas adicionales o desea informar de un problema relacionado con la investigación, puede ponerse en contacto conmigo al \_\_\_\_\_, por correo electrónico en \_\_\_\_\_, también puede ponerse en contacto con Sophie Degener en \_\_\_\_\_. Para preguntas sobre sus derechos como participante de la investigación, puede comunicarse con la Junta de Revisión institucional de la Universidad Nacional de Louis: Shaunti Knauth; correo electrónico \_\_\_\_\_; teléfono: \_\_\_\_\_; El IRRB de NLU está ubicado en National Louis University, 122 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL.

Thank you for your consideration.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma del Participante

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma del Investigador

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

**Appendix B**  
**Survey Questions about program enrollment**

1. How many children do you have enrolled in a Pre-Kindergarten program at the school?

Answer

2. Which program did you choose for your child? Bilingual program (Spanish-English) or Monolingual program (English)?

Answer

3. How long have you lived in the United States or were you born here?

Answer

4. Would you be willing to participate in a group interview about the program you chose for your Pre-Kindergarten student and to discuss the reason why you chose that program?

Answer

5. Have you previously enrolled other children at this school?

Answer

6. Would you be willing to participate in a one on one interview with the investigator to further discuss your responses in the group interview?

Answer

**Appendix B**  
**Encuesta sobre registraci3n de programas**

1. ¿Cuántos hijos o hijas tiene registrado en el programa de jardín en la escuela?

Respuesta:

2. ¿Qué programa escogió para su hijo o hija? ¿Bilingüe (español-inglés) o monolingüe (inglés)?

3. ¿Cuánto tiempo tiene viviendo en los Estados Unidos de América o nació aquí?

Respuesta:

4. ¿Estaría dispuesta(o) a participar en una entrevista grupal para conversar sobre el programa que registro a su hijo o hija y discutir las razones por las cual escogió ese programa?

Respuesta:

5. ¿Anteriormente ha registrado a otros hijos o hijas en esta escuela?

Respuesta:

6. ¿Estaría dispuesta(o) a participar en una entrevista personal con el investigador para discutir sus respuestas dadas en la entrevista grupal?

Respuesta:



## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PARENTS

### APPENDIX C Semi-structured Interview

1. Could you share with the group your name and where you were born?
2. How many children do you have in the school?
3. How many children do you have enrolled in Pre-kindergarten?
4. Have you had other children enrolled in the school? What programs were they enrolled in? Bilingual or monolingual?
5. Can you discuss why you chose this specific program for your child?
6. What are your thoughts about bilingual education? Why?
7. What is your opinion about the enrollment process at the school? Why?
8. What is your understanding of bilingual program at the school?
9. Do you believe that enrolling your child in an all English program will accelerate her English language acquisition? Why or why not?
10. Tell us one thing you would like the school to change about their enrollment process?
11. Tell me one thing you wish you knew about either the bilingual or monolingual program?
12. Where did you go to school? How was your schooling experience?

**APPENDIX C**  
**Semi-structured Interview Spanish**

1. ¿Podría darnos su nombre y lugar de nacimiento?
2. ¿Cuántos niños tiene en la escuela?
3. ¿Cuántos niños tiene inscrito en el jardín o prekínder?
4. ¿Ha tenido otros hijos inscritos previamente en la escuela? ¿En qué programa, bilingüe o inglés solamente?
5. ¿Podría decirnos las razones por la cual inscribió a su hijo (s) en ese programa?
6. ¿Qué es lo que piensan de los programas bilingües? ¿Por qué?
7. ¿Qué piensan del proceso de inscripción o matrícula de la escuela? ¿Por qué?
8. ¿Qué es lo que entiende usted sobre el programa bilingüe en la escuela?
9. ¿Cree usted que al inscribir a su hijo en el programa de inglés acelerara el aprendizaje del idioma inglés? ¿Por qué o por qué no?
10. ¿Qué cambiaría usted sobre el proceso de inscripción o matrícula en la escuela?
11. ¿Díganos una cosa que usted quisiera saber más del programa de inglés o bilingüe?
12. ¿A dónde fue a la escuela y cómo fue su experiencia como estudiante?