LATINA PARENT INVOLVEMENT:
AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY EXPLORING
A SPANISH TEACHING AND LEARNING PROGRAM

A Dissertation in
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by
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ABSTRACT

This action research study examined an eight-week parent involvement program known as the Spanish Teaching and Learning Program. This program was developed as a parent involvement/education initiative for mothers of students in an urban elementary school. Throughout this program, Latina mothers taught basic Spanish to non Spanish-speaking mothers. The experience of the Latina mothers as they assumed a teaching/leadership role in this program was a primary focus of this study; however, the specific purpose of this study was twofold: to examine the identity development of Latina mothers as they led a parent education program and to examine the intercultural relationships that formed as a result of this parent involvement experience from the perspective of both the teachers and the learners. The theoretical framework for the study was grounded in sociocultural theory and was supplemented by Latina feminist perspectives as well as critical multicultural education perspectives. Data collection consisted of pre and post-program interviews with the teachers as well as a focus group interview with the learners at the end of the program. Weekly reflection forms completed by all participants provided additional written data throughout the program in addition to my observation notes and audio recordings from each session which were transcribed and analyzed.

The findings of the study were grouped into six thematic sections. The first, fostering meaning-making through sociocultural connections, revealed the importance of eliciting funds of knowledge, fostering contextually-based learning, and the development of empathy which was evoked throughout the language learning experience. The second, establishing meaningful intercultural relationships, highlighted the mothers’ ability to transcend cultural and linguistic barriers as they participated in the program as well as the program’s impact on the greater school community. The third finding, embracing the role of teacher/leader, highlighted the teachers’
journey in successfully navigating their teaching role, their meaningful connections with one another, and their insightful reflections on the leadership experience. A fourth finding of the study was the program’s ability to enhance communication within the school community through both increasing individual communication capacity and fostering an environment through which the mothers used communication as a form of connection with one another. The fifth section of the findings revealed the mothers’ desire to maintain authentic and practical sessions which addressed the learners’ strengths and needs as well as the mothers’ heightened positivity toward participating in future programs as a result of the program. Finally, the program revealed positive aspects which extended beyond the adult learners in the group and related specifically to the children of the mothers participating in the program including more structured homework routines and the opportunity for the mothers to lead by example and show their children the importance of lifelong learning. The study culminates with a discussion of these findings in connection with theory and offers implications for adult education practice and future research.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of a qualitative, action research study which examined the relationships fostered through a parent education program and how these interactions impacted the identity development of Latina mothers participating in this program. The chapter presents background information regarding the study, a purpose statement, and the conceptual framework which guides the study. An overview of the research methodology and an explanation of the significance of the study are also presented. Throughout this chapter, the terminology used throughout the document will be defined, and various assumptions, strengths, and limitations associated with the study will be discussed.

Background of the Study

Through my experience as a teacher and program coordinator for English Language Learners (ELLs), I have embraced the task of educating large, diverse populations of students. Establishing connections and relationships with my students and their families have brought about numerous opportunities for learning about and celebrating other cultures. These relationships have not only expanded my awareness of the complexities associated with diversity, but have also heightened my knowledge of various cultural norms and values. Throughout the urban setting in which I work, as well as the rest of the United States, students of color are becoming more highly represented as populations of multicultural learners increase (Pang, 2005). The cultural values of these groups of students and their families may differ from those which are currently found at the core of formal education programs throughout the United States, thus creating dissonance in the learning experience of multicultural students (Gay, 2010). Throughout my personal experience as a teacher and school district administrator, I have worked
with students from seventy six countries speaking thirty eight different languages. The majority of these students are Latino and have a wide range of English speaking abilities. The rising numbers of Latino students in my district mirrors a population shift which is occurring throughout the rest of the country as well. As this subgroup grows, elements of the Latino culture are becoming woven into mainstream society. Latinos are gradually altering the way in which the country, “looks, feels and thinks, eats, dances and votes” (Garcia & Garcia, 2001).

Data collected in the 2010 United States census reveals that Latinos make up 16.3 percent of the total population, and the overall number of Latinos in the U.S. has increased by 43 percent in the past ten years (Passel, Cohn, & Lopez, 2011).

The increase in the Latino population in the U.S. warrants considerable focus on incorporating multicultural education within the classroom. Across the country diverse populations of students, including Latino learners, unfortunately represent disproportionate levels of achievement, as many students are receiving poor or failing grades. These groups of students also experience elevated drop-out rates (Castagno, 2009). Through legislation such as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), schools are faced with the challenge of quickly increasing student achievement for all learners. To better meet the needs of diverse learners, schools have begun to provide professional development training for teachers and other school personnel that will foster more culturally responsive instruction. Through the use of various forms multicultural education which range from developing an awareness of cultural differences to more critical approaches which move to challenge power structures, it is hoped that diverse learners may be educated in a manner that more closely aligns with what is valued in the home culture rather than what can be considered more traditional educational experiences in the United States (Castagno, 2009). Current literature highlights various differences between cultures and
frequently uses the terms collectivism and individualism (Lingenfelter & Mayers, 2003). While collectivist cultures value learning and living as a group, the mainstream culture in the United States more closely aligns with elements of individualism, or working for the benefit of the individual. Although schools may attempt to promote effective multicultural education, many are still not providing education in a manner with which their students can truly relate (Gay, 2010). Moreover, this disconnect is also felt between schools and the parents of the students they serve. The misalignment between styles of teaching and learning are also evident through the parent involvement programs which schools develop to help get diverse parents involved in the school community. The following section further describes the importance of designing effective parent involvement programs for adult caregivers within the school community, the research regarding culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) parent involvement, and ways in which to incorporate diverse families more effectively.

**Parent Involvement**

Educational institutions highly value parent involvement and rely on this home/school connection as another avenue to help raise student achievement. In fact, under NCLB, schools are required to have written policies and programs to include all families regardless of their home language or socioeconomic status (Epstein, 2005). Unfortunately, schools often request a level of involvement with which some multicultural families may not feel comfortable for various reasons. The parent involvement literature connected with immigrant families and particularly families with limited English speaking abilities describes various cultural barriers which inhibit parents from being involved in the school system. These cultural barriers may be related to structuring time, decision-making, and belief systems (Lingenfelter & Mayers, 2003). In recognizing that these cultural barriers exist, it is important for schools to use culturally
responsive practices that help to maintain and celebrate the home culture of their families to make effective connections and foster academic achievement (Guo, 2006).

This concept of promoting diverse cultures frequently happens at a superficial level within schools and does not address the needs of the students. In addition to cultural barriers, a language barrier also exists for many CLD parents presenting a number of other difficulties which inhibit parent involvement (Guo, 2006; Turney & Kao, 2009; Sohn & Wang, 2006; Smith et al., 2008; Cháves-Reyes, 2010). There may also be differing interpretations of the roles of school personnel and the roles of the parents. While it is clear that Latino families desire academic success for their children, the home-school connection which helps to foster this achievement is lacking (Epstein, 2001; Ryan, Casas, Kelly-Vance, Ryalls, & Nero 2010; Quirocho & Daoud, 2006). Parent education programs within the K-12 school setting that are rooted in adult education practices and theory are scarce. Furthermore, the number of parent education programs designed specifically to promote the involvement of CLD parents from a strengths-based perspective are almost nonexistent.

Studies argue that schools must involve multicultural families beyond a superficial level (Epstein et al., 2002). To accomplish this effectively, a deep awareness of the multifaceted nature of parent involvement, which extends beyond attending parent/teacher conferences and monitoring homework completion, must be recognized. This comprehensive model of parent involvement involves skills associated with effectively communicating, volunteering, decision making, collaborating with the community, and learning at home (Epstein et al., 2002). As Latino families continue to represent a rapidly growing sector of the United States population, schools must find more effective ways through which to connect with these families. Specifically, parent education and involvement opportunities must be designed with adult
education at the forefront rather than from the k-12 education perspective shared by most school staff and professionals who are responsible for developing these programs.

**Latina Mothers**

To increase parent involvement, understanding parents’ cultural backgrounds and incorporating this knowledge into the practice of including these parents is important.

Unfortunately, this consideration of a family’s cultural background does not happen consistently in planning and creating parent involvement opportunities. In addition to being educated through methods that frequently do not align with elements of their culture, Latinos in the United States may experience other societal disadvantages as well. This is especially true of Latinas, many of whom can be considered the primary caretaker for many school-age Latino children across the country. Zinn and Dill (as cited by Garcia & Garcia, 2001) remind us that women of color in today’s society:

- Receive the lowest wages, hold the worst jobs, and are more likely to be unemployed.
- They have the highest rates of infant mortality and births out of wedlock. They are also more likely to live in poverty and to be single mothers than their white counterparts (p. 80)

Although this research is dated, Latina women continue to experience numerous societal disadvantages connected with race, ethnicity, class and gender. Despite many obstacles, Latinas continue to persevere and achieve great accomplishments. Some Latinas have challenged the status quo to foster change within society. Along with this theme of marginalization, which runs throughout the Latina feminist literature, the struggle some Latina women face in constructing their personal identity while living among multiple cultures is also discussed. The identity development of Latinas may be inhibited when trying to conform to or adopt cultural values that
greatly differ from traditional Latino values (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002). Another theme found in the literature discusses the importance of language and how this connects with the maintenance of culture (Anzaldúa, 2007).

As mentioned, Latina literature also frequently discusses forms of oppression and discrimination and how this relates to marginalization for Latinos in the United States (McHatton, 2007). While this discrimination may be overt or subtly woven into our society as part of the hegemonic structures, it is important to acknowledge the cultural and gender-related marginalization that comes into play when considering this subgroup of women. This marginalization may lead to a sense of powerlessness for parents, and they may feel disconnected from the school which often represents dominant cultural values (Cháves-Reyes, 2010; Smith, Stern, & Shatrova, 2008). They may feel their voices and opinions are not valued, creating dissonance rather than building connections between these parents and the school.

To better understand the interaction of culture and learning for multicultural and, more specifically, Latino families, researchers need to examine this topic through a sociocultural lens (Torres-Velásquez, 2000). From a sociocultural lens, learners can better make meaning of new situations through eliciting prior knowledge which highlights the importance of each person’s background and experiences that are closely connected to culture (Liu & Chen, 2010). The notion of building on prior knowledge closely connects with second language acquisition (Ajayi, 2008; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 1995). Research has demonstrated that actively dialoguing both intrapersonally and interpersonally helps to expand mental schemas through which a person understands her/his world (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 1995).
Problem Statement

Despite the fact that the number of Latino students in the United States have more than tripled over the past thirty years, schools continue to struggle to successfully involve CLD families (Smith, Stern, & Shatrova, 2008; Kao & Rutherford, 2007; Turney & Kao, 2009). Studies, however, have demonstrated academic benefits for diverse students whose parents became actively involved in the school community (Turney & Kao, 2009; Wei & Zhou, 2003). The literature regarding Latino parent involvement describes the importance of breaking down both language barriers and cultural barriers which serve to inhibit involvement among this subgroup of parents (Levine & Trickett, 2000). One way to effectively transcend these barriers is by promoting acceptance of a family’s home culture and building culturally-sensitive partnerships with parents. Acknowledging the existence of power relationships which exist between the parents and the school is another important element in addressing these barriers which inhibit involvement (Cháves-Reyes, 2010).

While the necessity for culturally-sensitive parent involvement opportunities has been described throughout the literature, there is little information regarding the outcomes, successes, and relationships formed through actual examples of intercultural parent programs (Cháves-Reyes, 2010). An even smaller pool of research considers the gender-specific nature of Latina parent involvement (McHatton, 2007; Moreno & Lopez, 1999; Galindo & Medina, 2009). Also, there is a notable lack of research considering programs created by schools from an adult education perspective to empower this subgroup of women. This shortage of research is particularly problematic considering the demographics shifts throughout the country and especially considering that Latina women are the primary caregivers for many school-age children in this country. The literature which does exist discusses how traditional views of
parent involvement, “have actually served to oppress parents by inflicting harmful expectations that serve to further disenfranchise them [through reinforcing] social inequalities and adhere[ing] to biases of majority culture” (Snell et al., 2009, p. 242). This statement indicates that schools are far from adequately establishing parent involvement programs and groups which effectively include this group of parents. Some studies highlight the individual experiences of both Latinos and Latinas (Ramirez, 2003); however, few studies specifically consider the voices of Latina mothers in establishing and participating in parent involvement programs.

The existing research base was expanded through the results of this study which highlighted the relationships between a gender-specific parent group led by Latina mothers. This program took the existing research one step further by examining an adult education program designed to elicit the strengths of the CLD parents (specifically, the Latina mothers) through which parents assisted one another to become more involved with the school community. Furthermore, this research study explored the identity development of Latina women and the relationships that are fostered through this parent involvement programs which was designed in a culturally-sensitive manner. As illustrated in the literature, effective programs for CLD students and parents should celebrate their home language and culture at deep, meaningful levels and must not take a cultural-deficit perspective that merely considers what groups of people “can’t do” or what they “lack” when compared to the dominant culture (Gay, 2010). Often, the literature describes that parents do not have the educational background themselves to help their children with formal education. They lack language skills and may not have sufficient monetary resources or time to effectively embrace the role of “teacher at home” (Schaller et al., 2006). There is a focus on what parents cannot do rather than embracing the sociocultural notion of collectively eliciting background knowledge and skills to identify ways parents can help and
highlight their areas of expertise (Gay, 2010; Schaller et al., 2006).

There are a number of ESL (English as a Second Language) programs for parents across the country though which diverse groups of parents can study basic English skills. These programs have been the topic of numerous research studies regarding parent involvement, adult learning, and adult ESL (Menard-Warwick, 2005). Many of these programs are led by English-speaking teachers, parents, or other community members. While these programs foster collaboration among parents and, to some extent, increase parent involvement, they are still centered on helping these parents because of their lack of skills (Cheng-Ting et al., 2008).

Establishing a parent involvement program which celebrates a skill with which Latinas have expertise (such as knowledge of the Spanish language) allows these parents to take a leadership role in creating, planning, and delivering a parent education program and creates an interesting dynamic untouched by the current research base.

In considering the rise in the Latino population in the United States and that the need for increased parent involvement, creating lasting and effective partnerships between this cultural subgroup and the school culture becomes necessary (Cháves-Reyes, 2010; Levine & Trickett, 2000). Specific parent groups must be geared toward Latina mothers and should celebrate the importance of maintaining culture and language (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002). These programs must acknowledge the identity development of these women as frequently noted in the Latina feminist literature (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002; Garcia, 2004). Identity development refers to the way in which these women define their personal characteristics and individuality while taking into account the multiple cultures and subcultures with which these women identify. As Latina mothers assume a leadership role in parent programs that celebrate their existing funds of
knowledge and multi-faceted cultural background, their interactions and feelings toward this role must be analyzed.

**Purpose and Research Questions**

Through acknowledging how the topics of culture and language framed this parent involvement program, the purpose of this action research project becomes evident. The specific purpose of this study is two-fold: to examine the identity development of Latina mothers as they lead a parent education program and to examine the intercultural relationships that form as a result of this parent involvement experience from the perspective of both the teachers and the learners participating in this program.

Rather than forming a group through which these women could study English, the goal of this program was to examine a program through which Latina mothers were given the opportunity to teach other women literacy skills in Spanish. As the Latino population increases, there may be a great need for people in this country not only to speak English, but Spanish as well. Traditionally, when referring to second language acquisition, people in the United States automatically assume that this is in reference to acquiring English. Considering this topic from a different angle that is rooted in adult education theory and practice and highlights the expertise of the Latina mothers proposes interesting discussions regarding language, power, and culture.

This study was framed from a sociocultural perspective and was informed by Latina feminist theory. Through this parent involvement program, several research questions were explored which were designed to address topics absent from the current base of literature:

1. What have Latina mothers learned about their identity and cross-cultural relationships as a result of this language-based teaching and learning experience?
2. What role has teaching played in Latina mothers’ overall view of participation within this particular parent involvement experience?

3. What role does participating in this parent involvement program have on Latina mothers’ participation in their children’s K-12 school setting?

**Theoretical Framework**

The lens through which this study was framed acknowledges aspects of both sociocultural and Latina feminist theories. As sociocultural theory explores the interaction of culture and learning, this theory is often associated with the literature on second language acquisition. This connection between sociocultural theory and language acquisition aligns closely with the basis of this study which explores a language learning, cultural parent involvement program led by Latina mothers (Torres-Velásquez, 2000). Sociocultural theory is supplemented by information from the Latina feminist literature which refers to the particular experience of the population being studied throughout this action research project. The Latina feminist literature particularly addresses issues of language development as well as the maintenance of culture for Latinas. Through extending sociocultural theory to incorporate important aspects of Latina feminist literature, a theoretical foundation can be constructed which describes the lens through which this study was developed.

**Sociocultural Theory**

Sociocultural theory highlights the importance of building on pre-existing knowledge in order to construct new knowledge. Rather than merely absorbing knowledge, individuals are actively constructing their version of reality and understanding of the world (Liu & Chen, 2010). This notion of actively creating knowledge takes on a more social role through highlighting the importance of social interactions, participating, and relationships (Vygotsky, 1978). Learning is
a complex, social phenomenon which is constructed through activity, context, and culture (Packer & Giocoechea, 2000). The cultural context experienced by each individual adds interesting and diverse elements which contribute to the individual’s unique learning process (Gee, 1991; Kozulin, 1999). In this study which includes a diverse group of women engaged in a teaching and learning experience, acknowledging the existence of individual learning processes was crucial. A classroom community valuing social learning must bridge these cultural differences while also demonstrating mutual respect and collaboration (Alfred, 2009).

Acknowledging each individual’s diverse background is an important step toward building a trusting community of adult learners. Utilizing a learner’s background knowledge is frequently referred to as the “funds of knowledge” approach to learning (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992, Waterman, 2008). This method is frequently mentioned throughout the literature regarding second language (L2) acquisition. Through acknowledging a learner’s prior knowledge, higher levels of comprehension can be attained and learners can better internalize and make meaning of new experiences or information (Moll et al, 1992; Waterman, 2008).

Through the literature connecting social learning and language, it is noted that dialogue with the self and with others plays an integral role in forming a person’s understanding of the world (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 1995). This idea is outlined by Vygotsky and further developed through Jaramillo’s proposition that language increases most social interaction, thus fostering higher levels of thinking (Jaramillo, 1996). Often, individuals practice a second language through guided conversation or practice with others. This exposure to language through conversing with a more experienced individual can help to scaffold, and thus accelerate, the progress of the second language learner (Vygotsky, 1978).
This notion of second language acquisition also relates to this study of Latina mothers who are taught basic language and literacy skills. Through teaching a program which is designed to promote Spanish language learning for mothers who do not speak Spanish, these women used their expertise or background knowledge of the language to help scaffold the learning experience for others. In addition to this language connection, the Latina mothers have also experienced second language learning personally through their journey to learn English. The Latina feminist literature further supports the importance of language and culture. Latina feminist theory adds a valuable component to the theoretical framework in which this research is rooted which extends beyond that which is considered by sociocultural theory by specifically relating to the particular group of women involved in this study.

**Latina Feminist Theory**

Throughout the Latina Feminist literature, the importance of language and the maintenance of culture (or cultures) is often explored (Anzaldúa, 2007; Keating, 2009). These concepts are related to identity development and how this can become complicated and confused by multiple cultures or subcultures (Garcia, 2004; Kleinberg, Boris, & Ruiz, 2007). The literature reveals insight into the struggle of living among two different cultures. In reference to Latinos, this is frequently referred to as the “border culture” or living among the “borderland” (Garcia & Garcia, 2001; Anzaldúa, 2007). At times, these terms may refer to a physical border such as that between the United States and Mexico which is meant to provide a clear division between two places. The expression “border culture” also metaphorically considers the bi-cultural experience of living in the margins. This idea creates a space where two different worlds collide or merge (Anzaldúa, 2007). In connection with this concept of living in a border culture rather than the mainstream society, many Latinas face challenges regarding their
language and identity. These women also experience multiple forms of oppression such as that related to their gender, race, sexual preference, or socioeconomic status (Anzaldúa, 2007; Garcia & Garcia, 2001; Ruiz, 1998).

The themes identified throughout the Latina feminist literature help to outline the lived experience of Latina-Americans in an authentic manner. Through revealing their personal knowledge and understanding of what it means to be Latina, these women can further understand and develop their cultural identity. They can also explore and better recognize how oppression affects them personally. The themes of language, identity development, culture and oppression, which are presented in the Latina feminist literature, can help to inform a group of Latina mothers and may empower them to take control of their situation and become more involved in their children’s education (Flores & Garcia, 2009). Participating in a program through which they are able to showcase their knowledge and skills would not only empower Latina mothers involved but would also help to promote and place value upon the language and culture of these women as well. This program encouraged relationships that fostered collective identity development, increased confidence, and promoted continued involvement in the school community.

**Overview of Design and Methodology**

This example of qualitative research was designed as an action research study through which a group of mothers engaged in an eight-week program designed with the goal of teaching and learning basic elements of the Spanish language while also exploring aspects related to culture as well. Through this program, a group of Latina mothers taught basic Spanish literacy and communication skills to non Spanish-speaking mothers at their children’s elementary school. In aligning with qualitative methods, action research serves to better understand a problem or
question. This method of research promotes the study of peoples’ experiences, narratives, and the analysis of these aspects (Stringer, 2007). This study, in particular, examined the experiences of a group of Latina women as they assumed a leadership role in a parent involvement program.

Throughout this action research study, the researcher and participants engaged in four stages which were cyclical in nature. These stages included: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Herr & Anderson, 2005). In the first stage, I identified a problem and created a plan to improve this problem. For this study, a plan was developed to address the perceived lack of Latina parent involvement. The plan also acknowledged the shortage of leadership opportunities available to Latina mothers in schools that connect with these women’s funds of knowledge (or background knowledge and experience). Through the acting phase, the plan was enacted. This occurred throughout an eight week long, Thursday afternoon program. Observations were consistently made and recorded throughout each of the eight weekly sessions as well as during a planning session attended by the Latina teachers and both pre and post interviews conducted with the participants. Finally, I reflected upon the previous stages and the data which was collected in order to inform future planning and/or action. In addition to my reflections, the participants completed reflection forms at the end of each session which helped to establish the agenda for future sessions and flexibly guide the program to meet the needs of the adult learners.

A unique aspect of action research is that this method generally allows for the participation of the participants in planning and implementing the study (Herr & Anderson, 2005). This is especially true for one type of action research known as participatory action research (PAR). Through PAR, the researcher takes part in engaging with the group, making decisions, and collecting data, rather than merely assuming an outsider’s perspective (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). As mentioned, the participants play an important role in designing and
implementing the study. The current study of Latina mothers utilized this aspect of PAR, as the participants were invited to provide feedback on a weekly basis regarding how future sessions could most effectively be organized. As mentioned previously, the teachers were also encouraged to attend a planning session prior to the start of the program. In addition to including the voices of the participants in shaping the experience, PAR focuses on examining various types of relationships. In aligning with this element of PAR, intercultural relationships between participants will be considered throughout this study as is described through the purpose statement.

PAR tends to be critical in nature and may consider issues of equality, oppression, and power. This study touched upon issues of power through providing Latina mothers, a group which experiences societal marginalization, the opportunity to both celebrate their culture and take a leadership role in a parent education group.

Because of the critical nature of this study, it also aligns with another type of action research known as critical action research (CAR). While PAR considers power structures and inequality, CAR does this to a much greater extent. Through this method of action research, there is great emphasis placed on critical self reflection as a way to better understand one’s assumptions and ideologies. As the researcher, I also placed value on acknowledging aspects of my own ideology which affected my observations to separate personal feelings and beliefs from what others are experiencing. It was necessary that I also recognize examples of marginalization which occur within society (Merriam & Simpson, 1995).

The current study of Latina mothers combines aspects of both of these types of action research. Through utilizing the assistance of participants in constructing the parent involvement
program and acknowledging the critical aspects of this research, a multifaceted base for this action research study becomes evident.

**Significance**

Through exploring the literature related to sociocultural theory, Latina feminism, and parent involvement, the significance of this study becomes clear. Upon understanding the fundamental notions present within the theoretical frameworks previously described, it becomes evident that Latina mothers may benefit from participating in a teaching/learning experience that is social in nature and matches the values of a culture that embraces collectivism. This experience provides the opportunity to celebrate the importance of language and how it can foster learning, especially for those learning a second language. It is also important that it acknowledges the background knowledge of the learner and builds upon this prior knowledge. This program was not designed to further marginalize or oppress these women, but instead was created with the intent of fostering empowerment, confidence, and identity development.

This study is significant, because it combines all of these aspects in order to develop a parent involvement program that is truly designed for success based on these various elements that have been proven to foster success among this specific cultural subgroup. A program encompassing all of these characteristics is non-existent within the current research base. In fact, the Spanish Teaching and Learning Program yielded interesting results that can be applied to parent involvement programs across the country (McHatton, 2007; Moreno & Lopez, 1999; Galindo & Medina, 2009). Throughout the parent involvement literature, a constant theme is that schools find it difficult to effectively involve Latino parents (Smith, Stern, & Shatrova, 2008). With the current demands placed on schools to connect with families and build bridges throughout the community to support children and their education, research highlighting
effective ways in which to accomplish this is highly valuable. For the particular elementary school in which this research is conducted, there were immediate benefits as parents were seen and considered as valuable resources that may strengthen ties within the school community. There was also a shift in the level of confidence experienced by the Latina women participating in the study and their willingness to participate in other leadership opportunities within the school community in the future.

As mentioned, this study addressed a void in the research base regarding parent involvement, as it examined a program for Latina mothers which highlighted the strengths and background knowledge that these women posses. Few, if any, studies examine Latina parent involvement from an angle that highlights ways in which their cultural and linguistic knowledge and values can fit into the current model of parent involvement which typically reflects dominant cultural values. This particular population of parents is especially important to address, as the number of Latinos in the United States continues to rise and high numbers of Latino students are being “left behind” as they fail to graduate from U.S. schools. Through investigating parent involvement from multiple and varied angles, information can be gleaned that may help build and strengthen relationships throughout the school community.

Definition of Terms

1. *Latina* refers to a female member of an ethnic group that traces its roots to a Spanish-speaking nation from Latin America or Spain (Passel & Taylor, 2009). Latina Americans refer to Latinas living in the United States who may have dual citizenship or only be citizens of the United States. This may include both first and second generation Latinas.
2. *First generation Latina* refers to a Latina born in a Spanish-speaking nation from Latin America or Spain who is now living in the United States.


4. *Identity* is the combination of qualities that make us who we are. There may be various expressions of identity which may alter or change throughout a person’s lifetime. These identities may, at times, conflict with one another (Hayes & Flannery, 2000).

5. *Hegemony* is a process through which certain beliefs or systems of practice have become embedded in mainstream society and are widely accepted by the general population. These beliefs serve to perpetuate the power of the dominant group and marginalize others through neglecting to consider the values and beliefs of non-dominant groups (Brookfield, 2005).

6. *Cultural-deficit* is a term used to describe what members of non-dominant cultures are unable to do or those cultural aspects about which they are unfamiliar in regard to dominant cultural practices, values, and beliefs.

7. *Multicultural education* is a mode or style of education which encompasses aspects of cultures other than the dominant culture. Diverse cultures can be included at a variety of levels such as merely discussing aspects of various cultures at a superficial level and embracing and encouraging different cultural values throughout the learning experience. *Critical multicultural education* is a level of multicultural education which moves to acknowledge and alter oppressive structures in society (Castagno, 2009).
8. *Collectivism* is a trait specific to cultures which value working and learning for the good of the group. The needs of the individual are secondary to the needs of the group (Trumbull et al., 2001).

9. *Individualism* is a trait specific to cultures which value working and learning for the good of the individual rather than the group. The needs of the group are secondary to the needs of the individual (Trumbull et al., 2001).

10. *L1* refers to the first language learned and spoken by an individual.

11. *Home language* describes the native language spoken by an individual or a group of people. This term is used interchangeably with L1.

12. *L2* refers to a person’s second language or the language in which he/she learned to communicate after learning the L1.

13. *English Language Learners (ELLs)* are individuals learning to communicate in English whose L1 or home language is not English.

14. *English as a Second Language (ESL)* refers to a program through which English communication is taught to learners whose L1 or home language is not English.

15. *Parent Involvement* involves the participation of parents in their children’s educational experience. Parent involvement may be described as specific to certain subgroups of parents such as those who are learning English as a second language (ESL), immigrant parents, Latino/a parents, etc. There are several types of parent involvement including: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaboration with the community (Epstein et al., 2002).
16. *Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD)* refers to individuals whose home language and cultural background differ from the mainstream culture typically found in school communities across the United States.

17. *Scaffolding* refers to the idea that a person’s knowledge can be expanded through the assistance of a more advanced learner

**Assumptions of the Study**

There are several assumptions I hold regarding various elements of this study which must be recognized in order to clarify my perspective as a researcher. These assumptions include:

1. Latino parents are often not actively involved in their children’s school community in ways that are recognizable by the mainstream school culture.

2. Latina mothers often feel disconnected from the school culture/community.

3. Latina mothers will positively accept the role of teacher in a parent education program.

4. Latina women will draw upon their background knowledge regarding the Spanish language upon participating in a parent education program where they must teach language skills to others.

5. Latina mothers feel more comfortable teaching and learning in a group setting that is social in nature due to their collectivistic cultural values.

6. Forming a program that celebrates the importance of language and how this fosters learning will be beneficial for second language learners.

7. Forming a program that does not further marginalize or oppress these women, but instead is created with the intent of fostering empowerment, confidence, and identity development will be beneficial to Latina mothers.
8. Scientific knowledge is incomplete and the lived experiences of people and their explanation of those experiences are valuable additions to the research base.

9. There is a social reality to the human experience for which the scientific method does not account.

Limitations

In recognizing that all research is partial, the following limitations which may impact this study must be acknowledged:

1. Because of the small sample size used in this qualitative action research study, the results may not accurately reflect the larger population. Thus, the findings of this study may not be highly generalizable.

2. The women participating in this study reflect a mixture of first and second generation Latinas. As a result of the varying experiences of first and second generation Latinas, that which is experienced by one participant may not be generalizable to another participant within the group due to differing background experiences (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002).

3. The label Latina encompasses women from various, unique Spanish-speaking cultures. Although these women are combined within one umbrella term, this generalization may be problematic, as it does not accurately account for the differences between Latin subcultures (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002).

4. As the researcher, my cultural background is very different from the Latina mothers in this study. I am neither Latina nor a mother. Rather, I am a Caucasian woman with no children. These differences may pose a challenge as I attempt to build a trusting connection with the women participating in my study. Because my race
aligns with that of the dominant culture, the women in my study may not be as open or candid as they might be with a woman of their same race or cultural background.

5. While action research reaches beyond the scientific method to capture the lived experiences of participants, the scope of action research is rather nebulous in that I could not be certain of the course the study would take, nor could I plan far in advance, as the planning happened as the process evolved. Due to the flexible path action research studies take, the results may be broad and encompass information beyond the scope of the research questions.

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the background information regarding this study of Latina mothers involved in a parent education program known as The Spanish Teaching and Learning Program. The theoretical frameworks of sociocultural theory and Latina feminist theory were also outlined to provide a lens through which this study will be conducted. The problem statement and the research questions were also included. Furthermore, assumptions and limitations regarding this study were brought to light and definitions of terms used throughout the research were explained. Chapter two presents an overview and analysis of the literature related to this study. Chapter three describes the methodology used in enacting the research. Chapter four reviews the planning phase and the participant interviews. Chapter five details the action research experience within the context of the program sessions. Chapter six presents the findings of the study, and chapter seven outlines the implications of the outcomes.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

As previously outlined, the specific purpose of this study will be twofold: to examine the identity development of Latina mothers as they lead a parent education program, and to examine the intercultural relationships that form as a result of this parent involvement experience. Chapter two will address existing literature pertinent to this area of research while also providing a comprehensive description of the theoretical framework of this study. Elements of sociocultural theory supplemented by aspects of Latina feminist theory, second language acquisition, critical multicultural education, and culturally responsive teaching will outline the theoretical foundation in which this study is rooted. Additional literature surrounding parent involvement and, more specifically, Latino and CLD parent involvement will further create a well-rounded depiction of the complex nature of this study and the pre-existing research base with which it is associated.

Theoretical Framework

The following section will explain the theoretical framework for this study within the context of adult education. This framework includes sociocultural and Latina feminist perspectives. In addition, the discussion will address second language acquisition, critical multiculturalism, and culturally responsive teaching.

Foundations of Sociocultural Theory

This study exists within the framework of sociocultural theory which emphasizes social construction of learning within adult learning theory. This theoretical framework will also include Latina feminist perspectives. Second language acquisition, critical multiculturalism, and culturally responsive teaching will also be described as related to the sociocultural framework.
Sociocultural theory, also frequently associated with social constructivism, stems from cognitive learning discourses of scholars such as Dewey, Piaget, and Vygotsky (Kozulin, 1999). The premise of these cognitive learning theories is rooted in constructivism which is most often connected with psychologist Jean Piaget whose work extended from scholars such as Kant and Descartes. Piaget’s discourse regarding constructivism supports the notion that learners create awareness of their environment through developing mental schemas for assimilating and accommodating new information as they interact with their environment. Individuals use their prior knowledge to build upon their previous experiences and make meaning of new situations.

Social constructivism, often associated with psychologist Lev Vygotsky, extends the assumptions of constructivism to include the importance of social interactions (Jaramillo, 1996; Packer & Goicoechea, 2000, Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky’s work surrounding sociocultural theory is connected to scholars such as Dewey, Leontiev and Luria (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 1995; Packer & Goicoechea, 2000). While Piaget believed learning occurs in a linear fashion, Vygotsky viewed learning as developing in a non-linear sequence (Jaramillo, 1996). In addition to being non-linear, sociocultural theory is rooted in the idea that meaning is most effectively constructed through a multifaceted, social phenomenon through which learning is, “fundamentally situated in activity, context, and culture” (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000, p. 229). Individuals construct their own version of reality rather that adopting a universal version. Through his lens, determining what is “real” is an individual construction which varies from person to person (Jaramillo, 1996).

**Context**

Sociocultural theory proposes that cognitive development is mediated by cultural tools which are created in the context of social activity and are engrained in each individual’s personal
discourses. These cultural tools vary depending on a person’s cultural surroundings and are elicited frequently as individuals grow and change, while always rooted in the social context through which they developed (Gee, 1991; Kozulin, 1999). These ideas surrounding cultural tools illustrate the importance of context in creating each individual’s personal view of reality.

Packer and Goicoechea (2000) explain that sociocultural perspectives assume, “the formation and transformation of a person can occur only in a social context that is constitutive of being” (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000, p. 231). Variations of this idea are found in the work of other theorists such as Bourdieu, Habermas, and Foucault. Alfred (2009) considers context with regard to sociocultural perspectives as well and more specifically highlights how community education is a positively recognized context for adult learning. The mind of the individual is constantly developing and changing with each new social experience throughout his/her life. Alfred (2009) further describes how this notion of being a lifelong learner extends beyond the walls of formal education and includes non-formal learning experiences that occur in networks and communities.

Establishing a context which is conducive to social learning is an important implication for adult education. A classroom community with “shared norms, mutual respect, and collaboration to foster bridging across differences holds promise for the building of social networks that can benefit learner participants both psychosocially and instrumentally” (Alfred, 2009, p. 11). To build a trusting classroom community, adult educators must also consider the unique backgrounds of each adult learner.

**Building on Prior Knowledge and Interests**

Another assumption of sociocultural theory is that individuals categorize their world into themes or schemas within their minds. These themes are related to an adult’s interests and
experiences (Jaramillo, 1996). Berger (2002) refers to this idea of connecting new information to that which interests a person by stating that an effective way to promote the construction of new knowledge is to ignite a spark within the heart of the individual. In addition to noting the importance of interest in meaning-making, the literature associated with sociocultural theory also refers extensively to learning by doing. Through Vygotsky’s theory of experience, he explains that meaning is derived from experience (Jaramillo, 1996). In other literature, prior experiences are referred to as “funds of knowledge” (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Waterman, 2008, p. 132). The literature further describes how drawing on a learner’s background experience can be combined with learning in informal contexts in order to help adults cope with difficult changes such as financial hardship or other social circumstances (Moll et al., 1992). In their study of a Mexican community in Tucson, Arizona, Moll et al. (2002) describe how sharing funds of knowledge resulted in the exchange of resources that had the potential to benefit participating families. The importance of prior knowledge and experiences is a critical element of sociocultural theory and has also been frequently noted in the literature regarding adults learning a second language (L2) (Waterman, 2008).

**Language Acquisition and Sociocultural Theory**

According to the literature, sociocultural theory can be closely connected with language acquisition (Ajayi, 2008; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 1995). Vygotsky’s interest in the microgenetic domain alluded to mental changes occurring over relatively short periods of time such as when a person is learning a second language (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 1995). From a sociocultural perspective, developing an L2 extends beyond the mastery of the linguistic elements of the L2. It includes the interaction of both interpersonal and intrapersonal ways of making meaning of the world. In other words, dialogue with the self and with others plays a critical role in developing
and expanding mental schemas through which a person understands their world (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 1995). Jaramillo (1996) further highlights the connection of language to sociocultural theory through explaining that language (primarily through discussion and communication) advances most social interaction which, in turn, fosters higher levels of thinking from which new learning is constructed. This idea is extended through the notion that all discussion which occurs within a collaborative activity is beneficial for orienting students’ to the activity and to one another, regardless of whether this dialogue occurs in a student’s first or second language (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 1995).

Gee (1991) addresses the importance of social interaction and culture through his discussion of Discourses. He explains, “A Discourse (including social practices, cultures, and subcultures) is a socio-culturally distinctive and integrated way of thinking, acting, interacting, talking, and valuing connected with a particular social identity or role” (Gee, 1991, p. 33). According to Gee, a person experiences multiple Discourses simultaneously. He also notes the inseparable connection between literacies and Discourses. His plural definition of literacy includes reading, writing, and language which are all strongly related to a person’s culture. Gee further notes that conflict can arise between a person’s Discourses when the foundations of these Discourses vary drastically. This type of conflict may occur in situations when the home discourses and school discourses differ or when individuals are immersed in a new culture or are learning a new language (Gee, 1991).

In order to address and mediate this type of conflict, Vygotsky emphasizes that teachers must help these students develop the necessary tools to function within their social setting, thus assisting them in individually developing a new culture (as cited in Berger, 2002). Berger (2002) equates this to empowering students and helping them find their own voices. Vygotsky’s idea of
scaffolding can be utilized by teachers in order to help students critically utilize higher levels of thinking. The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) describes the range of a student’s actual level of thinking and their potential level (Vygotsky, 1986; Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky explains that through collaborative learning and scaffolding, or assistance from the teacher and others which extends a person’s thinking, there can be a great increase in a student’s potential level of learning (Jaramillo, 1996; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 1995). This idea of scaffolding can be directly applied to the manner through which many individuals acquire a second language through guided practice and conversation with peers or a more-highly skilled teacher.

**Latina Feminist Perspectives**

Through daring to write at the risk of shifting the foundations or ideologies upon which the United States has been structured, Latina women have broached the topic of Latina feminism without being stopped by borders or boundaries in order to illustrate the Latina experience from their personal histories. Themes emerging from their writing include the importance of language, maintenance of culture, identity development, and multiple forms of oppression. These themes help to outline the lived experience of the Latina-American in a way that is authentic. Through revealing their personal knowledge and understanding of what it means to be both Latin American and women, these writers portray very personal expertise regarding this topic. Their writings not only challenge the actions of the white male, they challenge all women including women of color to take control or responsibility for enacting change within society so that women can be more highly represented and diverse cultures can be truly valued.

**The Importance of Language**

The maintenance of language is a topic frequently discussed by Latina women throughout the literature. While many describe language as central aspect of one’s identity, many bi-cultural
women juggle the use of multiple languages throughout their everyday lives, at times being chastised for using one language over another. The shame at speaking Spanish in U. S. schools, as described by Anzaldúa, is plagued with stories of punishment from teachers, and negative criticism from peers (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002). While public schools have taking steps toward celebrating the teaching, learning, and speaking of languages other than English, some institutions neglect to recognize the depth and importance of language and its reflection of a person’s identity, culture, and spirit (Keating, 2009; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002). Many bi-cultural women feel the need to use a particular language within specific contexts. For example, in the home, a Latina may need to use Spanish; whereas, in the workplace she may be expected to use English. This struggle to linguistically identify with multiple cultures brings about multifaceted challenges in terms of identity development of Latinas.

In addition to struggling with language as a central aspect of identity, language can be used to oppress women with male discourse. The same is true in both English and Spanish. For example, we say, “If a person is hungry, he should eat.” We have been taught to use “he” when we are speaking of a hypothetical situation. In Spanish, the word nosotros is frequently used when speaking of a group of women. In actuality, the feminine ending ‘as’ should be used making the word nosotras (Anzaldúa, 2007). This notion of commonly accepted, masculine forms of language demonstrates the inferior role of women and how this extends across cultural boundaries.

Language can have many variations, especially for those speaking multiple languages or a combination of languages. Variations of language are created as needed when cultures begin to blend together. This may be considered mutilation of language to some who may criticize those who choose to use combined languages. In the U.S., the combination of English and Spanish is
commonly referred to as ‘Spanglish’ and is used often by many first and second generation Latinos.

The movie Selena which chronicles the life of the popular and successful Latina singer directly addresses her personal language struggle. Selena, a second-generation Latina, sees a combination of both the English and Spanish languages as an important element of her authenticity; however, her producer/father worries that her fans will not accept Selena because she is not “truly” Mexican or American and, especially, because of her “funny” Spanish accent. Fortunately, Selena’s authentic portrayal of her bi-cultural nature is accepted by her fans both in the United States and Mexico and springs her to international stardom (Báez, 2007). The movie illustrates Selena’s choice to take a risk and portray herself authentically through the use of her “Spanglish” and describes a scenario regarding language conflict to which many Latinas can relate.

Some Latinas may deliberately choose to speak only Spanish, as they may consider English the language of the oppressor. They take pride in their home language and reject the marginalization which occurs when they are required to speak the language of the dominant culture in the U.S.—a country that, ironically, does not have one, specified national language. These individuals decide not to learn or speak English even though it may provide them greater opportunities in the United States (Anzaldúa, 2007).

Anzaldúa extends this idea of language pride and how language plays a part in a person’s identity. She describes how, “If you really want to hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language” (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 81). Anzaldúa explains that until you have pridefully accepted your language or languages, it is virtually impossible to have pride in yourself (Anzaldúa, 2007). In addition, you must take pride
in your voice and what you say. Many Latinas have used language and their voices to convey personal narratives that describe their experiences and can be shared globally. Through language, these women have created an avenue through which to connect with other women experiencing similar situations.

**Maintaining Culture and Developing Identity**

First and second generation Latinas face a number of challenges as they strive to maintain their home culture and adapt to the mainstream culture in the United States (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002). Often, first generation Latinas either hold on to characteristics of their home culture while struggling to adapt to elements of a new culture or attempt to fully abandon their cultural practices in order to fully immerse themselves within a new culture. Many second generation Latinas embody a combination of White, Anglo-Saxon values and culture and traditional Latino culture.

Morales describes the complexities of Latina cultural identity through her first generation parents constantly “fleeing from their Puertoricanness” in an attempt to rid themselves of anything that could connect their family to a culture associated with the negative stereotypes of filth or slum-ridden neighborhoods that plague the minds of those in power (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002). She concludes her narrative by highlighting her desire to more fully become a part of that culture her parents were so desperately trying to rid from her system. As a second generation Latina, she describes a longing to be more closely connected to her Puerto Rican heritage by embodying characteristics such as dancing fluidly and speaking with a proper Spanish accent. In her bi-cultural experience, Morales describes how she identifies with both cultures amidst an unsettling feeling of disconnect (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002). Quintanales further addresses this notion of living in the margins. She relates that although she socially
benefited from being raised in a middle-class family and having very light skin, she has experienced overwhelming levels of fear, isolation, and pain as a Latina lesbian (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002).

This feeling of isolation and loneliness was further expressed in a study of second generation Mexican American who defined themselves as the “other” in comparison to their peers at a predominately white university (Garcia, 2004). These feelings of not fully conforming or assimilating to the mainstream culture were frequent themes in the narratives of these college students. While second generation women struggle with developing and understanding their identity because of the border culture in which they live, many seek to add a new dimension to their thinking which involves an increased awareness of the role of ethnicity in their lives (Garcia, 2004). As these women strive to understand the layers of their identity, they begin to more fully examine and recognize the complexity and often multifaceted nature of ethnicity, race, and culture. Through this increased awareness, second generation women work to mold and change the boundaries of their ethnicity to form a space through which to construct their personal identity (Garcia, 2004).

Many first generation Latinos think of second generation Latinos as the culture of possibility. Often, Latinos/as immigrated or traveled to the United States in order to provide better opportunities for their children without fully understanding ideas such as marginalization, or power structures and how this relates to various cultures represented throughout the United States. Quintanales, a first-generation immigrant terms her lack of awareness of social power structures plaguing North American culture as her immigrant ignorance. She notes that she has struggled as a result of this ignorance as well as her assumption that women of color representing
different ethnic backgrounds have the same experience relating to cultural identity and racism (as cited in Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002).

In addition to possibly experiencing “immigrant ignorance” a number of first generation Latina immigrants in the United States face other challenges. Many are physically living between two cultures, as they may work in the United States to support family living in their home country. This idea of transnationalism is often explored in the literature (Sanchez, 2009). According to Sanchez, “immigrants can potentially live connected to two places without having to sever ties to their countries of origin, maintaining linguistic and cultural practices that may have been lost in past immigration settlement processes” (2009, p. 86). For Latinas, this describes a phenomenon through which mothers are parenting their children from across the globe and, thus, creating alternate definitions of motherhood that challenge the belief that biological mothers should raise their own children. These mothers may have entrusted the direct care of their children to another family member or close friend in order in order to provide the basic necessities of survival for their children (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997).

Despite living in the United States, their country of origin, or a combination of both, many women often experience gender stereotypes specific to the Latino culture. Aurora Levins Morales describes the stereotypical gender-specific values impressed upon her by her first generation Latino parents (as cited in Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002). Through her narrative, she illustrates contradictions which exist within the Latino culture regarding the expectations for women. While frequently termed the “glue” holding families together and, thus, an essential part of the Latino family structure, many Latinas are, ironically, considered subservient to men or los patrónes both at work and at home (Anzaldúa, 2007; Ruiz, 1998). These women are frequently groomed to be obedient housewives, putting the needs of their spouses before their own;
however, these same women (who, as a culture, tend to wear tighter, sexier clothing) are inundated with messages that imply women should stay away from men, as they only want to use women for evil things such as sex. The topic of sexuality extends throughout much of the literature which highlights the expectation of Latina women to refuse sexual advances if they are unmarried. If a woman chooses to say yes to this type of interaction with men, she is considered to have low morals even by the man with whom she is engaging in sexual relations. In these exchanges, only the women are seen as impure and unclean. The men are seen as “macho” and praised for their power (Espin, 1989).

Anzaldúa acknowledges the topic of cultural contradictions as well stating that they create great divides within an individual, especially those living between two cultures (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002). She identifies these people as bridges, as they constantly “travel” between two different cultures. This internal divide is especially evident within second generation Latinas. For women living in the border culture, elements of Americanization become incorporated within their personal cultural frames; however, this cultural ambiguity may, at times, result in problems of identity (Anzaldúa, 2007; Keating, 2009; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002; Ruiz, 1998). This dilemma can also be compounded by the presences of multiple subcultures such as class, nationality, and sexual identity creating fissures that further complicate identity development (Kleinberg, Boris, & Ruiz, 2007).

The notion of sexual identity is further explored by Espin (1989). She explains the complexities which occur for Latin women who are not heterosexual. Because the Latino culture traditionally expects women to adhere to the role of a subservient housewife, little room is left for women who do not fit this mold. While lesbians are represented in every ethnicity and race, these women may feel like outsiders in the Latino culture. In fact, some Latinos think of
lesbianism as a sickness that was contracted from American culture (Espin, 1989). This further represents how the existence of multiple subcultures can constantly impact a person’s identity and how Latinas can face great challenges even within their home culture.

In further examining the complexities of living among two cultures, the literature reveals a great deal of insight regarding combination of two different cultures. In reference Latino/as, this is frequently referred to as the “border culture” or living among the “borderland” (Anzaldúa, 2007; Garcia & Garcia, 2001). At times, these terms may refer to a physical border such as that between the United States and Mexico which is meant to provide a clear division between two places. The expression “border culture” also metaphorically considers the bi-cultural experience of living in the margins. This idea creates a space where two different worlds collide or merge (Anzaldúa, 2007).

Alarcón (as cited in Trujillo, 1998), reminds us we do not have a fixed identity and that a person’s identity is constructed of numerous layers which are constantly developing and changing. The shifting identity of a person living in the border culture can be compared to learning to swim in a different element. As the “water” changes, a person must alter their stroke to stay afloat. This struggle is similar to that which Latinos experience as they learn to thrive in a culture which differs from their home culture (Anzaldúa, 2007). Anzaldúa speaks of how she stayed true to her personal identity by standing her ground and using her words. She speaks of leaving her home and moving to different areas but constantly keeping hold of the core values and beliefs of her existence. She describes herself as a turtle, always carrying her home on her back and expresses how this maintenance of her home culture helped her to survive within a different cultural context (Anzaldúa, 2007).
**Collectivism**

In the Latino culture, the cooperative nature of families is valued as well as interdependence (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). Families give and receive support to one another freely, and commonly live in the same home with extended family members. This notion of collectivism often differs from the practice of mainstream society which places value on individualism. Individualism is characterized by independence and generally does not celebrate working as a group to complete a task (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2001). The conflicting nature of collectivism and individualism often results in unsettling feelings of loneliness for first and second generations Latinos/as. This is especially true for students as they struggle to succeed at predominately white institutions (Flores & Garcia, 2009). A study of Latinas at a predominately white university demonstrated these women’s difficult journey to understand, define, and accept their identities. As a collective group, the women met weekly to share and discuss. This element of collectivity greatly increased the success of the group and greatly fostered identity development within this group of women (Flores & Garcia, 2009).

**Narratives**

The idea of storytelling is another important element in Latino culture and one that is passed down from generation to generation (Anzaldúa, 2007). In many homes, parents rely on oral tradition or cuentos to teach their children social morals and values (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). Because they are a valued tradition, narratives are a natural manner for many Latinas to express themselves and share their experiences.

Through collectively sharing and analyzing their narratives, Latinas can greater understand the importance of ethnicity, race, social class, and gender in their lives. In a study of collective identity formation of Latinas, Guzik and Gorlier found that narration can also serve as
a “feminist practice through which women, by adhering to the feminist principles of reflection, intimacy, and multiplicity, fashion groups into unique spaces within which they are able to make themselves into and express themselves as individual feminist subjects” (2004, p. 92). These women were able to share their narratives within a collective setting which, interestingly, helped them define themselves as individuals (Guzik & Gorlier, 2004). This process was effectively demonstrated through a program for Latinas the college level which demonstrated benefits for Latino students who were able to gather together weekly and share their experiences and struggles (Garcia, 2004). Sessions such as these help students overcome feelings of loneliness which are common for Latinos/as going to school at predominately white institutions (Flores & Garcia, 2009). In addition to sharing cuentos orally, much of the literature written by Latina women exists in the form of personal narratives (Anzaldúa, 1990; Ruiz & Dubois, 2000). These writings also appear in the form of written letters illustrating the correspondence between women and how this collective relationship fosters a cultural connection among Latinas.

**Multiple Forms of Oppression**

There are numerous forms of oppression affecting Latina women which differ as a result of the multiple subcultures to which they identify. Morales describes racism as an ideology that can plague every individual regardless of their race or culture (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002). She encourages all people to critically consider and understand the inner-workings of racism and deems this a necessary element in perpetuating the feminist movement. Critically and individually examining any elements of racism that lie within each of us is also an important aspect of understanding racism. (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002). Gender should be considered as part of interlocking systems of inequality (Garcia & Garcia, 2001). While these systems interlock, they also overlap, resulting in inequality based on multiple aspects or subcultures of a
person’s identity including their race, gender, or sexual preference. For women living in the border culture, elements of Americanization have been incorporated within their personal cultural frames (Ruiz, 1998)

Carillo (as cited in Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002) writes how women of color have a distinctly different connection to and understanding of racism than white women while acknowledging that oppression occurs for women regardless of their culture or ethnicity. She describes how white women have the luxury of being less forward about women’s rights because of the privileges from which they benefit because of their skin color. While acknowledging a number of strong, committed feminist women of color, she also proposes that white women everywhere should use their power to help make changes for all women, especially those whose voices are more deeply suppressed.

**Colonialism**

The theme of colonialism runs thick throughout Latina feminist literature (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002; Ruiz, 1998). This topic of colonies or *colonias* is mentioned in two different ways. The first describes colonialism as one culture dominating or holding power over another and the other describing the culturally-specific colonies (in this case, Latino communities) which form as a result of oppressive colonialism. The history of colonialism in the United States dates back to European men stripping land, resources, and power from the Native Americans who had been living there for hundreds of years (Anzaldúa, 2007). Anzaldúa describes the repercussions of this early form of oppression by stating, “In trying to be “objective,” Western culture made “objects” out of things and people when it distanced itself from them, thereby losing “touch” with them. This dichotomy is the root of all violence” (2007, p. 59).
The forms of power or domination in modern day society are interrelated and sustain each other. Their interconnected nature can be traced through different types of oppression but the effects are similar in that certain groups of people are kept in a perpetual cycle of marginalization. As described by Rodriguez, “Colonialisms legacy has been the divided house, the fragmented and stunned silence of the mind, the unwillingness of the colonized to move beyond the accepted boundaries established by the experts/colonizers” (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 280).

Due to the oppressive nature of colonialism, many Latinos in the United States have been forced to create their own colonias where they can experience a welcoming sense belonging and cultural familiarity. They carve a space for themselves based on shared traditions, histories and experiences (Ruiz, 1998).

**Latina Stereotypes**

Latina women, like women of other non-dominant cultures, are continually plagued by negative stereotypes. Those particular to the Latina culture include flashy, morally deficient, unclean or loud-mouthed (Ruiz, 1998). This is generally the case as well in the media and cinema. While Latina women have always been represented in film (although sparsely at times), their roles have not been diverse and typically promote stereotypical thinking. Báez (2007) outlines several movies including Selena, Real Women Have Curves, and Girlfight in which these stereotypes are challenged. These movies portray Latina women in a different manner, as the main characters exhibit traditionally masculine qualities such as strength, power, and success. In fact, Girlfight utilizes what some call “Amazon feminism” through which women are warrior-like and equal to men in terms of physical strength (Báez, 2007, p. 118). In battling these
stereotypes and trying to develop their multifaceted identities, Latinas must critically examine their multiple diversities and position in society.

**Changing the Status Quo**

Through engaging in and understanding Latina Feminism, Latinas can explore and better understand how oppression affects them personally. Latinas can also examine the relationship between multiple forms of subordination including race, class, and gender. Once these forms of oppression have been realized and addressed, Latinas in today’s society will be better able to come together in solidarity and use their collective strength to challenge their situation (Flores & Garcia, 2009).

While Latinas have an important role in altering the way they are viewed and treated within society, change will not occur unless numerous groups of both men and women take action. Anzaldúa (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002) speaks of the importance of all individuals taking responsibility for racism. She believes taking an active role through using either the verbal or written word as necessary for addressing and altering the origin and damaging effects of racism and oppression. Anzaldúa remarks that blaming others such as men, white feminists, or our parents is an easy way to simply maintain the current patterns and tendencies present in society. This type of activism has occurred throughout history and continues to make waves currently.

Feminist movements, and more specifically Latina and Chicana feminist movements, have been initiated globally and throughout the third world (García, 1997). Through studying these movements, Latinas can learn about collective identity formation in order to actively change their situation. By seeking solidarity with the women participating in these global movements and through promoting education regarding the history and culture of Latinas, the exploitation of
women can be better understood which, in turn, will foster opportunities to further address and change power structures within society (Villenas, 2006).

**Critical Multicultural Education**

Equity and diversity in education is a complex topic that, unfortunately, is not deeply discussed among most educational institutions throughout the United States. Nearly everyone is confronted with issues surrounding multiculturalism at some point, and understanding the context, background, and implications regarding cultural differences are critical for creating effective bridges among the cultures represented throughout this country. As the Asian, Latino, and Native American population increases, the need for effective multicultural adult education becomes even more imperative (Ukpokodu, 2010). Through culturally sensitive education, these groups of people may be equipped to challenge present societal structures which marginalize many people of color.

There are multiple, complex issues regarding culture and adult education. One of the most highly debated and discussed topics involves power relations. The hegemonic structures represented throughout the United States can also be connected to subsequent issues such as the need for teaching for social change and curriculum transformation. Historically, people in the United States have gone to great, and sometimes unethical, measures to ensure that White Europeans represent the dominant culture. Through understanding and unmasking the principal ideology represented by those in power, it becomes apparent that the dominant ideology is closely aligned with oppression and marginalization (Brookfield, 2005). While this power and oppression is not always overt, conscious, or intentional, the effects can be seen through the largely unconscious process of hegemony. Throughout history, this power imbalance favoring White ideology has negatively affected many groups such as African Americans, Native
Americans, and Latinos. As a result, a divide has developed between the dominant culture and those cultures which hold less power.

Through social action taken by groups and individuals to contest the dominant ideology, the United States has greatly reduced practices of overt oppression; however, aspects of the hegemonic core remain virtually unchanged. As described by Foucault, power in contemporary society, “works in much more subtle ways than previously acknowledged, and it should be understood as a circulation or flow around society rather than as something statically imposed from above” (as cited in Brookfield, 2005, p. 45). Although our country has taken steps toward promoting equality for all, the pain of non-dominant cultures should not be minimized or dismissed through the notion of colorblindness (the lack of awareness that cultural differences exist). Color and culture continue to define and divide us dramatically.

Awareness of and beliefs regarding hegemonic structures present within the United States contribute to the existence of various educational approaches. Some methods celebrate and accommodate cultural differences while others require individuals to assimilate to the culture in power. Castagno (2009) highlights six authors who have each summarized various approaches to multicultural education. Their ideas are presented as a continuum with the left side representing education for assimilation (requiring individuals to assume the culture of the dominant group) and the right side requiring social action (students effect change within society). The middle of the continuum highlights a cross-cultural competence approach to multicultural education through which students are expected to have a deep awareness of other cultures but do not delve into the critical aspects of culture and power structures. Often, teachers feel intimidated at the thought of initiating conversations which may insight awkward, emotional, and complicated situations (hooks, 2003); however, creating a safe community of learners through
which these topics can be discussed is critical for addressing cultural issues in adult education and effecting change (hooks, 2003, & Sheared, Johnson-Bailey, Colin, Peterson, & Brookfield, 2010). Gay (2010) also encourages educators to make changes and address issues of multiculturalism at an individual level in order to eventually bring about change at a national level. Critical discourse can lead to altering ideologies that are detrimental to our society. While current examples of cross-cultural competence approaches to education may not move to effect change or truly alter prejudiced beliefs that are engrained in our society, these methods may be a step toward creating a space for critical discussion among students.

The concept of educating for social change is expanded through the ideas of Myles Horton and Paulo Freire (1990). Through the development of the Highlander School, Horton provided educational opportunities for many people who, otherwise, would not have had access to learning. This education empowered adult learners to challenge suppressive power structures. Freire (1990) describes that education has the power to reproduce the dominant ideology which allows this way of thinking to thrive. In order to alter leading ideology, accepted beliefs and practices must be directly challenged. According to Horton (1990), a person who is part of a system will most likely function like the system. Changing social structures is significantly more effective than attempting to change individual people. Gay (2010) agrees that challenging the dominant ideology is necessary and posits that micro-level action will incite bigger movements leading to social change. While attempting to change individual people may prove unsuccessful, it is the individual who can begin to effect social change at the macro-level. As people develop awareness of the ways in which the current structural system affects their identity and behavior, they become more able to challenge and change those systems of privilege and oppression (Tisdell, 2001).
The curriculum currently followed in many educational settings primarily reflects the perspectives and ideals of the culture of power, thus minimizing the experiences of people representing other cultures and non-dominant groups. According to bell hooks, formal education presents, “imperialist, white-supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal values” (2003, p. 1). She believes in the importance of opening students’ minds to a well-rounded view of society and the previously mentioned idea of teaching for social change.

To enact this social change, curriculum transformation is necessary for the following reasons: to more accurately represent cultures which are currently absent from educational materials and literature, to enable higher success rates for students of non-dominant cultures, and to more holistically portray important events and issues highlighted throughout educational programs. Ukpokudu (2010) highlights three types of curriculum found in today’s educational settings: the overt curriculum, the implicit curriculum, and the null curriculum. While the overt, or directly taught, curriculum is most frequently challenged, both the implicit (that which assumes certain values to be legitimate) and the null (that which is left out) must be addressed as well. In revisiting Foucault’s idea that modern day hegemonic structures are subtle and presented as a flow around society, the importance of challenging what is assumed or not directly said is equally as imperative as addressing that which is overtly taught when attempting to effect change.

It is apparent that the curriculums found in most learning institutions need to be restructured to include the voices of those who are missing in order to truly teach in a culturally responsive manner. This is an especially significant issue as the current percentages of college-age Latino, Asian, and Native American students are greatly increasing (Ukpokodu, 2010). If curriculums do not incorporate aspects related to the culture of these students, many may
experience cultural crisis. Steele (As cited in Gay, 2010) describes how this crisis can be brought about through stereotype threat which occurs when classrooms only choose to portray cultures as their societal stereotype. This often causes students to feel a cultural crisis which frequently results in disengagement from academics (Gay, 2010). Many culturally and linguistically diverse adult learners need to experience education that includes culturally-responsive or culturally-sensitive methods in order to be truly successful academically.

**Culturally responsive teaching**

Before incorporating culturally responsive methods into teaching, educators must reflect on the context in which they work. Teachers must identify the population whom they are working and understand the multi-faceted definition of culture in regard to each individual student. According to Gay, “culture is at the heart of all we do in the name of education… [It] determines how we think, believe, and behave, and, in turn, affects how we teach and learn (Gay, 2010, p. 9). Understanding the context in which the students live, work, and socialize as well as the context in which you teach is critical for building bridges among various cultures and ways of thinking. Furthermore, investigating students’ prior or background knowledge and how this relates to their specific cultural context is also important. Good educators need to know their students at more than a superficial or stereotypical level. Gay refers to the idea of utilizing students’ background knowledge as the “funds of knowledge” approach to teaching (Gay, 2010, p. 181). Through this method, students are better able to connect with the material and take ownership for their learning. Using students’ existing funds of knowledge also helps foster cultural congruity between teaching practices and diverse learning styles which is a crucial step toward promoting academic success for diverse learners (Gay, 2010).
Learning about students’ interests and background is also an integral part of creating a trusting environment. Establishing a risk-free, trusting, community learning experience is necessary (hooks, 2003). Building this trust is one of the most difficult, yet imperative aspects to develop within the classroom. Trust is established through considering both similarities and differences between groups of people as well as individuals and by engaging in rich discussion about these comparisons (hooks, 2003).

Before students can trust one another, they must be able to understand themselves. Writing personal stories is an extremely powerful manner in which to develop this level of self-awareness (Tisdell, 2001 & Gay, 2010). Teachers and students alike must take steps toward knowing themselves before they can begin to comprehend and deeply connect with others. Stories, according to Denman, “are lenses through which we view and review all of human experience” (in Gay, 2010, p. 2). They can give insight into an individual’s personal ideology, values, and beliefs. Through sharing stories, students may develop a deeper level of understanding of their peers, thus creating a more trusting and accepting environment (Gay, 2010).

Effective communication is another crucial element of culturally-responsive teaching. Extending discussion to include topics regarding culture that go beyond the superficial level is essential for creating an effective community of diverse learners. When students are made to feel that they cannot express themselves in a natural manner, their technique of communication may be invalidated. This may lead to diverse learners feeling powerless, voiceless, and invisible (Gay, 2010). Cultural issues should not be avoided and are to be directly discussed in order to empower non-dominant groups as well as build cultural awareness for those in power. Initiating these types of conversations may be the first step toward altering the dominant ideology, as
authentic dialoguing helps people develop a sense of critical humility. Critical humility represents the idea of speaking out for social justice through an awareness that our ideas are only partially developed and will continue to grow (Sheared et al., 2010).

**Critical multicultural curriculum development**

The ultimate goal of critical multicultural education is twofold: to develop a deep awareness and understanding of different cultures and, ultimately, to effect change. These elements should be developed through utilizing many of the previously mentioned aspects of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010). As discussed, learners need to become privy to ideas surrounding hegemony and social structures (Brookfield, 2005). Many current and past educational practices are detrimental to the learning of diverse students. These flawed methods will not change naturally and should be deliberately altered (Gay, 2010). Teachers must be facilitators in this process and students should feel empowered take control or ownership for their own learning once provided with the information and tools to move forward.

Incorporating many of the techniques of culturally responsive teaching in order to build a trusting and caring environment, is a necessary step toward creating a multicultural curriculum (Gay, 2010). Individuals teaching a multicultural curriculum need to understand both themselves and the students whom they are trying to teach beyond a superficial level. As mentioned, sharing stories or personal information and finding value in those stories can help to build the community of trust and understanding that is essential for the discussions that will most likely develop within a culturally sensitive curriculum. As students feel more comfortable in their educational setting, the more likely it is that they will feel open to discussing those delicate subjects that are found at the heart of cultural issues. This is especially true for students representing non-dominant cultures.
Transforming curriculums to become more culturally-sensitive requires the inclusion of information that accurately represents cultures other than the culture in power. Including this information will provide a more well-rounded view of the events and issues already portrayed in many curriculums and help students of non-dominant cultures relate to the information they are learning in order to avoid the sense of cultural conflict which may develop when students feel as though their culture has been left out of formal education.

Educators must acknowledge and honor the many different facets of the word culture beyond race. Age, sexual orientation, and gender are all examples of culture and can be subcultures of various races as well. Additionally, the categories we use to describe races such as Latino and Asian can also be differentiated based on the individual groups represented in those broad categorizations. For example, Mexican and Puerto Rican people may exhibit very different values and beliefs while both being considered part of the Latino culture. These specific differences need to be recognized and discussed as part of a multicultural curriculum.

While an essential aspect of a multicultural curriculum is to accurately represent information beyond the view of the dominant culture, it is also important to help students who have the power to understand their privilege and the reasons behind their social status. Many White individuals do not recognize that they have a culture, let alone power and privilege (Tisdell, 2001). As stated by bell hooks, “one of the bitter ironies anti-racists face when working to end White-supremacist thinking and action is that the folks who perpetuate it are the individuals who are usually the least willing to acknowledge that race matters” (hooks, 2003, p. 28). Developing this critical awareness, especially for White individuals, is one of the most imperative steps toward developing a well-rounded multicultural curriculum.
Parent Involvement

Parent involvement has recently been the focus of numerous empirical studies and conceptual articles. The research has overwhelmingly demonstrated academic benefits for students whose parents consistently participated in their education (Schaller, Rocha, & Barshinger, 2006; The National Center for ESL Literacy Education, 2002; Wei & Zhou, 2003). In addition to increased academic success, students with involved parents also demonstrated higher levels of social development and were reported as requiring less disciplinary intervention (El Nokali, Bachman, & Votruba-Drzal, 2010). The various benefits of parent involvement illustrated throughout the literature are more frequently experienced by White, middle/upper-class students. Higher levels of involvement are often exhibited by parents of elementary students than those of middle or high school students (Anfara & Mertens, 2008). The literature addresses the reasons behind these disproportionate levels of parent involvement while also providing suggestions regarding ways in which to increase involvement, particularly for CLD parents.

History of Parent Involvement

Parent involvement has evolved and changed significantly throughout history. A number of forces affect power relationships which exist as part of family-school collaboration. These influences include social structures, economic conditions, political pressures, and cultural values (Hiatt-Michael, 2008). Historically, parents were considered their children’s first teachers and the home was the first classroom (Anfara & Mertens, 2008). Beginning in Pre-historic times, parents assumed this role, as there was no formal schooling. They were responsible for discipline and moral education. Additionally, parents taught their children life skills and vocational skills (Hiatt-Michael, 2008; Berger, 1991). Egypt established the first formal school
system long ago in 3787-1580 B.C. This system evolved throughout ancient Greek civilization. The purpose of parent education was to assist parents in raising productive members of society in order to benefit the state, not necessarily the family. Ancient Rome had similar sentiments regarding the topic, although the mother was specified as being primarily responsible for the children’s education. During the Middle Ages, churches promoted and sustained formal education. The churches were the sole reason that education was able to survive outside the home throughout this time period (Berger, 1991). By the seventeenth century, Western cultures began to highly value children and became increasingly interested in their growth and development. A shift from parent education to public education was in the early stages. This transition initiated in Europe and then spread to America (Hiatt-Michael, 2008). Famous philosophers such as Comenius, Locke, and Rousseau began to voice the importance of positive interactions between parents and their children. They believed children could be molded or shaped best when they were young and that they were blank slates which needed to be filled with knowledge. Informing parents of how to effectively impart this knowledge was necessary for rearing capable and productive children (Berger, 1991).

Throughout the early years in America, colonies were given local control of education. Schools were created by religious leaders in the church and the curriculum consisted of reading, writing, and religion. In Massachusetts, a law known as the Old Deluder Satan Act (1647) was passed requiring towns with a population of 50 families or more to hire a teacher who was to be paid out of local funds. These schools were sustained through fees paid by parents. The idea of public education spread to other colonies such as Virginia where public education was advocated by leaders such as Thomas Jefferson who believed education should be available for all children. Legislators in Virginia, however, did not adopt fully adopt Jefferson’s mentality of education for
all until the nineteenth century. Through this era, American elementary education continued to be, “one of local parental control of school governance, parental support of curriculum, parental choice of teachers, and parental support of religious teachings of the school” (Hiatt-Michael, 2008).

Throughout the beginning of the nineteenth century, the parents and community continued to hold a great deal of power over decisions that were made regarding the formal school system (Anfara & Mertens, 2008). Three theories involving child rearing were prevalent at this time. The first reflected the Calvinist doctrine and demanded that parents strictly guide their children and that children reverently obey. A second theory, influenced by Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Froebel, identified that children were inherently good and that parents’ guidance was necessary for gently introducing them to the harsh realities of the world. The third view reflected Locke’s ideas that children are primarily influenced by their environment. The importance of children’s social environment was especially relevant in the United States at this time, as immigrants from across the globe traveled to the United States, creating what some refer to as a “melting pot” or “salad bowl” of cultural values representative of their home countries (Berger, 1991).

Toward the end of the nineteenth century and the early 20th century, a divide began to grow between the home and the school. The school perpetuated this separation through the belief that teachers were more highly educated, and, due to their expertise regarding the education of children, they were better qualified to teach them (Anfara and Mertens, 2008). Language barriers between the home and school were also considered another reason why parents were less capable of helping their children academically. This time period became known as the “bake sale” mode through which parents were only involved with schools for
occasions such as fundraisers or special events such as performances or sporting events (Henderson, 1988 as cited in Anfara & Mertens, 2008, p. 59). During the 1920’s, 26 major parent programs were started throughout the country as a means to mainstream immigrants by acculturate them into the dominant culture which was reflected in schools. The 1930’s brought about much discussion regarding parent involvement as becoming an integral part of public education. Through programs established by public schools, there was a hope that parents would learn how to appropriately rear their children and better understand the ways of the school system (Berger, 1991).

These types of parent programs continued throughout the 1940’s during which an increasing number of mother’s worked as a result of World War II, and children were frequently placed in childcare outside the home. The tendency at this time was to focus on children’s emotional needs in addition to their academic needs as a result of increasing awareness of mental health struggles. The 1950’s brought about a time of great change in the field of education. The separation of public education based on race was ruled unethical through Brown v. the Topeka Board of Education in 1954. The effects of this court ruling carried into the 1960’s as schools began to consolidate and diversify. Through this era, administrators and school officials took primary leadership over education and parents were left with little power. The importance of pre-school and early intervention on students’ success later in life began to be increasingly noted as well. Additional services for the entire family became more accessible throughout the 1960’s in order to promote healthy lifestyles and discuss social concerns (Berger, 1991).

These types of parent and family programs continued through the 1970’s, during which there was a heightened awareness of appropriate education for students with physical disabilities and other special needs. Parents were required to be part of the process of creating
Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for their children. The 1980’s continued this trend toward increasing parent involvement for all families, including those of diverse ethnicities and those with special needs. Throughout this time, institutions worked to develop successful models of collaboration between the home and the school. These models of parent involvement were altered and expanded throughout the 1990’s in order to more fully include parents at a deeper level (Berger, 1991).

Throughout history, the pendulum has swung back and forth, as there have been periods of time when parents have had much involvement and power within the schools and times when they were virtually powerless. While schools across the United States are striving to increase parent involvement at this moment in time, that does not necessarily mean that all groups of parents have the same access to the school system, nor do they have the same power in helping to make decisions within the school system or advocate for their children. Including these parents successfully is critical for achieving the goal of including parents in their children’s education beyond a superficial level.

**Current Views Regarding Parent Involvement**

Currently, the issue of parent involvement has evolved from the “bake sale” mentality of the early twentieth century and promotes views that are completely opposite of this prior mode of thinking. Rather than viewing parents as incapable, they are viewed as valuable assets in educating children. In fact, a highly used and promoted text regarding parent involvement is entitled *Beyond the Bake Sale* (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007) and illustrates the value of engaging parents beyond a superficial level. The prevailing theme in this book is that including and involving parents in formally educating their children is a necessity. Numerous suggestions are made throughout the book describing ways to build connections between the
home and school. Some of these ideas include creating and conducting active parenting programs, establishing trust, and addressing cultural differences (Henderson et al., 2007).

This topic has especially been in the public eye since the establishment of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2002. Many low-income schools across the country currently receive federal funding to assist with their efforts to increase parent-school partnerships. Creating lasting partnerships between the home and school is a critical step toward promoting collaborative efforts to raise student achievement (Epstein, 2005).

Several principles, specific to the topic of parent involvement are outlined in Section 1188 of NCLB. Under NCLB, all schools are required to have written policies and programs to include all families regardless of their home language or socioeconomic status (Epstein, 2005). A school-parent contract is to be signed by parents each year acknowledging their commitment to their children’s education. Many times, parents sign this document but do not have a complete understanding of that to which they are committing (Epstein, 2004). Also, attempts to involve parents are frequently not directed toward those who work non-traditional hours or have complex schedules. These complications often result in the schools merely reaching the parents who are regularly accessible; however, NCLB requires that schools strive to involve all parents, even those who are difficult to reach. The legislation mandates that parent involvement become an element of both school and classroom organization. Professional development should be provided for both parents and educators in order to increase collaboration. These programs are to be developed through the use of Title 1 funds to support parents as they strive to become active participants in their children’s education (Epstein, 2005). Parents must also be informed of the state assessments and standards that are utilized within schools (Epstein, 2004).

Promoting the idea that adults at home and those at school have a shared responsibility to help
children succeed academically is an important premise of NCLB (Epstein, 2005). Daniel-White (2002) describes this approach to involvement as the parent-as-teacher paradigm. This evidence-based method of educating children through the collaborative efforts of both parents and school personnel is currently a leading model through which to promote academic success for children across the country (Wei & Zhou, 2003; The National Center for ESL Literacy Education, 2002; Schaller, Rocha, & Barshinger, 2006). Unfortunately, many parents continue to lack understanding of the important role they are expected to play in their children’s academic lives, and this unawareness often is misinterpreted as negligent or uncaring behaviors (Daniels-White, 2002). According to Epstein (2001), most families are, in fact, deeply concerned with their children’s academic achievement, but they need more effective assistance and information from the school regarding ways to be more productively involved. Although high expectations for involving parents have been described through NCLB, schools generally do not have partnership programs that are efficiently organized, sustainable, and goal-oriented (Epstein, 2004). This lack of effective methods for increasing parent involvement creates a matter of great concern for schools across the United States.

**Types of Parent Involvement**

A fundamental problem among schools is that many do not fully understand the complexity of parent involvement. While the topic has been the focus of numerous research studies for over thirty years, the findings have not been fully integrated into schools’ efforts to collaborate with parents. Research shows that in order to help children attain a proficient level of academic achievement, parents must participate beyond a superficial level (Hampton, Mumford, & Bond, 1998). Parent involvement traditionally considers the level to which parents volunteer in schools or ways in which they help their children with academics in the home;
however, there are a number of other facets which must be considered (Daniel-White, 2002). Hampton et al. (1998) describe the risk of expecting to see academic success result from shallow levels of parent involvement and state that, “although intentions were properly placed [in these schools], those activities fell short of producing meaningful outcomes or of realistically assessing parents’ interest in their children’s education” (p. 411). Kauffman, Perry, and Prentiss (2001) describe four types of parents incorporating varying levels and categories of parent involvement. The first type of parent participates in school events while also taking part in decision-making activities. This type of parent is a leader and demonstrates an outgoing personality. The second type of parent takes a more passive role. They appreciate the school’s efforts to maintain an open line of communication and do what they can to support their children at home; however, they generally do not join parent groups or programs. The third type of parent is described as taking a superficial interest in their children’s education. They may attend conferences or meetings, but do not apply what is discussed or help their children in the home-setting. The final type of parent is described as being neither supportive nor actively involved. Each type of parent exists within any school setting. Understanding differences among parents and their level of involvement is a critical first step toward designing programs that effectively address parental needs and ways in which to enhance their involvement (Kauffman et al., 2001). Other research on parent involvement reports that ninety percent of parents report having attending general school meetings, only sixty percent have volunteered in the classroom (Herrold & O’Donnell, 2008). Noting the varying levels and types of involvement is critical for fully understanding this topic; however, it is also important to recognize that these categories of parents and types of involvement could benefit from being amplified or expanded as they do not often reflect the experience of CLD parents who desire to help their children academically and want them to
succeed but are often not involved in ways that are recognized by schools.

In addition to the types of parents previously described, there are also several categories of parent involvement which must be considered to fully understand the current research regarding the topic. Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Jansorn, and Van Voorhis (2002) describe a framework which outlines six specific types of parent involvement existing in a variety of settings such as the home, school, and community. This type framework for parent involvement has been studied and utilized throughout many school districts across the country and can be used to develop more comprehensive parenting programs. The six areas of involvement include: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaboration with the community. When considering the level at which parents contribute to their children’s education, each of these six types should be considered to form a collective representation of parents’ level of parent involvement (Epstein et al., 2002).

**Parenting**

Assisting parents in areas that foster awareness of their children’s growth and development is a critical element of increasing parent involvement. Increasing parents’ understanding of topics such as safety, health, and nutrition may empower parents to build and maintain home environments that support children as students. Topics such as establishing daily family routines, monitoring out-of-school activities, and expressing high but realistic expectations for achievement should be included in an open forum for discussion among parents and school staff. Parents should also be encouraged to model the value of learning, self-discipline, and hard work. Through a more thorough understanding of these elements and by incorporating this awareness into interactions with their children, parents can more effectively encourage their children’s development and progress in school which, in turn, may foster success
in the academic areas of student learning (Epstein et al., 2002).

Schools across the country have created a variety of methods through which to promote this idea of effective parenting. Many have provided classes or training for parents in order for them to obtain further education. Examples of these programs include GED courses, college courses, and family literacy projects. Other schools have established family support programs which assist families with services such as healthcare, nutrition, and before or after-school care. The opportunity for parents to meet members of the school is another method through which parents can develop a better understanding of the school system and what is occurring at each level. Many schools have formed family resource centers containing information and services in order to provide easy access to information regarding parenting at each age and grade level. This type of programming and information is most helpful when combined with effective communication between the home and the school (Epstein et al., 2002).

Communicating

The second type of parent involvement encourages efficient parent-teacher communication regarding school happenings, student work and progress, and struggles or difficulties in the home environment. Through defining their views regarding parent, teacher, and student roles and by providing regular and timely updates, teachers can reduce barriers between the home and school which threaten student learning. Effective communication may reveal parents’ expertise which may be used to benefit their children, school, and community. Awareness of parents’ background knowledge and capability may transform harmful conflict resulting from ignorance, distortion, and misconceptions into positive support. Clear communication also improves chances that parents learn about the programs and services their district offers (Epstein et al., 2002).
In order to provide clear communication between the school and parents, conferences should be held once a year or more frequently if needed (Epstein et al., 2002). In addition to these conferences, there should be other forums for teachers and parents to communicate throughout the year in order to promote learning and open a space for discussion and reflection (Waterman, 2008). Considering families of students who do not speak English is also important. According to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VI, interactions with these families as well as materials sent home to these families should be translated into their preferred language (Department of Education, 2005). Epstein et al. also recommend folders containing student work be sent home to promote correspondence between the home and school. Report cards and other graded materials must also be shared with parents regularly. Teachers should make a consistent effort to communicate with parents through methods such as phone calls and newsletters. Parents should be provided explicit information regarding all important school events and any changes to the regular school schedule. Through improving avenues for communication, parents will be better informed and, thus, may feel more comfortable with the school system and encouraged to become involved in other areas (Epstein et al., 2002).

Volunteering

Volunteering represents the third type of parent involvement and is considered to be one of the most highly considered aspects of this topic. A school’s ability to effectively recruit, train, and schedule parent volunteers is advantageous for both students and teachers. Furthermore, regular and consistent parent volunteering results in even greater benefits for children and teachers. Through assisting in the classroom, parents gain a better understanding of what happens in school, the teacher’s role, and ways in which they can help their children at home.
Through volunteering, parents also grow to feel welcome and comfortable in the school setting (Epstein et al., 2002).

In order to promote volunteering in the classroom, schools are encouraged to establish volunteer programs. In addition to providing a wealth of materials for parents, family centers also provide a space for parents to meet and discuss their volunteer experiences (Martinez-Cosio & Iannacone, 2007). In order to obtain valuable information about parents, schools should provide informal surveys each year to better understand the parents’ expertise and discover ways in which they may be of assistance in the school setting. Frequently, parents are recruited to become “room parents” for their children’s classrooms. Room parents are often responsible for organizing and scheduling other parent volunteers and planning events throughout the year.

**Learning at home**

The fourth type of parent involvement involves providing information and strategies for parents to use with their children within the home setting. Learning at home involves a combination of academic skills such as homework completion, school-related activities, decision making, and educational planning. Depending on factors present within the home such as socioeconomic status, the parents’ level of education, family dynamics, linguistic and cultural barriers, and work schedules, this issue of learning at home may differ for each family unit (Smith, Stern, Shatrova, 2008). It is important for educators to know and understand the situations particular to each family with which they work (Cheng-Ting, Kyle, McIntyre, 2008). Through developing awareness of these families, a teacher’s suggestions for how to encourage or prepare parents to better assist their children will be better informed.

To enhance learning at home, schools should provide families with information regarding the skills needed/taught at each particular grade level, homework expectations, and school parent
nights or meetings. Discussing parents’ strengths and how they can use their expertise to help their children academically is also necessary. Schools must demonstrate how to actively assist with homework rather than merely monitoring homework completion. Parents should be encouraged to attend programs through which they can learn about and create manipulatives and other materials to use within the home. Another way to this type of involvement is for teachers to model effective strategies for parents to use within the home setting such as interactive read alouds through which parents would ask comprehension questions while reading books with their children. Parents’ attention should also be pointed toward effective literacy and mathematics strategies in which they are already engaging such as writing email and letters to friends in their country of origin (Ladky & Peterson, 2008). Utilizing parents as teachers within the home setting is a popular idea throughout schools across the United States; however, this is a difficult role for many parents to adopt due to a number of factors such as parents’ work schedules, limited English abilities, or values. While many schools expect parents to understand and adopt this role of “teacher in the home,” it is critical to also allow these parents to have a voice when discussing decisions regarding their children’s education and their role in helping their children succeed (Epstein et al., 2002).

**Decision making**

Decision-making requires parents to exchange ideas through collaboration while working toward a shared goal. This type of parent involvement can be defined as a community process where parent representatives and teachers work together to create and accomplish certain objectives. Through this type of collaboration, both parents and teachers can take ownership for the process of education in the school or district. Involving parents in the decision-making process decreases the likelihood for antagonistic sentiments toward the school and, consequently,
fosters better communication between the home and school.

Parent decision making groups already exist among most schools across the country. These are commonly referred to as the Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) or Parent-Teacher Association (PTA). These groups take an active role in participating in school and district-wide decision making processes; however, many parent-teacher group meetings continue to be poorly attended in certain areas, particular those which were urban and low socio-economic status (Bond, 1998). Parent groups should also be established in order for parents to have an open forum through which to discuss, plan, and voice opinions or concerns (Epstein et al., 2002). In addition to parent groups, schools should encourage parents to participate in other school committees such as parent safety patrol or event planning teams. Parents should also be encouraged to become part of advocacy groups working toward educational reform (Epstein et al., 2002). These types of involvement opportunities offer parents the ability to participate in their children’s education at a more critical level.

**Collaboration with the community**

Epstein et al. (2002) discuss the importance of involving local community members and organizations with schools to act as role models, mentors, and provide support and inspiration for students and teachers. Other benefits include creating opportunities for families to interact, improving academic achievement for students, and helping families learn to negotiate the school system (Epstein, 2001; Sanders, 2001). To develop connections with the community, schools must identify the resources and services from the community that will strengthen existing school programs, family practices, and student learning. In order to accomplish this task, schools must be aware of the needs of their population of students and their families. Once identified, the school would need to communicate the information regarding these community resources with
families and then promote opportunities for fostering connections between students, staff, families, and community resources.

In order to promote collaboration with the community, schools may hold informational sessions for families regarding community resources, activities, and events. These sessions or workshops may be led by a variety of groups or organizations; however, they must pertain specifically to the needs of the families. The school as well as the students and families should also be encouraged to support the community through service projects as the collaborative relationship between the community and the school must be mutually beneficial in order to be successful (Epstein, 2002).

**CLD Parent Involvement**

As a nation comprised of immigrant families, schools across the United States have struggled to effectively involve families representing diverse ethnicities and languages. Parents speaking a home language other than English currently represent an exponentially expanding sector of the population in the United States, creating a pressing need to understand how to effectively collaborate with this group of parents. For the purpose of this chapter, these parents are termed CLD parents (culturally and linguistically diverse parents). The term CLD was developed as a more exacting and cross-culturally respectful way in which to refer to students whose culture or language differs from that of the dominant culture (Herrera & Murry, 2011). The research on CLD students focuses on considering these students’ biographies, experiences, and culture as a beneficial asset to the overall learning experience (Herrera & Murry, 2011). Throughout this study, this term is expanded to also include the parents of these students.

Latinos comprise the largest ethnic group in the United States currently, and numbers of Latino students have more than tripled in the last thirty years (Smith, Stern, & Shatrova, 2008).
With the notion that parental involvement increases student success, schools frequently attempt to encourage parents to help their children with their school work in order to improve students’ academic abilities and raise test scores rapidly and significantly. Schools are also attempting to foster academic success among their students by creating effective, collaborative networks between the home and school. Despite the schools’ efforts to increase connections with parents, research has continually demonstrated a significant lack of involvement for CLD parents (Kao & Rutherford, 2007; Turney & Kao, 2009; The National Center for ESL Literacy Education, 2002). Other studies have demonstrated academic benefits for CLD students whose parents took an active role in assisting with their education (Turney & Kao, 2009; Wei & Zhou, 2003; The National Center for ESL (English as a second language) Literacy Education, 2002).

Through analyzing and synthesizing the results of existing research regarding the involvement of CLD parents, several common factors have been identified as contributing to the complexity of this issue. Upon recognizing and addressing these problems, educators may discover ways to increase the involvement of CLD parents while respecting their cultural values. Awareness of these barriers may also enable educators to involve this group of parents in their children’s education to a higher degree with the ultimate aspiration of benefiting the students and their families both educationally and socially.

Overview of the CLD Parent Involvement Literature

The reviewed studies considered parent involvement from various perspectives including that of administrators and teachers. The majority of the empirical literature, however, considered parental involvement from the perspective of parents. The parents in these studies were primarily representative of Latino and Asian cultures (Lopez, 2007; Smith et al., 2008; Sohn & Wang, 2006; Wei & Zhou, 2003). Since Asian and Latino cultures represent the majority of the
ESL population throughout the United States, the extensive focus on these cultures was not surprising.

Several studies (Cheng-Ting, Kyle, & McIntyre, 2008; Peterson & Ladky, 2007; Denessen, Bakker, & Gierveld, 2007) investigated parent involvement through the viewpoint of teachers and administrators. Through their research, Cheng-Ting, Kyle, and McIntyre (2008) described a program which described utilizing staff professional development to appropriately enact a parent involvement program resulted in success for ELL students.

Other literature (Guo, 2006; Turney & Kao, 2009) primarily highlighted barriers immigrant families faced when participating in their children’s education. This research (Cháves-Reyes, 2010; Ladky & Peterson, 2008) focused on CLD families as a whole rather than culturally-specific subgroups while other research (Levine & Trickett, 2000; Ryan et al., 2010; Huntsinger & Jose, 2009) centered on particular cultures such as Asian or Latino.

Through addressing this topic from several angles, a more thorough examination of the importance of CLD parent involvement in their school-age children’s education was possible. By considering the views of parents, administrators, and teachers, a well-rounded portrayal of issues surrounding this topic as well as implications for schools and districts could be analyzed. Regardless of the perspective through which CLD parent involvement was studied, several themes were unmistakably evident. The existence of a language barrier between immigrant parents and school personnel proved a distinct matter of concern throughout most of the literature. Also frequently mentioned was the issue of cultural differences between the mainstream culture and the home culture of the immigrant family. Understanding and defining the role of the parent and teacher from varying viewpoints was also a topic of particular attention within the literature. Finally, the notion that CLD parents desire academic success for
their children and consider this highly important was frequently expressed by immigrant families. These four themes, upon further analysis, highlight a significant, current issue to which increased attention should be directed.

**The language barrier**

One of the most apparent problems facing CLD parents is the existence of a language barrier. Parents describe this obstruction as being one of the most significant hindrances in their attempt to participate in their children’s education (Guo, 2006; Turney & Kao, 2009; Sohn & Wang, 2006; Smith et al., 2008; Cháves-Reyes, 2010). Many families immigrating to the United States do not speak English and feel uncomfortable approaching teachers. Parents are intimidated by teachers because of their lack of English speaking ability. Their lack of verbal communication with the teacher does not mean that parents do not want their voices to be heard (Yoo-Seon, 2009). Many struggle to understand numerous aspects of their children’s education such as school policies, homework, report cards, and notifications as described by Smith et al. (2008). Teachers also frequently use educational jargon which further confuses limited English-speaking parents (Kauffman et al., 2001). Lopez (2007) found that a group of Mexican-origin fathers who spoke only Spanish had a more negative perception of their children’s education than fathers who spoke both English and Spanish. The research findings equate this to Spanish-only fathers feeling unwelcome by schools because of their linguistic differences (Lopez, 2007). This feeling was further illustrated by Shuang Ji and Koblinsky (2009) in a study of Chinese immigrant families, seventy-six percent of whom described their limited English abilities as a considerable barrier in attempting to help their children educationally. A mother’s touching testimony of not understanding that she needed to buy a simple school item for her child clearly portrayed the significance of the language barrier highlighted by this study (Shuang Ji &
Koblinsky, 2009).

A study of Korean parents’ perspectives regarding involvement in their children’s education noted a desire for translation of all important school materials (Sohn & Wang, 2006). A study by Denessen et al. (2007) explained the value of communicating with parents directly rather than through formally written notices and letters. Principals interviewed in this study reported much higher success with parental involvement when teachers or administrators personally communicated with parents. Through this method, parents felt more welcome which lessened levels of intimidation. This approach to parent communication was also sensitive to the needs of parents who are not literate in their home language (Denessen et al., 2007).

Schools are working to improve the accessibility of translation services in compliance with legislation requiring that educational information be presented in the home language of every family; however, the level of communication between schools and immigrant parents continues to involve complications as illustrated by Ramirez (2003). This study of 43 Latino parents highlighted common frustration associated with a language barrier. For example, the parents collectively found frustration in attending conferences with teachers who only spoke English. Dissatisfaction with the availability of translation services was also expressed. This issue was especially highlighted by a group of parents who took the initiative to attend board meetings and were forced to bring their own translator in order to participate in the meeting (Ramirez, 2003). Levine & Trickett (2000) further highlighted the importance of home language accessibility by describing how, through translation services in the school, parents could better advocate for their children. Requiring parents to supply their own translator goes against the mandates of current legislation as does using students as translators for their parents. Many schools struggle to comply with these new requirements for various reasons including the myriad
languages represented in schools and budgetary issues relating to the economic recession.

However, as mentioned by Denessen et al. (2007), parents do have a right to be appropriately informed about their children’s education.

While the research demonstrates challenges faced by schools in their quest to fully incorporate non-English speaking parents into the school environment, the home-language of a family should never be discredited. In fact, as described by Peterson and Ladky (2007), parents should be encouraged to read and write with their children in their home language whenever possible, as this mode of support has lasting benefits for a child’s literacy level in both English and the home language. Peterson and Ladky (2007) also highlighted the success of using dual-language books created by the children and their families when printed bilingual materials were unavailable. The idea of preserving the home language was also emphasized in the results of a study of low-income immigrant Latino parents (Orozco, 2008). These studies alluded to the idea that rather than considering the existence of another language as a barrier, these linguistic differences should be celebrated as an opportunity for further literacy enrichment for ELL children.

The Highlander School, originally founded by Myles Horton in an effort to provide access to education for marginalized groups of people, currently addresses the language barrier in a number of their programs. Highlander focuses on reducing this barrier in order to empower speakers of languages other than English and to promote social justice. Programs such as training for social justice interpreters and the availability of multilingual spaces and meetings enable speakers of diverse languages to more effectively collaborate and become active, informed members of society. Through their educational programs and online tools, Highlander promotes the idea that language is a central identifying aspect of each person and an important
means for sharing ideas and dreams that will help to shape the future of the world. The belief that voices from all cultures and peoples should be shared is evident through Highlander’s mission which fosters collaboration and empowerment for linguistically diverse groups (Robin Easter Design, 2012).

**Cultural differences**

In addition to valuing the home language of ELL students, preservation of their home culture is critical as well (National Center for ESL Literacy Education, 2002; Orozco, 2008). The combination of both cultural and linguistic barriers can lead to feelings of helplessness among parents (Md-Yunus, 2008). Developing an awareness of cultural differences is essential for teachers and administrators in order to respect the home culture while students adapt to the new culture present within the school and community (Guo, 2006). Creating bridges between home and school cultures is an effective strategy for increasing parent involvement. The initial step toward building these bridges involves developing cultural awareness. In several studies, (Cheng-Ting et al., 2008; Peterson & Ladky, 2007) principals described the importance of providing staff members with appropriate professional development opportunities to better understand the cultures represented among their student populations. Peterson and Ladky (2007) studied principals who attended workshops in an effort to develop awareness regarding cultural differences. Cheng-Ting et al. (2008) describe a program through which teachers learned various strategies to increase parent involvement. A main focus of the program involved utilizing the background experiences of the students and families when presenting new information. The idea of using parents’ “funds of knowledge” or prior knowledge was a common thread throughout much of the literature (Moll et al., 1992; Waterman, 2008). Many of these experiences were culturally-specific; therefore, increased awareness of various cultures...
proved beneficial for teachers in this study. Eliciting involvement from parents in a manner that is comfortable, intelligible, and culturally sensitive should be of primary importance. Schools commonly mistake different life experience for a lack of experience. Teachers must re-frame these thoughts to discover how parents can effectively assist their children (Cheng-Ting et al., 2008).

As a result of cultural differences, many immigrant parents do not feel comfortable going into the school and meeting with a teacher. They may see the schools in the United States as intimidating or perplexing (Kauffman et al., 2001). Teachers are considered authority figures, and many CLD parents do not find it acceptable to challenge a teacher’s decisions or even to understand them (Ramirez, 2003; Sohn & Wang, 2006). They may feel as though teachers can better educate their children and that their appropriate role as a parent is to merely supervise homework completion, and not to act as a second teacher in the home, as many schools expect. Even the seemingly basic task of ensuring homework completion is understood differently across immigrant groups (Ladky & Peterson, 2008).

In considering cultural differences, it becomes clear that many parents are simply respecting the teacher as the adult with the authority to educate rather than being lazy or uninterested in their children’s education. The parents’ intentions are frequently misinterpreted by many educators who assume parents understand their unofficial role as teacher-at-home (Sohn & Wang, 2006). Peterson and Ladky (2007) note the importance of deliberately helping parents see themselves as partners alongside the teacher in an effort to successfully educate children. As previously mentioned, utilizing parents’ background knowledge and ability to strengthen their children’s skills in their home language were methods found effective in fostering this partnership (Peterson & Ladky, 2007).
While recognizing that many of the CLD parents in the United States are representative of Latino and Asian cultures, it is important to understand that these cultures include many different subcultures (Cháves-Reyes, 2010). For example, while Mexican and Dominican families are considered subgroups of the Latino culture, there are vast cultural differences between the two groups, even when considering superficial aspects such as the foods they eat and clothes they wear (Ramirez, 2003). Linguistic differences are also found within these subcultures. For example, Latino subcultures may utilize different vocabulary words for the same item. Also, some of these countries have high populations of people speaking languages other than Spanish. This is true in Mexico, where both Nahuatl and Spanish are widely spoken. If teachers are unaware of these cultural differences, they may encounter serious predicaments when addressing culturally diverse families that may inadvertently “deny a person’s cultural identity [which] may cause further social distance between the school and home” (Ramirez, 2003, p. 105).

Another aspect of cultural barriers includes the topic of gender roles. Certain cultures exhibit strict beliefs regarding the roles of men and women. Respecting these gender roles may promote more effective connections with CLD families. Denessen et al. (2007) describe a situation where parent involvement programs were established separately for men and women. The men and women participating in this program felt more comfortable expressing their thoughts and opinions in a gender-specific group (Denessen et al., 2007). By respecting values such as gender roles, schools are better able to build a necessary bridge between the home and school culture.
Parent/teacher roles

As a result of the cultural and linguistic differences represented within the various groups living in the United States, the perceived role of parents in their children’s education may be different than the actual expectation schools have for parents. According to Volk (2009), methods immigrant parents use to help their children academically may be ignored or unseen, because they do not align with the methods of what is deemed appropriate or effective involvement by the schools. Understanding parents’ varying views regarding their role in their children’s education is also linked to their general unfamiliarity with the school system in the United States (Guo, 2006; Levine & Trickett, 2000).

As views of a parent’s role differ, so do beliefs regarding a teacher’s role. Understanding that the parents’ beliefs regarding the teacher’s role may not align with what is actually occurring in the school is critical as well. As mentioned, parents of certain cultures highly respect the professional opinion and experience of the teacher therefore, do not feel comfortable or qualified enough to assume the role of teacher at home (Kauffman, Perry, & Prentiss, 2001). Some parents are also unable to assist their children academically as a result of their lack of awareness of the school system, or they may have had limited access to formal schooling in their home country. Schools must clarify the parameters of the presupposed roles of the parent and teacher in a culturally sensitive manner. The parents should also be given an opportunity to express their feelings regarding their interpretation of parent and teacher roles.

In the United States, expecting parents to be teachers within the home is a common practice (Daniel-White, 2002). In order to encourage parents to adhere to this model, government agencies and schools create programs that are meant to teach parents how to perform in their role, as determined by the school. Rather than recognize cultural differences, these
programs, “take a cultural deficit approach to minority and language minority parenting. They see parents as entities that need to be fixed for the benefit of their children” (Daniels-White, 2002, p. 31). Under this belief, parents are expected to work with their children outside of school hours to promote skills in all subjects, especially literacy and mathematics. This goes against the beliefs of many cultures (such as Asian and Latino) which promote the idea that the teacher is the expert, and school work is to be completed during school hours (Ramirez, 2003; Sohn & Wang, 2006). CLD Parents may feel uncomfortable with this expectation, as some lack formal education due to financial barriers (Schaller et al., 2006). Finders and Lewis (1994) quoted a Latina mother who described her frustration at being given little assistance with understanding how to help her children at home. She stated, “Sometimes we can’t help [with homework], because it’s too hard (Finders & Lewis, 1994, p. 51).

Peterson and Ladky (2007) described that many immigrant parents also find it difficult to be co-teachers for their children because of complicated work schedules and the need to care for younger children in the home. Other obstacles included health and housing problems and lack of resources (Levine & Trickett, 2000). Ramirez’s (2003) study describes a group of Latino parents who were unaware that a folder of parent training materials was coming home with their children and was meant for them to read. Many described never having seen the folder (Ramirez, 2003). Immigrant parents of low socioeconomic status or those who have had limited formal schooling need assistance with understanding ways in which they could effectively help their children rather than by receiving formal written communication regarding this issue. Schaller et al. (2006) describe a study through which immigrant mothers were able to, “create strong, lasting educational development in their children” (p. 355). This study demonstrated how it is possible to create a bridge between the home and school culture and to foster academic success utilizing
the parents’ experience and help at a level with which they are comfortable.

A study of Korean mothers’ involvement in American schools, (Sohn & Wang, 2006) outlined items believed to portray the teacher’s role in their children’s education. These ideas included treating the children fairly, being careful not to discriminate against culturally diverse children, understanding their cultural background, being warm and kind, and including minority students in activities involving their American peers. These mothers believed that their personal role was to be involved in their children’s education, as it would increase their children’s self-confidence, help them be more at ease with the American schools, and increase their academic abilities (Sohn & Wang, 2006).

Many teachers are unaware about how to effectively help and include CLD families. Their role as teachers of culturally diverse students adds a complex level to the already intricate art of being a successful educator. Professional development programs, as described by Cheng-Ting et al. (2008), can heighten teachers’ awareness of their role as educators of CLD students and can promote effective strategies to use with these students and their families. Daniels-White (2002) and Cháves-Reyes (2010) suggest educators adopt the funds of knowledge approach to parent involvement through which parents’ experiences and lifestyle are examined to identify and enhance ways in which they can help their children that are connected to their expertise and routines they are already doing within the home.

While the definition of parent involvement may differ according to the perspective of the parents and that of school personnel, both entities must be aware of each other’s beliefs and desires. Through developing mutual awareness and understanding, these groups can collaborate in a more meaningful and effective manner.
CLD parents’ desire for their children’s success

Overall, CLD parents have a strong desire for their children to succeed in school both academically and socially (Epstein, 2001; Quiocho & Daoud, 2006; Ryan, Casas, Kelly-Vance, Ryalls, & Nero 2010). Their high aspirations for their children to become productive and contributing members of society often includes the hope that their children will both graduate from high school and earn a college degree (Garcia Coll, Akiba, Palacios, Bailey, Silver, DiMartino, & Chin, 2002). Often, schools misrepresent parents’ cultural beliefs, language difficulties, or views regarding parental roles as disinterest in their children’s education. Research demonstrates that this is not the case. Studies, such as Schaller et al. (2007), illustrate immigrant parents’ belief in the importance of helping their children to have positive educational experiences and to receive a high-quality education. In many instances, the promise of better educational opportunities is what brought these families to the United States (National Center for ESL Literacy Education, 2002). As highlighted by Shuang and Koblinsky (2009) through their study of Chinese parent involvement, many parents “worked long hours and made personal sacrifices to help their children move up the socioeconomic ladder” (p. 701). This dedication for achieving success is a motivating factor in academic achievement. Shuang and Koblinsky (2009) believed this type of dedication directly helps students achieve their educational goals.

A study of Mexican mothers (Shaller et al., 2006) further conveyed this idea by highlighting the mother’s feelings that education is vital for financial and occupational success. These mothers shared a need for assistance regarding appropriate ways to help their children at home. This sentiment illustrated the mothers’ desire to support their children but frustration with feelings of inadequacy in their role as teacher in the home. While these feelings may be the result of factors such as limited formal schooling, temporal constraints, or socioeconomic status,
they do not frequently relate to a lack of interest or desire to educationally assist their children. As described by a Latino father, “The schools make me feel stupid because I have trouble with English, and all I want is for my children to do well in school. To become something better than I” (Ramirez, 2003, p. 93). This notion of Latino parents feeling excluded from the school system was further highlighted by Quiocho and Daoud (2006) in their analysis of commonly held myths regarding Latino parents. Oftentimes, parents wish to become involved, but feelings of intimidation prevent them from becoming connected with the school (Quiocho & Daoud, 2006).

The Mexican culture was also studied by Auerbach (2006) in an effort to explore ways in which Latino parents provide moral support for their children in regard to their academics. This study highlighted the Spanish word for education, “educación,” as a way to describe a person who is educated, knowledgeable, and respectful. Also mentioned was the “estudios schema”—the mindset that diligent studying leads to academic achievement (p. 281). The estudios schema encompassed the notion that a person’s level of effort determines their level of success (Auerbach, 2006).

The Latino community is often considered significantly less involved than other ethnic minorities. The results of a study involving parents of Latino and White-American cultural orientations in Omaha, Nebraska revealed this notion to be untrue. Not only did Latino parents value their children’s academic and social success, they did so more strongly than White parents. The results further indicated that the stronger their Latino orientation, the more deeply they valued education (Ryan et al., 2010).

The National Household Surveys Program (2007) reported that less than one percent of parents did not expect their children to finish high school. This finding demonstrates the collective parental desire throughout the United States for academic proficiency for all students
Although CLD parents generally desire success for their children, many have limited understanding about how to provide assistance (Md-Yunus, 2008). One mother reported feeling as though, “her body of knowledge did not match the institutional knowledge of the school and she [was] therefore excluded from home/school conversations” (Finders & Lewis, 1994). Hopefully, through the appropriate implementation of effectively structured parent involvement programs, parents will be provided the support they need in order to build their confidence, ability, and knowledge of how to better assist their children.

**Latino Parent Involvement**

To better engage parents of Latino learners with limited English-speaking abilities, current school practices must be altered. Effectively reducing the barriers described through the research is a critical element toward building trust among parents of Latino families and is a necessary step toward building bridges between the home and school (Levine & Trickett, 2000). Utilizing inclusive methods for parent engagement is one avenue through which to decrease these barriers. Cháves-Reyes (2010) describes four characteristics of inclusive methods to Latino parent involvement. The first characteristic promotes acceptance of a families’ home culture. The second requires schools to acknowledge the existence of power relationships that exist between the parents and the school. Educational institutions must also direct their efforts toward human relations to better promote interpersonal connections between the families and the school. Finally, inclusive approaches to parent engagement should empower both school personnel and parents to work collaboratively for the academic benefit of children. Programs encompassing each of these four characteristics may effectively empower Latino parents, as well as parents of other ethnic minorities, to become increasingly connected to their children’s
academic lives. While inclusive methods foster this sense of empowerment for parents, they should also be motivating approaches for schools as they strive to develop more effective avenues through which to build effective, culturally-sensitive partnerships with parents (Cháves-Reyes, 2010).

Although typically united by the Spanish language, the culture of Latino subgroups vary drastically in regard to socio-economic status, age, country of origin, the reason for their immigration, and the level of their acculturation (Smith, Stern, & Shatrova, 2008). This cultural heterogeneity must be considered in order to better understand the needs and background of the diverse range of families grouped under the umbrella-term “Latino” (Delgado-Gaitán, 2004).

Literacy activities done in the homes of Latinos often go unnoticed, writing letters to relatives, dramatic play, reading the Bible. Networks of support go beyond the immediate family (Volk, 2009).

As previously mentioned, Latino parents want their children to be formally educated and academically successful. Quiocho and Daoud (2006) moved to dispel myths about Latino parent involvement through their study which revealed Latino parent’s high expectations for their children. The study also confirmed that some teachers had negative, preconceived notions about Latino parents (Quiocho & Daoud, 2006). These distorted and unsubstantiated judgments create a lack of trust between the home and school which, in turn, distances parents from the school (Smith et al., 2008). Unfortunately, this estrangement or division is often misunderstood as lack of caring or interest when, in reality, Latino parents strongly desire academic success for their children. Furthermore, the results of another study (Ryan et al., 2010) demonstrated how Latino families the United States more strongly value their children’s education than do White parents. The literature further addressed this desire for success through examining the definition of the
word “education”. Western cultures generally accept a much narrower definition of the word education than do Latinos. In the United States, education primarily refers to combination of academic instruction and graded assessment. In Spanish, education (or educación) means something quite different. The Latino culture believes educación extends much further than standard academic achievement and encompasses learning proper etiquette, social skills, and respect for authority (Delgado-Gaitan 2004). These differing views of education mark another element of the rift between Latino families and American public schools. This topic was further explored through a report published by the The National Center for Educational Statistics (2007) which described Latino families as being less satisfied with their children’s school than were White parents (59 % vs. 64%). Schools must begin to understand the reasons behind this dissatisfaction in order to better connect with families representative of this culture.

In many Latino families, parents work physically demanding jobs, and the mothers are expected to care of the children in addition to school-related issues (Finders & Lewis, 1994). Latina mothers identify difficulty at being expected to attend programs at school. This frustration is illustrated by one Latina mother who reported, “What most people don’t understand about the Hispanic community is that you come home and you take care of your husband and your family first. Then if there’s time you can go out to your meetings.” (Finders & Lewis, 1994, p. 51). Other mothers in this study seemed to be unaware of multifaceted definition of parent involvement, as they identified school involvement with merely attending school parties and functions.

In addition to not being directly informed about the multiple layers of parent involvement and having to accommodate for busy schedules and responsibilities within the home, some Latino families do not become involved with the school for fear of appearing foolish or
misunderstood. These feelings of fear or the notion of being intimidated by teachers or other school personnel was a common feeling among Latino parents in Finders & Lewis (1994). Schools must acknowledge these concerns and strive to make Latino families feel welcome and valued by opening communication and building trust.

**Critique of the Literature**

The literature on the topic of immigrant or ELL parent involvement revealed a number of factors contributing to a lack of participation in school-age children’s education particular to this subgroup of parents. As described by Turney and Kao (2009), virtually every minority group represented in the United States faces significantly greater barriers than native-born, White citizens. These barriers have been presented as they are depicted in the results of numerous research studies. The literature effectively described areas in which schools must improve in order to attain their goal of promoting and achieving student success through collaborating with parents (Daniel-White, 2002; Kauffman et al., 2001; Smith et al., 2008). Issues such as the existence of a language barrier, lack of awareness regarding cultural differences, differing perspectives regarding parental roles, and misinterpretation of parents’ academic desires for their children must be addressed and understood by schools. These issues were clearly highlighted in the findings of the research discussed which provided valuable suggestions for what schools can do to better involve parents in their children’s education (Daniel-White, 2002; Kauffman et al., 2001; Smith et al., 2008).

While the literature (Schaller, Rocha, & Barshinger, 2006; The National Center for ESL Literacy Education, 2002; Wei & Zhou, 2003) highlights what may be done within the school setting in order to promote parent involvement, programs through which schools have involved immigrant parents in a highly successful manner are not frequently described. Of the articles
reviewed, few mentioned the successful implementation of a parent involvement program (Sanders et al., 2005). More research studies regarding effective CLD parent involvement in an actual, specific school setting would give merit to the suggestions made throughout the literature. Few studies have given an in-depth overview and analysis of successful parent involvement programs. There were, however, several programs mentioned throughout this limited area of the literature which included The Project FAST (described by Hampton et al., 1998) and the Bridging Cultures Project (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, & Hernandez, 2003). These programs, described as promoting successful collaboration between parents and schools, utilized methods that were extremely meaningful to parents, culturally sensitive, and that took into account parents’ experience or funds of knowledge. National programs such as the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) were also examined and described as effectively promoting collaboration with families that was connected to specific student learning goals (Epstein, 2004; Sanders, Sheldon, & Epstein, 2005). Galindo and Medina (2009) outline a case study through which Mexican mothers became empowered through a folkórico (folkloric) dance performance which helped to present the topic of parent involvement in a culturally-relevant manner.

Additional research examining successful parent involvement programs would benefit both immigrant families seeking academic success for school-age children, as well as educational institutions experiencing the pressure of strict legislation forcing them to create successful educational experiences for all children.

In addition to effectively developing and then researching programs for parents, schools should consider incorporating professional development sessions for their teachers and staff regarding cultural diversity and how to incorporate both ELL and immigrant children and their families into a new school setting effectively. ESL education is an area in which few teachers
have been educated, but teaching culturally diverse students is something nearly all have experienced. Increased teacher education in this area is clearly a way to help teachers understand their expanding role as educators. Research regarding the outcomes and success of these teacher professional development sessions may also be vital in constructing successful partnership programs between the home and school.

The research frequently describes aspects of CLD parent involvement through a cultural deficit lens (Schaller et al., 2006). Often, parents’ “lack of education” is mentioned as a reason that they are not as visibly involved in their children’s education. Perhaps, when examined from a more culturally-sensitive and strengths-based perspective, their perceived lack of participation may be the result of a cultural conflict rather than disinterest. Becoming involved in the school community may go against their assumptions about the role of parents and the role of teachers which, as mentioned before, is frequently a cultural difference.

Often, the research seems to suggest that parents’ limited formal schooling or lack of education makes them incapable of helping their children in any way. Approaching this topic from this cultural deficit perspective tends to diminish lines of communication between the home and school and prevent parents from trusting the educational institution. This negative view of parents (that they are poor and uneducated) may lead to the school misinterpreting the reasons behind this issue, when the problem may have more to do with social norms. The research seems to focus on the parents as frequently being poor and uneducated, but the parents may not see themselves this way. This approach to understanding parent involvement needs to be critically questioned, and additional research about schools that are successfully incorporating parents through celebrating and understanding cultural differences rather than looking through a cultural deficit lens would strengthen the research base regarding CLD parent involvement.
Latina Parent Involvement as an Action Research Project

Latina mothers often report experiences of discrimination (McHatton, 2007). While this discrimination may be overt or subtly woven into our society as part of the hegemonic structure, it is important to acknowledge the cultural and gender-related marginalization that comes into play when considering this subgroup. This marginalization often leads to a sense of powerlessness for these parents, and they may feel disconnected from the school community which represents dominant cultural values. They may feel their voices and opinions are not valued, creating dissonance rather than building connections between these parents and the school.

While there is some existing literature pertaining directly to Latina mothers (McHatton, 2007; Moreno & Lopez, 1999; Galindo & Medina, 2009), there is a notable lack of research considering programs created by schools to empower this subgroup of parents. In examining the literature on Latina parent involvement, one study described an action research project through which a parent program for Latina mothers was actively studied. Snell, Miguel, and East (2009), discuss a study through which participatory action research was used to examine parent involvement in an urban Colorado Middle school. The staff at this school created focus groups through which parents had the opportunity to discuss and reflect upon their role in their children’s academic lives. The goal of these groups was to bring forth the voices of Latina parents that had been previously excluded and also considered feminist approaches to organizing and learning. Through this study, the women discussed how traditional views of parent involvement “have actually served to oppress parents by inflicting harmful expectations that serve to further disenfranchise them [through reinforcing] social inequalities and adhere[ing] to biases of majority culture” (Snell et al., 2009, p. 242). The women in this study demonstrated
high levels of resiliency by overcoming difficult life obstacles and reported having taught their children how to be strong through challenging experiences. They described a disconnection between the school and the family which they explain to be the result of their children living dual lives because of cultural differences and discrimination occurring within the school. Many of these parents identified interventions they did within the home that they believed had a direct impact at school but were not recognized by the school. An interesting aspect which resulted from the focus groups was that the mothers developed a desire to help other parents in the school rather than merely their children. This study created the basis for a theoretical framework for parent involvement strategies; however, there is not yet enough research to truly validate this theoretical framework (Snell et al., 2009). Taking this research one step further by examining a program through which parents assist one another to become more involved with the school would also be beneficial.

Parental involvement regarding Latina mothers must be explored more thoroughly, as many of the youth in this country are being raised by Latina mothers without the help of a male figure or role model (Snell et al., 2009). As previously mentioned, the Latino population is rapidly growing in the United States, and schools with high numbers of Latino students must strive to develop required parent involvement programs which reflect a more thorough understanding the population with whom they are working. These programs also need to empower this subgroup of parents by not considering their needs from a cultural deficit perspective in order to give them a voice through which they can advocate for their children. Until parents feel confident and power structures are acknowledged, lasting bridges between CLD parents and schools will not be formed.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

After reviewing the purpose of study, this chapter will provide an overview of qualitative research, which was the type of research used in this study. This description is followed by a description of action research. Particular attention is directed toward participatory action research and critical action research, which were used in conjunction with one another throughout this study. The background information regarding the researcher and methods for selecting participants will also be reviewed along with a discussion of data collection procedures, data analysis, and methods for ensuring the integrity of the study.

Research Purpose and Problem

This study served to broaden the limited body of knowledge regarding Latinas participating in parent involvement programs. With the understanding that few programs have been studied that highlight a strengths-based and culturally-sensitive approach to teaching and learning, this type of study is necessary in building the research-base regarding parent involvement for this greatly expanding sector of the population (Smith, Stern, & Shatrova, 2008; Kao & Rutherford, 2007; Turney & Kao, 2009). The purpose of this study was two-fold: to examine the identity development of Latina mothers as they led a parent education program and to examine the intercultural relationships that formed as a result of this parent involvement experience.

Overview of Research Kind

The methodology of this study generally aligned with characteristics of qualitative research. Qualitative research considers the way in which people make meaning of experiences. This mode of research utilizes inductive reasoning which is characteristic of a bottom-up
approach (Merriam & Simpson, 1995). Through inductive reasoning, a researcher makes specific observations and discovers themes or patterns within those observations. The goal of qualitative research is associated with discovering theory rather than verifying already existing theories as in quantitative research (Mertler, 2009).

Qualitative findings evolve from three modes of collecting data which include interviews, observations, and documents (Mertler, 2009). Interviews, utilizing open-ended questions, and fostering in-depth responses are used to elicit information from participants. In addition to interviews, field observations are also useful in gathering narrative data. Documents such as journal entries or other written materials should also be examined to provide a well-rounded representation of a situation (Mertler, 2009; Patton, 2002). Since qualitative research involves a researcher’s observations and interpretation of situations, it is important to acknowledge her/his context and the lens through which she/he views the world. Therefore, even though the purpose of the research may be to construct theory, citing and describing the theoretical framework which aligns with the researcher’s perspective is necessary (Merriam & Simpson, 1995).

Several specific types of research align with the overarching characteristics of qualitative research. Examples of these methods include ethnography, case study, grounded theory, and phenomenology. While occasionally described as quantitative or mixed-methods research, action research studies are most typically associated with qualitative research while incorporating additional elements that create a unique type of research (Patton, 2002).

**Research Type**

While there are many types of action research, most methods can be closely connected to or even be considered a type of qualitative research as previously described. As do qualitative methods, models of action research focus on studying a particular element, or problem, at an in-
depth level. Like qualitative methods, action research attempts to better understand a question or problem and is becoming a more widely accepted method of study as people’s experiences, their narratives, and the analysis thereof are becoming realized as useful contributions to the current research base (Stringer, 2007). While there are similarities, certain characteristics of action research are more specific than those of qualitative research, making this a unique form of study. Through action research, participants generally have a greater role in designing and implementing the study. This shifts some of the locus of control to those participating rather than to one, individual researcher (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Stinger, 2007).

Action research is frequently conducted in a collaborative method of including participants or others affected by the problem which is being researched. Participants serve as co-researchers who help make decisions regarding the design and implementation of the study. This collective mentality of examining a situation often invites interesting perspectives, skills, and resources to the study creating a richer, more complete approach to addressing a problem (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Stinger, 2007).

The prospect of collaborating with others invites frequent opportunities for dialogue among researchers and participants. This acceptance of discourse aligns with the ideas of scholars such as Vygotsky and Habermas (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Their belief that, “democratic organizational development [is] closely linked to language and communication” promotes the verbal sharing and critique of ideas (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 13). Action research promotes the notion that through social interaction and communication, steps may be taken to effectively solve problems both organizationally and in society.

Through action research, the researcher engages four stages. The first is creating a plan to improve something which is already occurring. The plan should address a specific
problematic situation. Next, the researcher implements the plan while continuously making observations. After gathering this qualitative data, the researcher reflects on what has occurred in order to inform future planning and/or action. This process tends to be cyclical in nature (Herr & Anderson, 2005). At times, the lead researcher in an action research project may work at the institution or organization they are choosing to study which combines their roles as researcher and practitioner, making him/her more of an “insider” throughout the study rather than a researcher in the traditional sense who is looking at a situation from the outside. This concept of an “insider” performing research is happening more often due to an increased number of professionals studying to get doctoral degrees and complete research regarding the particular institution in which they work. Often, this occurs out of a researcher’s curiosity and desire to change or examine a situation that affects him/her personally. Through action research, the researcher may also opt to become a participant in the study, which further alters his/her role (Herr & Anderson, 2005).

Action research seeks to examine and alter a specific problem and can carry some elements of critical theory. Certain methods of action research are closely connected with critical ideas; whereas, some merely have intonations of critical theory. According to Herr and Anderson (2005), “action research takes place in settings that reflect a society characterized by conflicting values and an unequal distribution of resources and power” (p. 4). This critical view of recognizing power structures within society is especially evident in participatory and critical action research through which situations are studied to recognize oppressive situations which marginalize those who do not represent the dominant culture and to enact change. Through my study of Latina women, elements of both participatory and critical action research will be employed in order to provide the women in this study the opportunity to take a leadership role in
creating and implementing the study while also allowing the participants to consider, analyze, and begin to change power structures which may be present within the current school community.

**Participatory Action Research**

Participatory action research (PAR) builds on the characteristics of action research that were previously discussed. This method fully embraces the notion of including participants in all aspects of the study, and utilizing the four steps of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting to address a problem. Through PAR, the researcher takes part in engaging with the group, making decisions, and collecting data rather than merely examining the situation from an outside perspective. The researcher should, “be open to learn from others and to adopt a genuine learner’s attitude even in situations in which apparent ignorance tempts her to become a teacher,” (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 38).

PAR is sometimes critical in nature, especially when it attempts to addresses issues of equality, oppression, and power. The roots of PAR are closely connected to the ideas of Myles Horton. Through his work in constructing the Highlander School, the first examples of PAR become evident (Herr & Anderson, 2005). The Highlander School provided access to education to those who generally did not have this opportunity and enabled them to make informed decisions regarding important life issues (Horton & Freire, 1990). This type of work evolved to include action research models that were not driven by the white, male-dominated ideological underpinnings of earlier models of action research. These projects encouraged participants to work in a collaborative manner in an effort to obtain skills to better their lives while also fostering social action and critique (Herr & Anderson, 2005).
A current focus of the Highlander School aims to reduce language barriers in order to provide immigrants and speakers of languages other than English the opportunity to gain access to the community at large. Through the creation of multilingual spaces, Highlander is working to increase the number of social justice interpreters in order to more effectively include and empower speakers of other languages (Robin Easter Design, 2012). As does the research associated with the Highlander School, many other examples of PAR focuses on teaching adults in low-income communities and providing them access to skills and information with which to address their needs. This is similar to what will be done through the current study in which Latina mothers from a low-income, urban school community will work together to create a program for parents that may address certain needs but also provide opportunities for both leadership and empowerment.

In addition to providing participants the opportunity to have power or control over decisions made regarding a study, PAR also focuses on examining various types of relationships. These relationships include those which occur between individuals and their environment, individuals and the groups or communities of which they are a part, and among those groups and communities as a whole. PAR looks at how these generally marginalized groups of people make meaning of their situation within their context (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). The current study considered the situation of mothers within the community in which they live. Through the experience, the relationships fostered by the discussion surrounding language and culture were considered.

Since becoming a popular mode of action research, a number of groups and organized functions have been founded in order to bring those together who specialize in participatory research. The Participatory Research Group was created in Canada in 1976 and has encouraged
PAR throughout the world, especially Latin America and third world countries (Herr & Anderson, 2005).

While PAR can, at times, be criticized for a lack of generalizability, the results of PAR can often be applied to large groups of people. In reference to the current study, the results may affect parent involvement initiatives across the country for districts that have similar demographics and student populations. The literature provides another example of how the results of PAR are applicable to a broad audience through describing how issues of drug addiction and violence are extremely prevalent in today’s society. By examining these issues in a collaborative and participatory manner, valuable information and knowledge may be provided that can be generalized to large populations (Reason & Bradbury, 2006). For the proposed study, eliciting the help of the Latina mothers in planning the program would enhance the leadership role that these women would be assuming.

**Critical Action Research**

Critical action research (CAR), much like PAR, examines power structures and equality in hopes of shifting power to those who are typically marginalized in society. Through CAR, however, this is done to a much greater extent. CAR derives from Marxist philosophy, and extends to include Habermas’ ideas regarding the “relationship between knowledge, learning, and the human condition” (Merriam & Simpson, 1995, p. 131). Habermas believed that humans have the potential to learn about themselves, nature, and other people. As people develop self awareness through critical reflection, we may begin to better understand our assumptions and ideologies which create a less obstructed lens through which to examine and learn about our surroundings (Reason & Bradbury, 2006).
In addition to self-awareness, the democratization of society is deemed a necessary step toward transforming the knowledge of adults in order to better include groups who are not appropriately or effectively represented. According to Merriam and Simpson (1995), a critical researcher takes a stance that opposes many elements on which dominant society and much of the educational research is based. This opposition may be epistemological, cognitive, cultural, or political (Merriam & Simpson, 1995).

CAR differs from other forms of research through its strong desire to challenge power relationships and forms of oppression. As discussed, this is accomplished through fully rejecting notions of positivism or objectivity and developing the researcher’s self-awareness in order to recognize personal bias and ideology. Through CAR, a researcher must be able to note elements of their own ideology which play a part in their observations of a situation in order to separate their feelings and beliefs from what others may be experiencing. The researcher should also be cognizant of societal views which serve to marginalize others in various ways (Merriam & Simpson, 1995).

**Latina Parent Involvement as an Action Research Project**

As previously described, the collaborative nature of action research opens a space for multiple perspectives and can create a rich, multi-dimensional space through which to conduct a study. Therefore, action research may not only appeal to people who are more interpersonally inclined, but also to those from certain collectivistic cultures that value engaging and learning as a group. The Latino culture traditionally values this sense of collectivism to a great extent (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2001). For my study of Latina women, I found it appropriate to identify and utilize a method of study that aligned with the cultural values of the population of women participating in the study. The collectivistic nature of action
research and, particularly, participatory action research encouraged the participants in this study to fully and openly engage in a non-threatening manner that fostered a safe community of learning. Also, the notion of constructing meaning based on one’s context which was discussed as an integral aspect fostered through PAR easily connected with aspects of culture including cultural identity and awareness. The importance of better understanding identity as it is related to and formed by culture is a topic frequently addressed in the literature and narratives written by Latina scholars (Kleinberg, Boris, & Ruiz, 2007; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002). Quintanales, a Latina writer and first generation immigrant to the United States, addresses the lack of awareness many first generation immigrants have regarding social power structures occurring in North American culture. She refers to this “immigrant ignorance” (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002) and illustrates the importance of breaking this pattern of ignorance. While this lack of awareness may strongly apply to first-generation Latina women, second generation Latinas also grapple with identity construction as it relates to their bi-cultural existence. The second generation must work to mold and extend the boundaries of their ethnicity to form a space through which to construct their personal identity (Garcia, 2004). Alarcón (Trujillo, 1998), reminds us we do not have a fixed identity and that a person’s identity is constructed of numerous layers which are constantly developing and changing. The shifting identity of a person living among two cultures can be compared to learning to swim in a different element. As the “water” changes, a person must alter their stroke to stay afloat. This struggle is similar to that which Latinas experience as they learn to thrive in a culture which differs from their home culture (Anzaldúa, 2007).

Through PAR projects, these women can better form an understanding of their identity and how this relates to the culture or cultures with which they associate. Providing Latinas the opportunity to collectively share, discuss, learn, build relationships, and examine the shifting
elements of their identity is essential for eliciting authenticity, developing confidence, and empowering these women.

Elements of critical action research also closely align with my study as well. Latina mothers often report experiences of discrimination (McHatton, 2007). While this discrimination may be overt or subtly woven into our society as part of hegemonic structures, it is important to acknowledge the cultural and gender-related marginalization that comes into play when considering this subgroup. This marginalization often leads to a sense of powerlessness for parents, and they may feel disconnected from the school which represents dominant cultural values. They may feel their voices and opinions are not valued, creating dissonance rather than building positive connections between these parents and the school.

While there is some existing literature pertaining directly to Latina mothers (Galindo & Medina, 2009; McHatton, 2007; Moreno & Lopez, 1999), there is a notable lack of research considering programs created by schools to empower this subgroup of parents. In examining the literature on Latina parent involvement, one study described an action research project through which a parent program for Latina mothers was actively studied. Snell, Miguel, and East (2009), discuss a study through which participatory action research was used as a parent involvement strategy in an urban Colorado Middle school. The staff at this school created focus groups through which parents had the opportunity to discuss and reflect upon their role in their children’s academic lives. The goal of these groups was to bring forth the voices of Latina parents that had been previously excluded and also considered feminist approaches to organizing and learning. Through this study, the women discussed how traditional views of parent involvement “have actually served to oppress parents by inflicting harmful expectations that serve to further disenfranchise them [through reinforcing] social inequalities and adhere[ing] to
biases of majority culture” (Snell et al., 2009, p. 242). The women in this study demonstrated high levels of resiliency by overcoming difficult life obstacles and reported having taught their children how to be strong through challenging experiences. They described a lack of connection between the school and the family which they explain to be the result of their children living dual lives because of cultural differences and discrimination occurring within the school. Many of these parents identified interventions they did within the home that they believed had a direct impact at school but were not recognized by the school. An interesting aspect which resulted from the focus groups was that the mothers developed a desire to help other parents in the school rather than merely their children. This study created the basis for a theoretical framework for parent involvement strategies; however, there is not yet enough research to truly validate this theoretical framework (Snell et al., 2009). Taking this research one step further by examining a program through which parents assist one another to become more involved with the school would also be beneficial.

Though this study, I examined the concept of parents assisting one another and becoming more involved with their children’s school. Specifically, I studied a program that was designed to involve Latina mothers in a leadership role using a strengths-based perspective. In aligning with elements of critical action research, the program challenged the threads of hegemony that run throughout society by flipping the typical societal roles and providing a group that is generally considered less dominant the opportunity to become empowered through teaching a program for parents who wanted to learn Spanish. I also examined the relationships that were built throughout the study and how these connections impacted the school community. Also studied was the way in which the identity of Latina mothers was constructed and altered throughout the program.
Parent involvement regarding Latina mothers must be explored more thoroughly, as many of the youth in this country are being raised by Latina mothers without the help of a male figure or role model (Snell et al., 2009). As previously mentioned, the Latino population is rapidly growing in the United States, and schools with high numbers of Latino students should strive to develop parent involvement programs that reflect a more thorough understanding the population with whom they are working. In order to be successful, programs for adults within the K-12 school community must empower Latina mothers by focusing on these parents’ strengths rather than assuming a cultural deficit perspective. This program gave the Latina mothers a voice through which they were able advocate for themselves and their children and take pride in the unique and extensive knowledge base they possess.

Until all parents feel confident and power structures are acknowledged, lasting bridges between CLD parents and schools will not be formed in a lasting and effective manner. Through this action research project that utilized elements of both participatory action research and critical action research, this topic was more thoroughly examined and understood.

**Background of the Researcher**

My desire to study Latina mothers participating in a parent involvement program derives from a number of personal interests and observations. For six years, I was an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher in an urban district. I currently work as the ESL program coordinator in an urban district. Through my experiences, I have had the opportunity to build relationships with many of the students and families served through my ESL program. Many of these families are Latino. While I greatly appreciate the connections I have made with families, I have noticed extremely low attendance from parents and family members of my ESL students at parent involvement activities or initiatives. In a school building of about seventy-five ESL
students, only two or three parents attended back-to-school nights. This observation is what bridged my role from teacher to researcher in hopes of better understanding this particular population and to seek a more effective manner in which to involve Latino families and foster meaningful connections within the school community.

Although as a teacher and public education employee I am closely connected to this topic, my personal culture and ethnicity differs from that of the population being studied. While I can speak Spanish, I am not a Latina. I define myself as a white, middle-class woman. I may have students who consider me one of the most important adults in their lives; however, I have no biological children of my own. Though my background may differ from those of the participants in my study, I believe examining myself and acknowledging these differences is an important step in better understanding others. As I prepared to complete this study, I continually asked myself “Who am I?” and, “Who am I in relation to those in power?” (Flowers, 2010, p. 274). I realize that as a white individual, I have a number of societal privileges (McIntosh, 1988).

Culture remains a constant topic in my daily life, and my identity is continually shifting as I discover how my Whiteness informs who I am culturally (Tisdell, 2001). I find it interesting that White individuals are often unable to identify that they have a culture because a sense of being ‘different’ is masked by being a member of the mainstream culture or culture of power (Tisdell, 2001). The idea of White people describing themselves as ‘colorblind’ or ‘colorless’ further illustrates this notion of neglecting to recognize or admit that differences exist. Flowers (2010) highlights this issue by stating, “Racist language tends to masquerade in the rhetoric of color blindness” (p. 278). Quotes such as this help to address the importance of developing intrapersonal awareness and an understanding of how we differ from others. Recognizing my
personal background as a researcher and identifying aspects of my culture and subcultures such as gender and class provide a more complete representation of the lens through which this research will be conducted.

**Participant Selection**

To effectively examine the identity development of Latina mothers as they led a parent education program and to examine the cross-cultural relationships that formed as a result of this parent involvement experience, a purposeful sample of parents was selected. Through this type of sampling, individuals meeting specific criteria were actively recruited to participate in this study (Mertler, 2009; Patton, 2002). Those participating in this action research study represented two different groups—the teachers and the learners. The primary group being examined through this research was the teachers. The teachers consisted of a group of women who were both Latina and the mother of children who attend the school at which the parent education program took place. While these women were categorized as Latina mothers, they differed in regard to their country of origin, their status as first or second generation Latina, and their language and literacy abilities in both Spanish and English. These Latina mothers needed to be fluent in oral Spanish and have basic Spanish literacy skills. These participants also needed to be able to engage in basic interpersonal communication in English as well.

The learners engaging in this experience were non-Spanish speaking, and they were also the mother of children enrolled in the school at which the program occurred. These participants also needed to be able to engage in basic communication in English as well.

While the study mainly focused on the experiences of the Latina mothers participating as teachers, data regarding the group of mothers who were learning Spanish was valuable as well, as they were an integral part of this teaching and learning experience. The group of learners was
especially important when examining the intercultural relationships that formed as a result of this parent involvement program as they added cultural variety to this study. The representation of multiple cultures created an interesting layer through which these intercultural relationships were considered.

A snow-ball sample of women was collected for this study. Through snow-ball sampling, initial participants were located and then additional participants were identified through having various connections with the initial participants (Patton, 2002). The researcher worked alongside the parent advisory council representative at the elementary school to identify parents that may be interested in becoming a teacher or a learner in this program. The researcher then contacted potential participants to discover their level of interest and convey the background information and scope of the study. These women were asked for suggestions of other mothers who were interested in taking part in this study. These women needed to meet the previously described criteria specific to this purposeful sample. The study began with the goal of having total of five to six teachers as well as five to six learners participating in the study. These participants were asked to attend all eight Thursday afternoon program sessions consistently. These mothers varied in regard to socioeconomic status, however; most were of low socioeconomic status. The ages of the participants also differ, as they ranged from 26 to 43. Overall, this sampling of women mirrored the parent population present in the school community in regard to culture, age, and socioeconomic status.

Data Collection Procedures and Methods

There are several methods of data collection conducive to action research. These include the use of interviews, focus groups, observations, journals, and documents and records (Stringer, 2007). Data was collected at various points in the plan, act, observe, and reflect cycle of the
action research study (Herr & Angerson, 2005). This data was continuously compiled and analyzed throughout the study and changes were made to better meet the participants’ needs based on their reflections and feedback. As mentioned, eight to ten women were to participate in this study, four to five Latina mothers were to participate as teachers and four to five were to participate as learners. The women met for one hour each Thursday afternoon for eight weeks. During the meetings, participants learned through a highly collaborative group model, often consisting of partnerships including one teacher and one learner. The context of this particular action research study was considered in describing the particular data collection methods that were utilized. The next several pages serve to elaborate on these methods and consider the specific procedures which were used to gather data.

**Interviews and Questionnaires**

Interviews and questionnaires were used multiple times throughout the course of this study. These data collection methods were used to help recognize the legitimacy of the participants’ experiences (Stringer, 2007). These strategies were also used to understand the background of the participants and to expose other factors that may have impacted the process and outcomes of the research.

This qualitative action research study began with individual narrative interviews with the Latina mothers helping to teach the program. These interviews included guiding questions regarding the mothers’ views about parent involvement, their parents’ level of involvement in their schooling, as well as the level at which they are currently involved with the school (Appendix G).

In addition to conducting pre-program interviews with the teachers, post-program interviews were also conducted individually with the Latina mothers. The interview process for
both the pre and post-program interviews was semi-structured in nature, using open ended questions to guide the interviews and then incorporating additional questions tailored to the specific nature of each individual conversation (Appendices E & R; Mertler, 2009). These interviews were conducted individually in English; however, the participants were encouraged to use their language of preference in the event that they could not convey an idea or recall a word in English. The semi-structured interviews included several standard questions, and then those questions were followed by questions specific to the answers of the participants in order to clarify or elaborate on their responses (Mertler, 2009). The interviews further explored the way in which these women made meaning of their identity and explored the relationships that were formed throughout this parent education program. The interviews were tape recorded and then transcribed accurately. Throughout the interviews, the researcher also took field notes in order to capture information regarding facial expressions and other elements which was not evident through the tape recording. The researcher took a neutral stance in order to neither confirm nor disagree with information yielded from these interviews.

At the end of each program session, both the teachers and the learners were asked to complete a reflection form (Appendices E &F). The forms given to the teachers had questions directly related to their leadership role in the program. These questions were more directly related to their confidence as a leader and also requested information as to how these women see themselves as leaders. The women were encouraged to write their answers in either English or Spanish to reduce a language barrier, which may alter or limit their responses. The learners were also asked to complete weekly questionnaires regarding their experience as a learner in the program and whether the program was meeting their needs. Since the questionnaires were administered weekly, it is important to note that the questions on each form remained the same
throughout the program.

Upon transcription and translation, these interviews as well as the questionnaire results were analyzed thematically in order to identify commonalities throughout the data. This data was also examined to identify aspects which potentially skewed or affected the process or results of the study.

**Focus Groups**

Throughout this process, a focus group interview was also conducted with the learners at the end of the program. This group interview gave the learners an opportunity to collectively discuss their overall thoughts about the program (Mertler, 2009). This group interview was considered a modified focus group since it only occurred once at the end of the program rather than multiple times throughout the experience (Mertler, 2009). This interview was semi-structured in nature and was guided by several questions related to the learners overall experience in the program (Appendix Q).

Throughout the focus groups, the researcher ensured that each participant was given the opportunity to share so that several people did not take over the entire discussion. This equal sharing of ideas was critical for including and collectively understanding the perspectives of each member of the group. By utilizing focus groups, individual interviews, and questionnaires, participants had multiple avenues through which to share their thoughts and ideas in a risk-free manner.

**Observations**

Observations were an important method of data collection throughout this study. During each of the Thursday afternoon sessions, the researcher served as a facilitator for the Spanish Teaching and Learning Program. I also recorded the events that occurred throughout the study
and observed participant interactions, behaviors, and discussion. In particular, I noted the relationships between the women participating in the program and how these relationships changed and developed over time. I also closely observed the Latina mothers, in particular, to identify possible elements leading to their identity development, level of confidence, as well as their response to being involved in a leadership role. These participant observations enabled me, “to build a picture of the lifeworld of those being observed and an understanding of the way they ordinarily go about their everyday activities” (Stringer, 2007, p. 75). During group-work and partner activities, observation provided information as to how the participants went about completing these activities and the effectiveness of their collaboration.

In order to record these observations, I typically used field notes, or the written record of important details that occurred throughout the session. While field notes were used throughout each session, this type of observation was not used to the exclusion of other tools such as audio recording. Through my observations, I was able to describe specific actions that took place during the study rather than merely addressing a participant’s individual perceptions of those actions.

Documents and Records

Considering pre-existing documents, records, and other data was necessary throughout this study as is frequently the case for action research (Mertler, 2009; Stringer, 2007). To better understand the nature and history of parent involvement at this particular institution, flyers, agendas, sign-in sheets, and brochures from previous parent involvement initiatives were valuable sources of information. This type of data, which existed outside of the current study, helped to better explain certain aspects or dynamics of the current parent involvement program. When used in conjunction with the other previously mentioned types of research, a more
complete picture of what took place throughout the study could be yielded.

Data Analysis

The process of data analysis for qualitative research does not follow a clear process or recipe and, thus, requires a more involved process that may be unique for each researcher (Patton, 2002). Qualitative research studies typically generate a plethora of data, which the researcher must thoroughly consider before analyzing the implications of the data (Patton, 2002). Sorting through immense layers of data was a challenge throughout this action research study as numerous types of data including interviews, questionnaires, observations, and existing documents were collected. Considering what was apparent through the data and what was missing from the data in order to form a complete picture of what occurred throughout the study was important.

To streamline and make sense of the data, the multitude of information collected throughout this study was first reviewed and organized into more manageable sets of data. Through the use of a coding scheme, similar information and patterns were identified. In order to properly code the data, the information was read and re-read several times. These smaller, related groups of information were then considered with the purpose of identifying significant patterns (Mertler, 2009; Stringer, 2007).

Accurately describing the commonalities which existed among the data was the next step of the data analysis process. These themes were described by considering the various types of data collected as well as my insight. To more clearly explain the themes present in this study, a category system was developed to provide a comprehensible representation of the specific categories and subcategories elicited from the data (Stringer, 2007). I used this category system
as well as the specific information surrounding a theme to develop a comprehensive description of each theme (Mertler, 2009).

The final step in the data analysis process for this action research study was to interpret the data which was been reviewed, summarized, and thematically organized. These themes were considered in relation to both the research questions and the overall purpose of the study. Possible connections to these core elements of the research study were further analyzed to develop the findings and implications of the research. While it was important to identify these connections, considering areas which did not correspond with the purpose of the study and research questions was also critical. Furthermore, recognizing pieces of data which contradicted or conflicted with the significant themes found throughout the information were also relevant in forming the complete picture of the overall study (Mertler, 2009).

Because data was collected throughout each step of the plan, act, observe, and reflect pattern of action research, it is important to note that analysis of this data also occurred throughout each of these cyclical phases. As is done through action research, changes were made throughout the study to proceed in a manner that effectively met the needs of the participants. While data analysis occurred throughout this cyclical process, a comprehensive analysis of the data can be found at the end of this study to better understand the overall findings and implications in regard to Latina women and their role in parent involvement programs.

**Verification**

Various strategies were incorporated throughout this qualitative action research study to foster the truthfulness of the conclusions that were derived. These modes of verification include: credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability and are more thoroughly explored in
Credibility

Credibility refers to “the plausibility and integrity of the study” from the perspective of the participants and is a fundamental element regarding the verification of action research (Stringer, 2007, p. 57). If the participants felt as though the study lacked integrity, they would be less likely to participate authentically which would have affected the overall authenticity and process of the action research study (Stringer, 2007). Since this study of Latina mothers was participatory in nature, the genuine and consistent involvement of the participants was especially important since they were actively assisting in the planning and implementation of the Spanish Teaching and Learning Program.

Credibility, or ensuring that the elements of the study are viewed as accurate by the participants, involves three distinct elements: rigorous methods, the credibility of the researcher, and the philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry (Mertler, 2009; Patton, 2002). Throughout this study, rigorous methods were used while making observations, collecting documents and conducting interviews. For example, when conducting interviews, I attempted to leave personal biases behind when interviewing participants. My credibility as a researcher was related to my level of training and experiences. While I do not have ample field experience, I have been trained throughout multiple formal education courses. I have also had a high level of interaction with the population being studied as well as the context in which the study was completed. In regard to the importance of philosophically believing in the value of qualitative inquiry, I consistently demonstrate both holistic thinking and appreciation for qualitative methods (Patton, 2002).
In order for a study to have credibility, the researcher must have prolonged engagement with the participants in order to afford them ample time in which to express their ideas, thoughts, and experiences. The researcher should also engage in persistent observation over a sufficient period of time. Triangulation of the data must also occur which involves determining themes among several sources of data. Member checks should also be included to give participants the opportunity to review the data and information which is drawn from the data. Through incorporating these strategies for improving the credibility of this study, the overall verification will be strengthened (Stringer, 2007).

**Confirmability and Dependability**

Confirmability refers to the level to which the results of a study can be validated or confirmed by others. This type of verification is used to reduce researcher bias which may affect the study. Throughout this study of Latina mothers, an audit trail was maintained including the actual data collected throughout the interviews, questionnaires, observations, and documents (Stringer, 2007). The audit trail was designed in a way to keep track of all of the data. It “confirm[ed] the veracity of the study, providing another means for ensuring that the research is trustworthy” (Stringer, 2007, p. 59).

The use of the multiple data sources previously listed further promotes confirmability. As the results of these data are analyzed and considered for themes, the triangulation of these patterns throughout various data sources proves to be stronger in terms of verifying the trustworthiness of the study than themes constructed from a single data source (Patton, 2002).

The dependability of the study focuses on the level at which it can be trusted that the systematic research process has been followed while conducting this study (Stringer, 2007). As mentioned in the section regarding confirmability, an audit trail of the data was collected
throughout this study. This trail of data illustrated evidence of the process that was used which aligned with the plan, act, observe, reflect pattern present within action research. Prior to this study, a dense description of the research method based on quality literature surrounding action research was developed and included. This explicit documentation of the research methodology and the procedures incorporated throughout this study increased the dependability of the research.

**Transferability**

Transferability refers to the prospect of applying the results of the current study to other contexts (Stringer, 2007). While the outcomes of this action research study may not be generalizable to large populations as are the results of quantitative studies, the outcomes of this study were relevant for certain populations (Stringer, 2007). Through the use of purposeful sampling, a dense description of the context and findings, and a thorough analysis of the data, this study proved very relevant for others. Certainly, other parent groups within the same school district may want to replicate the program developed in this study or a modification of the program, based on potential positive outcomes. Also, the results of this study may be interesting for other urban districts with high Latino populations which are frequently present throughout the United States. These districts may also wish to replicate this type of study with their parent populations as well.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided a description of the methodology for the proposed study. An explanation of qualitative research was included as the kind of research to be used for this example of research. The chapter discussed action research as the research type and provided a rationale for the use of both PAR and CAR throughout this study. In addition to identifying the
research kind and type, chapter three outlined the background of the researcher to better describe the lens through which this research will be conducted. Information regarding the selection of participants as well as data collection and analysis were also included. Finally, methods of verification for providing trustworthiness throughout the study were discussed.
CHAPTER FOUR

PLANNING AND PARTICIPANTS

Chapter four introduces the participants for this critical action research study while focusing heavily on individual interviews which were conducted with the Latina mothers participating as teachers in this parent education program known as The Spanish Teaching and Learning Program. These interviews highlighted the mothers’ prior involvement in the school setting as well as projects in the past to which each had contributed. The interviews also provided insight into the participants’ past experiences and their feelings at being asked to be part of the program.

In addition to introducing the participants, chapter four discusses the beginning phases of the program as well as an overview of the schedule for The Spanish Teaching and Learning Program which was collaboratively agreed upon through a pre-program planning session with the Latina mothers and flexibly modified throughout the program as needed. Throughout the planning session, the mothers decided how each Thursday afternoon would be framed and agreed upon a general outline and topics for the complete program.

The purpose for this study was twofold: to examine the identity development of Latina mothers as they lead a parent education program and to examine the intercultural relationships that form as a result of this parent involvement experience.

Program Overview

The Spanish Teaching and Learning program was structured in such a way that allowed for the mothers, with my facilitative support, to design the Spanish topics and content around the needs and expertise of the group. The participants consisted of a group of Latina mothers who volunteered to lead the program and a group of mothers who wanted to learn Spanish. The
participants engaged in eight weekly sessions occurring on Thursday afternoons from 3:30-4:30 throughout the months of October and November. I was present in both the role of researcher and to facilitate the group when needed; however, the Latina mothers (teachers) were largely responsible for much of the planning and delivery of the sessions through which they taught basic Spanish communication and literacy skills to non-Spanish speaking mothers. Each week, I collected desired agenda items to add to the following sessions from both the teachers and the learners and typed and printed agendas to guide us during our sessions. As the sessions were conducted, I frequently facilitated the transition from one topic to the next by identifying a teacher who would help to lead that section of the lesson. Throughout the sessions, I also participated as a learner at times and asked questions of the Latina mothers when I personally wanted to understand a concept more fully.

The sessions were molded to the needs of the learners and altered or enhanced as appropriate. The original plan was for each teacher to have a specific partner with whom she would interact throughout the class period and then as needed throughout the week when working on take-home assignments. Prior to the start of the program, the Latina mothers who agreed to volunteer as teachers participated in individual interviews and a collaborative planning session. During these initial sessions, the teachers were provided a copy of the book, *Spanish for Gringos* (Harvey, 2008) which was used as a curriculum resource throughout the program. I selected this book based on the combination of positive recommendations from colleagues who teach basic Spanish to adult learners as well as the practical and context-embedded examples of language used throughout the text. Content from this book was used to frame each of the program sessions. In addition to this resource, teachers were also provided a calendar of
important program dates I created to help the participants understand the schedule for the program (Appendix D).

The Spanish Teaching and Learning Program was held for one hour each Thursday for eight weeks in the parent resource room of an elementary school with a population of approximately 550 students. The elementary school is located in an urban setting south-central Pennsylvania. Approximately fifty percent of the total student population is comprised of both first and second generation Latino students. Almost eighty percent of the students are from economically disadvantaged families. The students and their families all live within walking distance of the school. The elementary school is an example of an urban community school, partnering with community agencies to provide a number of school-based resources to both students and families in the realms of health and wellness, extended day academic enrichment/support, and counseling services. Because of the school’s desire to both collaborate with and meet the needs of both adults and children within the school community, the principal was very open to the idea of hosting the Spanish Teaching and Learning Program.

Each week, the parent resource room was organized by a school employee prior to the arrival of the parents. Two tables in the room were pushed together and surrounded with chairs in order to create an environment through which the mothers could easily see and interact with one another. A large whiteboard was mounted on the wall on one side of the large table. The children of the mothers attending the program were able to attend childcare at the elementary school while their mothers were participating in the program. This was provided in a separate location from the room in which the program was occurring. Up to eighteen children attended childcare each week. Pre-school age children were in a separate room from the older children
who spent much of their time receiving homework help. Basic snacks and drinks such as cheese and crackers and juice were provided weekly for all of the mothers and their children.

To better analyze the program, I recorded each session with an audio recorder. I also asked participants to complete a written reflection form at the culmination of each session. The teachers and learners each had a form with questions that were specific to their role in the program (Appendices E & F). The questions on the teacher reflection form asked the following:

1. How were you able to contribute to this session?
2. Did this session meet your expectations? Why or why not?
3. What can we do to improve or change future sessions?
4. What would you like to see included in future sessions?
5. What did you learn about yourself as a teacher throughout this session?
6. Would you recommend this program to others based on today’s session? Why or why not?

The learners were asked to respond weekly to these questions:

1. Did this session meet your expectations? Why or why not?
2. What can we do to improve or change future sessions?
3. What would you like to see included in future sessions?
4. What was the most valuable thing you learned in today’s session?
5. Would you recommend this program to others based on today’s session? Why or why not?

At the end of the experience, the teachers were asked to participate in individual post-interviews. The learners collectively engaged in a post-interview to provide feedback about their experience in the program as well. The following section highlights detailed information
regarding the study participants and the process by which they were selected to be part of the study.

**Study Participants**

In selecting participants for the program, the original goal was to develop a group of five or six Latina mothers who would volunteer as teachers throughout the program and five or six mothers who would take part as learners. To participate, the Latina mothers needed to have basic communication skills in English, strong communication skills in Spanish, and basic literacy skills in Spanish.

Recruiting teachers for this program proved to be challenging. This was unexpected, as over fifty percent of the students attending the elementary school were Latino. Names and phone numbers of potential teachers and learners were provided by school personnel and parents associated with the parent/teacher organization as well as the building principal. Potential teachers were called directly and asked to take part in the program. Mothers who agreed were asked to participate in individual interviews and a planning session which were set up for the following week. Out of the twenty-three mothers who were asked to help teach in the program, eight agreed. The other fifteen did not participate for a variety of reasons. Three had phone numbers listed for which the phones had been disconnected. Four mothers never returned the phone calls or messages that were left. One mother shared that she had recently arrived to the United States and needed more time to get settled. Another discussed that her family members had just arrived to Pennsylvania from Puerto Rico, and she was busy helping them. Two mothers explained that their work schedules would not allow them to participate in the program, and another mother stated that she had just had surgery. The other three mothers said that they were not interested in participating, but did not give a specific reason.
Of the eight who agreed to participate, two did not show up for their individual interviews the following week. One mother’s work schedule had changed which prevented her from being able to participate in the program. The other mother forgot about the appointment and did not make it to the next two scheduled appointments either. When called with reminders, she replied that she forgot about the meeting and said she would try to make it next time. After three unsuccessful attempts to meet this mother for an interview, I stopped contacting this potential participant. One mother named Noemi came to the planning session and provided valuable input. Unfortunately, she was unable to participate in her interview and subsequent program sessions due to the health condition of a family member.

In addition to Noemi, I assigned pseudonyms to the other five remaining Latina mothers who agreed to participate as teachers. The names of the teachers included Seriah, Rita, Raina, Evalisa, and Maria. One of the teachers, Seriah, had a serious health condition which worsened after her individual interview and prevented her from attending the program sessions. Another mother, Raina, began taking a Thursday afternoon GED course after her individual interview which pulled her away from the program. While unable to participate in the sessions, information from both mothers’ pre-program interviews were included in this chapter, as their stories provided interesting insight into their lives as well their level of involvement with the school community and prior leadership and teaching experience.

The other three Latina mothers were integral in planning and delivering the program sessions. Both Evalisa and Rita came to nearly every session. Maria was unable to come to several sessions during the middle of the program due to a health condition experienced by one of her sons.
Recruiting a group of mothers interested in learning Spanish was somewhat easier. Out of sixteen mothers contacted, six agreed to participate. One mother called a week later to say that the program times conflicted with her children’s sport schedule and that she would not be able to participate after all. Another mother, Haley did not come to any of the sessions beyond the first session and did not provide a reason as to why she chose not to attend.

Of the nine mothers who did not accept the invitation to participate, one was expecting a baby the following month and knew she could not fully commit to the program. Three already knew basic Spanish, two had conflicting work schedules, and three did not answer the phone or respond to phone messages.

The following table succinctly outlines basic information regarding the eleven women who consented as participants in this program. All of these women were heterosexual mothers of students at the elementary school.

Table 1: Participant Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Positionality Details</th>
<th>Prior school involvement</th>
<th>Role in Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Noemi</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>4: 2 biological sons, 1 niece, 1 nephew</td>
<td>Latina, first generation Puerto-Rican, mother</td>
<td>Parent/teacher conferences, after school programming, field trips</td>
<td>Teacher—only participated in planning session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>5: 4 sons and 1 daughter</td>
<td>Latina, first generation Puerto Rican, mother, grandmother</td>
<td>Parent/teacher conferences, meetings with school based counseling services, field trips</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evalisa</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2: 1 biological daughter and 1 stepdaughter</td>
<td>Latina, second generation Puerto Rican, mother, stepmother</td>
<td>PTO, evening family events, parent/teacher conferences, field trips</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rita</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3: 1 daughter and 2 sons</td>
<td>Latina, first generation Dominican</td>
<td>Parent/teacher conferences, back to school night</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Children</td>
<td>Race/Background</td>
<td>Role in Program</td>
<td>Narrative Focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raina</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1 son</td>
<td>Latina, first generation Puerto Rican, mother</td>
<td>Meetings with school-based counseling services</td>
<td>Teacher—only participated in pre-interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seriah</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>3: 1 son and 2 daughters</td>
<td>Latina, second generation Puerto Rican, mother</td>
<td>Volunteering in classroom, PTO events, parent/teacher conferences</td>
<td>Teacher—only participated in pre-interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3: 2 daughters and 1 son</td>
<td>Mennonite, Caucasian, mother</td>
<td>Parent/teacher conferences, evening family events</td>
<td>Learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tashauna</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>3: 2 daughters and 1 son</td>
<td>African American, mother</td>
<td>Parent/teacher conferences, evening family events, field trips, volunteering in classroom</td>
<td>Learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JoEllen</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>4: 2 daughters and 2 sons</td>
<td>Caucasian, mother</td>
<td>Parent/teacher conferences, PTO events, after school family events, volunteering in classroom</td>
<td>Learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcy</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>4: 2 daughters and 2 sons</td>
<td>Caucasian, mother</td>
<td>Parent/teacher conferences, after school family events, meetings with school-based counseling services</td>
<td>Learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haley</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2 sons</td>
<td>Caucasian, mother</td>
<td>Parent/teacher conferences, field trips</td>
<td>Learner—only participated in session 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Pre-Program Teacher Interviews**

To develop a better understanding of the stories and prior knowledge the Latina mothers brought to the program, each mother participating as a teacher participated in a narrative
interview prior to the first session. Throughout the interviews, the mothers were asked to respond to the following prompts (Appendix G):

1. Describe the ways your parents encouraged your schooling.
2. In what ways have you been involved with your children’s school community previously?
3. In what ways have you been contacted about parent involvement activities in the past?
4. Can you tell me a story about your reaction to being asked to assume a leadership role in a school program?
5. In the past, what was the most positive experience you have had when contributing to a project? (Can you elaborate?)

The responses to the questions varied greatly and began to paint a picture of the women’s past experiences, successes, fears, and prior involvement in the school community. The following sections outline each Latina mother’s story based on her individual interview.

**The Teachers**

**Maria**

Maria, a 42-year-old mother of five and grandmother of one attended her interview accompanied by her infant grandson, mother, and 4-year-old nephew. She explained that she watched her grandson and nephew frequently throughout the week while their parents were at work. She shared that her mother lived with her, helped her, and frequently accompanied her to the school for meetings and to drop off and pick up her two elementary-age sons. When participating in program sessions, Maria always arrived with several family members. Maria’s mother and the baby would wait at the school until our sessions were complete while the 4-year-old played in the childcare room. Maria explained that without the childcare and the ability to
bring her family members, she would not have been able to attend the program at all. Through her interview, Maria exhibited great apprehension at assuming a teaching role in the program, primarily because of being insecure about her level of English proficiency. She also expressed a deep desire to help her children and the school in any way she could. Maria’s story also revealed a great desire to persevere and overcome great obstacles.

The interview began with Maria expressing her apprehension about being able to answer questions in English. She was relieved when told that her answers could be in Spanish or English and that she was welcome to ask me to repeat the questions or parts of the questions in Spanish if needed.

When asked to describe the ways in which her parents encouraged her schooling, Maria replied:

They was teaching me. My mother she was my teacher. When I went to school I already know how to write my name…I was here. In New Jersey…I don’t remember too much. But I know that there was my mother who teaches me to write my name and…. No more. Really, I don’t know no more. I don’t remember no more. [My parents came into my school] every time. They… are very responsible. Every time they go to school my mother take me to school and she pick me up and what they need, you call. They call my mom every time she was needed in school [for meetings].

Maria then described ways she has been involved with her own children’s schooling both currently and in the past:

I come every day. I bring them. Every time they call me, I be there. I let her [the child’s teacher] know it does not matter, every time I have to come I come…Sometimes I help, you know, with… to take care of other kids, you know? Long time I was working. They
give me like, a job, helping to be a… helping teacher [referencing her children’s school in Puerto Rico], and I was there taking care of the kids, watching the class, and helping somebody that needed help in mathematics. That was my [favorite]… I love mathematics a lot. [That was] In Puerto Rico. And when they need… you know, they have an activity to make things, we get newspapers and make flowers. And making flowers with a bottle of coke. Plastic coke bottle. And go on the trips, go on the trips. I go on the trips every time [with all of my sons]. When they was little. And I was [their] teacher… All the three, when they was in school, I teach them to write their names and the colors and help them with their homework.

In Puerto Rico, the school is different. They give a lot of projects that you have to get newspapers, you have to go to the libraries, you have to go buy pictures, a book of pictures, different pictures, go to the library and get information, all that stuff. Sometimes I did the homework for them (laughs), because I know how to write with this hand, too [held up left hand]. You write with this one, you write like little kids. I tell you the truth, you know. In Puerto Rico, it’s different. They give a lot of work. Sometimes they give them a project, like a hundred page. And for a little kid, it’s hard. Yeah, it’s very different [here]. Over there you have to take seven notebooks. They give like five or six books for each class and then sometimes you have to… they give a book, you have to take that book and read it, and then you have to answer like two hundred questions about the book, and then you have to put the author, what is the character of the book, one important thing of the book. They [her sons] don’t do it like that. You have to read the book, and then you have to make a paragraph… of the book, and then sometimes you have to go in front of the class. I never do that because that made me shy. I never do that,
to be honest. And then you have to say to the students what you think about the book, what’s the most important thing of the book, what you like, what you don’t like. It was… a lot of things. You know, sometimes, you get a big paper, a cartolina… I don’t know how to say that [poster]. [The poster] is white, and I put a lot of pictures, and you have to explain it, you know.

[At the school here] I go to the trips. And when they need me I come, you know. Every time they need me I come. In Head Start, we were making things with the hands. When [my son] was in Head Start. When he was over there, that’s when we were making the flowers. I do one, and I give it to the teacher. He put a candle in the middle.

Maria also described when and how she had been contacted by the school about becoming involved. She responded:

No, they never [contacted me]… Only when I come to the school [to pick up/drop off my sons]. You need me you call me. That’s it…that sort of thing. Sometimes they call me when I want to do things, you know. Or sometimes when I come in to the school they say you want to come here? And I say okay. Mr. Jones [son’s teacher] I go with him a lot. Whenever he needs me, I come.

This is the first time [I have been contacted about a teaching a program]…I was a little bit nervous. I like it because… I want to learn a little bit of English, and I want to learn how to write English, because that’s my point, you know. I was looking… when Juan [my son] was in preschool, I was looking for a program. There are a lot of places that are teaching English, but it doesn’t have [a good way for us to] learn English. Because I can talk with you, you know. The reason that I’m looking for a place is the same thing that I said. They can have classes but the thing is if you are teaching me in English, tell me in
Spanish what is it. You could tell me, for example, a ball, and for me I could tell you a ball, a ball. And then you ask me in Spanish what’s a ball and that’s an example that I give you. I don’t say “Oh the ball! He hit me with the ball!” but in Spanish if you ask me, I will say, “I don’t think that I know that he hit me with the ball.” You know what I mean, right? If you teach me a ball, I want to know that in Spanish, because that help you. That’s the point, that’s the thing that I’m looking for. [My husband] he is looking for a place that teaches him in Spanish and in English. Because that’s the point. You can learn Spanish and English but you don’t know what you’re talking in English.”

Maria further described how she hoped to learn more English through the program even through her primary role would be to help teach Spanish since there would be mothers attending who were strong in English.

That’s one of the points that I decide [to become involved]. I say, maybe the person that we’re teaching will learn more and I can learn to write. We’re learning small words, and then I’ll learn how to write in English, and I can help my son, too, with the same thing. Because sometimes they take the homework and I really, really do not understand. Sometimes I write a note to the teacher and say I do not understand. You know, you need to help him because I don’t know. That’s the thing. You help me, I help another person. [I am still a little nervous] yeah, that’s the thing, because I never do it. It makes me timida, nerviosa [afraid, nervous]. The day everybody was talking, I was thinking, oh my God. I don’t know what I’m going to do [referring to the planning session], but I try to help. Yeah, I wanted to help everybody, you know, that’s the most thing that I want.

Throughout the planning session, Maria had offered to locate a copy of a book, *La Cartilla*, which is frequently used to teach sounds and sound combinations in Puerto Rico.
I thought, I know I can find it. I know that my mother-in-law, whatever I ask for her, I told her that I’m going to have a copy, too, for my sons, so they can learn in Spanish. I want them to. I was trying to do that because sometimes that’s the point that Pedro [my son], he told me one or two words in Spanish and three words in English. And I say no. if you want to tell me something, it’s everything in English or everything in Spanish…because that would be confusing. Because, like, my niece, she don’t know how to speak Spanish too much good, because she was doing it like that. You have to try to help them to do everything in one way or the other way. [Do not mix the languages], because then they’ll be confused, and when he don’t know what a thing that is in English that is in Spanish, and he says ‘Mom,’ I say it in Spanish.

At the end of the interview, Maria described the most positive experience she had when working previously on a project in her personal life that had positive results.

The only thing I was excited about was when I lose pounds, because when I was very fat, everybody, you know, talked a lot…Everybody laughed that I was so fat, and then [to my husband], they said” what do you see in that fat lady?” And I don’t mind what other people say. After [I had my son], I was fat. I was 328, and then with my cousin, we decide to go on a program, and I lose a lot of pounds…One day I put on jeans, and a dress, and maybe [scarf], and I put boots [on]. I went to pick my kids, and I put makeup, and all the little kids said “oh! That’s your mother!” and then [my daughter’s friends] and everyone was like “I want a girlfriend like her!” and then I keep losing weight. Then my son was very happy, and everyone told him that his mommy was beautiful. And then the big one, Pablo, they told him “your mother should be a model.” And he was so happy. And that was the most happy thing I had, you know.
I was 328 pounds, and that’s the only thing I don’t like. You try to help people, and everybody talks bad on another person. That’s the only thing I would feel bad [when people talk about me]. Now, the people that was talking about me, that was saying I was fat, everything changed, because I’m really skinny. You know, when you want to do something and you do it [I was committed], and I want to be 150, and that’s my limit. I’m fighting for that.

The interview culminated with some discussion of the next session. Maria shared her desire to bring the *La Cartilla* materials she promised to get from her relatives in Puerto Rico.

**Evalisa**

Evalisa was the youngest mother in our group at 26-years-old. Her daughter and stepdaughter were both first graders at the elementary school. She worked part-time at both the local community college and a video rental store. Evalisa was also working toward getting a degree at the local community college. Evalisa’s interview demonstrated a strong desire to demonstrate the best parenting skills possible and not follow in the footsteps of her parents.

To be very honest, my mom nor my dad were very involved [in my schooling]. I was born here and raised with my mom and her family, and then we moved to… I moved to Puerto Rico with my dad, who wasn’t really involved. I don’t think I really had a person to be around the school much. Here I was in and out of my mom’s house or my aunt’s, and once I moved to Puerto Rico, my stepmom was around, but wasn’t really involved with school. So if there was a school activity, I would get more dropped off and picked up when it was done. I would go, and just hang out with my friends or something, but it was never something parent-related. Homework was more… like I would do the homework, and if I had a question I would ask, but other than that, I never really had
someone say, “Okay let me sit down with you and do homework.” I was six, about to turn seven [when I moved to Puerto Rico]. [I was there] until I graduated from high school, and in my first year of college, I went to Puerto Rico.

I’ve always been involved [in my daughter’s schooling]. She started daycare, and I was one of the parents that was always helping out or going to field trips, and then when she started here in kindergarten last year, I was always around, just because I feel like it’s important to show her that I should be involved. I wasn’t taught that, but I feel like, in her case, she’s more laid-back. She’s not as worried about school or homework, so I feel like I need to be there to show her yes, it is important, and yes, this needs to get done. I’ve been in the meetings plenty of times, I volunteer with after-school activities. She was in the after-school program. I went to field trips with them. So… any meeting that requires a parent to be there, I’m there, regardless. I’m here if she needs to be picked up, to drop her off in the morning. Like it’s always me. So, yeah. I’m kind of there to show her that it’s important. I would definitely say that I am [involved].

To be honest I don’t know [how I decided to do things differently than my parents]. I guess it’s an automatic thing. Like my daughter’s in school, and now I need to show her, okay, mom’s here, regardless. I wasn’t accustomed to it, but I feel like I need to teach her a different lifestyle. My childhood growing up was a little bit harder, and I don’t want her to feel that. I don’t want her to feel like oh, my mom, or my stepdad in this case, aren’t around, and we aren’t involved. Again, it’s usually me, he’s usually working, but if he needs to be here, he will be here. You know, it’s something that we tag-team, she knows that if anything happens in school, she’s like, “mommy, this is going on in school.” I mean, for example, tonight my stepdaughter is with her mom and her mom is
not coming [to an evening family event at the school]. So her mom has this issue where she feels like I’m trying to push being mom on her daughter, so my stepdaughter asks me, “can I go with you [to the family program]?” And I say, “look, I’m sorry, you’re with your mom today, you have to ask your mom.” Like, I have to step back, but she felt a certain type of way because she felt like, well my step mom is going. Why can’t my mom go? So I feel that way, but I also feel pressure, like, this is what I am and I need to be there for my daughter.

There’s a conflict of both households. Because I’m very involved and they’re not, and so that’s a little bit of an issue, because my stepdaughter loves school. She loves books. She loves learning. She just loves the environment. On the contrary, my daughter could care less. She just comes, because she wants to hang out at school with the rest of the people, but I try to show them both, like, okay, this is important, you know what I mean? So I have a little bit more in common with my stepdaughter in that aspect, because I’m big into books, and there’s books all over my house, and let’s read, and she’s all about coloring, and meanwhile my daughter’s like, ‘well can I just watch TV?’ So it’s… I don’t know. It’s kind of weird. But I try to be there as much as I can.

I had been contacted previously to help in the school by the librarian, Ginny. The first meeting I came in and then from there I started [helping]...I participated in the yard sale, and from there on, every time there was a meeting, Ginny was like, “Hey! I need you! We need a parent volunteer at the sign-in table or at the pretzel stand.” She automatically knew, “okay, I can count on her.” I think I feel that it’s just showing my daughter, like, okay… I have to help you. This is school. This is what we do for school. And not only that, but eventually I know she’s going to have kids, and I want her to be involved,
because I know how it feels not to have the parent there. [Ginny will] send me a text or even in the morning, when she sees me here, she’ll be like, “oh by the way, next week, are you coming?” So it’s just an automatic, “okay, I’ll be there!”

The first time I saw the welcome back night, that’s how I saw it, through one of the sheets, on the first one that they sent out, and then [Ginny] called me. Actually, I called her because of an issue that we were having with my stepdaughter with the uniforms that I need more uniforms for her but I can’t afford to go buy more, so I asked her because I know parents sometimes donate. So I explained the situation that we were having, and she said, “Well I don’t have uniforms, but I need a parent to volunteer this week, can you?” I was like, “yeah, that’s fine, I’ll be there.” So it was one of those situations.

[When asked to be a teacher in the program], at first I was a little confused, I was like, what’s going on here. And again I thought it was for me to help the Spanish speakers talk English, like I thought it was vice versa, but as soon as you explained what was going on, I, again, said yes, because I’ve seen not many parents like to volunteer. Even when it comes down to all the parents that are in the school in the gym, or cafeteria, the outcome isn’t really big. And I don’t like to be part of that statistic. I want to be part of the parents that are responsible enough to help out with the school. It’s a little bit that I can do, so why not. I don’t know [why people opt not to volunteer]. I feel like everyone’s having kids really young, so their focus isn’t here. I mean I feel like the thinking is, “well, I’ll just go next time,” and they just don’t make it or make up excuses, or they’re working late, but I feel like it’s more… I don’t know. In a way, I feel like it’s just irresponsible parents. I see a lot of the parents in the morning with their kids, and just the way they walk into the school, into the parking lot with the kids, it’s just their demeanor. You can
tell who’s willing to help out and who’s not. Unfortunately, I don’t know why they don’t come [especially the Latina mothers]. I don’t understand why. Just again, our Spanish-speaking community is really big. Around here, it’s huge, and I would say more than half of the parents are Spanish-speaking. I don’t get why not help, or why not just be around. Just go to the school and see what your kid is doing. See what’s going on at school, and again, I see my situation. I compare myself to my stepdaughter’s mom. How is it that this is your only kid, and you don’t want to be involved? To the point where she has physically said, out loud, “I don’t have an interest in it.” So I look at it like, “why not?” Like, that’s your only kid, why not be involved? It’s going to be exciting. When she’s eighteen years old, she’s going to say, “Well my mom never was around.” You know? And I don’t want that. I want my daughter to say, “Yeah, my mom always helped.”

I would say, at least for here, the most beneficial [project I have worked on] was the yard sale. It was really big. I think it had a really big outcome. A lot of people came to the yard sale. I was there all day. I was exhausted, but I did mean what I said. A lot of parents dropped stuff off. Like they would just come to the front of the area, drop it off, and keep going. Even that alone was like, okay, cool. Because if we can’t sell it, maybe it’ll be in the resource room, you know? It’ll be there, and maybe a parent one day will need a jacket, or a coat, or a shirt, or something, and they can just go to the school and get it. So I think that was the most positive one that I felt like there was definitely an outcome.

[The yard sale benefitted the school community] not only financially, but it also brought [the community] together. The community was saying, “Oh it’s a yard sale!” They’re not
a stuck-up school like they are too good for it. Perfect example, and I don’t want to criticize, but I’ve never seen other school district name do a yard sale. Or if there was, I’ve never heard of it, which is kind of weird. But this one, I did, I saw it in newspapers. The school sent home papers. Parents would mention it to each other, and not only that, it’s right there. A lot of people are passing. There is a church is right across the street. So I feel like it was known. It was known to the community that there was something big going on and we needed help. So that was pretty cool.

After describing her experience with the school yard sale, Evalisa’s interview culminated with a brief reminder about the time and location of the first program session. Evalisa mentioned how wonderful it was that Maria was planning to get a copy of La Cartilla. She stated:

“It’s very basic, and so it’s easy to read. That’s how I learned Spanish. I learned Spanish as a six-year-old, about to turn seven, reading that book, and actually, I went there when I was six, and I somehow ended up coming back and right after I turned seven, I went back down, when I was in third grade. So I was in that barrier of trying to learn a different language, but there, in full, regular, Spanish-speaking classrooms. There was no English-speaking, no translator, nothing. It was just like, here you go. So I kind of was shoved into it, and that book helped a lot. Like, I would sit there every day and just read the book. [English was my first language] but my mom spoke Spanish… my whole family speaks Spanish but I was never taught. They would speak it… like, my mom and her sisters would speak it between each other. But never like, hey, this is what you need to learn. Never. At all. And then once my dad [took me to Puerto Rico], I had to learn it. [I didn’t fully understand Spanish before that], not really. Like, certain words, if it was like “clean the kitchen” or “do the dishes” or something like that, I would understand. I
would relate the words to what they were doing, but never spoke the language. This was something that I never spoke, and I ended up in Puerto Rico. I was just like, “Okay. Now you gotta learn. Now there’s no option.” My dad didn’t really speak English. My uncle’s wife, she spoke English, so she helped me out, like she was the one that was like, “let’s do this, or let’s do that.” It was a hard time. As a kid, going to a complete different culture with different traditions and different language and just… I don’t know, it’s hard, but the book will definitely work. I definitely recommend it, even if you want to teach kids with the book, it’ll work.

**Raina**

Raina, a 28-year-old mother of one fifth-grade son, had recently reconnected with her child after a number of years apart due to her history of substance abuse and subsequent trouble with the law. Now clean and sober, Raina hoped to make up for lost time by becoming more involved in her son’s life. Through meetings with the school guidance counselor, she was recommended as someone who would be very interested in helping with the program. Raina attended her interview with her boyfriend, Tito. She requested that Tito stay with her while she was answering the questions, as she admitted to being quite nervous about the process.

Unfortunately, the week after her interview, Raina began attending a Thursday afternoon GED classes at the local community college which coincided with the timing of the program sessions. Ultimately, she was unable to participate in the Spanish teaching/learning experience. She sent a message of apology through her stepfather when he came to pick up her son from school the following Thursday. Through her interview, Raina expressed a strong desire to help her son and to learn from him as well. She was thoroughly grateful to have him back in her life.
I taught [Spanish] before in the family. That’s it, but it’s good, because the Spanish that they’ll learn is different than the real Spanish, because I’m taking a class for reading and writing now, for the GED, and sometimes I don’t understand some words. And she [the teacher] told me about this Spanish from Spain, or something like that… [My parents were involved in my schooling] just only from first grade to fourth. And then we were walking alone, doing our homework by ourselves, and everything. But that was good. I teach my mom how to add and subtract. My dad dropped out from first grade, so I teach them a couple of stuff I learned in school [when I was in] elementary school. My mom took me to school walking sometimes and when I used to have homework. She helped me a little with writing letters and everything. She teach me a lot of stuff- how to write my name, how to write a, e, i, o, u.

[My son] started two years ago. Before, my mom was his guardian, because I had my [health problems], so I signed a paper, his father too. So now [that I am] with him, I start dealing with my son’s homework and everything. Before, I didn’t like it, you know? Now, everything changed. I can teach him what I know, and he can teach me new stuff that he learns, you know, here [at school]. I don’t know, it’s like, “wow!” Yesterday, he was telling me something about mold, and I said, “dude, I’m forgetting!” and he said, “let me explain!” and I said “wait, wait!” I started looking in the book and couldn’t find it. When I don’t know something, [Tito] helps him, but his English is better than mine [referring to her son].

Everything changed when I had [my son] back with me. Now, I don’t know how to explain it. I’m happy, you know? I learn from him, and he learn from me.
[I have] never been asked to help at the school. I got like nervous [when I was asked to help]. I was thinking at the same time that I’m going, I’ll learn to talk to different people, because I don’t like to explain something in front of a lot of people, you know? I get nervous but at the same time, now I can be me. You know? Teach them what I know and learn from them, too.”

When asked about a positive experience or project she had recently been a part of, Raina responded that the most positive things she had done most recently was getting her son back. She also described feeling accomplished through a babysitting job she had previously had. She replied:

Having him back [is my biggest accomplishment]. I feel good about it. I was doing babysit[ing] a couple of years ago, and the kid doesn’t know how to speak Spanish, and I didn’t know how to speak English, so I learned from him and he learned from me, you know? I told his grandfather, because they speak a little bit of Spanish, I said to tell him that if he wants something, he can say the word in pointing, that way I’ll learn it. So, I learned with little kids, and they learned a little bit of Spanish from me. That was the first time I take care of someone. Before I wasn’t, I was like, “kids? They cry. They do a lot of stuff.” I was nervous because when you babysit someone, you need to always watch the kid, you know? Something happens you want to be responsible; I’ll learn.”

Rita

Rita, a 34-year-old housekeeper, was encouraged by the school principal, Juanita, to participate in the program. She was extremely nervous about her limited English. As the mother of three children (2 sons and 1 daughter), Rita expressed an inspiring view of motherhood and work ethic. Being an immigrant from the Dominican Republic, Rita understood the difficulty of
working from the ground up and attempting to instill ethics and values in your children, despite
what they may be learning from society. Rita discussed having previous experience working as a
Spanish translator in the court system and revealed an advanced understanding of Spanish
grammar and conventions. In discussing her background, Rita shared the following:

I have three [children] ages fourteen, nine, and three. My oldest is in his first year at the
high school. He’s starting to feel like, “I’m the man in the house,” and he’s not. [I am
from] Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

I think it’s going to be a little bit easier to use the book (Mi Cartilla) [to teach Spanish to
others], of course, that’s my language. When you’re talking about your language you
think it’s going to be easy, but the difference between English and Spanish, and that
makes me confused a lot, that is the difference between one word is the way that you
write but sounds different. In Spanish, no. [English is all mixed up], and you have to
spell it. Sometimes, I know how may I talk to you, but I don’t know how may I spell
[what I am saying]. In Spanish, it’s all the same. If casa is house, casa is casa no matter
how you write it or however you say. It’s the same thing. Do you have a dictionary for
English and Spanish? (I gave Rita a bilingual dictionary which she used frequently
during the program).

When asked how her parents encouraged her schooling, Rosa replied:

Well, when I was in school, [all the] time. For example, we have same hours to do our
homework, everybody supposed to do it, and I do it with my kids. Like, when my mom
say it time to do homework, we shut up. But my kids, they want to fight with me.
“Mom, can I…?” But no, it’s time to read, it’s time to do homework. [I do that with my
child in high school as well]. My parents [did that] every single day. When I complete
college, I learn about business. Everything about different kinds of business. Here I’m housekeeping, but my customers, when they ask me about the attitude, I believe in the attitude, because it doesn’t matter what you do. If you do it by [being] honest, and if you do it with love, it’ll be great, but if you do it because you have to do that… the same thing for college. If you go to college for your parents, not for yourself, it’s really difficult. You never really appreciate that.

Don’t only tell [your children you what you have to do, show him with yourself. You do the correct example. [You have to have your own motivation], every single day. I know that depress[ion] is a mental symptom, but I think that depress[ion] is a luxury. You know what I mean? If you think, “I’m okay, I can do that, today is my day and I’m able to do that, I’m able to help,” then you can do that…If you have a good attitude, that will help you. Sometimes for me, this is personal, sometimes I look at me washing bathrooms, and I ask myself, “why [did I go] to college if I have to do this?” But in my [mind], my mother was, like, a normal woman. That helps me, because when you complete a different level, you think different. You only think like you can do it, and think positive. If you think negative only one time, you lose. If you stop to see what the others do—oh, she has better shoes than me—you lose a wonderful time. I don’t care what kind of shoes I have, because I have two. That’s it. So if you think like that, it’s better.

I try to explain to my kids. My parents, nobody explain to me why we are supposed to be in college or why we be a professional, and now I try to explain to my kids, “you’re going to be a professional for your futures, not for me. You don’t have to do what I want you to do. No. You can do whatever you want. But you have to study. You have no
choice.” And they don’t like that. “No, you’re not supposed to tell me that! That’s control!” That’s the truth, especially in this area. When you are able to learn every single day, it’s better for your brain and for yourself. You never know what you’re going to do tomorrow. Today you may be teacher, but what about tomorrow? What about in twenty years? You never know. You never have an idea of what you’re going to do in the future. So it’s better if you be ready for everything.

I have that trouble [of people having a negative mindset] especially in my own family, because teaching your kids, it’s difficult here, especially when you immigrate to that country and you come, like, you have a job there, you complete your college, you are somebody important there. And here, you have to start, step-by-step, and then you try to push your kids. Okay, appreciate everything that you have here, but they don’t, because they compare with the other kids. Nobody, especially us, Hispanic people, we have that trouble. They don’t [think it’s a problem] but for me that’s really, really, really bad if you see kids, like my own kids, 14 years old, like, “why do I have to study?” like, for example. They have an excellent [school] program. We don’t have that in my country, but here I think this is a big problem for young kids. Because kids ask, “why do I have to fight every single day if I can wait for a [welfare] check?” and that’s what I try to explain my kids. If you sit, watching only TV and video games, what’s going to happen to you in twenty years? What’s in the future? What do you do for yourself to feel proud of yourself, for your kids, for the rest of your family? And so that’s really difficult. And now, to be a teacher, I think every single day you learn something. You think you’re going to teach somebody and learn about somebody else. I’m able to help others, because I found help when I came here.
[I come to the school to help] depending on the day, because in the morning, I work. I’m busy, but I’m trying to keep close relationships with each teacher. So they let me know when they need me. Not only when they have parent-teacher meetings, but no, every single day, because that’s the way that they can tell me if I have something to do, something else to do, to help the teacher. Because sometime the parent think, “oh, she can do that, she the teacher,” but no, you have the first job, the principal job. It’s at my home, because I’m the mother. [Other people don’t think that way] because this is a circle. The grandparent teaching to the son and the son teaching to the grandson, and this is our circle… [nothing to stop it] in the future…It’s easy to let your kids do whatever they want. It’s more difficult to teach them every day. It’s hard, but you’re supposed to know [that this is your problem]…This is your [problem]. I’m supposed to help the teacher. I’m not supposed to be the enemy of the teacher. They have too many kids. So... it’s the attitude of each one person, or each one family.

When asked about ways she has been invited to participate, Rita replied:

I think calls [are best], because we receive too many flyers about the school. I read every one, but it’s more personal when you hear and you talk with somebody and you explain about what is the program or what do you want to do or what’s the idea. I never [have been asked to lead a program before]… this is [an] amazing program, and I like the way the school principal [does] her job cause she is thinking of others. They are not supposed to think, “Oh, we have to be worried about learning another language.” But if you see how this is one step more. If you are able to learn about different language, if you are able to talk to other parents, you are open to everyone. It opens [the communication].
I feel okay [about participating]. I think saying no, but I feel okay. That was a little bit stressful for me ‘cause I’m so full. My schedule full, but I like this. I don’t know how I may explain to you. [I like the idea of having different programs to connect with more people, to learn and to teach.] You teach me, and I can teach to others. So when you take time to think about it, you think, like, that would be good.

I would like to have [a school program that helps translate] all the papers that we receive every Tuesday, because not everyone needs it in Spanish. And I can read, and I can understand that… I know two families here that don’t understand exactly what the papers say, so that could be another program. And for example, when you have too many meetings with parents, if you put a little line, we have somebody to speak Spanish, that’s going to be better…Because in my case, for example, when I came, they start to blah blah blah blah, if I watch the TV in English, for example, the news on channel 8, if I keep my mind pay attention to what they say, I can understand that, but if too many people talking at the same time, I can’t translate in my mind. So that’s happened to other parents and the reality is that too many Hispanic families feel that. It’s like… frustrating. In my case, I prefer to come only when it’s personal [one on one], but if you call me, okay, we have fifteen [people] that is talking to you, I am not [going] to come. That’s difficult for me.

Seriah

Seriah, although unable to physically participate in the program sessions due to extreme health conditions which worsened soon after this interview, provided an extremely detailed account of some very serious situations in her life that led her to wanting to become involved in her children’s school. Her older sister, Tania, who had been living with Seriah for a short time accompanied her to the interview. Throughout the duration of the program, this 32-year-old
mother of two kept in touch almost weekly to update me on her health conditions. Each conversation ended with, “I’m hoping that I will be able to come next week. I am so excited to be part of this program.” Unfortunately, Seriah was too ill to make it into the school for the sessions. In order to make things slightly easier for her during this period, the school continued to allow her children to attend the childcare after school on Thursdays so that they could complete their homework and interact with the other children. Seriah began her interview on a very enthusiastic note:

I can’t wait [for this program]! I was looking forward to this, and you called me, and I was really excited… but I think they should do it for kids, too, and parents could work with kids that want to learn how to speak Spanish, like have a class where we teach the kids. I think that would be great. Like, for example, for the first-graders, we would do something simple—not hard, small. First, second, third, fourth, depending on what grade they were in and the level of Spanish. Even some of the kids that are here, they really don’t know Spanish. You know?

When asked if her parents were involved in her schooling, Seriah replied:

Not at all. We had a rough life growing up. My mother abandoned us and my father raised us, seven of us. He was an alcoholic and we never, never were allowed to do activities. Not allowed. He was strict about the homework, but he didn’t even really care. It was cleaning first, and if we didn’t finish our homework, it wouldn’t of mattered to him. [He only met with teachers] to tell them off for making us write ten times, or twenty times, or a hundred times...if we misbehaved or something. It was a pretty hard life. It’s really different than what I’m doing with my kids now.
I want to get involved with my kids because I don’t want them to grow up the way I did and finish school. I went through ninth grade but I’ve got my GED now, and I want them to go to college and do things, you know, because I’ve always wanted to be a teacher. That was my thing. I’ve always wanted to be a teacher, and I think being involved with the kids is important to them because they learn more. At home, like what I was telling you, when they come out of school we play teacher. I print out activities on the computer like math, social studies, science, spelling, sight words. They got their own folders, their own tablets, their own homework folders. I give them homework. They get it to me the next day, so they can do it either at nighttime or the next day or after school, but they gotta bring it back to me, and then they get a star. They get gifts and stuff like that if they do it, and gift certificates. They beg me to play the teacher. I’m so sick like, all this week I couldn’t play with them, and they were like “mommy!” and I was like, “No! Mommy’s sick!” and they were like “Mommy, you promised me!” I’m trying to get a chalkboard. I’m the principal. I tell them I’m the principal, man, you don’t want to come to the principal’s office. Yeah, but they do good. Like, Joniel [my son], I have him doing less than Marisol [my daughter] because he’s in second grade and she is in third, but I have him doing something... [I] sit him down and say you have to do it, no games, no nothing. That’s all you have to say. He finishes it fast, and then it’s right! He just don’t wanna do it, and I do cooking with him, too. Measurements...I like cooking, I like baking.
Sometimes I do it like a project. I make him bake something and do the measurements, and I make them write down what they’re doing and what they’re measuring and stuff like that, or we go outside and we’ll get leaves, and construction paper like this big [showed with hands], because I have everything in my home. I have everything for
school: crayons, sharpener, everything. And so they go outside, they get leaves, and we learn about like spring. They get certain leaves, flowers, things like that. They put them in a little bag, and they put it on the construction paper and talk about what kind of flower it is, stuff like that. They’re smart. They know. They’re just smart. My kids are smart, and I’m trying to get a chalkboard, but I can’t find none. I have fun. I give them stickers, like on their work, and then I have my teacher thing where I grade the work, and then they get report cards and stuff too. Oh, yes they do. I’ll put like 96% vocabulary on one, because I print them all out on the computer, activity sheets. Yeah, so that’s what I do, and then I also have them doing, like, if they read a certain amount of books, they get a prize or they get to go to Chuck ‘E’ Cheese, and they do. And they do that here [at the school]...I like reading now, too. When I was young, I hated reading. Now, I love it. They got a bookcase in their room. I got boxes of books downstairs. Like, books galore, right? I have so many books, it’s crazy, and I have bins of books that are theirs. I guess it’s ‘cause we never had that in our life where our parents pushed us to study or to go to school. I don’t want my kids to be like us. You know, I want them to have an education, to make something of themselves, because half of our family, psh, ain’t nothing. We live off of welfare and SSI and… that’s it. Half of our family. Most of our family. So if one or two graduated out of our family, that’s a lot. So I will be proud of my kids if they graduate. [My] parents passed away when I was twenty. And she (pointing to sister) was always the one in jail, and I was the one always out and taking care of my brothers, because I’m the youngest out of the girls, because I had younger brothers. But I’m the like, the head of the house. You know the one that got my head on my shoulders. My sister’s doing good right now. She’s helping me out now, but I’m like the mom.
They look up to me and you know. I wanna help…. I want my kids to grow up and have a better life, and even though I’m sick and I’m struggling in life, I want my kids to be good. If I die, or something would happen to me, I will be proud of my kids, ‘cause they’re somebody and they depend on themselves like I did. I’ve got a lot of sicknesses. I’m HIV Positive, fibromyalgia, bone cancer… I have so many problems, it’s crazy. Depression, anxiety, I’m ADHD, high blood pressure.

It’s my dream [to volunteer in a program like this]. I’ve always wanted to be a teacher. This is what I want to do. Teach, and it’s hard for me. I was trying to get into something where it starts at 8:00 in the morning to like 3:15 in the school where I could do something with the kids. That’s what I really want to do. Like last year I did reading. I would read to the kids. It kept my mind off my sickness. It kept me strong. So even with all my sicknesses, it would keep me from thinking like that I’m gonna die, or I’m sick, or I could be home like down and stressed. When I was here all the kids loved me. It would make me happy, like brighten up. I would go home and be happy. It would give me energy, and I loved it.

I am [getting treated for all different things]. It’s a shame that, well I was twenty years old, my dad had just passed away, and their father, my kids’ father, was forty-seven years old and I was twenty. And I guess because I was so lonely, I got with him. I was with him for eight years and he gave me HIV. I didn’t know when I was pregnant with my daughter, I didn’t know when I was pregnant with my son. I found out after my son, and I was so young. It was a shame, but I did a video for young girls that are HIV positive that are scared to come out. I did a video for a support group, and my daughter wrote a book about how she takes care of me—my seven year old. About my sickness...She made
her own book, and I made a video, you know, to inspire them...I’m thirty-two now, but when I was twenty, it wasn’t easy. I was in the street, and then to find out that I was sick and I had my two kids, you know, thank God they’re not sick, it was hard—and to have nobody. My sister was always in jail, my brother is too. I took care of them, they’re younger than me. My older sisters were always in jail, and I’m the baby. It was like terrible. [My sister] is doing well now and helping me a lot. I just hope she keeps it that way. Because it’s been three weeks she’s been out, out of six years in [jail]. So I’m just hoping.

[To be involved in the school], I went to parent teacher conferences, I did lunch aid, too, like I told you. The kids loved it, every time I come they be like, “Ms. Seriah! You coming tomorrow?” or when I was sick and I didn’t come the kids would be like, “Please, can you come?” like they missed me, and I think they learned a lot from me, too, because I treated them not only like I was teaching them, but I treated them with the confidence that they could come and talk to me about anything. I haven’t been contacted about volunteering [in a leadership role] before… I always come to the school and ask. They don’t really tell us a lot about how we can get involved. I mean… they do, but not so much as I would like for them to do, because I’m the one always begging them to call me. Every day I’m calling them, like, “Ginny, you got something for me?” I want to come in, at least from 12-2.

I felt good when you asked me to be part of this program. This is what I like to do. I felt like I could do something for somebody. I felt like I would learn something out of it too. Because I don’t think I know everything. You know, sometimes you may learn. I learn a lot. Each day people learn more. I know how to write it, I know how to read it, I’m good
at Spanish. Like I said, I made a video for young girls that are HIV positive that are afraid to come out and say it or are afraid to get tested. And, you know, I felt proud of myself. Because who would put their face out there or put their name on TV and say, “I’m HIV Positive”? Nobody! And my brothers and sisters were encouraging me not to do it, and I said, you know what, I’m going to do it, because maybe I can change somebody’s life out there. Maybe I could teach something to some young girls who are not using protection to use protection. To know what I went through even though I was vulnerable at the time because I was twenty years old, my dad had just passed away, I was in the street, I was pregnant, you know, I was vulnerable at the time. I didn’t have nobody to run to. I was homeless, and look what happened to me. I was protecting myself. That’s the thing. All my sisters were prostitutes. I never ever in my life did that, and I was always protecting myself. I was always the one with the long relationship, and look what happened to me. Yeah, it’s not [fair], but I see it this way, maybe this had to happen for a reason because God made me stronger than what I was going to be. Maybe something else would have happened. Maybe now that I’m sick that brung me to where I’m at now. To have my kids and be good and not be running in the streets and doing worse things, I think. It’s hard for me. I cry. I still suffer. I don’t know if you see it in my face. Sometimes I want to cry. It’s hard, because I was twenty. I was just… I was a young girl. And now that I’m HIV Positive I got all these sicknesses on top. It kills me, but I see it the positive way. I see it like, God’s good. And God knows what he does, because who knows where I would be at right now. I got my house—I own my house. I got my things. I don’t need nothing. I’m good. I thank God. I would love to come [to the school] all the time. I just keep my mind away from everything.”
Noemi

Noemi, 36, considered herself to be a mother of four. As the biological mother of two sons, she was also a mother-figure to her niece and nephew who are twins. The twin’s mother suffered from bouts of depression and other physical ailments which often left them in the care of their aunt. Noemi’s niece and nephew attended the local junior high with her older son. Her younger son was in fifth grade at the elementary school. Noemi frequently participated in parent-teacher conferences and other evening school events. Her strong sense of family responsibility often kept her home, caring for relatives including her mother and her sister’s children. Although Noemi was a very active participant in the planning and development of the program, she was unable to participate in the program beyond the planning session due to a family emergency. During the first week of the program, Noemi’s mother suffered a stroke and needed a considerable care. Noemi sent a note to school with her son explaining what had happened to her mother and apologizing as she, unfortunately, would be unable to participate in the program sessions. In a later phone conversation, Noemi assured us that her mother would eventually be fine; however, she needed to keep her schedule open to care for her mother until her condition improved.

The Learners

Five mothers participated in the program as learners. All of these mothers had an extremely limited knowledge of basic Spanish. While the program did not exclude Latina mothers who wanted to learn Spanish, none of the mothers participating as learners in the Spanish Teaching and Learning Program were Latina. The learners were also given
pseudonyms. The group of learners included the following: Melissa, Tashauna, JoEllen, Marcy, and Haley.

**Melissa**

Melissa, 32, had two daughters attending the elementary school and a 4-year-old son. When asked to participate in the program, Melissa’s first response was that she needed to check with her husband. Melissa and her family held traditional and conservative Mennonite beliefs which included wearing head coverings and skirts for the women. As a stay at home mother, Melissa had many responsibilities in the home that kept her busy. She also had a small sewing business through which she created and sold purses and other items at various markets and craft shows.

**Tashauna**

Tashauna, a 37-year-old African American mother of three was eager to join the program. She shared that in her job, which consisted of providing extra enrichment and learning opportunities to students in the district, she often came across situations where it would be helpful to speak basic Spanish. Tashauna had one daughter in high school and twins (a son and daughter) who attended second grade at the elementary school. She said that her main reason for joining the program was because her younger daughter was really interested in learning Spanish, and she wanted to be able to share what she learned during the group with her daughter.

**JoEllen**

JoEllen, 34, had four children (two boys and two girls) attending two different elementary schools. Her two youngest children had been accepted into a specialized bilingual program through which a large percentage of their school day was taught in Spanish. Much of their homework was also in Spanish. JoEllen was very grateful when asked to participate in the
program. She longed to better interact in basic Spanish with her children who were participating in the bilingual program. She also wanted to be able to help them with their homework. JoEllen worked in a family candy business which employed a number of refugee families living in the area. She expressed a strong desire to help these families become successful in their new environment. JoEllen expressed a strong desire to learn about other cultures and valued a collectivistic mentality through which people worked together for the common good of the group.

Marcy

Marcy, a 35-year-old mother of four, had three children in the elementary school and a daughter in high school. She worked in healthcare and hoped to learn some Spanish vocabulary that might help her to communicate better with some of her Spanish-speaking patients.

Haley

Haley, 38, had two sons. One son was eighteen and no longer in school. The other son was a third grader at the elementary school. When asked to participate, Haley was very open to participating in the program but then did not attend any sessions beyond the first day. She did not provide a reason for not continuing in the program.

The Facilitator/Researcher

I participated as both the facilitator and observer throughout the program. I am a former English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher, currently serving as a district ESL Coordinator. Through my background which, beyond the field of ESL, includes a degree in Elementary Education, Language and Literacy Education as well as proficiency in Spanish, I was able to interact with participants bilingually. As the facilitator, I was present to help guide each session,
collect necessary materials, and serve as a point of contact for the parents participating in the program.

**Planning Session**

Upon committing to participating as a teacher in the program, the Latina mothers were asked to join the facilitators for a planning session through which additional information regarding the program was addressed. The planning session was held the Thursday afternoon prior to the start of the program for approximately an hour. In order to maximize the efficiency of the limited amount of planning time and in an effort to best honor the time of the group, I prepared for the planning session by developing a general agenda for the meeting (Appendix H). The goals for the planning session were to do formal introductions, provide an overview of the program, schedule individual interviews with the teachers, and collaboratively develop a program schedule outlining what topics could be covered during each of the eight weeks. Several of the teachers were unable to attend the planning session due to scheduling conflicts. Those in attendance included: Maria, Evalisa, and Noemi.

To begin the session, I introduced myself. I informed the teachers that I would attend each of the sessions to support and observe; however, the teachers were encouraged to be actively engaged in planning for and instructing the learners throughout the program. I explained that their expertise with speaking and understanding Spanish would be very necessary and helpful to the learning process of others. The mothers then introduced themselves and shared their connection to the school and information about their children. Throughout their introductions, all of the mothers demonstrated a high regard for the elementary school. Maria stated that, “they give me a lot of help” while both Evalisa and Noemi shared that they liked the school as well. Maria had arrived at the session with her mother, baby grandson, and nephew in
addition to her sons who attended the elementary school. Maria’s mother did not actively participate in the session but remained at the elementary school during the planning session and cared for the infant.

After the introductions, all participants were given a program calendar (Appendix D) and a copy of the *Spanish for Gringos* (Harvey, 2008). When discussing the program dates, Evalisa brought up the fact that our first session was the same afternoon as the school’s “Welcome Back” night. She was worried that it may be difficult to attend both, as she had already been asked to volunteer at the sign-in table for this event. I reviewed the times of each program and discussed how it would be possible for Evalisa to attend both events and provide dinner for her daughters in between. After talking through this possible conflict, the group agreed that the calendar did not need further changes.

I provided copies of the *Spanish for Gringos* text, as the book had been suggested by a colleague who taught a Spanish course to adult learners (Harvey, 2008). The mothers agreed that this text should be the main reference for the teaching sessions; however, the mothers decided it would be best to not necessarily follow the topics in the order in which they were written. Prior to the session, I had typed a list of topics in the order they were presented in the text, and the mothers then engaged in a conversation about switching the topics around and which topics would best fit with each session. The mothers decided to begin with Spanish introductions during the first session and also included letter sounds (particularly vowel sounds) to the agenda for the following week.

The mothers then began to discuss the differences between Spanish and English. Noemi discussed how the best approach would be to teach sounds in Spanish as part of syllables rather than in isolation. She made this distinction by giving an example of how her son’s teachers had
taught him to read every sound in isolation in English and then blend the word together. Noemi described that when she was taught to read in Spanish, she was taught to read in groups of several letters at a time. She stated:

English is so different than Spanish. English you do everything by each sound. We do the same thing, but… you know… we pronounce it completely, and after we break it down like you guys do it, instead of one letter we do two letters, and then three letters, and then four letters, and then so on and so on.

Noemi and Maria began to think of other teaching materials based on their experience with learning Spanish. La Cartilla was a popular material the mothers felt would add value to the program. La Cartilla is a short magazine that is used to help teach beginning Spanish by introducing syllables and basic sentences. The mothers began discussing how they could get a copy of La Cartilla for the program. Evalisa suggested that it would be great if someone had a friend in Puerto Rico. Noemi suggested that maybe the facilitators could get a copy online and then keep it at the school. After the planning session was over, Maria approached the researcher individually and shared that she could get a copy of La Cartilla from her mother-in-law in Puerto Rico. When asked if it would be too much trouble, she said, “No, it’s fine. My mother-in-law she do anything for me.”

Upon deciding to teach letter sounds first, the mothers began to identify more language differences between Spanish and English and the confusion which can be experienced when learning another language. The conversation switched to describing difficulties that were personally experienced when trying to teach their own children to read and write in Spanish, since their children were only being formally educated in English at school. Evalisa stated that the only thing her daughter says in Spanish is “buenas noches”. Noemi explained:
It’s going to be hard for [the mothers] to do in the beginning too, because you are going to give them the letters and [they will] be like, “okay, is it in English or is it in Spanish?” Because the ‘ah’ in English is the ‘e’ in Spanish, I mean, you know they’re gonna keep messing up. They’re gonna try to focus on one thing but then mess up on another one, and I know by experience, because I’m trying to teach Carlos [my son] how to write and pronounce things in Spanish, and he goes way off. So I gave up… I really do give up.

In addition to letter sounds, the teachers decided to include the alphabet in the first session as well as Spanish introductions and greetings. When I asked if she would be willing to lead the alphabet section, Maria agreed, although she had a frightened look. When I asked if she was sure she was ok with that, Maria replied, “I’m scared, because this is my first time...Oh my God, when I was in school- you see me here, I just listen...I’m so nervous.” The group reassured her that she would be great, and that she could do this. In looking over the greetings vocabulary in the text, Noemi exclaimed, “There is a little bit of a problem, because our words in Spanish are different than [the book’s]. Like, for us a cake is a cake and for them a cake is something else.”

Evalisa continued this idea that Spanish vocabulary words may be different depending on the country from which they originated. She discussed that some words in one Spanish culture may mean something offensive to those of another Spanish culture. She described:

We have this name for this thing. This thing we call it this. So if you’re going to talk to someone you have to say it this way so they don’t get offended, because there’s people that will get offended with that word, and like… it has different meanings for both our cultures. Not only Puerto Rican, but there’s Dominican words that we don’t understand, and when we finally do understand, we’re like, “oh, okay, that’s what it is.”
I reassured the mothers of the value they brought to the table as native Spanish speakers and with their ability to share differences in vocabulary words as they come up so that the learners can understand multiple words and the form or forms that are most prevalent in this community.

Throughout the session, the mothers had been taking notes to develop a revised draft of a flexible schedule of topics for the program (Appendix C). The mothers decided that certain concepts, such as those that pertained directly to the lives of the learners and basic foundational skills that were necessary in order to move forward, were more important than other topics. The mothers also wanted to focus on vocabulary the learners could use right away. Some of the essential topics included: simple introductions, sounds, and vocabulary that pertained directly to the jobs or careers that the learners may have. At Evalisa’s suggestion, the mothers also decided that, in the future, topics should be moved or changed as necessary depending on the needs of the group and the pacing of the lessons. The mothers agreed to devote time to their partners as needed throughout the week to solidify concepts or provide extra practice. At the end of the session, the mothers expressed some apprehension about leading the program. For example, Maria stated that she did not want to divide up the sessions and lead one or two by herself. She would rather do the sessions “all together” with the rest of the teachers. Despite this apprehension about being a leader in the program, the initial planning session ended on a positive note with the group agreeing on a plan for the first week.

**Initial Findings**

Throughout the initial interviews and the planning session, several findings regarding the Latina mothers’ and their identity development began to emerge. These findings revealed several themes including the Latina mothers’ overall apprehension about assuming the role of
leader as well as their goal of both learning from and contributing to the program while serving as leaders. Other findings included the high value placed on interpersonal connections, and the Latina mothers’ desire to be role models for their children.

**Having and Moving Beyond Apprehension**

When approached about becoming a teacher in the program, the Latina mothers were collectively nervous and slightly confused about the purpose of the program. None of the mothers participating in the program as teachers had ever been asked to take a leadership role in a parent program within the school before. Furthermore, the mothers had never been approached by the school to engage in a project or program because of a strength or asset that they possessed. The mothers initially had a number of questions about the purpose of the program. Evalisa mentioned that she had originally thought the program was designed for parents to learn English. She said she was confused, because she spoke English very fluently and did not understand why the school would be contacting her to join a program for Spanish-speaking parents to learn English. Once she realized the true nature of the program, she was eager to help, although still a bit nervous because of her perceived lack of teaching background. Noemi described that she, too, was apprehensive about teaching when she was asked to lead a particular activity during the planning session.

While Evalisa and Noemi’s apprehension stemmed from feeling insecure about physically teaching the material, Maria and Rita’s anxiety was related to their limited English proficiency. Rita was especially anxious and revealed that she contemplated saying no when asked to help with the program because of her self-doubt and busy work schedule. She ultimately decided to participate because of the high respect she had for the school and the principal with whom she had formed a positive relationship. Rita’s story about how she
typically avoided coming to the school if it was a program for a large number of people was easily relatable to Maria as well. Rita shared that when multiple people were speaking in English at the same time, it was very overwhelming and frustrating, because she did not have adequate time to translate in her head. She declared that this program would be much easier for her, since we would be working in a small group and the parents would mostly be speaking in what she described as “her” language.

Despite the fact that the mothers were going to be speaking in their native language, thus reducing the existing language barrier within the school, they were still nervous about assuming the leadership role and acting as a teacher in the program. During the planning session, they opted to all work together to lead each session rather than having one person take the lead. Their collaborative efforts to lead the program began were established early on.

**Motivating Learning and Contributing Information**

While the teachers expressed anxiety over taking a leadership role in the program, they felt they had something important to contribute which helped to convince them to reach outside their comfort zone and assume this leadership role. The mothers expressed excitement over having the opportunity to share something with which they felt knowledgeable (their language). In addition to their excitement over sharing their language, the mothers were also eager to share their expertise regarding various materials and techniques for teaching Spanish. They bonded over the common method through which they had learned to read in Spanish and decided that the *La Cartilla* book should become part of their lessons with the learners. Maria was thrilled at the prospect of being able to contribute a copy of the book which she planned to secure from her mother-in-law in Puerto Rico.
In addition to contributing both materials and methods for teaching basic Spanish, the teachers were also glad to volunteer their time to the school community. Maria mentioned that whenever the school asks her to attend an event, she comes. Evalisa and Seriah echoed this sentiment. Rita made statements which alluded to the fact that she felt she had more to add to society than what she was currently able to contribute in her role as a housekeeper. One of her statements which had a large impact was when she stated, “Sometimes I look at myself washing bathrooms and I ask myself, why did I go to college if I have to do this?” Rita continued by sharing that, overall, she was excited to be part of the program. She, along with the other mothers, felt this program was a wonderful opportunity to open communication within the school and community.

In addition to increasing communication, the prospect of this program seemed to give the mothers hope. This idea of providing hope particularly related to Seriah who was extremely thrilled about the program and shared that being a teacher was one of her biggest dreams in life. Despite her serious illnesses, the idea of this program seemed to bring light to Seriah who shared that it felt good to be asked, because she was able to do something positive for someone else. Maria, who had recently lost a significant amount of weight, was excited to become part of the program and proudly show her face at the school.

Throughout the planning session, the teachers began to contribute greatly to the program by discussing and drafting an outline of exactly what would be the most beneficial information and methods of instruction for the mothers who were participating as learners. During this session, the Latina mothers leaned on their background knowledge of Spanish language and Spanish instruction to form a program that would best serve the needs of the other mothers.
Interestingly, in addition to contributing to the program sessions, the Latina mothers also hoped to learn a lot throughout the program as well. Several of the mothers shared they hoped to learn English throughout the program, despite the fact that the main focus of the program was to teach Spanish. Maria shared that because the learners would be native English speakers and she would need to communicate with them in English on a basic level, it would help her to practice English in a small group setting. Maria also shared the importance of learning a new language through the context of your most proficient language. She shared that directly translating English words into Spanish helped her remember the words in English. She hoped that this technique would be used to teach Spanish throughout the program so that she would benefit from seeing the connection between English and Spanish words. For her, the benefit would be to strengthen her English. She shared that the prospect of learning more English as one of the main reasons she decided to become involved. She stated that one of her main goals for learning English better was to help her children with their homework.

In connection with the desire to learn English throughout the program, some of the teachers, particularly Raina, discussed the idea that their children’s English proficiency was stronger than theirs. Raina shared a reciprocal teaching model between her and her son, as he taught her more English, and she taught him Spanish. This idea of reciprocal teaching aligned with what the mothers hoped would occur throughout the program as well.

**Fostering Interpersonal Connections**

In addition to the hope that the program would lend itself to reciprocal teaching between the Latina mothers and other mothers in the group, the teachers also placed a high value on interpersonal connections with others, especially their families. For example, throughout the individual interviews, the Latina mothers brought along family members, either because they felt
supported by these family members or because they were caring for them. For example, Maria brought her mother, nephew, and grandson. Seriah brought her sister, and Raina brought her boyfriend. Raina shared her desire for interpersonal familiarity by stating, “I just feel more comfortable when he is here.” Noemi ended up leaving the program after the planning session due to her responsibility to care for her mother who had a stroke. Placing value on strong interpersonal connections represented characteristics of collectivistic cultures. As part of a collectivistic culture, the Latina mothers naturally functioned as a collective unit rather than as individuals. Outside of the family unit, the teachers also formed bonds with one another throughout the planning session. As they planned together, the mothers instantly connected over their similarities including their common language and experiences growing up in schools where Spanish was the primary language of instruction.

In addition to valuing family connections, the mothers also hoped to strengthen interpersonal connections with other mothers at the school. Rita shared that she felt the program had remarkable potential for opening communication. She appreciated the idea that this was not just another program to teach English, but, rather, to foster communication at a different level by strengthening another language that was extremely prevalent in the community. She hoped that by increasing communication, she would be able to connect with other mothers of students in the school whom she may not have felt comfortable approaching before.

Living as Role Models

While all of the mothers hoped to connect with other adults, they also revealed a strong desire to use the program to help build positive connections with their children as well. Specifically, the Latina mothers wanted to “live by example” as positive role models for their children. While these women had little formal experience with teaching others, they did
recognize their importance as their children’s first teacher. This notion was expressed by Maria who helped her children with basic concepts such as numbers and colors when they were very young. Raina also shared that she found joy in helping her son learn through the reciprocal teaching of English and Spanish described previously. Seriah shared her dream of one day becoming a teacher and the strong emphasis she placed on learning and teaching within her own home which she fostered by playing school in the evenings to help her children grow academically.

For most of the teachers, although anxious about assuming a leadership role, they wanted to demonstrate for their own children the importance of taking risks and doing something to help others as well as the school community. Maria revealed that after losing a significant amount of weight, she finally felt comfortable coming in to the school and wanted to show her children that she was useful to the school and proud to be there. Evalisa shared that while her own parents were not involved in her schooling, she placed a great importance on being involved and communicating this with her daughter. She wanted her daughter to understand that it is natural to help others and the school. While she was unsure of why she chose to parent differently from her own parents, she did share that her childhood was difficult and she did not want her own daughter to have the same experience. Seriah also recounted a story of growing up in extremely difficult circumstances. She hoped to demonstrate another way of life for her own children. Although Raina had previously not been a positive role model for her child due to her own afflictions, she hoped that taking a part in this program would contribute to her goal of consistently acting as a role model for her son. She was very proud of herself for learning to become responsible and for regaining custody of her son.
Rita’s account of her desire to lead by example was especially moving. In moving from the Dominican Republic to the United States, Rita detailed a deep understanding of the difficulty of starting over and working from the ground up as a housekeeper, despite having a college education in the Dominican Republic. She clearly stated that she wanted to instill ethics and positive values in her children, despite what they may be learning from society. She shared that teaching by example goes much further than telling your children what to do. While she was nervous about teaching in the program, she wanted to participate to show her children the importance of taking risks, working hard, and helping others. In a powerful statement, Rita declared, “I believe in attitude, because no matter what you do, if you do it by [being] honest, if you do it with love, you will be great.”

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter discussed the initial planning of the Spanish Teaching and Learning Program as well as provided an overview of the participants including the teachers, learners, and facilitators. The chapter also focused the teacher’s stories which were brought to life through their individual interviews and provided insight into their past educational experiences, current level of involvement in their children’s schooling, and stories of both pain and success which have helped to frame the personality and experiences of each of these Latina mothers. Chapter five will present the remaining phases of the action research project, described throughout the context of the eight-week program as well as the post-interviews conducted with both the teachers and the learners.
CHAPTER FIVE

ACTION RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Throughout chapter five, details regarding each of the eight program sessions are outlined to demonstrate the ongoing action research cycle of planning, acting, observing and reflecting. These phases occurred cyclically throughout the program and will be put into the context of the topics discussed and the intercultural interactions which evolved among the teachers and the learners participating in the program. The purpose of this study was to examine the identity development of Latina mothers as they led this parent education program and to examine the intercultural relationships that formed as a result of this parent involvement experience.

Because the participants actively participated in the action research cycle and led the sessions, this study was an example of participatory action research. Furthermore, the leadership or teaching role throughout this study was given to the Latina mothers, a population frequently marginalized in society. By drawing upon the Latina mothers’ pre-existing funds of knowledge, the teaching role had a strengths-based foundation which led to very rich conversations among the participants and very thoughtful reflections presented throughout the post-program interviews which have been included within this chapter.

Session One

The agenda for session one (Appendix I), illustrates the topics that were to be covered throughout the duration of the first hour: program information and introductions, the secrets to sound making, the alphabet, Spanish introductions, and family vocabulary. The group agreed that modifications to the agenda could be made as needed and any topics that were missed could be moved to future sessions. During session one, the group covered the first three items on the agenda; however, there was not sufficient time to begin discussing family vocabulary. The
teachers who were present included Maria, Evalisa, and Rita. The learners in attendance were JoEllen, Tashauna, Haley, and Marcy. The following sections review information from the notes and recordings from session one.

**Program Information and Introductions**

I began the first session by sharing that the group was very fortunate to have teachers who are experts in Spanish helping to lead the program. I also thanked the learners for their desire to learn Spanish and commended the entire group for their willingness to devote their time and energy to the group. After a brief overview of the program and review of the agenda which was developed by the Latina mothers during the planning session (Appendix C), participants were asked to go around the table and briefly introduce themselves in English. Rita introduced herself first by stating the following:

> Hi, my name is Rita. I have two kids here in fourth grade and [preschool]. My English is like, maybe your Spanish...I was thinking that maybe one of you need to learn a specific words. For example, if you work in cleaning like me, I work in housekeeping, you need to know Clorox, or hot water, agua caliente, what’s most important for you right now, because this is Spanish, but it’s Spanish basic. So we will try and we are able to help you, but it is short time to learn. So if you are interested in something specific in the language, you can ask me, or ask us... And then we can help you with each one...Like, my kid has fever, fiebre in Spanish, Something like that. What you need for now.

JoEllen, one of the learners, went on to share some brief information about her connection to the school and her reason for joining the program. She shared:

> I have two kids here at Madison Elementary, in fifth and fourth grade and then two children at Jefferson Elementary in the Spanish bilingual program. They’re in
kindergarten and first grade. I’m happy to be here because my son’s homework [in the Spanish bilingual program] is starting to get harder and it’s like, oh no, crash course in Spanish! My husband knows a little bit, but any help we can get is great.

Haley, another teacher simply shared that she had two kids ages eighteen and eight. Evalisa, a teacher shared her unique situation of having two children, a daughter and stepdaughter, in first grade. Marcy shared that she had three children, two sons and a daughter, attending the elementary school and one daughter in high school. Rita chimed in that she also had a child at the high school. Both women rolled their eyes in a joking manner and laughed to imply the significant challenges of raising teenagers. Tashauna, another learner shared her interesting reason for joining the program. She stated, “I have two second-graders here, they’re twins, and the one really wants to learn Spanish bad. So that’s sort of why I decided to do this, to teach some stuff to her.” Tashauna also shared that she had an older daughter as well. Maria, a teacher who appeared to be the most timid of the group, shared briefly about herself as well. She shared with the group that she had two children at the school in first and third grade. She stated, “I don’t speak too much English, but I want to learn.” After completing these introductions, the women were ready to begin covering the first item on the agenda.

The Secrets to Sound Making

Before beginning to practice letter sounds in Spanish, I first checked with the teachers to make sure they still wanted to start with the secrets to sound making or alter the plan. Evalisa said, “I think they should do sounds before they [learn anything else].” She then began to lead the group in practicing various sounds in Spanish as outlined in the *Spanish for Gringos* (Harvey, 2008) text. Evalisa began reviewing consonant sounds which were paired with vowel sounds to create syllables. For example, she discussed breaking up the word qué. She explained:
It means what, it’s pronounced k-e-h, just like that. Qué, and it’s like when you start a question. That’s immediately how you’re going to start. Like, “what is the weather like?” or “what is that?” “Qué es eso...Okay. So the second word would be “Qui” and as you can say, it’s k-e-e. Qui. And then there are certain words that have the “que” sound in them. It says “pequeño.” The qué is in the middle. Pequeño. Another word would be porqué. Or queso, which is cheese, but it doesn’t matter. Any time you see q-u-e, it’s que. It doesn’t matter if it’s beginning, middle, or end.” Evalisa paused and I pointed out how Evalisa was making the sounds in a very short and clipped manner which was typical of native speakers, so that the other mothers would begin to notice and mirror Evalisa’s sounds.

Rita chimed in to describe the importance of the vowels and how in Spanish, the vowel sounds do not change as they do in many English words. She stated, “...the sounds of the vocales [the vowels]. This is the special key. A, no, /ah/. Every time it’s /ah/. Or e, always /eh/.” Marcy exclaimed that it is very confusing how the vowels sounds differ in English. Rita validated her sentiment by stating, “I confuse everything [in English].”

Evalisa then continued by reviewing more sounds in the form of syllables such as ‘ji’ and ‘je’. She was careful to explain to the group that the j in these syllables actually makes the /h/ sound. I explained to the learners that the teachers had decided to do a brief sound review at the beginning of each session and that Maria was able to secure a copy of La Cartilla which the mothers described as being an essential element for helping to teach the sounds in Spanish.

Evalisa proceeded to go over several other sounds and then and clarified the pronunciation of one of the syllables for Tashauna who repeated the word out loud several times. Evalisa stated that the /ll/ sound in Spanish made the /j/ sound in English. Haley remarked that
the way that Evalisa was pronouncing the sound with a /j/ was different that what the book had written which was /y/. Evalisa described that she had grown up saying /ll/ as the /j/ sound in English. I chimed in to say that this letter was pronounced differently among various Latino cultures and countries and that the learners would most likely hear it pronounced with a /j/ sound in the community.

Evalisa reviewed the sounds with the group once more. At the end, Rita told the group they did a good job. The teachers then began to review the vowel sounds in isolation. Rita began to say each vowel and the group repeated the sounds aloud. I wrote the vowels on the front whiteboard for visual reference. After Rita demonstrated the appropriate pronunciation of the vowels, Evalisa referred back to the La Cartilla resource which had been mentioned previously. She explained:

That book is a book that, at least I was raised in Puerto Rico, I don’t know if everybody was, they traditionally use that book when you start in elementary school. It has every single alphabet letter, a, b, c, d, and then it just tells you what it sounds like and puts some words with a, and then it goes b, and b with some of the vocales. Sorry, vowels. If it’s b-a, it’s bah. If it’s b-e, It’s beh. So that’s what it does. It breaks down everything, and then at the end of the book it starts putting words together and sentences together. So it’s actually really good, I think it’s a really good book.

I described how Maria had gotten this book all the way from Puerto Rico to help support the class. Maria, looking very shy remarked, “Yeah, that’s why I bring it. My mother-in-law [got it for me].” The learners then began practicing some consonant/vowel combinations featuring consonants as directed by the teachers (example: da, de, di, do, du). Maria stated:
And everyone can have an idea. For example, you can practice with [someone] later. For example, p. You know, if a is /ah/, p and a is pa. So you can practice it with [one another] or with [different vowels]. T and a is ta. Ta, te, ti, to, tu. The key is the sound of the [vowel].”

The learners agreed that they understood what had been discussed so far with the sounds and were ready to move on; however, they wanted to review and practice the sounds multiple times throughout the course.

**The Alphabet**

After a brief introduction into sound making in Spanish, Maria began going over the names of the letters of the Spanish alphabet. Throughout the letter introduction, she read the name of the letter out loud and the group repeated. Evalisa and Rita assisted at times and also shared some differences in how they spoke Spanish verses what the book was stating. Because the Latina mothers had learned Spanish in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, some of the information differed from the text which was based off of European Spanish (also referred to as traditional Spain Spanish). The mothers pointed out several examples of this. For example, the b sound in the book had a soft /b/ sound. The mothers pronounced this with a soft /v/ sound. Also, the Latina mothers were taught one name for the letter ‘w’ where as the book was sharing a different name.

After Maria went through all over the letters of the alphabet, Rita corrected her on her pronunciation of the letter ‘j’... No es jeh, es jota. I’m Dominican. Maybe it’s different. Evelyn agreed with Rita stating, “It’s jota. We’re confusing j and g. but they’re not the same. You know what I mean? If you say jota, that’s different than jeh.”
After the ‘g’ and ‘j’ discussion, Maria appeared embarrassed that she had misread one of the letters. I reassured her by telling her she did a great job introducing the letters. I then challenged the mothers to sing a song that reviewed the letters of the alphabet in a silly manner that would hopefully reduce any tension which had been created when Maria mis-read the letter.

**Spanish Introductions**

After checking to ensure the group was ready to move on, the mothers began to discuss basic introductions in Spanish which were outlined in the text. Evalisa shared:

So “hola” is the one general greeting, hello, and then we have the other three buenos dias, buenas tardes, and buenas noches. You’ll see buenos dias, good morning or good day, buenas tardes, good afternoon, and buenas noches, good evening or goodnight.

After practicing the pronunciation of the greetings with the learners, the Latina mothers began to share insight as to which greetings were most commonly used as well as other terms which were not listed in the book. Evalisa shared, “We always use hola, buenos dias, buenas tardes, buenas noches, and adios, just the general.” Maria described that the term nos vemos was also frequently used. The learners were then challenged to remember some of the vocabulary which had just been discussed. They were asked to identify a term for goodbye. Marcy said “adios” with the emphasis on the o. Rita corrected her and encouraged her to change her pronunciation to adios. Haley contributed by accurately pronouncing another term for goodbye.

When asked if she had any prior Spanish background she stated:

Just my ex-husband, that’s it. I know how to say “pass the ashtray” and “thank you,” that’s about it. His dad didn’t speak English. He was from Cuba. He spoke very little English and his girlfriend was from Puerto Rico and everybody smoked. So we’d always
have to say give me the ashtray, you know, because everybody was always smoking. So that was the first thing I learned.

The group then moved to discussing more courtesy expressions on the next page of the book. Rita described that halo, bueno, and diga are all appropriate to use when answering the phone. Rita mentioned that her preferred way to answer the phone was by saying “Halo.” Evalisa replied that she just says hello, and Maria’s preference was to answer the phone by saying hola. Evalisa culminated the discussion by stating, “These are just the generic words that you use on a daily basis, so it’s kind of just throwing them out there for you.”

The learners used their books to practice appropriate responses to an initial interaction with another person. Each learner paired with a teacher or facilitator to practice basic Spanish introductions. The learners were very engaged in the activity and were eager to work with their “expert” partners one on one. At one point when practicing, Haley said, “Now, with the usted, that’s the polite version, right? Like you would use it with anyone you don’t know?” Evalisa replied, “It’s a respect thing. Usually you’d use it a lot with elders. Anytime you speak to an elder you say usted.” Rose contributed to the answer by saying, “Especially if they’re a senior. Anytime it’s a senior it’s usted, especially if it’s a sir, or a miss, or a missus.”

After practicing Spanish introductions in pairs, the hour was nearly complete. Since family vocabulary was not discussed during this session, it was decided that we would add this to our agenda for the following week. The mothers were asked to bring a picture of their family to the next session if possible, so they could refer to the photo when practicing their family vocabulary.

At the end of the session, JoEllen stated, “I’m really excited to hear you guys [the Latina mothers] talk more, because I really like the accent, you know, like, we sound so English when
we’re reading.” The other learners nodded in agreement to show their appreciation for the expertise of the Latina mothers leading the session.

Reflections

The mothers were given the choice to complete reflection sheets and turn them in right away or return them the following week. Maria did not fill one out there, stating she would like to do it later and bring it back the following week. Rita expressed an interest in utilizing a Spanish/English dictionary throughout all the sessions. One had been made available for the first session, and it was decided that the dictionary would remain in the room for use during future sessions. Rita mentioned that she was still nervous about participating but thought the program was very beneficial. Evalisa was happy to be able to help with the program but could not identify anything she had learned about herself as a teacher during this session. Two learners submitted reflection sheets. From the learner’s perspective, the session was great and they were thrilled to be part of the learning experience. One wrote, “I love that moms from Madison Elementary who are native Spanish speakers can help those of us who are not.” Another note, “I am a nurse, so for me I would like to learn medical terms or conversations.” The mothers also noted that it would be helpful to continue to break into small groups or partners to practice conversation in the future.

Session Two

Session two began by quickly discussing the concepts which would be covered during the session with the teachers who arrived to the session early. The agenda items for session two included: a review of sound making, a review of Spanish introductions, family vocabulary, numbers and colors, and school vocabulary. The teachers in attendance included Rita and Evalisa. Tashauna, Marcy, JoEllen, and Melissa participated as learners. At the beginning of the
session, Evalisa worked individually with Melissa, who missed the previous session, to bring her up to speed with the vocabulary that was practiced regarding Spanish introductions.

**Spanish Introductions Revisited**

Prior to engaging in Spanish introductions with a partner, another practice interaction was modeled for the class involving two experienced Spanish speakers. The introductory conversation led the group to a discussion of formal verses informal words and plural verses singular. Rita explained that cómo está is used if a person is talking to someone in a formal situation. Cómo estás would be used in an informal interaction and cómo están would be used when referring to a group of people.

After reviewing the important vocabulary and concepts associated with introductions and modeling an example for the group, the women were organized into partners consisting of at least one teacher or facilitator and one learner. The women practiced introducing themselves to their partner in Spanish. Then, they shared what they had practiced for the full group. Before sharing out for the full group, Rita explained that her partner Melissa was having some trouble making some of the sounds in Spanish, specifically the /rr/ sound. This difficulty with pronunciation was evident as I observed the learners beginning to get frustrated when they struggled to say the words like their experienced teachers. The group paused to do a brief tongue rolling exercise to practice the /rr/ sound. Rita sympathized with Melissa’s difficulty with making particular sounds. She said:

It’s really hard. I was teaching my kids, when they started here in school, you know, we start with the /m/. Mah, mah. Like, what you talking? Yeah, m! No, that’s not. We do different. We start more with the vocab. And then you combine. Something like when
you combine a with b, for example, mi mama, or mi papa. But here they start just with the sound.

I added to Rita’s point by explaining that, in English, the emphasis is on the individual letter; however, in Spanish, the sounds are practiced in syllables with the emphasis being on the changing consonant. JoEllen remarked, “Just like in this book! [referencing La Cartilla].”

The group began sharing the conversations they had practiced with their partners. After each presented the introduction they had practiced, the teachers discussed specific words that could be added to deepen their level of vocabulary. The learners wrote some of these suggestions in their books. Evalisa shared another way to ask for a person’s name, and the group turned to their partners and again practiced introductions using this alternate way to ask their partner for her name. After several minutes of partner practice, the women came back to the larger group and were ready to move to learning family vocabulary.

**Family Vocabulary**

Since family vocabulary had been rescheduled for this session from the previous week, the mothers were asked to bring along a family photo to help with the discussion. The mothers also used the *Spanish for Gringos* (Harvey, 2008) text for reference. Rita began the words he, she, his, her, your, and their in Spanish. She gave several examples such as the following:

Es su esposo. Él, the other person, he. He is your husband...Él es su padre. He is your father. Él es su hermano. He is your brother. Él es su hijo. Hijo is son...You see it’s different when it’s he and when it’s her. Like ella es su esposa. Ella is like she. She. Ella es su madre. She is your mother. Ella es su hermana. She is your sister. Ella es su hija. That’s a difference when it’s a girl, a. when it’s a boy, o. Hijo-Hija.
I described how all nouns in Spanish have gender, either masculine or feminine. It was important to know the gender when learning a noun in Spanish to determine whether to use el or la.

Rita continued with her overview of family vocabulary and stopped to clarify the word esposo by stating, “the difference between esposo and marido is that esposo is when you are really married. Marido is like your boyfriend who lives with you. El esposo o el marido. That’s like a husband.” Evalisa added to her description with, “or like when you’re really mad, you know what I mean, you can be like “mi marido,” like… he’s driving me crazy.”

After reviewing the family vocabulary words, the mothers were challenged to tell about their own families using the vocabulary. Tashauna described her family photo first by saying “Él es su hijo.” Rita corrected her by reminding Tashauna to use ‘mi’ hijo since he belongs to her. Tashauna joking replied with, “He can be yours. I share… I have twins. I share them with everyone!” The teachers also contributed by telling about their families. I began to see the mothers opening up through this activity. Not only did sharing about their families help to model the vocabulary for the learners, it also fostered an open, risk-free environment where all members were able to share about themselves. After Evalisa and Rita spoke, Tashauna said to Rita, “so you’re saying you have two boys and one girl?” Rita again explained the importance of listening to the gender of the nouns which can typically be identified with the last letter of the word. She used the example of niño/a to confirm her point. JoEllen then shared who was in her family photo. Although she said the words slowly and struggled through her description, she was very accurate in her use of vocabulary. Rita praised her effort by exclaiming, “Wow, good job!” JoEllen replied “It’s like I’m staring at it, and I don’t have words to describe it!” Rita commiserated with her frustration by saying, “Don’t worry, that’s happened to me.” She
described how she is usually comfortable with speaking but when asked to spell certain words, it is very difficult for her. Marcy and Melissa used family vocabulary to describe their pictures also. After going around the table to share information about their families, the mothers were congratulated by the teachers for their effort in completing the challenging task. With a short amount of time remaining, the group decided to move to an introduction of numbers and colors.

**Numbers and Colors**

While referring to a page in the text, the group chorally read numbers one through ten in Spanish. Counting to ten in Spanish was familiar to all of the mothers. The mothers were asked whether they would like to learn higher numbers. JoEllen stated, “Some of the higher ones I don’t remember. I know veinte is twenty. I would like to learn higher numbers in future sessions.” After deciding to add this to the schedule, Evalisa began an overview of color vocabulary in Spanish. When going over the Spanish word for brown, it was identified that the choice in the book was not the most popular term used among the teachers. They outlined the other options for the word brown on the whiteboard, and the learners copied these options into their books. Tashauna asked Evalisa to repeat the word for orange. Since this word was complicated for the mothers to repeat, Rita offered a simpler option for orange which also doubled as the word for the fruit.

After the brief introduction to color words, the hour was complete. The group chose to continue with school vocabulary the next week and to use some of their color words in describing their surroundings.

**Reflections**

Through their written reflections, the teachers felt the program was meeting everyone’s expectations and wrote that the class had been very productive. Evalisa mentioned that more
peer to peer interactions would be beneficial and mentioned that she was still learning about herself as a leader and could not identify something specific to write as of yet. Rita wrote that she never imagined she would be able to do something like this. She felt as though she was really able to contribute to the discussion about specific differences between Spanish and English. Rita also mentioned that it would be good to get the learners to speak more Spanish throughout the sessions. After the session, Rita stated that it would be helpful to add some specific topics that would be helpful to the mothers’ line of work or their daily lives. She said, for example, that it was important to cover medical vocabulary as part of the agenda, because Marcy worked at a hospital.

The learners noted that they valued the conversational practice and enjoyed being forced to talk was beneficial even though they were just learning. JoEllen noted, “This is GREAT. You are never too old, and it is never too late to learn a new language.” Tashauna wrote that she looked forward to sharing the vocabulary she learned with her children at home. Marcy explained that she was looking forward to learning more about higher numbers, colors and family words, and she would like to also learn vocabulary associated with telling time.

**Session Three**

Because of the mothers’ desire to incorporate agenda items that were missed during the first two sessions, the agenda for session three was quite ambitious (Appendix K). Items to be covered included the following: Expanding on introductions using family vocabulary, reviewing sound making using *La Cartilla*, El/la and un/una, higher numbers and colors, School/house vocabulary, making sentences with new vocabulary, and asking questions. The teachers in attendance for session three included Rita, Maria, and Evalisa. Melissa, Marcy, and JoEllen participated as learners. It was encouraging to see Maria again, as she had missed the previous
week. Her ability to return despite being apprehensive about leading the group and about making mistakes showed great strength.

Marcy, Rita, and Melissa arrived early to session three and talked with one another until the mothers arrived. They spoke about how wonderful it would be if there was a class for learning Spanish for their children as well or one that they could attend with their children. Melissa and Marcy engaged with Rita in a brief review of the vocabulary which was discussed the previous week and the gender associated with each of those vocabulary words. Rita reminded the mothers, “you see el and la, and the special key is that, if you read there, is when it’s masculine it’s like o. when it’s feminine it’s like a.” Melissa and Marcy appeared to enjoy the time with Rita prior to the official start of the session where they could informally ask questions that had developed since the last session.

**Sound Making**

Once the rest of the group had arrived, the mothers decided to begin with a group warm-up activity. Rather than beginning with the expanded introductions, the mothers felt it more valuable to begin with the sound review. Maria shared that she would rather not lead the activity, so Rita volunteered to begin. She first modeled the sound exercises for the letter ‘n’ using a page from *La Cartilla* and defined some of the vocabulary words using this sound. She then led the mothers with practicing some sentences using those sounds and words. When practicing the word el mano, Rita pointed out how this word went against the rules that were discussed the previous week regarding the gender of a noun. JoEllen entered the room at this time, and Rita felt it would be beneficial to quickly review the activity for her. Rita said, “So here we practice un, ni, ne, no, na. You see the [vowels] in each one? The a, e, i, o, u. You practice each one.” JoEllen appeared very grateful that Rita had stopped to ensure that she was
not lost upon entering the session. The women then practiced reading the syllables independently. After individually reading the examples, Rita exclaimed, “exactly, and it’s the same thing if you have an f. fah, feh, fee, foh, foo. It’s exactly the same thing.”

Maria volunteered to lead the group in reading the words using the sounds which had been practiced. As she read each word, the learners repeated using the proper cadence and pronunciation which was modeled by Maria. After practicing syllables, words and sentences using the /n/ sound, the mothers began the same activity using the letter /l/. Evalisa led them in this exercise which went much faster since the mothers were familiar with the format of the sound making practice activity. After practicing letters /n/ and /l/, the mothers transitioned to reviewing introductions.

**Introductions**

Since the mothers had already practiced Spanish introductions with partners during the previous session, the learners appeared to be more confident practicing in front of the whole group. This was evident by both their body language and their willingness to try more difficult vocabulary and sentence structures. I started by engaging in a brief conversation with the mother on my right, Melissa, in order to greet her and ask how she was doing that day. Melissa replied and asked the question back to me using the appropriate form of the verb. She stated, “Muy bien, gracias. ¿Como estás?” Melissa turned to the mother on her right and asked the same questions which had been asked of her. The conversation continued around the entire table until all participants had been greeted and asked how they were doing that day. The mothers were then challenged to go around the table once again and ask the person to their right for their name and how old they are. This exercise served to review some of the vocabulary discussed during the previous session including numbers, and asking for a person’s name. Since the mothers’
ages were higher than the numbers they had discussed the previous week, I pointed out the page in the text which outlined numbers higher than ten so the mothers could refer to the page for assistance when sharing. Rita reminded the group of the two ways to ask for a person’s name. She modeled by saying, “me llamo Rita, and you can say mi nombre es Rita, because sometimes people say my name, mi llamo, but it’s different.”

The mothers went around sharing their name and age and asking the person to their right for her name and age. At the end of the activity, Evalisa pointed out a verb tense mistake that many of the mothers made when introducing themselves. She said:

We have to talk about me llamo or me llamo. It’s one of those where you say me llamo, when you’re talking about you, yourself, it’s yo. Me llamo. Ella se llama. Or mi nombre es. But don’t mix them up and say me llamo es.

After practicing the different verb tenses associated with asking for a person’s name, the group was ready to move to the next item on the agenda.

**Higher Numbers and Colors**

To practice higher numbers, the mothers opened to the page in the text to which they had referred during the introductions activity through which they shared their ages. Rita led the group in reading numbers eleven through thirty in Spanish. The mothers pointed out that some of the teachers used a soft /v/ sound to say numbers in the twenties which began with the letter ‘v’ while others used a soft /b/ sound. It was shared that either way of reading words with the letter ‘v’ was correct. Evalisa shared the pattern for numbers higher than thirty by saying:

Up to thirty, all the numbers are a little bit unique, but then once you hit thirty through ninety-nine, there’s a pattern and it’s really easy. You all know one to nine and that’s all you really need to know in addition to the ten words. So if you want to say thirty-two,
and it seems like when you guys were going around and saying your ages that you 
already know this a little bit, but if you wanted to say thirty-two, you could just say 
treinta y, (y means and) treinta y dos. If you wanted to say eighty-seven—ochenta y siete, 
but it kind of goes quickly together. So with ochente y siete, it sounds like one-word, but 
it’s actually three words put together—ochenta y siete.

Maria confirmed what Evalisa had said but also shared that the pattern held true for 
numbers in the twenties as well; however, these were written as one word rather than three 
words. The teachers played a game through which they asked a number in English and the 
learners had to identify the number in Spanish. This game was practiced until the learners felt as 
though they understood the pattern of how to read higher numbers in Spanish.

**Articles and New Vocabulary**

The mothers decided that rather than focusing specifically on the definite and indefinite 
articles el, la, un, and una for a great deal of time, it would be better to do this in context when 
discussing vocabulary words. They briefly referred to two pages in their books which outlined 
the rules governing articles in Spanish. Rita further explained the use of these articles with some 
specific vocabulary words as had been done during the previous session. She stated:

> In English everything is the— the door, the table, the chair. Everything is the. In 
> Spanish, it’s el or la or los or las depending. La puerta-the door. La mesa-the table. You 
> see? El carro. It is not here, but it is a car. Every time you use the, we use el, la, or los, 
> depending.

The mothers were then reminded of the word, la mano, which was described earlier as a 
rule breaker. Rita alerted the learners to a list of these types of words which were outlined in the
book. Evalisa also reminded the mothers of the measures that should be taken when a word is plural giving the example of el niño verses los niños.

**School and House Vocabulary**

The learners were asked to think about whether to use el/la in front of the school and house vocabulary words that were about to be introduced. They were told that they would be given index cards that they could use to label their homes. By labeling the actual item, it would help the mothers make a visual connection between the item and the word in Spanish. Labeling school vocabulary would also be accomplished with the help of both the teachers and the learners throughout the parent resource room.

Maria led the group in a brief review of colors so that the learners could practice identifying the new school and house vocabulary using a specific color or colors. She stated each color in both Spanish and English and the learners repeated. When she got to the color purple, Maria said, “We don’t say morado [like is listed in the book]. We say violeta.” The mothers copied the word violeta into their books as another option. The learner’s nods and smiles indicated that they were happy to learn the word that was actually used in their community.

After reviewing the colors, the learners were told to refer to the section in the book which outlined typical items found in a classroom. The mothers were each asked to write several of the words on index cards using large lettering, so they could be visible when placed around the room. Evalisa led the mothers in an exercise through which she asked, “Where is the **fill in vocabulary word**?” The learner who had written an index card for the particular vocabulary word had to go to the item, tape the index card on it and say, “This is the **fill in vocabulary word**.” By identifying the vocabulary in context and labeling the space, it helped the mothers to
make a physical and visual connection with the vocabulary word. After labeling the items in the room with the vocabulary referenced in the text, the mothers were asked whether there were any other items in the room that they would like to label. With the help of the teachers, several items such as door, bathroom, windows, and shelves were labeled as well. It was decided that the labels would remain on the classroom items for the remainder of the sessions.

To expand on the words they had labeled in isolation throughout the classroom, the mothers were encouraged to identify the new vocabulary using a specific color. The mothers were reminded that the gender of the noun must also be reflected in the color word as well. Rita modeled an example by saying, “la computadora negra”. The learners contributed with examples such as el cuadro marrón, la pisara blanca, la pared blanca, and el reloj blanco y negro.

After practicing the school vocabulary with a color word, the learners were challenged to take a stack of index cards and label their homes with the house vocabulary outlined in the book. Following Maria and Evalisa’s lead, the mothers practiced reading the house vocabulary as outlined in the text. Throughout this activity, Evalisa stopped the group several times to clarify certain words. For example, she explained that inodoro would be a more commonly used word for toilet and lavamano was a more appropriate word to use for sink than what the book had listed. JoEllen replied, “It makes a lot more sense [to learn the term that’s more commonly used]. Because if I learn the other one and then somebody says lavamano, I’m going to be like, what [does that mean]?” Rita commiserated with this potential feeling of frustration by sharing that she often gets confused with English when multiple words are used to describe the same thing and when people talk very fast. Maria nodded her head in agreement.

At the end of the session, the mothers were again reminded to label their houses with index cards throughout the week. They were also encouraged to look over the pages describing
how to ask questions in Spanish since this topic was not covered throughout today’s session and would be added to the agenda for the following week.

**Reflections**

The teacher revealed that they enjoyed helping with translating words and demonstrating appropriate pronunciation throughout this session. Evalisa wrote that she wished more parents could attend the sessions as learners and that she was impressed with how the learners were advancing. She noted that she was unsure of what she learned about herself as a leader, but stated how very beneficial it was to learn another language. Rita made a very interesting comment on her reflection sheet about what she learned about herself as a leader which directly related to her identity development. She wrote, “You never know what you have inside of you.”

The learners felt this session was excellent and that they would definitely recommend this program to others in the future. Melissa wrote that she wanted to keep speaking out loud, and Marcy noted that it was a great way to communicate with others. All learners recorded that the session fully met their expectations.

**Session 4**

The agenda for session four included a review of sound making, expanding on introductions, asking questions, who’s who vocabulary, telling the time and date in Spanish, and city vocabulary (Appendix L). Several of the mothers had called to say they were going to be unable to make the session for various reasons including work conflicts, after school activities for their children, and illnesses within their families. Since the group was very small, with Evalisa being the only teacher in attendance, the lesson could really be tailored to the needs of the learners (JoEllen and Melissa). Evalisa took the lead in presenting much of session four.
Sound Practice and Introductions

The group began with sound practice using an excerpt from the *La Cartilla* book that reviewed the syllables ta, to, tu, te, ti and da, de, di, do, du. Rather than modeling the sounds and short sentences in the activity, Evalisa prompted Melissa to try to read these on her own. Melissa stated that she would like to know what the words in the sentences meant before she read them. Evalisa promised she would explain the vocabulary after Melissa tried to read it. For the first sentence, she read, “Ese pato mi pasó”. Evalisa clarified, “that means the duck went around him or past him”. Melissa continued to read the sentences. As she read, Evalisa translated the meaning of the sentences into English, and Melissa made notes in her book. Evalisa also assisted Melissa with pronunciation highlighting certain words or syllables that were to be accented. At the end of the activity, Evalisa congratulated Melissa by saying, “that was awesome!” Melissa was very pleased when Evalisa praised and smiled widely.

After the sound making activity, the mothers agreed that it would be beneficial to practice introductions again and also orally practice using the vocabulary that had been taught in previous sessions in complete sentences. At first, Melissa was slightly panicked as she wracked her brain searching for the appropriate response when asked “¿Cómo está usted?” Melissa kept saying, “Oh my goodness.” Evalisa reassured her that it was fine and to take her time. She eventually was able to correctly answer the question. When asked, “¿Cómo se llama?” Melissa again stumbled in her response. She eventually replied, “me llamo es Melissa”. Evalisa gently corrected her by stating that she could say, “Me llamo Melissa, or mi nombre es Melissa.” Melissa then corrected her response. After asking these basic interpersonal questions, Melissa was challenged to incorporate a new element into the verbal exchange which expanded her vocabulary to include other question words in Spanish.
Asking Questions

In preparation for the lesson on question words, Melissa was taught the question “¿Qué tienes?” meaning “what do you have?” She was then challenged to use the sentence frame “Yo tengo un/a...” (I have a ...) and insert a vocabulary word and color word that had been practiced previously. Evalisa and I modeled an example of how to appropriately ask and answer this question, and Melissa was then asked the question. In constructing her sentences, she was able to use the color page in her text as a scaffold in addition to the labeled cards which had previously been affixed around the room. She replied, “Yo tengo una mesa marrón” (I have a brown table).

Melissa was encouraged to incorporate this newly practiced vocabulary into the introduction she had practiced previously. She was challenged to have a conversation with Evalisa in which she would need to greet her partner, state how she was doing, ask for her partner’s name, say her own name, and then share something that she had and the color of that item. Melissa again stumbled over how to say, “My name is...” but eventually remembered what Evalisa had told her. After practicing this exchange, JoEllen entered the room apologizing for her tardiness and attempting to explain, in Spanish, that her daughter had needed to use the restroom. Rather than saying daughter, JoEllen said sister in Spanish, and apologized when she realized she had made an error. JoEllen was eager to join in with the activity and took a turn having a full conversation with Evalisa. Through her increased use of Spanish, it was evident that JoEllen was taking the sessions seriously and truly wanted to extend her ability to communicate. JoEllen did a wonderful job recalling the previous vocabulary and was encouraged to keep using complete sentences when practicing. When asked if they were able to label their homes, both learners laughed. JoEllen replied, “I’ll do it, I just didn’t do it yet.”
Michelle agreed with this sentiment. The learners were reminded that labeling their homes would help them recall important vocabulary.

After practicing sentences using school/house words and colors, the mothers were prompted to share their telephone numbers in order to practice saying numbers more quickly in Spanish. The whole group practiced saying the sentence frame together, “Mi numero de telephono es…” (My telephone number is...). The mothers were given a minute to gather their thoughts and practice the numbers before sharing aloud. They commented that saying the numbers in a random order was much more challenging than counting one to ten. JoEllen stated, “You’re just saying the numbers without counting. You have to mix them all around, and it’s hard.” The mothers described how it was harder to recognize the individual numbers when a string of numbers was said quickly. Evalisa said that this was probably a good time to explain to the learners how ask for something to be said more slowly. She modeled this question by saying, “Se puede decirle más lento?” The other mothers wrote this sentence in their books. JoEllen shared that she wanted to know how to ask how much something costs. Evalisa responded with the correct sentence in Spanish. The mothers were then asked to use the vocabulary from around the room to ask how much specific items cost. Evalisa stated an estimated cost of these items in Spanish and the mothers had to identify the numbers in English. Melissa said that she wanted to ask how much something cost in Spanish next time she went to the corner store which was owned by a Latino family. She joked that she would have to take her book and index cards with her to feel confident.

The mothers continued practicing sentence frames using various questions words in Spanish. Evalisa led this discussion and outlined a number of words including, cuál (what/which), cómo (how), qué (what), dónde (where), cuánto (how much), cuántos (how many),
cuándo (when), and quién (who). She spent some time identifying when to use qué and when to use cuál as these words are often confused when learning Spanish. Evalisa also gave specific examples of when and how each of the question words could be used. At the end of the lesson, the learners were asked to close their books and identify question words in Spanish when given their English equivalent. Although they were able to accomplish this with assistance from Evalisa, the learners expressed that it was difficult to remember the vocabulary even though it was just discussed. Melissa stated, “I think I just need to keep practicing, because it makes a lot of sense. It’s just remembering what question word you want with what you’re trying to ask.” Evalisa said that the learners were welcome to call her throughout the week if they wanted to practice more. JoEllen mentioned that she would continue practicing the vocabulary when helping out in the classroom for her children who were currently in a bilingual program. She stated, “When I’m helping in the bilingual classroom, the children are great teachers, because they don’t know I don’t know very much, and then I repeat what they’re saying. Children are so kind and gracious and I mean…. I know you’re kind and gracious too [Evalisa].” JoEllen’s comments illustrated how much she respected her teachers and how appreciative she was of the time they had given to helping the learners throughout the program.

At this point, the mothers were asked whether they would like to cover item five or six on the agenda with the limited time remaining. Melissa responded that it would be fun to go over city vocabulary since all of the mothers lived in a city. It was agreed upon that the other topic would be moved to the following session.

**City Vocabulary**

When directed to the section of the book outlining city vocabulary, Melissa laughed and said, “There are a lot of words here. Wow! I’ve changed my mind.” The learners discussed that
a number of these words such as “tortilleria” (or tortilla shop/factory) were irrelevant for their daily lives and for the community in which they lived, so the group decided to only focus on the words that were relevant. Evalisa also added some different words/terms that the mothers may use regularly such as beauty salon. Evalisa stopped to explain to the mothers when to use a hard and soft /c/ sound in Spanish such as in the word “motocicleta”. She continued reading through and translating the full list of words.

Because of the large number of new vocabulary words in this section, the learners, at JoEllen’s suggestion, were encouraged to specifically identify the vocabulary that would be most relevant for them to learn. They spent several minutes circling their individual list of vocabulary and then sharing why they selected these particular words. Melissa stated, “I need fabric store. I need someone to tell me how to say fabric store. Is it on here?” JoEllen said, “Oh yeah, you need that for your business”. This comment highlighted the connections the teachers were beginning to make based on their knowledge of each learner and how they were beginning to tailor the concepts to the needs of each individual. Evalisa responded by helping Melissa pronounce and write this word.

JoEllen asked Evalisa how to say parking lot. This word had many syllables and took JoEllen several attempts to pronounce. She declared, “That’s been one of the most helpful things with this class is learning how to break down the syllables, because it feels like it’s not as overwhelming”. Evalisa shared that it was very simple because Spanish is so phonetic, “you just break it apart. So no matter the length of the word, you can figure it out because you just sound it out.”
At this point, the class was over. The mothers were told to review the city vocabulary if they had time throughout the week and to bring back items they wanted to discuss further or practice more the following week.

**Reflections**

Evalisa shared that she was very happy with the pace at which this session progressed. She shared that they were able to accomplish an exceptional amount during this session because the group was so small. She mentioned that she would like to continue to see the group members interacting and practicing speaking during future sessions and felt as though she was very proficient in helping with pronunciation during today’s session.

Both learners wrote that they wanted to continue practicing speaking and felt the program was going very well. Melissa shared, “I really enjoy these classes and practicing Spanish words”. JoEllen noted that it would be great to start reading paragraphs rather than isolated sentences. Both Melissa and JoEllen mentioned that they enjoyed having Evalisa, a native speaker, helping them with pronunciation.

**Session Five**

The agenda for this session included reading a short passage and practicing the days of the week. Other topics on the agenda included: expanding on introductions using city vocabulary, telling the time/date, weather vocabulary, and parts of the body (Appendix M). The mothers in attendance included Evalisa, Melissa, Marcy, Tashauna, and JoEllen. Evalisa was, again, the only teacher available to assist with the session, so she led most of the activities.

**Reading a paragraph**

At the end of the previous session, JoEllen mentioned that it would be beneficial to begin reading full paragraphs rather than practicing sentences in isolation. During the week, I found
some short, basic Spanish passages and shared them with the group as an opening warm up activity during session five. As the mothers arrived, they were each given a copy of the passage and asked to practice reading and pronouncing the words and sentences independently.

Once all of the learners had read the passage, the mothers were asked to guess the meaning of the title, “Deportes”. Melissa said that her initial reaction was to say that the word meant “deport”; however, after reading through the passage and identifying some familiar vocabulary and looking at the accompanying picture, she assumed her initial guess was incorrect. By using the context clues and her limited knowledge of Spanish vocabulary, she correctly identified that “deportes” must mean “sports”.

At this point, Evalisa reviewed some important vocabulary that was necessary for making meaning of the passage. This included words associated with the seasons as well as the days of the week. Through her description of the days of the week, Evalisa pointed out that these words do not begin with a capital letter as they do in English. She clarified that the months are also written with “letras minúsculas” (lowercase letters). Melissa asked her how to say capital letters, and Evalisa shared this word as well.

After previewing the vocabulary with Evalisa and pre-reading the passages independently, Melissa volunteered to read the passage aloud in front of the group. Evalisa clarified the answers to other vocabulary questions posed by the learners after Melissa read and also described when to use the verbs “tocar” and “jugar” in reference to playing sports verses playing musical instruments.

There were several questions written at the end of the passage which prompted the mothers to use some of the vocabulary they had read in the passage. One question asked whether they played any sports. The mothers used the sentence frame “yo practico” (I practice) to
identify various sports in which they participate. Since many of the mothers did not currently play sports, they opted to share what sports they liked using the sentence frame “me gusta” or they shared their favorite pastime if they did not like sports. As the learners shared, Evalisa helped them translate words that aligned to their various interests such as sewing, walking, and playing the piano. Marcy stated, that she didn’t really enjoy football but really liked watching her son play. Evalisa helped her say this sentence in Spanish. After reading the passage individually once again, the mothers were ready to move to the next topic.

Introductions with City Vocabulary

For this activity, the mothers were challenged to use the city vocabulary from the previous session to build on the introduction conversations they had been practicing over the past few weeks. They were instructed to complete this activity with a partner. Melissa and JoEllen worked together and Tashauna and Marcy became a second pair. Evalisa served as a facilitator while the partnerships practiced. Melissa revealed during her introduction that she had a high level of stress, because she was preparing for an upcoming art show at which she was planning to sell her handmade purses. Evalisa helped her put her ideas into Spanish. Through Tashauna and Marcy’s conversation, Tashauna asked for directions to a certain pharmacy in town and Marcy gave directions. Marcy then asked Tashauna for the location of a park. Evalisa clarified that there was a more commonly used term for one of the words in the book. The mothers wrote her version of the word in their notes. Tashauna exclaimed:

This is why people start learning this language when they’re kids! There are so many different ways. I love it, but it’s just so hard… you know? And then the Spanish we get here is mainly from Puerto Rico, so some things even that they teach you in school is from Spain, so it’s still a little bit different.
Tashauna’s comment illustrated a sense of empathy that I began to observe between the teachers and the learners as they began to empathize with one another as a result of their shared experience of learning a new language. After working through the partner introduction activity, the mothers participated in a brief overview of how to say the time and date in Spanish.

**Telling the Time and Date**

For this activity, Evelyn first reviewed the question, ¿Qué hora es? (What time is it?) She also outlined the sentence frame for the formal response “the time is...”. And then when somebody would respond in a formal sentence, they would say “la hora es…” She modeled an example of how to say “It is 6:15, and it is 2:20.” The mothers were then asked to identify the current time. After several minutes of thinking, JoEllen stated a rough estimate. When asked to be more specific, she was able to provide the correct answer. Evalisa helped her to put her response into a complete sentence. After the mothers had a chance to individually practice several examples, Evalisa took the discussion one step further by telling the learners how to identify the half hour and quarter hour. When there were multiple ways to say a word or expression, the mothers specifically asked Evalisa how she would say it, because they wanted to know what was common for their community.

After the discussion on time, the mothers began looking at how to identify the date. Some important elements that came out of this discussion included vocabulary for the months of the year and the idea that the calendar begins on Monday for most Spanish speaking countries. Evalisa also pointed out that when writing the date in Spanish, the order goes day, month, year which is different than how the date is recorded in the United States. Evalisa shared:

It was so hard for me as a kid to get used to that, because I went to first and second grade here [in Pennsylvania], and I was taught the month, the day, and the year. In Puerto Rico
it’s the day, the month, and the year. Yeah, that took me a long time. When I was in high school I still had problems with it, and then when I came here I realized, oh, that’s why.”

After introducing how to say the date, JoEllen said, “Why don’t we go around and all try to say our birthdays in Spanish.” After Evalisa helped her with the sentence frame, JoEllen began by saying, “Mi cumpleaños es el trece de diciembre” (My birthday is December 13th). The rest of the mothers went around the table sharing each of their birthdays as well. When they had finished sharing, the mothers were reminded to continue practicing their numbers, as they would need to use them frequently. Since their children were all in school, the mothers wanted to know how to say the grade levels including first grade, second grade, etc. Evalisa demonstrated how to say these grade levels and where to find this vocabulary in their books.

After practicing the words which corresponded to their children’s current grade levels in school, the session was nearly over. The mothers were asked to complete a homework assignment in preparation for the parts of the body discussion during the following class. Each mother was provided a blank picture of a body and asked to fill in the body using words from their book. They were asked to bring this completed diagram to the next session to preview the vocabulary and aid in our discussion.

**Reflections**

Through her reflections, Evalisa again mentioned that she felt she was able to greatly contribute to the session by helping to translate and pronounce various words. She stated that she thought everyone in the group was doing a great job and that while the group was investing a lot of time into practicing, it was very necessary for the success of the learners.

The learners expressed gratitude over being able to be part of the group. They described the sessions as very informative, and Melissa wrote that she especially enjoyed how much
Spanish was being used in the sessions. Interestingly, each mother listed a different item as the most valuable topic that was covered in session five. Clearly, the mothers found value in learning different things that were relevant for them individually. Marcy also mentioned that it might be good for them to take a written test reviewing what had been learned throughout the program.

**Session Six**

Session six began again with another passage in which the mothers were able to practice pronouncing words through reading a complete paragraph. In addition to this activity, the agenda also included a partner activity based around the time and date vocabulary discussed the previous week. Other topics included a deeper discussion of the parts of the body vocabulary, clothes and weather vocabulary, and the verbs “ser” versus “estar”. During the first few minutes of the session, the researcher reviewed the schedule for the remaining sessions and reminded the participants that if there were any other topics they would like to see covered during the final two sessions, that they were welcome to share any suggestions with the teachers. The mothers expressed surprise at how quickly the sessions had gone and how near to the end of the program they were and appeared sad at the thought of the program ending in the near future.

Both Rita and Evalisa were present to teach session six. Marcy and JoEllen participated as learners. Marcy also brought her teenage daughter who had expressed an interest in learning Spanish to the session. The mothers who were unable to attend had other commitments for work, and/or children who were ill.

**Practice passage and Introductions**

Because the activity had been well-received the previous week, the mothers were again presented with a short passage to read when they entered the room. They were asked to read the
passage independently and try to figure out what was happening in the story which was about two children playing videogames. In addition to reading the text, they were asked to complete a table highlighting each child’s name in the passage and the number of points that child had on the videogame. This activity again reviewed some of the higher numbers the mothers had practiced in previous sessions. They were encouraged not to use any of their materials to assist them in coming up with their answers; however, Evalisa and Rita did assist when there were questions or when the learners needed confirmation as to whether their answers were accurate.

While they were completing the activity, Marcy said, “So I have a question. How do you say the temperature?” She had been working with a patient at the hospital that day, and the patient spoke only Spanish. Marcy had a difficult time explaining to the patient what her temperature had been. Rita began explaining the word for temperature and how Marcy would use this in a sentence at work. Evalisa contributed to the conversation by explaining how to say “degrees” in Spanish. Evalisa added, “You know what, in that situation, if you would write it down and show it to her, she can read it. If you ever get yourself stuck again you can just write it, and then you can both work on saying it. You know what I mean?” Marcy replied, “I showed it to her. I just showed her the thermometer, you know?” Evalisa said, “That works too!”

After this conversation, the mothers turned back to the passage they had been reading. JoEllen and Marcy took turns reading the sentences in the passage. At the end, Rita exclaimed, “¡Muy bien! Very nice! Muy muy bien. Even the pronunciation, it sounds different. Not so gringo!” All of the participants laughed at this comment and appeared aware of how incorrect they had initially sounded when they tried to pronounce words in Spanish. Rita then directed the learners to try to say the time and the date. Because the time was 3:50, JoEllen said three and fifty in Spanish. Rita said this was a good start but reminded JoEllen of the proper way to read
this time in Spanish by saying four minus ten. For saying the date, Rita told the group to be sure to put the day first and the month second. JoEllen replied very slowly and with several long pauses, “La fecha es el primero de noviembre. Sometimes I think if you just stop long enough it’ll come out, but it doesn't work that way.”

The learners then reviewed how to say their birthdays in Spanish as they had practiced previously. Marcy’s birthday had been the day before, and the group ended the activity by asking her how it went and whether her children had offered her any of their trick-or-treat candy since it had also been Halloween.

**Parts of the Body and Clothing Vocabulary**

To practice vocabulary associated with parts of the body, the learners were asked whether they had completed their homework assignment from the previous session. Marcy had completed the diagram of the body labeled with the appropriate words in Spanish; whereas, JoEllen had not remembered hers. Evalisa told the learners that they would be completing another activity to practice these words called “El Monstruo” (The Monster). Evalisa first directed the mothers to take a blank piece of paper and some crayons from the center of the table and draw a circle in the middle of the paper for the face (la cara). Rita and Evalisa then took turns dictating the next body part(s) the mothers should draw on their monster. For example, the mothers were asked to draw three green eyes, two red mouths, two green noses, five blue arms, etc. As they were talking, the teachers were also creating monsters of their own. At one point, Rita exclaimed, “my monster needs a beautician.” Tashauna jokingly agreed stating, “Mine looks horrible.” The mothers laughed and continued drawing.

When the monsters were completed, the mothers agreed that their monsters should be put on display in the classroom, as long as they were anonymous. The group really enjoyed the
activity and taking time to laugh together. Their smiles and ability to joke with one another mirrored the positive bonds that were developing through the comfortable environment that had been established through the sessions.

After creating their monsters, Evalisa shared that the group would now begin discussing clothing words so that we could put clothes on their monsters or on the person in the homework diagram. She read through the list of vocabulary words related to clothing that were found in the text, stopping to allow the learners to repeat for words that were complicated. As she read, she also paused to identify words in the book that were not commonly used in the community and give an example of a better word that the mothers could use. For example, the word dress was listed in the book as “vestido”. Evalisa described that she only used “vestido” to describe a very fancy or formal dress such as a wedding dress. Evalisa described that the word traje was more commonly used to describe a typical dress.

After previewing the vocabulary, Rita took the lead in playing a game with the mothers. She dictated various clothing items that the mothers needed to draw on either their monster or their homework diagram. She asked them to draw a tie, shirt, pants, boots, hat, and belt on the person. The mothers asked her to repeat the words several times throughout the game.

After drawing the clothing words, the mothers were asked several questions which aligned to clothing such as, “Where do you shop, and how much does this cost?” The learners took turns practicing and then answering the questions that were posed by the teachers. This was done in a whole group format. After practicing for several minutes, the mothers agreed that they were ready to begin discussing a different topic.
**Weather Vocabulary**

Evalisa led the weather vocabulary activity by sharing some typical questions that are frequently asked regarding the weather. She also reviewed specific words to describe various temperatures and types of weather. When she got to the word ‘water’, she stopped and remarked how that word would be used with a hurricane. JoEllen remarked:

This is funny, because my daughter’s teacher asked me after the hurricane… ¿tiene agua en su casa? and I said “sí” and she was like “oh no,” and I was confused, because I thought she meant do we have water in our house, but she meant do we have water in the basement. I thought that was a funny thing to ask.

Evalisa added, “well in Puerto Rico when you have a hurricane, you have no light and no power.” JoEllen continued, “Well that’s what I was thinking! So when she started over I understood.” Rita chimed in, “And there it’s more strong than here—absolutely. The last one was bad, but the construction is different, because there it’s concrete, but here, no.”

The learners appeared very interested in hearing how the teachers’ prior experiences differed from their current living situation. Evalisa continued to read and describe each vocabulary word and Rita chimed in to clarify certain words as she read. To practice this vocabulary in context, she asked the other mothers to describe the type of weather we were having today. She also asked the learners to describe their favorite type of weather. Marcy’s response that she used to live in Hawaii and liked cold weather because it was so different sparked a conversation among the mothers about places they had lived and different types of climates they had experienced.

Since the teachers had led the weather vocabulary rather quickly, Rita again reminded the learners that they were welcome to call her if they had any questions or wanted to practice
throughout the week. For the last part of the lesson, the teachers briefly introduced the conjugations and usage of the verbs “ser” and “estar” (to be). The book identified the vosotros form (the plural form of you), but Rita and Evalisa shared that they did not use this form. Rita did, however, mention that the vosotros form was frequently used in Spain and that some people in her culture would use the form if they were speaking or writing in a highly formal manner. Since the class was coming to an end, the mothers were encouraged to read the rules that were listed regarding the appropriate use of ser and estar as homework and to ask any questions when the topic was reviewed the following week.

At the end of the session, Rita offered to bring in food for the last session. She said she wanted to prepare Dominican food for everyone and took a poll as to whether the group would prefer pork or chicken. The mothers replied that the pork sounded delicious. Rita mentioned she would also bring rice. She also posed the idea that if anyone else (teachers or learners) wanted to bring food from their culture, it might be nice to have a fiesta celebrating all of our cultures at the very end of the program. The other mothers excitedly agreed to the idea of a party and thought it would be a good idea to go over restaurant conversations and vocabulary during our last session when we would be having the food.

**Reflections**

The reflections for this week validated that this had been another successful session in the eyes of both the teachers and the learners. Rita shared that something that really struck her throughout this session was the fact that every Spanish-speaking country communicates somewhat differently. Throughout this session and prior sessions, Rita and Evalisa determined ways their everyday vocabulary differed from one another and from the book which was written to align with traditional Spain Spanish. Evalisa shared that she thought the program was
extremely beneficial because our community has such a high Spanish-speaking population. She still did not identify anything specific she had learned about herself as a leader throughout the session and recorded that she was “still learning about this.”

The learners described that they liked the monster activity and wrote that they would like to continue having conversations were they could practice their new vocabulary in context. JoEllen wrote, “I think you are all doing great with teaching us!” She also attempted to write some parts of her reflection answers in Spanish as well.

Session Seven

Because session seven was the second to last session, the teachers felt it was important to include any Spanish vocabulary the learners would need for their daily lives and professions that had not yet been reviewed. Marcy had voiced a desire to learn medical vocabulary, and Rita thought this topic would be beneficial to include in the session seven agenda. As she put it, “Everyone has different jobs, so sometimes you need to learn more specific vocabulary in your area.” In addition to medical vocabulary, the agenda also included reviewing other job-related vocabulary, warming up with another Spanish passage, reviewing clothing vocabulary, and expanding on the “ser” verses “estar” topics from the previous session. The mothers also discussed more details surrounding the party they decided to have for the final session. Rita volunteered to bring in pork and rice and declared, “of course I have the time to make it, because I already cook for my family everyday!” JoEllen said that she would make one of the traditional Dutch desserts that she and her husband sell as part of their candy and cookie business. JoEllen also commented that food and restaurant vocabulary would be helpful for her in her line of work. The teachers agreed to include this in the final session. Evalisa and Rita were in attendance as the teachers for session seven. The learners who were present were JoEllen, Melissa, and Marcy.
Maribel had called to say that her son was still having health problems, and Tashauna was away on a work trip.

**Practice Passage and Introductions**

Since the mothers wanted to focus on medical vocabulary during this session, I located a warm-up passage that described an interaction between a doctor and a patient. Marcy offered to read the part of the doctor, JoEllen volunteered to be the patient, and Melissa read the introduction. All three women read their sections with greater ease and much better pronunciation than they had exhibited several weeks ago. As the women read, Rita asked them what they thought the various vocabulary words meant throughout the reading. She reminded them to use the picture and the context clues to figure out what the passage meant. Melissa read, “Blanca está en la escuela. Ella está mal.” When asked for the meaning, Melissa replied, “Escuela—Is that school? And she’s sick.” Rita praised her for her correct response. The learners continued to read their parts in the passage while the teachers prompted them for the meaning of the vocabulary. No longer were they simply translating each word for the learners as they had done initially. The learners had to refer back to vocabulary they had practiced previously, especially vocabulary related to the parts of the body. At one point during the reading, I asked Rita to clarify the word ‘resfriado,’ as I was unsure of the meaning. She answered that it meant the person in the story had a cold. She went further to say that if I were talking about myself, I would say, “yo estoy resfriado.” At the bottom of the passage, there were several fill-in-the-black sentences to clarify comprehension of the passage for which the learners were asked to insert a word or words from the text to make the sentence align with what they had just read. Evalisa reminded the mothers that their answers needed to match the gender of the patient. For example, the person named Juan in the story was ‘enfermo’ rather than ‘enferma’
since he was male. This reviewed the concept of gender-specific nouns which was practiced in past sessions. Since the warm-up passage aligned with medical vocabulary, the mothers decided it was a natural spring board to begin the rest of the discussion regarding this topic.

**Medical Vocabulary and Other Job-Related Vocabulary**

For the discussion of words related to visiting the doctor or the hospital, the mothers were provided copies of flashcards that could be folded in half to include the English word on one side and the Spanish word on the other. I had been given these flashcards from a colleague who had made them for teaching Spanish at the high school level.

Evalisa volunteered to read through the words to model pronunciation and describe their meaning in greater detail. When she got to one word, la diagnosis, she verified that this was not how this word was actually used. At her direction, the mothers changed the word on their cards to el diagnostico. The learners and I confirmed that we were glad for her expertise in helping to clarify and catch things that may be incorrect or irrelevant to our learning. After reading through the vocabulary, Evalisa told the mothers that it would be good to take this home and practice. She said if they were interested, they could even practice with their children in order to build their own vocabulary and teach their children as well.

Once the vocabulary had been introduced, Rita reminded the learners how to conjugate the verbs ‘ser’ and ‘estar’ (to be) in the present tense. She then used these verbs to make complete sentences including the new words. Some of the sentences included the following: Soy una doctora, está enferma, and estoy resfriado (I am a doctor, you are sick, and I have a cold). Rita again clarified when to use one verb over the other and gave the learners some helpful pointers to remember which one to use. When JoEllen asked which verb to use when a
patient has a long-term illness such as cancer, Rita included another verb, tener (to have). She stated that the full sentence would be, “Yo tengo cancer.”

The learners were directed to two pages in their text that listed detailed information regarding the differences between ‘ser’ and ‘estar’. Rita further discussed when to use each verb, saying examples of a variety of sentences that would necessitate the use of one verb or the other. For example, she modeled, “Yo estoy en la escuela. Not yo soy escuela. Because I am not the school, I am just in it or at it.” The learners took turns reading several examples that were written in the text. They were asked to note the verb, the tense in which it was written, and the meaning. Melissa read, “Yo estoy aqui. I am here.” JoEllen read, “Ella está bien. She is fine.” At the bottom of the page, the learners were asked to write some sentences on their own in Spanish to practice these verbs. Rita said the sentences in English, and the mothers had to write them in Spanish. When JoEllen repeated one of the sentences back to Rita in Spanish perfectly, Rita said, “We have a good student! That was really good.” JoEllen quickly replied, “That’s because we have good teachers!”

With the session nearly being finished, the mothers were directed to a section of the text which outlined additional vocabulary related to an assortment of occupations as well as some very general job vocabulary. The mothers were encouraged to quickly look over the list and identify any additional vocabulary. Evalisa and Rita worked with the mothers to pronounce and practice the specific words they desired to learn from this section.

**Reflections**

Both Evalisa and Rita again recorded that this session met all of their expectations and that they thought it was going very well. Evalisa wrote that she felt that one of her biggest assets to the program thus far was being able to help translate. She recorded that she learned
throughout the program that she could teach and that was something she never had thought about doing before. She noted how great she thought the program was and commented further by saying she wished we could have had more time together each week to allow more practice time for the learners. Rita wrote that she, “had more inside her than she thought” and that she was proud that she had been able to make almost every session despite her busy schedule.

The learners shared that the session had been very informative and that they had especially liked the medical flash cards. Marcy wrote that she also appreciated the opportunity to use the body parts vocabulary again as well. JoEllen responded that she was looking forward to the fiesta the following week and wrote, “This is excellent. I really enjoy having Spanish-speaking mothers helping to teach.” She also recorded how she found it very interesting when the mothers discussed differences among cultures and wanted to learn more about different Spanish-speaking cultures. Melissa felt she was learning a great deal in the program. She mentioned that the most valuable thing she learned in today’s session was that she was feeling more prepared to share out loud. Throughout session seven, all of the teachers and learners had exhibited this increased confidence which Melissa described. It was great to see them coming out of their shells and interacting with one another openly and making plans to celebrate all they had accomplished during their final session together.

Session Eight

For the final program session, the mothers decided they would like to practice restaurant and food vocabulary and conversations and then have a small party. The mothers had discussed bringing some food (if they were able) that was specific to their culture or something they frequently made at home. Rita headed this initiative by offering to bring pork stuffed with sofrito and rice and beans. Including restaurant vocabulary, the agenda also included completing
a practice passage at the beginning which also aligned with the food theme, reviewing information about the Spanish culture, and passing out a culminating quiz for the learners to complete at home. The teachers in attendance for this session included Maria, Evalisa, and Rita. The learners were JoEllen, Marcy, and Melissa.

**Practicing in Context and Learning about Culture**

As the learners entered the room, they were asked to work on a practice activity through which they read a passage involving an exchange with a waiter. After reading, they were challenged to complete a cloze activity that involved filling in blanks within sentences based on their comprehension of the passage. Prior to beginning the reading, Evalisa went over the vocabulary for “left” and “right” in Spanish, as the mothers would need this information to understand the content of the passage.

As Rita came in carrying piles of food, I immediately thanked her for cooking for us. She said she had burned her fingers cooking but that she was ok and that it was because she was always rushing too much. She explained that she cooked the pork at five o’clock that morning, because that’s what her husband likes to eat. My response was, “Wow, so you make this for him every single day?” Rita said, “Yeah, that’s why I enjoy this” (pointing to the cookies and little sandwiches that had already been placed on the table by some of the learners). Evalisa chimed in, “That’s true though. Hispanic families eat rice almost every day, so when you’re out you want to eat something different.” Rita shared, “Salad, you know, I like to get a green salad every time!” Evalisa added, “And I enjoy mashed potatoes every once in awhile.” Evalisa and Rita’s exchange about the food spring boarded the discussion on Spanish culture which was also guided by a passage in the *Spanish for Gringos* text (Harvey, 2008). Evalisa said that she thought we should all read the passage individually and then discuss rather than having one person read it
aloud to the group. I added that I hoped the teachers could share what was true, not true or missing from the passage in the book which provided generalized information about the Hispanic culture as a whole and examples of some specific phrases that are used in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Mexico.

After the mothers had read the information, I posed a question to the teachers, “How do you feel about the first line, where it says that language and culture are inseparable? Do you feel like your language and culture go together?” Rita replied, “Yes, absolutely. Especially when, you know, a family is Hispanic and the kids are growing up here. They’re absolutely different when you grow in your own country.” I clarified that she meant what we would consider second generation Latinos in the United States. Rita said:

Yes. For example, in here when I saw in the school, my teenager’s school, the way that the teenagers talk with the parents is absolutely different from Dominican families. Because we believe in respect. When one parent told you no, you just shut up, you must shut up, that’s it. No “you’re so mean.” There’s respect. Even the way that they look at you.

I asked her what she thought contributed to this difference. She replied:

Because here the parents need to work so hard, and then they don’t have time to teach the kids. That’s the difference. When you leave your country, they’re different because you have more friends there, the family, everybody help[s] you. You can share the problem[s] with your mother, parent, whatever. Everybody help[s]. But here, everybody here has too many rights, and in my mind like mother, that’s the way I think. I tell my son, I can’t give you a bunch of rights if you don’t know your responsibility. When you control your responsibility then I can give you your rights. But here they think well I
have the right to speak [a certain way] with my teacher because my parent pays taxes. That’s absolutely stupid. You don’t talk to your teacher like she is lower than you. No no no no no. She is always upper than you. So it is the way you grow independent from where you come from.

JoEllen chimed in, “Melissa just said she’s going to elect you for the next president.” Melissa nodded in agreement. Evalisa contributed to the conversation by sharing:

Parents here let their child have their own ideas and express their own ways, when unfortunately a lot of the ways are not appropriate. That’s when parents do not step in and say that it’s inappropriate. This is where you need to draw the line, and it’s because the belief in freedom, and all the kids need to grow their own way. No. I’m sorry but that’s why there are so many not nice kids around here. Hispanic families are very strict. Very many rules. You do not curse, you eat all your food when you sit down, and you are not rude.

Rita added, “And say thank you for everything, every time.” Evalisa said, “And when an adult yells at you, no matter who it is, you stay quiet and you put your head down. No matter if it’s a stranger across the street.” Since Evalisa had attended school in both the U.S. and Puerto Rico, she began to talk about the differences between the two school environments, surprisingly stating the biggest difference was with math (which is often thought to be the universal language). Evalisa shared, “The math in Puerto Rico is horrible.” Rita agreed, “I can’t understand nothing here! Nothing! It is too hard.” Evalisa added:

It’s more advanced here. There’s more involvement—a lot of stuff that over there I never even touched that I was like “oh my.” English… I also think the English classes over there need to be with actual English speaking people. Not really somebody learning
English from a class, rather than somebody being born or raised here. I never had an English teacher that way, but schools here are strict when it comes down to schedules and people walking outside. When it comes down to strangers inside the school, over there you walk in and out whenever the hell you want. It’s very easy for people to cut class. The teachers see you walking, and they don’t say anything. Yeah, schools over there are not very structured at all.

I questioned Rita about how schooling was in the Dominican Republic and whether it was similar or different than what Evalisa had shared. She commented:

It’s different, yeah, because the Puerto Ricans, they are part of the United States. We aren’t. I’m talking about Dominicans, I’m not talking about all Hispanic, because every country has a different position. In my position, I think there are two kind[s] of Hispanics here. They want to come and say “we have welfare! And we have retirement! And why do we have to work so hard?” There is one part that prefer[s] the easy way. And the other part, they say no, no. You have to work. If you want or you need something special you can have it, but you have to work day by day. We are all Dominican, but we think different. So that’s the way that I think. It’s absolutely different when you grow in your country and when you grow in here, absolutely different, and it’s hard, because I have trouble with my teenager, because he compare[s] a lot with the other kids. He asks me, “Why are you cleaning houses if you can go to welfare?” I say no, because if I go to welfare, and I have to sit in my home watching TV, what are you going to do in twenty years? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. I don’t have any trouble with welfare because thanks to the Lord we have a program like that here, because we don’t have that in my country. But I think this is a help. It is supposed to be
help, not maintaining. You know what I mean? That’s the way that I think. But it’s hard because every house is different, every family is different, every position is different.”

Evalisa added, “What she says about the kids, at least how they’ve been raised, is true. Because in my house, I was raised full Hispanic and then I married her stepdad. He wasn’t raised in Puerto Rico, but his parents are super-strict, like old-fashioned Puerto Rican. So we are strict, but then all the kids around the block it’s like 9:00 at night, they’re running around all wild, and then my daughter’s upstairs in her bed pissed off, because she wants to play, and I’m like nope, there’s rules here, and she gets upset. It’s a problem, because there’s certain things that she wants to do and it’s like nope, sorry, that’s not happening. When you’re eighteen and you want to move out, go right ahead, but while you’re under my roof, it’s my rules.” Rita agreed that parenting is more difficult here in the United States, and that her teenage son doesn’t understand why she feels the need to question where he is going and who he is with especially when she doesn’t know the parents of his friends.

To get Maria involved in the conversation, I prompted her by first welcoming her back to the group, as she had been out for a number of weeks due to her son’s health condition, and then asking her to share a little about her experience. She stated:

I born in Puerto Rico, but for five years I be in New Jersey, and then I went back to Puerto Rico when I was nineteen years old and then I come back. I don’t like Puerto Rico. I’m Puerto Rican but I don’t like it. I don’t have nothing in Puerto Rico. I like here better than there. You can go wherever you want to go. You could do whatever you want to do. In Puerto Rico, it’s different. There are a lot of people that live like poor, it’s different.
Maria, along with the other mothers, began to share how most of their children were born in a Spanish speaking country, while several were born in the United States. Maria shared that one of her five children was born in the United States, and Rita shared that her two youngest children had been born here as well. Evalisa shared that her daughter had been born in Puerto Rico but that they moved to Pennsylvania shortly thereafter. She told an interesting story of how her daughter had transitioned from only speaking Spanish to now only speaking English and how she had experienced a silent period in between. Evalisa commented:

It was interesting, because we were there for the first year and actually when she turned one, and like two weeks after she turned one, we moved to New York, and she actually stopped talking. There was a period of time when she stopped just fully talking. As soon as I came here, I enrolled her in daycare, because I started working for the state right away, the Department of Revenue in New York. At daycare there was only one lady who spoke Spanish, and she became extremely attached to this lady and would only talk to her, and at one point she quit. So it was a period of transition for her, and she fully started speaking English, full sentences where you could understand her… well, I would understand her a little bit more, but people who wouldn’t see her on a daily basis around three years old. Now, I try to get her to speak Spanish, like when her grandmother will call from Puerto Rico, and she’ll talk English, and if she says something in Spanish, she’ll be like, “okay, mom, here’s the phone.” She doesn’t want to talk. I don’t know what it is, and there’s certain words I can get her to say like “good morning” or “good night” or “I love you” or “give me a kiss.” But then to actually try to have a conversation, no.
Evalisa continued to share that they only spoke English at her house currently because her daughter refused to speak Spanish. Rita agreed saying her children do not like to speak Spanish either. She added:

I talk so fast, I talk in Spanish all the time, because I think in Spanish. But they think in English. If I say so fast in Spanish, “Give me a cup of water,” [my son] will give me shoes, and I’m like, “What are you doing? These are zapatos. I want agua—water!” They’re confused so much—all three of them. But I don’t care. I’ll speak the Spanish. I tell them I have to.

I added that the learners had been able to sense throughout the program this feeling of not having the vocabulary to be able to say what they wanted to say and how it’s not related to any sort of cognitive problem, but rather a whole processing and translating piece that is occurring when learning a new language. Rita added that learning a second language was very difficult for her. She remarked, “I’m involved with every teacher of my children, like [I come to] meetings.” She stated that she never comes to large events for all of the parents, because it is so difficult and overwhelming for her to translate what is occurring in her mind, because of the many conversations that are happening at once. She mentioned that she has openly told the teachers that when they have a big meeting, she won’t come. Maria agreed with this sentiment saying that when she is talking with one person in English, she understands, but when there is a large group of people speaking English, she cannot keep up, because the conversation happens too quickly and she gets very anxious. Evalisa shared that even though she speaks English very well, she still struggles. She said, “I feel so stupid that I have to stare at [people speaking English] in order to catch what they’re saying. And again, I can express myself in English very well, but I still have that issue.” Melissa added the fact that certain words have multiple
meanings and, “as we’ve learned throughout this class, different Spanish cultures may use a variety of words to mean the same thing.” Rita agreed and shared an anecdote of a time she was cleaning houses with another woman and there was a Spanish language barrier between the two native Spanish speaking women. Rita shared, “in her country, horita is like right now. For us, horita is like later. When we started to work together, that was really difficult. I thought she understood me. When I would ask, “Can you do this later?” She would do it right then.

Throughout the time the teachers shared their stories and experiences, the learners were very interested and engaged in the conversation. They wanted to learn more about the traditional Latino foods, so we turned back to the book and began reading through the next page which outlined comidas tradicionales. They decided they would like to discuss the food and restaurant vocabulary listed on this page briefly and also while they were enjoying the food that was brought for the fiesta.

**Restaurant and Food Vocabulary**

The teachers began discussing traditional Spanish foods by sharing what Rita had brought to share. They talked about how the rice had gandules which were pigeon peas in English and how the pork was stuffed with sofrito which was a delicious seasoning made from blending peppers, onions and spices. Throughout their discussion, the teachers made reference to a number of restaurants around the city that served the foods they described. The learners were eager to try these new foods and were told to try to order in Spanish when they went to the restaurant in order to practice what they had learned in this program.

From this conversation, the mothers moved to discussing general vocabulary and phrases they would need to know when ordering at a restaurant or having a meal. Rita read through the
list of words and explained the meaning of each one. Maria and Evalisa contributed at times when certain words required further clarification or examples.

The learners were then asked to split into partners and practice conversations as though one person was the waiter and one person was ordering at a restaurant. Each learner was paired with a teacher and the group began practicing their conversations. After they had gone through several interactions with their partner, the mothers were encouraged to share part of what they had practiced aloud. Evalisa and Marcy volunteered to go first. Marcy struggled slightly with her part of the conversation, but Evalisa guided her through. Rita and Melissa shared next. They had extended their conversation to include other vocabulary which had been practiced previously. JoEllen and Maria were the last to share. JoEllen was able to easily navigate the conversation. She had clearly picked up a lot throughout her time in the program. I commented about how comfortable everyone in the group had become over the past couple of months and shared that the learners would be given a culminating take home quiz to practice all of the vocabulary and skills that had been taught throughout the program. The learners were encouraged to use their books or other resources to find the answers if they needed assistance. They were encouraged to return their completed quizzes during the group interview session that was scheduled for the learners the following Thursday.

After passing out the quizzes, the mothers began to enjoy the food that had been contributed by each of the group members. Rita’s pork and rice and beans were extremely popular. JoEllen brought delicious Dutch cookies that she made as part of her cookie business. Other contributions included chips and salsa, drinks, and small sandwiches. While they were eating, the teachers encouraged the mothers to continue learning Spanish by watching the Spanish channel on television. Rita mentioned that watching shows in English had helped her
tremendously when she was learning English. Evalisa reminded the learners that they could also refer back to the activities they had done in the *La Cartilla* book and in the *Spanish for Gringos* text (Harvey, 2008). Marcy mentioned that she would try to figure out what the clerk was saying the next time she went to the corner store. The mothers engaged in a discussion about the various corner stores around town. They talked about the location of the stores they frequented and which store clerks preferred to communicate in Spanish. Rita mentioned that other resources for the mothers to continue learning Spanish could be found at the public library. For the remainder of the session, the mothers joyfully socialized and enjoyed the food which had been provided. At the end, they split up the leftovers and took home something different than what they had contributed in order to allow their families to try some different kinds of food as well.

**Reflections**

The teacher’s reflections from the final session illustrated a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction regarding the program and their roles as teachers. Evalisa commented that she was happy to be able to contribute as a leader and Rita wrote that this program absolutely met her expectations and she wished we could have more parents involved in learning Spanish. Rita also mentioned that through her role as a leader, she had learned to accept other people’s views and positions on various topics, subjects, and ways of life. Maria recorded that she wished she had been able to be at all of the sessions and was sad that she had to miss several sessions due to her son’s health condition. She noted that it was great that more people wanted to learn her language, because she felt it might be helpful when people need to communicate at their jobs or at other necessary times such as during an emergency. Maria also added that through her role as a teacher in the program, she was able to learn about people who speak another language while
they were learning her language. She highly valued the opportunity to learn and practice her English in addition to her role of teaching Spanish.

The learners’ reflections mirrored the positive sentiments described by the teachers. They wrote about how extremely valuable they felt the program had been. JoEllen commented, “Thank you so much. I have thoroughly enjoyed the class.” She felt the most valuable thing she learned in session eight was the cultural information and sharing that had taken place. Melissa wrote that she did not really know what to expect of the program, but was very pleasantly surprised about how much she enjoyed it. She stated, “It was a great way to learn a language in a very relaxed atmosphere.” Marcy believed the session had been extremely informative and that she was excited to learn how to order at a restaurant. All of the learners agreed that they would like to attend more Spanish sessions in the future, perhaps the following spring.

**Final Interviews**

A focus group interview was held the week after the program with the learners to collectively discuss their overall reflections regarding The Spanish Teaching and Learning Program. Post-program interviews were also conducted with the teachers. While the teacher interviews were intended to be done individually, Maria and Evalisa arrived at the same time and ended up doing a joint interview. These interviews were conducted in the room at the elementary school in which the program sessions were held and, like the pre-program interviews and program sessions, the post-program interviews were audio-recorded.

**The Learners Reflect**

The week after the final program session, the learners met to participate in a collective post interview through which they described their experience in the program and provided
feedback (Appendix Q). Throughout the interview, I posed the following reflection questions to help guide our discussion:

1. Can you describe your experience as a learner in this program?

2. What was the most rewarding part of this experience?

3. …the most challenging?

4. How was this experience different than other ways you have been involved in the school community?

5. How will this experience affect your decision to become involved in the future?

6. Can you give me an example of how this experience may have expanded your connections with other mothers?

The mothers in attendance included, Marcy, JoEllen, and Melissa. Tashauna was unable to attend, but provided written feedback. The mothers began by discussing the positive aspects of the program. Marcy shared that she thoroughly enjoyed the experience and that it taught her a lot about having the patience to communicate in a language that is not your native language. She commented that her kids thought it was funny that she was participating in the class, but that she valued the idea that everyone in her family could be learners at the same time, either in school or though the program. JoEllen agreed that learning the second language was difficult, but that she did not find it challenging to be patient, likely because JoEllen was very patient by nature. She again reminded the group that two of her children were currently learning Spanish in bilingual classrooms. She commented that the program helped her have empathy for the experience her children were having. She stated, “I feel like it helped me a little bit to understand what they’re going through, and I felt like I really did learn, so that’s really exciting.” Melissa agreed that she had learned a lot as well, but that she was still nervous to speak Spanish in public. She
mentioned that she had told the Latina woman at the corner store about the Spanish class, but had yet to try to communicate with her in Spanish. Marcy chimed in, “I just really loved that there was actually Spanish mothers that could come to teach. I thought that was the coolest thing.” When I prompted her to describe what she found cool or interesting about having the Latina mothers participate as teachers, she replied, “Well, especially Rita. I felt like it was really empowering to her, because maybe not knowing English really well was holding her back a little bit, but she was like, this is something that I can really do, and I feel like that really empowered her. This was so much to do, and everything they did was big for us. So that was my absolute favorite part. Seeing that was dynamic.” JoEllen agreed and shared

I thought it was really neat too, just to hear the words they used, that they weren’t always the ones in the book. Like naranja, instead of that other really weird long word, but I just thought it was really neat that we could learn more practical Spanish, that the people around here can use.

I then prompted the mothers to discuss the most rewarding part of the experience. Melissa shared:

Touching base with other moms. We’re not yet terribly involved in school here, so it was just neat to hear the other moms talk about the same things that our kids are going through. I mean, that doesn’t have much to do with Spanish, but even to hear Rita’s opinion coming from the Dominican Republic. Just her view on life coming from there, I thought was really neat.

Marcy described that the biggest benefit of attending the program for her was how it helped her communicate with patients at work. She stated, “I feel more confident where I know
what I’m saying, I’m not just trying to think about how to put it together. Some of the words I do know now, so it does help.”

The mothers were then asked to share what they felt was the most challenging part of the program. Melissa shared that learning languages is very difficult for her, so actually remembering the vocabulary and what was taught was most challenging. She shared a story about how her husband could learn other languages right away, but for her it takes a lot of practice. JoEllen commented that the resources that were used throughout the program were very valuable. She said she had taken a lot of notes while the teachers were talking and was looking forward to referring back to these notes later. She shared, “Speaking was most challenging part for me, and knowing that when learning another language you have to be okay with just talking and knowing that you’re going to make mistakes.” Marcy agreed with this sentiment stating:

I know, I feel weird when I say things, like people are looking at me weird. I know I sound weird, and I know I don’t have the vocab, but just opening my mouth and trying, and you’ll probably look like a fool, but you will be laughed at. And that’s the way to learn, because if you don’t do that, you won’t remember anything. So that’s the biggest challenge for me, just opening my mouth. And then once my mouth’s opened, it’s like, okay, I said it out loud, now what can I do to say it right?

Melissa agreed that at first it was very intimidating to have the whole group looking at her when she was asked to speak in Spanish for the group. Marcy commented that strangers often mistake her for being a native Spanish speaker because of her dark hair and dark eyes. She told a story of feeling very nervous when someone on the street began talking to her in Spanish,
thinking that she was proficient in the language, when really she did not understand what was being said.

I then asked the mothers how this experience had been different from other ways they had been involved at the elementary school before. Melissa said, “It’s more personal. A lot of the other stuff we come to is a big crowd, and I just kind of float in and out. But here you are more one on one.” JoEllen commented:

I felt like as we went along we got to know each other a lot more and we became friends. I was thinking, how many times do you actually have a time when you’re with the same set of people for that long? Normally, if you come to a parent social or a coffee social, normally there would be, you know, a group of people, but it’s probably going to be a different group of people the next time you come. So you actually get to know people a little more. And I think to myself, like, oh, this is so cool, how could this happen more often? Because I think that’s what we need.

JoEllen commented that this type of program would be very beneficial for parents of students at the school where the bilingual program was held that two of her children were attending. She shared that often, the parents of children in that program do not know enough Spanish to help with their children’s homework. Melissa added:

It could just work, because let’s face it, if it’s not a heartfelt need, it’s going to be hard to have it happen, but if there’s a need, it’s going to be a lot easier to have it happen.

There’s going to be motivation to say yeah, this is what we’ll sacrifice for and so, I mean, I think definitely in that setting. But I think it’s also just finding what the heartfelt needs are and then acting. Just sometimes you have to dig a little bit more. Discover what they are. Sometimes it’s really obvious, other times it’s not.
I then asked the mothers how this experience will affect their decision to become involved in the future and how it has shaped how they want to be involved in the elementary school. Melissa explained:

It just depends on what [the program] is, and the time. This actually ended up being a really bad time of year for me, I had several art shows that I had to get ready for in between everything, and the art shows are either Friday or Saturday, so by Thursday afternoon it was difficult. So maybe I can be a little smarter about that next time around, but I think… I don’t see why I wouldn’t be willing to do something again at some point.

Marcy commented that she would gladly participate in another program. Since she had three children at the school, she felt as though it was very manageable for her to come to the school to participate. JoEllen agreed that despite her busy schedule of having children in multiple schools, she would be willing to participate in another program if it was beneficial. She shared:

If I have something that I can give and something that I can receive in a setting like this, then I would definitely be there, because this is by far the most valuable thing that I have participated in in this kind of setting, and I’m not saying the other things don’t have their place, but this was the thing that I thrived in the most.

Melissa commented that having childcare available was extremely critical to her ability to participate in a program. She stated, “There was no way I could have done it otherwise. I don’t have enough family close enough, and I would have had to drive two hours worth of driving for babysitting if it wouldn’t have been provided, so there’s no way it would have happened otherwise.”
I prompted the mothers to further describe any other examples of how this experience may have expanded their connection with the other mothers. Marcy explained that it helped them understand more about each other. She said:

Sometimes people will say, you speak Spanish, come on, you live in America, learn English. But now I realize how hard it is to learn another language. Just interacting with [the Latina mothers] more one on one, you see them more as individual people. You don’t see them as just faceless. I learned more about individuals and about their culture.

Melissa added:

I feel like it takes so much time just to be able to address people, and if you don’t have settings like this, you’re probably not going to ever know them. I mean, how many times have I walked by you [referring to Marcy], and I may have smiled or said hi, but, you know, we didn’t have any common ground, but now maybe we would talk to each other in Spanish or something, so I feel like that’s the kind of thing that was most beneficial. I grew up in a small, private Mennonite school where everybody knew everybody, so I feel like especially in a setting like this, you have to find those ways to build the trust. Then it’s going to happen, but there has to be a platform for it to happen, because if you don’t know each other outside of school, how are you going to connect?

Marcy added:

Um, I just think [the Latina mothers] were just as uncomfortable as we were at first. We were all just learning. And they have it tougher because they need to learn English to communicate with almost everybody, really. And us, we kind of, we wanted to learn it. Not that we really needed it. And it was free! Spanish classes normally do cost a lot of money.
JoEllen stated:

Another thing, my particular block is constantly changing, and right now Spanish isn’t quite as prevalent as other times, but there are times when most of our neighbors speak Spanish, and to get involved with your neighbors at all, you almost have to know it. I mean, I had one neighbor that was pointing at me and laughing. I was digging in the flower bed, and they were going off in Spanish, and I was like, oh, what I wouldn’t give to be able to turn around and speak right back to them.”

JoEllen and Melissa clarified that there were a number of refugee families from other parts of the world living on their blocks, and it would be nice to communicate with them as well. To close, the mothers were prompted to share any final comments about the program. JoEllen mentioned again that learning Spanish was a very strong need for her, so anytime something like this is offered, she would be willing to sign up. The other mothers agreed that it had been a wonderful program. Before the mothers left, I checked the quizzes they had returned for accuracy and made suggestions for various items that needed to be corrected. As they were leaving, JoEllen thanked me profusely for asking her to be part of the program. I thanked all of the mothers for participating and for all of the hard work that they had done throughout the sessions.

The Teachers Reflect

Evalisa, Maria, and Rita participated in interviews the week after the program had ended. They answered several questions to further describe their role in the program, their overall experience, and the connections they had made with the other mothers. The interview questions also asked about how this experience had impacted their desire to become involved in future
opportunities within the school community (Appendix R). These guiding questions were as follows:

1. Can you describe your experience as a leader in this program?
2. What was the most rewarding part of this experience?
   a. …the most challenging?
3. How was this experience different than other ways you have been involved in the school community?
4. How will this experience affect your decision to become involved in the future?
5. Can you give me an example of how this experience may have expanded your connections with other mothers?

While the interviews were set to be done individually, Maria and Evalisa ended up coming at the same time and chose to do their post interview together. Rita participated in her post interview individually.

**Rita**

At the beginning of Rita’s interview, I thanked her for being part of the program. She responded that she tried her best and liked that the mothers were able to learn. She also added that she was glad that they liked Spanish. When I prompted her to share how she felt as a leader in the program, she shared that she was proud of herself for contributing to the group as a leader, even though she had been very uncomfortable at first. Rita stated:

It was amazing, because I think you have too much inside of you and you never know you can do that. So I think it’s amazing to help others, to share with others your language, your culture, your rules, everything. So it’s good. Sometimes hard, but it’s good. The timing [of the program was the hardest]. I have three kids, so sometimes it’s really
difficult. For example, now, Christian [my son], he start basketball every Thursday at 6:30 so I have to be running, but I like the program. I really like that I help the other parents and they help me with my English, because you know I don’t have absolute perfect English. I’m confused so easy. So that helped me.

I commented that I thought her English was very good. She shared that she is fine if we are talking slow, but that she gets really confused when people talk fast. Rita added how she felt this program was very much needed. She stated that sometimes people say that they want to learn another language, but it’s not until something like this is offered that people actually act on that desire. Rita commented that the learners did an especially wonderful job learning the sounds. She said she was impressed how the mothers had started to pronounce the words more like native Spanish speakers toward the end of the program. In her words, they sounded, “not so gringo.” She felt her role in helping with pronunciation and sharing about her culture had been important.

When asked to describe the most rewarding part of the program, Rita shared a very interesting story about how assuming the role of teaching in this program was directly related to her role as a mother. She shared:

This was really special for me, because my first job is mother. So I think you teach by example, day by day, so my kids could see me as a teacher. A [person who] helps others. So it’s good for me, my feeling, myself. So I like that program.

She shared that her children thought it was funny when she told them she was going to be teaching Spanish to other parents at the school. She was assertive in telling me that no matter what your children think, you must lead by example and you must show them how to be a
responsible adult and contributing member of society. Rita stated again that it was wonderful that more people were interested in learning Spanish.

When asked about her biggest challenge while participating in the program, Rita shared that she gets nervous about her ability to speak English, and, at first, she did not know how much emphasis was going to be put on her speaking, especially spelling, English words. She shared that once she had gotten more involved in the program and realized what it was all about, it was much less stressful for her, because the emphasis was really on teaching and learning Spanish—an area with which she felt at ease. She said interacting with the other women was like talking with friends, and that it was very comfortable. I again thanked her for helping to foster that comfortable atmosphere and for offering to cook for the group at the end of the program. She replied that she was glad to do it.

I asked Rita about how this experience was different from other ways she had been involved in the school previously. She described how this program encouraged parents to become involved as students and how that was different than a number of programs or events she had attended before. She added that she liked how the focus was on Spanish, “because in Spanish, I know my culture. I feel comfortable in my area; I know what I’m talking about. That’s the part that I feel [was] most different.” She also added that as a mother, she is constantly teaching, but it’s a very different type of teaching than what occurs in a school. She said it is not teaching about the A, B, C’s, but rather about life, culture, and respect. She added that as an adult, she does not learn as children learn in school either, but, rather, in context, or in her words, “in talking”. She stated that, as an adult, you learn, “…what you prefer, like the language of the community in your area, for example. If you are nurse and you need to learn about fiebre (a fever), you have to learn those words.” She commented that because the members of the group
had the freedom to ask for what they needed and to stop and explain items when they needed clarification, the program was different than formal education that might happen in a school, because it did not have a rigid structure. She added, “This is good because the mothers feel free to ask and to learn, and that makes it easy to feel comfortable.”

I asked Rita whether she had ever been involved in a program like this before. She shared that while she had not been involved in something exactly like this program, she had worked teaching migrant children about eight years ago, but had not engaged in a formal teaching experience since, as she was so busy with her cleaning business and her family.

When prompted to discuss if this experience had affected her decision to become involved in future parent involvement opportunities for the school, she said:

Yes of course [I would be involved], of course, and I think we have to explain to everyone, parents, share the news with the other parents. So I think we can offer that program more, maybe different times. For example, on summer, it’s good for different families on summers. Maybe they have more time.

Rita described herself as one little drop of water. She said that since we are all using the school, we should all add our little drops of water to make it thrive. I asked Rita to give an example of how this experience may have expanded her connection with other parents or the other mothers. She said when waiting outside the school to drop her children off in the morning, “Other families ask me, “are you teaching?” Because they look at me like, “you don’t look like you help the school.” She said the other mothers notice when she speaks Spanish to the “Gringa” mothers in the program. She added, “They hear about that. They hear about what you are doing, what the school is doing. We feel like part of the school, part of the program.”

I asked about her connections with the other mothers in the program. She said:
[It was] amazing. Amazing, because they enjoy it, and every class they enjoy to learn. They were laughing, and they enjoy it. I feel like they discover more about what’s inside of this school. Do you know what I mean? This is not just the school of my children, they have more to offer to us. So it’s good to everyone. When I see their faces, they feel confident. Like, “I’m talking Spanish. I can do it.” And that’s good!

Rita discussed how it would be beneficial to have a program like this for the students also. She suggested starting a program for teaching Spanish to parents along with their teenagers. After sharing this suggestion, she mentioned that she needed to pick one of her children up from an activity and that she needed to head out. She again said that, although she was very busy, she would be interested in helping out with programs in the future whenever she was available.

**Evalisa and Maria**

During the post interview with Maria and Evalisa, I first asked how they felt about their role as a leader in the program. Maria stated, “I was nervous! That’s why I don’t talk too much.” Evalisa shared:

I liked it. It was an experience, definitely. I didn't realize I was capable of trying to help somebody else with the language besides my daughter. It’s not the same as teaching a child, but it is interesting. It’s interesting to just see the response from other parents just trying. That’s what I liked about it.

I asked Maria whether she felt better and less nervous at the end of the program. She responded, “Yeah, I felt a little bit better, but it was too short. I missed a lot of the program, but it was not my fault. I have a problem with my son. I don’t know what day they’re going to make
the surgery”. Maria went on to describe how her son’s health condition will require him to get a hip replacement surgery in the near future, and how, currently, he is in a great deal of pain.

After discussing Maria’s son for several minutes, I asked the mothers if they had ever been involved in a program such as this before. Evalisa responded:

No, I have never- especially with the translation. This was the first time, first experience. So that’s why I said it was very interesting. It was interesting to know to what level I could push myself to try to teach myself, or to explain it to somebody else so they could explain it. I feel like I can get to know myself a little bit more about something like that.

Maria shared that she participated as a teacher with something previously, but it had been quite different. She explained, “I was helping the kids with orientation when they were having problems. They were fighting in school. I [had] to go to the house to see what was going on.” She explained that she had done this when she was in high school in Puerto Rico. Maria explained that this program had been challenging for her, because it was the first time she was ever involved as a leader and had to go out of her comfort zone and speak English with the other parents at times. She conceded that, in the end, the program had been a very positive experience, because the other mothers had taught her also and she had the opportunity to practice having conversations with other mothers in English as well. Evalisa added, “And you get to know more parents around the school. It’s just the simple fact that I did not know any parents, and now I walk around, and I know at least five more people. So it’s good to just know more people.”

I prompted the mothers to tell me other ways in which this program had helped them connect with other parents. Evalisa mentioned, “You get to know things about other people, even like the woman JoEllen, with her business. I had no idea she had a business with cookies and stuff. It’s just interesting to get to know them a little bit more, find out the situations of a lot
of these parents, so it’s just a good experience.” Maria shared that one of the learners had seen her at the store and said “Hola!” She said it was nice to see and interact with another mother outside of the school setting, as she had never been approached by another parent outside of the school before. Evalisa said it would have been great to have an even bigger group of participants that could come every time. She mentioned that having childcare available was essential. She stated:

If it was not for the childcare, either all the kids would have been running around, and it would have not been a good learning environment, or the parents couldn’t be here. Like there was no way. So at least you know your kid is doing their homework, and they’re being entertained.

Maria added, “That was a good thing for mine too, now every day they’re doing their homework [right after school]. When they go home they say, “Let me do homework!” and on Thursday they ask to stay again.” Evalisa agreed that her child benefitted from getting into a routine of doing homework right after school as well. She commented that prior to establishing this routine, she always wanted to come home and immediately play games on the computer.

When asked about the most rewarding part of the program, Maria immediately said, “the book!” She described that it felt very special that she was able to contribute to the group by bringing the *La Cartilla* book. She said her mother-in-law was currently working on sending the next level of the book, and she was planning to donate that to the school as well. She mentioned that it could help if we decided to do another program. Evalisa added that she was surprised Maria was able to get that book so quickly, all the way from Puerto Rico. Evalisa continued by describing the most rewarding part for her was getting to meet other people. She commented,
“Just that they’re trying to learn Spanish and we’re trying to help them and to help the community, and that’s good.”

When I asked about the most challenging part of the program, Evalisa stated, “Being here for the class. For me, I would just rush, because I’m at the community college working. Other than that, I liked being here.” Maria described her biggest challenge was having to miss several classes because of her son. She also added that when she was able to attend, it was difficult for her, because she usually had her baby grandson and other family members with her as well, and she was always thinking about them when she was trying to concentrate on participating in the sessions. She mentioned that even though her mother was there to help, she usually took the lead in caring for the child.

The mothers were then asked to share how this experience was different from other parent involvement experiences in which they had participated previously. Evalisa answered, “Usually when I’ve been involved, it was either volunteering for a school activity or just helping out at an event. This was different, because I knew what I was doing. I knew what I was talking about. I felt like it was close to home, you know? Like I know what I’m trying to talk about. I know what I’m trying to do. It was just a matter of trying to get it so that they could understand it.” Maria responded, “And for me, this was the first, because this was the first time I come to a program for the school.” She clarified that she had participated in conferences with her children’s teachers before, but that this was the only time she had been involved in a program for adults. Maria noted that she would be more willing to become involved in the future after participating in this program. She added, “I could teach a little bit better next time, you know, more than the first time because I was nervous.” Evalisa noted that the group had gotten very comfortable. She said, “You’re here with a little group, it’s enclosed, it’s not like you’re doing it
in front of a class. It’s different, it really is.” She mentioned that the learners seemed to begin to understand the challenges of learning a second language, and that the teachers had also experienced many of these same challenges when learning English. Maria told several stories of her struggle with speaking English and the helplessness she felt when she could not say certain words. The first example was when she was looking for coffee filters at the grocery store and found a clerk who she knew spoke Spanish but refused to speak Spanish with her until she was completely frustrated and embarrassed. She said this also happened at another store as well. Maria also mentioned that she had recently gone to Subway to get a sandwich. She looked to see what the man in front of her was ordering, decided it looked pretty good, and just told the Subway worker that she would like the same thing. She said she would rather do that than try to struggle through making all of the choices and finding all of the words in English for those choices. Maria mentioned that while she wants to learn English better, it is sometimes exhausting to try. Evalisa added, “Well, it’s a process. Just like they were learning in Spanish. It takes some time. You just have to get used to it.”

I asked whether being around the other parents helped her learn any English while she was at the program sessions. She agreed that it had been helpful in especially helping her identify multiple meanings of words which she mentioned was one of her biggest struggles. She clarified that it was much easier to practice her English with the small group, because people in public often talk too fast. She told a story about taking her son to the doctor and having to ask the doctor to talk slowly, because she really wanted to know what was going on.

When asked if they would participate in a future program, Evalisa shared that she has always been involved in the school as much as her schedule would allow and agreed that, depending on her schedule, she would be happy to participate in future programs. Maria agreed
and said, “If you do it again, you let me know!” I thanked both women for their participation in the program and for all of their hard work and effort as they left the room.

**Chapter Summary**

Throughout the program sessions outlined in this chapter as well as the final interviews conducted with both the teachers and the learners, I utilized the recordings, reflections, and my observations to relate the data to the purpose of the study which was to explore the identity development of the Latina mothers and the intercultural relationships that formed among the women participating in the study. Furthermore, the findings which evolved from the program sessions and interviews will be connected to the research questions governing the study and thematically discussed within chapter six.
CHAPTER SIX

OVERALL FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to explore the identity development of Latina mothers as they lead a parent education program and to examine the intercultural relationships that form as a result of this parent involvement experience. The research questions guiding the study include the following:

1. What have Latina mothers learned about their identity and intercultural relationships as a result of this language-based teaching and learning experience?

2. What role has teaching played in Latina mothers’ overall view of participation within this particular parent involvement experience?

3. What role does participating in this parent involvement program have on Latina mothers’ participation in their children’s K-12 school setting?

In analyzing the data collected throughout the Spanish Teaching and Learning Program sessions and during the pre and post interviews, several important findings emerged. Throughout this chapter, these findings have been organized into six categories which will be discussed in depth. These categories include: fostering meaning-making though sociocultural connections, establishing meaningful intercultural relationships, embracing the role of teacher/leader, enhancing communication, maintaining authentic and practical sessions, and positively impacting children. The first three sections directly relate to the purpose of the study: to examine the identity development of Latina mothers as they lead a parent education program and to examine the intercultural relationships that form as a result of this parent involvement experience. While also connected with the purpose of the study and overarching research
questions, the last three sections strongly relate to the program’s impact on the school community.

The first section describes how the teachers and learners involved in the program fostered meaning-making through socio-cultural connections. The second extends from the first section by analyzing the intercultural relationships which formed as a result of the experience, and the third section examines the Latina mothers’ identity development as they embraced their leadership role. While the findings primarily focused on the experience of the Latina mothers, critical elements pertaining to the learners as well as the shared experience of both the teachers and the learners are included in order to effectively craft the findings of this study through examining the full experience of all participants.

In addition to the three sections previously described, the data also revealed the program’s impact on parent involvement, specifically in the area of communication, within the school and community at large. Other findings included the teachers’ constant desire to maintain authentic and practical sessions that were meaningful to the adult learners as well as the positive effects the program subsequently had on the children of the mothers participating in the program.

These findings will be connected to existing literature and research and described through contextual examples that developed throughout the planning, acting, observing, and reflecting phases of the study. These phases occurred cyclically and included both elements of participatory and critical action research. As the mothers, particularly the teachers, fully engaged in both the planning and the implementation of the program, they developed a highly authentic program which effectively fostered adult learning through a number of different facets. These connections to adult learning will be described throughout the sections outlined in this chapter.
and further connected to research throughout the final chapter. A data display of the findings with categories and subcategories is outlined in the following section.

**Data Display**

**Study Purpose:** To explore the identity development of Latina mothers as they lead a parent education program and to examine the intercultural relationships that form as a result of this parent involvement experience.

**Findings emphasize their role in:**

**Fostering Meaning Making through Sociocultural Connections**

- Eliciting Funds of Knowledge
- Fostering Contextually-based Learning
- Building Empathy

**Establishing Meaningful Intercultural Relationships**

- Transcending Cultural and Linguistic Barriers
- Extending Beyond the Classroom

**Embracing the Role of Teacher/Leader**

- Navigating the Leadership Role
- Developing Connections among Teachers
- Reflecting on the Leadership Experience

**Enhancing Communication**

- Expanding Individual Communication Capacity
- Communicating to Connect

**Maintaining Authentic and Practical Sessions**

- Addressing the Participants’ Strengths and Needs
- Participating in Future Programs
Positively Impacting Children

Fostering Meaning-Making through Sociocultural Connections

Throughout the program, the teachers and learners collaborated through partnerships and whole-group activities to foster learning among all participants. The teachers shared personal stories and cultural and linguistic knowledge which greatly enhanced the overall learning experience. By scaffolding the information provided in the text to a higher level by offering personal anecdotes and sharing information that was specifically relevant to their community, the Latina teachers helped to provide context for the new information taught during the program. Through this social learning experience, a foundational aspect of sociocultural theory (Jaramillo, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978), a sense of empathy developed between both the teachers and the learners as they developed a mutual understanding for the challenges associated with learning a new language (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 1995).

Eliciting Funds of Knowledge

Personal anecdotes and other connections to their personal lives became a valuable way for the mothers to help teach Spanish to the learners. The teachers, as well as the other mothers in the group, were excited to share their stories related to their identities and the various paths their lives had taken. In addition to the teachers, the learners also frequently connected concepts, vocabulary, or ideas to their personal lives and experiences. The participants’ stories helped shed light on the mothers’ personality, talents, desires, and dreams. By connecting the information to something with which they were familiar, the teachers were able to confidently speak about the topics at hand and the learners were better able to internalize the new information. This idea of connecting to prior knowledge relates to the literature on sociocultural theory which describes this as an integral part of meaning making (Moll et al., 2002; Waterman,
2008). For example, during the lesson on weather vocabulary, Evalisa and Rita reviewed the new vocabulary words and shared personal information regarding why some of the words, such as hurricane, were more important to know when they were living in the Caribbean. They shared stories of violent tropical storms they had witnessed which left them without power for long amounts of time. In another session, the teachers described their favorite dishes and provided information pertaining to restaurants within the neighborhood that prepared these dishes. The Latina mothers even provided street by street directions telling the learners how to get to the restaurants. Rita also offered to cook some of the dishes that she and Evalisa described and bring them to the final session. She encouraged the other mothers (both the teachers and the learners) to also bring something that represented their cultures or something they typically make for their family. This prompted JoEllen to discuss her cultural background and share that she would like to bring some Dutch cookies made as part of her family business. This sharing of culture illustrated how sharing their funds of knowledge resulted in the exchange of resources that benefitted all of the mothers in the program (Moll et al., 2002).

Another example of how the teachers’ funds of knowledge helped to benefit the program and their connections with the learners was their constant ability to stretch beyond the face value of the guiding *Spanish for Gringos* resource (Harvey, 2008). During each session, the mothers helped to add, clarify, or alter certain concepts in the lessons based on their knowledge of Spanish and their awareness of what was most common or culturally acceptable within the community. Because the teachers were from different Spanish sub-cultures, they were also able to clarify multiple meanings of certain vocabulary words and phrases specific to Spanish in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. Rita shared an interesting example of how Spanish vocabulary can change meaning depending on the specific Spanish sub-culture. She told an
interesting story of when she hired a woman to help with her cleaning business. When she asked the woman to do something right away, the woman did not do it. Although she thought the woman was being rude, the woman actually thought Rita had asked her to do the task later. The communication breakdown had occurred because the word Rita understood to mean “right now”, but, to the other woman, it meant “later”. This story spurred a conversation among the group about multiple meaning words and the complexity of language. These conversations also described how unique and important the Spanish language was to each of the Latina mothers and how their language was an extremely interrelated part of their identity (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002). The mothers were grateful that the teachers could help them identify words that were specific to the population of Spanish speakers most highly represented in their community. Overall, the teachers’ expertise with the various topics was extremely valuable for the learners. Through sociocultural theory, the expertise of a more skilled individual is needed to help scaffold the learning of a novice (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 1995; Jaramillo, 1996). The teachers’ were able to showcase their strengths with the Spanish language in a way that was very meaningful for the other women in the group and helped to create a climate of mutual respect. This was evidenced by the learners’ reflection sheets which stated that they were thankful to have teachers that were native Spanish speakers. The Latina mothers’ funds of knowledge and sharing of their personal Discourses (Gee, 1991) helped the program reach a level of authenticity it likely would not have reached had mothers from the community not been the program leaders. Through highlighting aspects of their personal Discourses (or social practices, cultures, and subcultures), the Latina mothers were also able to help the learners empathetically understand their experiences, challenges, and culture throughout the Spanish Teaching and Learning Program (Gee, 1991). In addition to the personal stories shared by the Latina mothers, this level
of authenticity was achieved through the use of relevant, context-based examples of how the
vocabulary and phrases were truly used within the local community.

**Fostering Contextually-based Learning**

Throughout the sessions, the teachers helped the learners access a linguistic component of their local community with which they were not previously connected. This was achieved through both fostering and establishing contextually-based learning. From a sociocultural lens, learning extends from preexisting funds of knowledge that each person possesses as a result of her/his experiences, environment, and culture. Meaning is made by connecting new information to that which we already know (Gee, 1991; Kozulin, 1999). The mothers participating in the program came from highly diverse backgrounds (in regard to various elements such socioeconomic status, culture, religion). Each had a separate story to tell regarding their upbringing and prior involvement in the school system, and each had a different reason for participating in the program. As described in the previous section, the teachers frequently connected the new information to be presented in the sessions with their preexisting funds of knowledge which helped to ignite interest within the hearts of the learners (Berger, 2002). While individual connections were a critical aspect of learning process throughout this program, developing a shared context for learning was essential for establishing effective social connections. With the diversity of the group in mind, the teachers helped to create a common understanding or context for learning in addition to using and inviting real-life stories and examples to establish connections with the learners’ prior knowledge (Moll et al., 2002).

At the start of the program, the women knew little about one another; however, since the group was comprised of individuals who were all women and mothers, this gave the participants instant areas in which to connect. During the first session, they began to share basic information
about themselves and practice personal introductions in Spanish as well. The second session continued this notion of building a common ground from which to learn, as the mothers were encouraged to bring in family pictures and use Spanish vocabulary to describe the members of their families. This helped the mothers to discover commonalities with other mothers in the group. For example, several mothers realized that, in addition to all having elementary-age children, they also had teenagers and began to bond over the challenge of parenting teenagers. Another activity the mothers completed which helped to establish common ground was when they worked together to label the items in room with various Spanish vocabulary. The vocabulary cards posted throughout the room served as a shared foundation for learning and stayed in place until the end of the program. In addition to the shared text used a resource by all participants, these cards served as an additional reference that all members of the group could utilize as they were teaching/learning. The cooperative nature fostered by building common ground and working together as a group, aligned with the collectivistic nature commonly associated with the Latino culture (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). The Latina mothers were very comfortable with this idea of working as a full group to learn from one another and preferred informal group conversations over one person leading the group (Trumbull et al., 2001).

Throughout the sessions, the mothers continued to learn and share information which helped them to more comfortably and effectively interact with each other. Over time, the mothers moved from making personal connections to making associations that were related to the learning of other group members. For example, Rita suggested adding medical vocabulary to the schedule, because she knew it would be beneficial for Marcy in her profession. Also, the teachers began to scaffold the information for the learners by providing clues such as, “you should know this word because it connects with what you did on Saturday with your daughter”.
These connections not only helped the mothers to put the new information into context, they also helped promote relationships between the mothers which led to empathy between the teachers and learners in the group.

**Building Empathy**

During the first few sessions, the learners revealed various reasons for wanting to learn Spanish and participate in the group. Their reasons ranged from hoping to help their children learn Spanish (either because they were currently in a bilingual program or they had expressed interest in learning Spanish) to wanting to communicate with the clerk at the corner store. All of the mothers communicated an interest in connecting with other mothers in the school. As described previously, the teachers hoped to contribute their Spanish language expertise while also learning some English throughout the process as well. Despite their varying reasons for joining the program, the women experienced shared challenges associated with learning a new language. This included difficulty with pronouncing the words and the inability to access vocabulary to communicate fluently and accurately. One of the most interesting findings that arose from these challenges was the shared sense of empathy which developed regarding the difficulties associated with learning a new language. As the learners began to hear the stories of the Latina mothers, they began to experience a shift in their personal Discourses which contributed to this feeling of empathy which emerged. As Gee describes, this shift in personal Discourses can often occur when the foundations of these Discourses change drastically such as when a person is immersed in a new culture or learning a new language such as in the Spanish Teaching and Learning Program (1991).

From the start of the program, the teachers were very supportive and encouraging as the learners struggled to remember the new information. The Latina mothers were extremely patient
and gracious as the learners made mistakes and had to be reminded of concepts. The learners were surprised at how challenging learning a new language could be. For example, in the fourth session, Tashauna exclaimed, “This is why people start learning this language when they are kids...I love it, but it’s just so [difficult]”. JoEllen often tried to push herself to use longer and more complex sentences even though it took a great deal of time and effort. Marcy and Melissa were often timid when prompted to speak out loud in Spanish but noted on their reflection forms that they wished to continue to be pushed to speak in Spanish. At the end of the program, the learners reflected on these challenges and made the connection to the teachers’ experiences with learning English. They shared that they had a much better understanding of the anxiety and insecurity their teachers were experiencing in learning to speak English. One learner commented that she sometimes overhears people complaining that all of the Spanish speaking people in the community should just learn English. She claimed that if those people knew how difficult that task actually was, they would not be so quick to judge others.

Through their shared struggle of learning another language, the teachers were also able to share personal experiences that helped create a bond with the learners in the group. When reviewing the time and date in Spanish, Evalisa shared a story of how difficult it was for her to remember the order when writing the date. She commented, “It was so hard for me as a kid to get used to that, because I went to first and second grade here [in Pennsylvania], and I was taught the month, the day, and the year. In Puerto Rico, it’s the day, the month, and the year. When I was in high school, I still had problems with it!” Maria shared a recent example of a time when she was ordering a sandwich at Subway and merely stated that she would like what the person in front of her had ordered rather than trying to place a complete order including numerous sandwich toppings in English. The stories shared by the Latina mothers helped the learners to
understand and connect with their struggles and potentially speak knowledgeably to these struggles when uninformed and inappropriate comments are made regarding marginalized groups (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002). Because the difficulties encountered with learning a new language were very similar for both groups of mothers, they were able to empathize with one another in a way that led to meaningful intercultural relationships.

Establishing Meaningful Intercultural Relationships

As a result of the sociocultural learning focus of the program which elicited the stories and background knowledge of both the teachers and the learners, the women developed bonds that breached cultural and linguistic barriers. Through developing a shared sense of empathy regarding learning a new language, the mothers were also able to connect beyond a superficial level. These connections also had a positive impact throughout the sessions as well as outside of the classroom.

Transcending Cultural and Linguistic Barriers

The relationships formed by the mothers deepened with each session. These intercultural connections were fostered by first establishing common ground and similarities. For the participants, their commonalities were acknowledged early in the program, as they were all women, mothers, and second language learners. As the program progressed, the learners were better able to communicate in Spanish. Their shared ability to speak Spanish was celebrated by both the teachers and the learners and helped to reduce the linguistic barrier that had previously existed. As described through the literature, the language barrier often obstructs the development of effective relationships and connections within the school community (Guo, 2006; Turney & Kao, 2009; Sohn and Wang, 2006). During session six, Rita told the learners that their Spanish pronunciation had improved. She stated, “You sound much better—not so
“gringo!” The learners laughed, because they recognized how unnatural they had sounded at the beginning of the program. Rita’s comment about the mothers sounding “gringo” may not have been welcome early on; however, it was well-received and created a lighthearted moment due to its placement in the latter half of the program once deeper relationships had been fostered.

In addition to creating connections based on commonalities, intercultural relationships were also developed by establishing and celebrating the differences of the women in the group. Through acknowledging these differences, the mothers were able to celebrate each person’s individual strengths. This focus on the women’s unique identities was both self-affirming and especially positive for the Latina mothers as they had a platform through which to communicate the complex layers of their identities (Garcia, 2004).

Throughout their reflections, the learners revealed that they especially appreciated the information about the Latino culture that was shared by the teachers. This multicultural education occurred naturally throughout the program and then more deliberately in session eight through which a portion of the session was dedicated to having the mothers share information that was specific to their home country. The program upheld many tenets of culturally responsive teaching by including many contextually-based examples which related to the specific community in which the mothers live and work (Gay, 2010). Additionally, personal stories were elicited and authentic connections were fostered between the new information and the lived experiences of the participants (Gay, 2010). The topics of study throughout this program intentionally steered away from presenting “imperialist, white-supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal” views often found in education programs (hooks, 2003, p. 1). To supplement what was presented by the teachers, the book provided some information about additional Spanish-speaking cultures. In her reflection, JoEllen wrote that she would like to learn more about
different Spanish-speaking cultures. During their final interview, the learners revealed that being able to get to know others at a deeper level and realizing that their teachers are real people with real lives, interests, and feelings helped build meaningful relationships between all mothers in the group. These comments illustrated that the learners had become privy to the challenges associated with the hegemonic structures experienced by their Latina teachers (Brookfield, 2005). All of the learners were very grateful that the Latina mothers had volunteered their time to teach Spanish. They expressed that the teachers’ background knowledge and thorough understanding of authentic Spanish terms and phrases that were relevant to their community were extremely helpful.

In addition to promoting intercultural connections through building upon commonalities and differences that existed within the group, the program was also designed for a high level of collaboration which fostered relationship development between the mothers. While the sessions were somewhat structured, they were designed to be flexible and invited a great deal of interactive participation from all women. For much of the time, the women sat around a large table facing one another. The physical structure of the space lent itself to “round table” discussions and participation. The women were encouraged to add their thoughts, feelings, questions, or concerns whenever they felt appropriate. The original plan was for each learner to be paired with the same teacher during partner activities for the duration of the program; however, this did not happen naturally throughout the program. Because the group consisted of between four and eight people each week, it was much more natural for the partnerships to fluidly change based on the mothers’ seating arrangement and depending on which participants were present at each session. The mothers enjoyed the collaborative nature of the program and especially appreciated the opportunities to practice Spanish conversations with their partners.
This collectivistic or group-centered approach to learning is frequently absent from formal education in the United States, but was preferred by all of the mothers participating in the program (Trumbull et al., 2001). The teachers were also happy to communicate with the learners over the phone or in person outside of the sessions. Each teacher provided her personal phone number for the learners and encouraged them to call with any questions or to practice concepts that had been introduced. By inviting communication outside of the class setting, the mothers began to extend the program beyond the four walls of the classroom.

**Extending Beyond the Classroom**

As the program gained momentum and began to function more smoothly due to the participants’ increasingly developed relationships with one another, two interesting things happened: the participants expressed a desire for informal social connections, and the program began to attract attention from other parents of children at the school.

The mothers’ appreciation for collaborative group and partner activities led to a desire to plan an informal social gathering as part of the final session. Toward the middle of the program, the mothers began discussing the prospect of having a fiesta. They wanted to have the fiesta to celebrate their accomplishments throughout the program and to take some time to informally chat and enjoy some refreshments specific to each woman’s cultural background. This idea, driven by Rita, was discussed frequently throughout the program. The mothers began to record their excitement regarding the upcoming fiesta on their reflection forms. Seeing the mothers’ connections extend beyond the barriers which had initially been in place and outside the semi-formal structure of the sessions was invigorating.

While cultural dinners are often criticized for being an activity that often promotes learning about different cultures at a superficial level, this fiesta served a much more complex
role, as the final celebratory activity of an intercultural experience. Because of this, the fiesta planned by the mothers in the program transcended the superficial level often reached by many cultural dinners that merely celebrate the food, songs, and dances of various cultures. This program was able to not only bridge but celebrate differences and create social networks that were beneficial to all of the participants (Alfred, 2009).

In addition to planning an event through which to interact socially, the mothers in the program began to communicate (often in Spanish) with one another outside of the sessions and led to interest about the program from other parents in the school community. As described by Rita, several families asked her questions about the program during student drop off and pick up time at the school. She shared that parents saw her speaking Spanish to the “Gringa” mothers in the program and asked if she was teaching Spanish in the program. She revealed how these parents looked surprised when she said yes, because (in her words), they appeared to be thinking, “you don’t look like you help the school.” She added that the parents “hear about [the program]. They hear about what you are doing, what the school is doing. We [the Latina mothers] feel like part of the school, part of the program.”

Maria’s story about seeing one of the learners at Wal-Mart was equally as powerful. She shared that the women came right up to her and said “hola”. Maria shared that she had never been approached by another parent outside of the school before and was very appreciative that the woman had taken the time to say hello. As these positive effects began to ripple throughout the school and community, the Latina mothers began to more confidently embrace their role as a leader in the program which, at first, they so anxiously had assumed.


Embracing the Role of Teacher/Leader

When asked to be involved in the program, the teachers all expressed a high level of anxiety over participating in this role. This nervous reaction occurred for several reasons: the idea of assuming a leadership role was intimidating, the women had faced both language and cultural barriers when participating in other parent involvement opportunities within the school, and many had very busy lives and found it difficult to set aside the time commitment required by the program. The women had pre-conceived notions that the task would be too difficult or that they would be unable to rise to the challenge. As the program developed, the Latina mothers began to realize their ability to lead and contribute to the group which contributed to a heightened sense of self-awareness for the mothers. The process toward self-awareness involved navigating their leadership role, developing connections with the other teachers in the group, and reflecting on their leadership experience.

Navigating the Leadership Role

Although the Latina mothers’ exhibited initial apprehension over being asked to lead the program, it was evident that they wanted to and were ultimately able to rise to the challenge. Initially, the teachers began to bond over the idea that they could incorporate La Cartilla materials. They shared stories of how they had used La Cartilla when learning to read in Spanish as children and began to talk about how to incorporate this resource into the lessons. The notion of using materials that had been used to teach Spanish in their personal experience helped the mothers realize their potential as experts and fostered a link between their prior knowledge of something they had experienced personally and the current task at hand. In fact, the mothers began to recognize this as an opportunity to showcase their language—a very important aspect of their identity (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002; Keating, 2009). Once the Latina
mothers began to recognize the links between their experiences and their role as a Spanish teacher in the program, they began to lead with greater confidence and frequently connected the material to their funds of knowledge. The mothers detailed personal narratives during their interviews and throughout the program sessions. As described by Guzik and Gorlier, this practice of sharing personal narratives helps Latinas to “express themselves as individual feminist subjects” (2004, p. 92). An example how the teachers made these personal connections occurred during Seriah’s pre-program interview through which she described the adversity she had faced that made her the strong person she is today. This was also evident in session seven when Evalisa was reviewing the medical vocabulary listed in the text. When she got to the word *la diagnosis*, she commented that the word was used differently in the book than how it should be used based on her knowledge of Spanish commonly used in the community. At her direction, the mothers changed the word on their flash card to the proper form. The learners and I expressed that we were glad for her expertise in helping to clarify and catch items that may need further clarification.

In addition to the mothers gaining confidence by drawing upon their background knowledge, they also began to more assertively lead the lessons as they developed deeper relationships with the other mothers in the group. As these connections grew, the environment, which initially was somewhat threatening to the teachers, began to reflect a more risk-free atmosphere in which the mothers felt comfortable sharing and teaching the learners through their personal stories and examples from the text (hooks, 2003; Sheared et al., 2010).

As the environment became less threatening for the teachers, they were able to more authentically teach the other adult learners in the program. The mothers naturally began to shift from delivering information to the learners and having them simply repeat the vocabulary words
to facilitating the learning process through utilizing more context-based examples and practical, constructive learning activities. This transformation toward facilitating rather than directing the sessions was evident in various lesson components including the warm-up passages which utilized new and previously-practiced vocabulary in context, and the monster project which fostered creative ways for learners to display their understanding of new concepts. Toward the end of the program, the teachers encouraged the learners to use the context clues in the Spanish passage they were reading to find the meaning of new vocabulary rather than simply translating the words into English for them. This helped to elicit higher-level thinking which was an extension of the basic skills taught in the first few sessions.

As the Latina mothers began to constructively foster learning by scaffolding the learners’ knowledge rather than simply giving them answers (Lantolf & Pavlenko, Jaramillo, 1996), they also began to recognize their own strengths and how they could best contribute to the program. While Rita was a more natural leader, Evalisa also became very comfortable speaking in front of the others and leading the lessons. Rita was also very talented at incorporating and bridging topics that would be relevant to the learners based on what she learned about their personalities, families, professions, and reasons for wanting to speak Spanish. Maria valued the time spent practicing conversations with a partner and would stay after the sessions to provide feedback about the program and offer to find helpful materials and resources. By developing this awareness of their personal strengths and navigating their leadership role, the Latina mothers were able to more effectively relate to one another.

Developing Connections among Teachers

In addition to the intercultural bonds which developed between the teachers and the learners, connections were established between the teachers as well. At the beginning of the
program, the flow of instruction was slightly disjointed. When beginning a new topic, I had to prompt one of the teachers to lead. Toward the middle of the program, the Latina mothers (specifically Evalisa and Rita) began to take the initiative to lead the activities without being prompted. They were much more comfortable speaking up and adding to the conversation even if another teacher was leading. Maria took a more passive role due to her shy nature but greatly contributed to the program by bringing materials to supplement the sessions.

Initially, the teachers struggled to appropriately interject their comments while another mother was leading. While Rita was most inclined to naturally take charge, she sometimes approached situations in an unintentionally intimidating manner. For example, as Maria (after some encouragement) began to lead an alphabet activity at the beginning of the program, Rita was quick to jump in and correct a mistake she made regarding the name of the letter ‘j’. While Rita’s intention was merely to provide accurate information for the group, this shook Maria’s already lacking confidence. When Maria did not return for the following session, I was worried that she decided to permanently leave the program because of the incident. Following her absence, I called her at home and shared that the teachers and learners had really missed her at the program and hoped she would return the following week. Luckily, Maria was able to overcome her insecurities that had been magnified while leading the activity and decided to return the next week. Throughout the other sessions she attended, she successfully led activities and participated in the discussions in a valuable way. She and Rita also developed a very positive connection as they got to know one another at a deeper, more personal level.

The teachers brought individual strengths to the program. The combination of these assets helped with the success of the program. While it took several sessions for the mothers to establish a level of comfort which allowed for smoother transitions and a greater understanding
of each other’s personalities and strengths, they were able to successfully accomplish this early on. The Latina mothers began to naturally take the lead on activities, build upon conversations, and interject their expertise while still maintaining the flow of the lesson. Their reflections revealed that, as they increasingly took pride in their language, they were able more fully recognized their potential as leaders in the program and began to demonstrate pride in themselves (Anzaldúa, 2007).

**Reflecting on the Leadership Experience**

Throughout their written reflections and interactions with those in the group, the teachers gradually began to embrace their role in the program. At first, the Latina mothers did not frequently answer the question on their reflection form regarding what they had learned about themselves as leaders. They would often write that they did not know what they had learned or that they were still learning. For much of the program, these women were not able to self-identify how they were growing as leaders; however, it was very apparent to me as an observer. I watched the mothers change over time from being prompted to lead a section to contributing confidently without first being encouraged. I also watched the mothers begin to authentically interact with the other mothers based on their commonalities and unique qualities. This was evidenced by the shift through which the mothers began to facilitate the learning of the group based on their knowledge of the learners and their background knowledge of the material.

Although the realization that they were experts did not occur initially, the mothers were able to recognize this over time as they began to take pride in their knowledge, identity, and strengths (Anzaldúa, 2007).

As the program progressed, Rita began to acknowledge her accomplishments as a leader by recording statements on her reflection form such as, “you never know what you have inside
you”. Rita had received a college education in the Dominican Republic and had been employed in her home country as a translator for the court system. Despite her strong background with academic Spanish, Rita initially seemed to overlook her great potential to contribute to the program and demonstrated apprehension over teaching very basic Spanish to the mothers in the group. Through reflection, Rita began to recognize her potential to not only effectively lead the group but to also participate as an expert. The same was true for both Evalisa and Maria as they frequently shared their expertise through personal stories or connections that extended beyond the resources. At the end of session seven, Evalisa finally commented on what she was learning about herself as a teacher by writing, “that I can teach!” This mirrored Rita’s notion that you never know what you can do until you embrace a new challenge.

In addition to the reflection process through which the teachers began to recognize their strengths and leadership capacity, the learners also recorded appreciation for the positive contributions of the Latina mothers. Through their reflection forms, they noted deep gratitude over the fact that the native Spanish-speaking mothers were leading the group. This appreciation for the culture and linguistic expertise of the Latina mothers evidenced the culturally responsive practices which had been beneficial for both the teachers and learners in the group (Gay, 210). During session seven, JoEllen verbally shared this appreciation. When she used the appropriate pronunciation when reading a sentence, Rita said, “We have a good student! That was really good.” JoEllen quickly replied, “That’s because we have good teachers!” Through developing this awareness of their strengths and potential to contribute to the school community as leaders, the mothers began to more freely interact with the learners, thus enhancing the level of communication, an important type of parent involvement (Epstein, et al., 2002).
Enhancing Communication

One of the most transparent findings from this study was the manner in which this program enhanced communication between the teachers and the learners. Prior to the study, the women had very little contact with one another. Both the teachers and the learners expressed a desire to learn to communicate more effectively in a second language. The teachers hoped to attain a higher level of English proficiency through connecting with the learners who were native English speakers while the learners hoped to communicate effectively using basic Spanish. Both groups had very interesting reasons for wishing to expand their capacity for communication. In addition to the individual reasons expressed by the mothers for wanting to improve their ability to speak a second language, an overarching theme of using communication as a vehicle for intercultural connection emerged from the study as well. Through their increased ability to communicate in each other’s native languages, the mothers began to see one another in a more authentic light which promoted value of the mothers’ individualities based off of the common linguistically-based foundation they were building together.

Expanding Individual Communication Capacity

One of the main goals of the program was promoting the capacity for Spanish communication for the learners in the group. Equally as important became the teachers’ goal of increasing their individual ability to communicate in English. Both were accomplished throughout the course of the program. Each mother’s desire to learn a second language stemmed from a personal goal, whether it was to communicate with others at work or in the community, help their children with their homework, or connect with other parents in the school. These personal reasons for enhancing their level of communication was a driving force that kept the
mothers coming back to the program each week. Communicating, described as one of the types of parent involvement is typically considered in regard to the interactions between school personnel and parents (Epstein et al., 2002). This program demonstrated the importance of building effective communication between parents within the school community as well.

As the mothers were challenged with learning the new language, they ran into a number of struggles. JoEllen frequently verbalized this frustration at not being able to access the vocabulary she needed through comments such as, “It’s like I’m staring at it, and I don’t have the words to describe it!” and, “Sometimes I think if you just stop long enough it’ll come out, but it doesn’t work that way.” Evalisa commiserated from her perspective sharing that while she was very proficient in English, she still experienced difficulties comprehending what was being said. She stated, “I feel so stupid that I have to stare at [people speaking English] in order to catch what they’re saying. And again, I can express myself in English very well, but I still have that issue.” Evalisa’s comment shed light on the tremendous amount of time it takes to become fully proficient in a language that is not your dominant language and how it can pose a challenge throughout a person’s life.

In addition to expanding individual communication in a second language, the program also advanced communication in the sense that it gave the Latina mothers a voice within the school. The Latina mothers expressed pride in having the opportunity to share what they described as “their” language with the other parents and to facilitate communication in a way that differed from other programs which were developed around teaching English to Spanish speakers. Through participating as leaders in the group, the teachers also were seen as experts, thus boosting their confidence levels and prompting them to not only overcome a language barrier but also show a side of themselves that was unknown to other parents through sharing
their stories, personal anecdotes, and knowledge of the Spanish language. By communicating with one another through sharing stories, partner activities, or whole-group interaction, the mothers also used communication as a way to connect with one another.

**Communicating to Connect**

Collectively, the mothers in the group saw great benefit in enhancing their communication skills to gain better access to their community and perform daily tasks in a more efficient manner. This was true for both the teachers and the learners. Throughout the sessions, the mothers leaned greatly on their social collaboration with others in order to learn the new information (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000). As described previously, reciprocal teaching occurred throughout this collaborative model which benefited both the second language skills of the teachers and the learners and drew them closer as they began to understand and learn about one another. As Rita described in her final interview, “I really liked the program. I really like[ed] that I help[ed] the other parents and they help[ed] me with my English. Because you know I don’t have absolute perfect English, I’m confused so easy. So that helped me.” Rita went on to describe how she viewed herself and the other mothers as little, individual drops of water that could collectively work together help the school community thrive. She shared that the program was one step beyond what many other adult programs in the schools achieve, because it focused on strengthening communication in Spanish rather than in English. She stated, “If you are able to talk to other parents, you are open to everyone. It opens communication.” Marcy also stated through her reflection form in session three that, the program is a great way to communicate with others.” This increased ability for communication among parents within the school was valued by the parents in the program and illustrated a need
within multicultural communities that extends beyond parents effectively communicating with school personnel (Epstein et al., 2002).

In addition to creating an opportunity for the mothers to communicate using both the teachers’ and learners’ preferred language of communication at various points throughout the sessions, the program also provided a chance for the learners to more authentically speak Spanish through the modeling and assistance of the Latina teachers. Toward the end of the program, the learners had modified their accents when speaking Spanish which, at first, sounded very unnatural. During session six, Rita acknowledged their progress by saying, “Muy bien! Very good! Muy muy bien! Even the pronunciation, it sounds different. Not so gringo! All of the teachers frequently stopped to assist the mothers with their pronunciation and accentuation throughout the program to ensure that the learners were not merely memorizing vocabulary words, but that they were able to orally produce them appropriately. This collective practice helped foster more authentic communication in Spanish between the teachers and the learners over the course of the program. During the final session, the mothers discussed various Latino restaurants within their community. The mothers referred to the surrounding area as “our” neighborhood. This shift in their language reflecting a shared community and shared resources within that community represented the relationships which had been formed by the deep level of communication that was shared by the women.

**Maintaining Authentic and Practical Sessions**

To maintain an authentic environment that was conducive to learning, the teachers continually reorganized the schedule and the agenda items to include and allow appropriate time for items that were most practical and relevant for the learners. Through the relationships that developed between the women as a result of their commonalities and appreciation for each
others’ strengths and unique qualities, a risk-free environment was established (hooks, 2003). As described throughout the mothers’ interviews, the teaching and learning program was different from any program in which they had previously been invited to participate. Since the parents participated as adult students and teachers, their role in the community was expanded beyond the often considered role of teacher for their children within the home. By focusing their instruction on an extremely prevalent, yet non-dominant, language in their community, the program was built on a unique, yet very meaningful, premise for the mothers in the group. The goal of teaching basic Spanish was very appealing to both the teachers and the learners because of their individual strengths and needs which were continuously considered throughout the planning, acting, observing, and reflecting stages of this study.

Addressing the Mothers’ Strengths and Needs

As the program was developed and the sessions were taught, there was a constant ebb and flow between incorporating authentic and relevant examples and the personal stories of the teachers to help solidify important concepts while also addressing the practical needs of the learners. To achieve balance, the program required a welcoming environment through which the mothers could express thoughts that were beneficial to the learning experience (hooks, 2003). According to the mothers, this necessary comfort level was achieved within the parent resource center where the program was held. Rita described that, because the mothers had the freedom to ask for what they needed and to stop and explain items when clarification was desired, the program differed from traditional formal education that may happen in a school, because of the flexible structure. She noted that this was a very positive aspect of the program and that the mothers felt free to ask and learn which is why the sessions were so comfortable.
The teachers also addressed their desire to contextualize the vocabulary that was being taught in order to most effectively foster meaning for the learners. Once establishing a basic foundation by outlining basic greetings, letters, and sounds, the teachers began to use more context embedded examples and began to introduce concepts and topics through full paragraphs and examples rather than simply identifying isolated vocabulary words and having the learners repeat their pronunciation. Rita mentioned that as an adult, she learns differently than her children. She described that she best learns in context, or “in talking.” Rita also shared that adults only learn, “what [they] prefer” or that which is relevant. This is supported by Knowles through the theory of andragogy which states that adults are relevancy oriented and only will put forth effort to learn something they see as valuable (as cited in Merriam et al., 2007). JoEllen agreed with this notion by stating that she only would budget time to learn something that was helpful to her. She described, “If this hadn’t been something that was helpful for me, I would not have come.” During her post-program interview, Melissa shared that the program had been a beneficial learning experience because it was a “heartfelt need” of their community. This notion aligns with Berger’s idea that igniting a spark in the heart of an individual is important in the construction of new knowledge (2002). Melissa described the importance of finding out what these interests or needs are and then acting on them:

Let’s just fact it, if it’s not a heartfelt need, it’s going to be hard to make it happen, but if there’s a need, it’s going to be a lot easier to have it happen. There’s going to be motivation to say, “Yeah, this is what we’ll sacrifice for.”

To ensure the topics were relevant and addressed the needs of the mothers, the sessions were continually modified. For example, in learning that Marcy wanted to learn more about medical vocabulary to use within her job setting, Rita was sure to add this topic to the agenda
and voice the importance of including job-related vocabulary in future sessions to me and the teachers. This further demonstrated how the teachers continually strived to relevantly meet the needs of the learners throughout the program and aligns with the notion that adults need to find importance in what they are learning (Merriam et al., 2007).

Since the learners wanted to use their Spanish right away, the agenda was also amplified frequently to address “on the spot” requests of the mothers. For example, in session four, JoEllen wanted to know how to ask the cost of an item, so the teachers stopped and shared that information. In planning for session five, Melissa responded that she would like to go over city vocabulary since all members of the group lived in a city. This idea of choosing relevant topics and vocabulary that could be used with immediacy pervaded the program. This notion also aligns with one of the main assumptions of andragogy (Merriam et al., 2007). The expertise of the teachers was instrumental in clarifying certain Spanish vocabulary and phrases that would be most frequently used within their specific community. Because the program provided such an authentic and relevant experience for the mothers, they were highly interested at the prospect of participating in a similar experience in the future.

**Participating in Future Programs**

Within the post-program interviews, all participants shared that they would be very willing to take part in a similar program in the future as long as it would fit into their busy schedules and provide them the opportunity to either teach or learn something meaningful. The mothers stated their interest in the program stemmed from the fact that they found value in the topic and that it was relevant to them because of the community in which they lived. They shared that if the program topic had not interested them, they would not have budgeted time for it. As described by JoEllen through her post-program interview:
If I have something that I can give and something that I can receive in a setting like this, then I would definitely be there, because this is, by far, the most valuable thing that I have participated in, in this kind of setting.

The teachers also stated that they were willing to participate because it was a topic with which they had background knowledge. Rita described that being an expert in the group gave her the confidence boost she needed to assume the role of leader in the program.

The mothers also described that having childcare was an essential aspect of their ability to participate. Melissa commented that her family lived about two hours away, and she did not have a local babysitter. If the school had not had a childcare option, she and the other mothers could only have attended if they were able to bring their children to the session. They agreed that the program would have had a much different atmosphere and they likely would not have covered as much information with the very young children in the room.

**Positively Impacting Children**

In addition to the findings which directly related to the adult learners, positive elements of the experience transferred to other family members, particularly the children of the mothers participating, as well. Positive impacts for children are often the result of effective parent involvement programs that bridge connections within the school community (Epstein, 2005; Henderson et al., 2007). Interestingly, several of the mothers originally decided to join the program because of their children. Either they wanted to help teach their own children who wanted to learn or were in the process of learning Spanish or they wanted to demonstrate the importance of volunteering within the school community. The latter was especially true for the Latina mothers, and was visible through conversations with their children which were elicited as a result of the mothers’ involvement in the program. This notion aligns with one of the main
themes throughout the literature on Latino and CLD parent involvement which highlights these parents’ desire to help their children succeed both socially and academically (Quiocho & Daoud, 2006; Ryan et al., 2010). Also impacted was the manner in which the mothers contributed to their children’s education within the home, as well as the mothers’ outlook on promoting second language learning with their own children.

All of the participants took advantage of the school’s after school childcare when the sessions were taking place. Prior to the beginning of the program, the mothers had conversations with their children explaining why they would need to go to the after school childcare program each Thursday afternoon. Questions were posed by the children regarding what their mothers would be doing at the school. When the Latina mothers told their children they would be participating in a program where they would be teaching other mothers Spanish, their children had a variety of reactions. Rita’s children thought it was amusing that their mother would be volunteering as a teacher at their school, Evalisa’s daughter wanted to know why her mother was helping, and one of Maria’s sons was initially very nervous about attending childcare. The teachers explained that they found this a great opportunity to explain to their children the importance of helping others and helping out the school. These conversations gave the learners the opportunity to explain how they were investing their time in the school community as well. This related to the mothers’ desire to lead by example which was revealed in the pre-program interviews and throughout the sessions. Originally, the teachers were skeptical of their ability to assume a leadership role but worked to succeed with the challenge. This matched their belief in the importance of leading their children by example. Through the conversations that were initiated as a result of the mothers joining this program, the mothers informed their children that it is necessary to face your fears, take on new challenges, support causes and program that are
important. These conversations also provided a platform for the mothers to discuss the value of lifelong learning and growing (Garcia Coll et al., 2002). As Rita described, she told her high-school age son that she didn’t care what studied in college in the future as long as he went to college for something and that it is imperative to never stop studying and learning. Showing children the value of lifelong learning and growing through participating in the teaching and learning program was very important to the mothers (Garcia Coll et al., 2002).

In addition to valuing lifelong learning and contributing to the school community, the mothers also described a desire to do what was best for their children educationally. For several mothers, the routine provided by the after school childcare program helped to establish a homework routine within their home. Maria and Evalisa shared that it was great how the children went straight from their classrooms to the childcare location where assistants would help them with their homework. They stated that it was a struggle to get their children to do their homework and that the task generally ended up with disagreements within their homes. This changed as a result of the homework help the children received during childcare. Maria shared that now, when her boys come home, she has established that they must complete their homework as soon once they have eaten a snack just like they did at the childcare program. The mothers shared that by setting up this homework schedule, it benefitted their children by ensuring that the homework would be completed at a time when the mothers could assist their children if needed.

In addition to helping their children in a more structured and strategic manner, described through the type of parent involvement referred to as learning at home (Epstein et al., 2002), the mother’s also began to express a desire to help their children learn Spanish. During the planning session, the Latina mothers expressed that their own children either refused to speak or were
unable to speak Spanish, even though their mothers and fathers spoke in Spanish at home. This
was further explained by Rita through her comment, “You think in your language of strongest
proficiency. My children think in English. My children did not maintain their Spanish even
though they were born in a Spanish-speaking country.”

Through their conversations, the Latina mothers began to discuss ways in which they
could promote literacy in Spanish within their own homes in order to maintain this important
aspect of their culture and identity (Moraga and Anzaldúa, 2002). This was also true for the
learners who wished their children could participate in program for learning Spanish. Because
there was no formal program set up within the school for elementary-age students to learn
Spanish, these mothers hoped to use the information they learned throughout the sessions to
teach their own children basic Spanish.

**Summary of Findings and Conclusion**

The findings which evolved from this action research study described the sociocultural
connections and intercultural relationships which developed as a result of this study. Chapter six
also provided insight as to the manner in which the teachers were able to embrace their
leadership role within the program while enhancing their level of communication with the
learners. The chapter also discussed how the mothers worked to maintain practical and relevant
the sessions to create an authentic adult learning environment. After discussing the findings
directly relating to the mothers, connections fostered between the mothers and their children as a
result of their participation in the program were also outlined.

While many interesting findings emerged from the Spanish Teaching and Learning
Program, these findings gain clout only when examined through and in extending beyond the
existing body of research surrounding this topic. Chapter seven continues to connect these
findings to the research and suggests both implications of this study and areas of future research beneficial to the field of adult education.
CHAPTER SEVEN
CONNECTION, IMPLICATIONS, AND REFLECTIONS

The purpose of this study is to examine the identity development of Latina mothers as they lead a parent education program and to examine the intercultural relationships that form as a result of this parent involvement experience. Specifically, this action study was guided by three research questions:

1. What have Latina mothers learned about their identity and intercultural relationships as a result of this language-based teaching and learning experience?

2. What role has teaching played in Latina mothers’ overall view of participation within this particular parent involvement experience?

3. What role does participating in this parent involvement program have on Latina mothers’ participation in their children’s K-12 school setting?

Throughout this study, which was a combination of critical and participatory action research, the Latina mothers followed the action research model of planning, acting, observing and reflecting (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Through this model, the mothers worked to develop agendas and lessons, and, subsequently, teach basic Spanish to a group of mothers who wanted to learn Spanish. During the eight, one-hour sessions, the mothers revised the program schedule on a weekly basis to develop a highly relevant, authentic language-learning experience that was rich with personal stories and examples from the Latina mothers. These revisions were made as the result of observations and reflections that were noted during each session. Throughout the experience, feedback and active participation from the teachers and the learners in addition to the intercultural relationships which formed between these groups were integral elements in making the program as effective and meaningful as possible. This foundation of the study aligned with
the tenets of both critical and participatory action research (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). The study was naturally associated with participatory action research because of the natural manner in which the participants led and molded the experience based on their needs. Furthermore, the more critical aspects of the study aligning it with critical action research became evident through the intercultural relationships and empathy that was established among the participants. The Latina mothers also began to develop a deeper understanding of their personal capacity for leadership within the school community which reflected elements of the critical action research model in which this study was rooted (Merriam & Simpson, 1995).

While considering the data and findings from the Spanish Teaching and Learning Program which were highlighted in chapters four through six, chapter seven will align these findings with the body of existing research surrounding sociocultural theory and Latina feminist theory which establish the foundation for this study. Furthermore, chapter seven will provide connections to the areas of critical multicultural education and parent involvement. After discussing the study in light of the theoretical viewpoint, the implications of the research will be outlined. Limitations of the study and areas for future research will also be examined.

**Discussion in Light of Theoretical Viewpoint**

The following sections will discuss the findings of the study in connection with the theoretical framework for the study. This framework includes sociocultural theory combined with Latina feminist perspectives. Critical multiculturalism, culturally responsive teaching, and language acquisition will also be highlighted.

**Sociocultural Connections**

As illustrated through the findings in chapter six, the mothers worked collaboratively to make meaning of the new material they were learning through the Spanish Teaching and
Learning Program. Through partnerships and whole-group activities, the adult learners increased their understanding of basic Spanish through leaning on the expertise of the Latina mothers who shared their preexisting funds of knowledge and stories to help solidify the concepts for the mothers participating under their tutelage. Sociocultural theory is rooted in this notion that learners build upon previous information, or background knowledge, to foster a deeper understanding of new material (Jaramillo, 1996; Packer & Goicoechea, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978).

Throughout the program, the teachers helped the learners make connections by sharing their personal funds of knowledge. The importance of eliciting prior knowledge and experiences is a critical element of sociocultural theory (Moll et al., 2002, Waterman, 2008). By sharing their personal stories, the Latina mothers helped the learners make connections to their own funds of knowledge. For example, through the introduction of weather vocabulary, the teachers discussed the tropical weather vocabulary that was heavily used when they lived in the Caribbean due to the frequent hurricanes and tropical storms. The Latina mothers told stories of severe storms and the effects of those storms. The learners began considering their present environment and deciding which vocabulary would be most beneficial to learn for their current setting. The discussion elicited social connections through stories from both the teachers and the learners and contextualized the new vocabulary within relevant examples of when and how the vocabulary is used.

Gee (1991) and Kozulin (1999) describe the importance of contextualizing new information and how an adult’s cultural tools vary depending on that individual’s cultural surroundings. Meaning is described as being rooted in the social and cultural context through which each personal develops. For the mothers participating in the program, their personal stories helped to promote these connections while also fostering deeper cross-cultural awareness.
and intercultural relationships. Alfred (2009) affirms the importance of these intercultural experiences by describing that an adult classroom setting with mutual respect and shared norms can bridge differences and develop social networks that are beneficial to all adult participants.

The benefits of the intercultural relationships formed through the program were frequently demonstrated in the participants’ comments and reflections. For example, in the post-program interview, Marcy explained how the program helped her to learn more about individuals and about their culture. She explained feeling a much deeper connection to other mothers within the school, especially the Latina mothers from whom she learned so much throughout the experience. Through these social, intercultural interactions, the mothers learned from one another in a highly relevant and authentic manner.

Theorists such as Bourdieu, Habermas, and Foucault describe how personal transformation can only occur in a social context that is “constitutive of being” or reflective of a person’s core, intrinsic beliefs which are often shaped by her/his culture (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000, p. 231). Developing intercultural relationships promotes reflection on personal cultural beliefs while establishing cross-cultural connections that help to evoke empathy. During the program, the teachers’ stories also helped to build this sense of empathy among the learners related to second language acquisition. The social interactions with and anecdotes shared by the teachers helped to develop the mutual respect mentioned by Alfred (2009). All of the learners in the program expressed their appreciation at having native Spanish-speaking mothers lead the program. They found value in learning about and connecting with the teachers’ experiences and appreciated the teachers’ ability to relevantly connect the information to the learners’ specific needs and their unique community. The learner’s expressed frustration about the great challenges associated with learning a second language, and praised the teachers for their ability
to speak multiple languages. The Latina mothers showed patience and compassion toward the learners as they struggled to remember the new vocabulary and form sentences. This compassion was warmly received by the learners, and they began to hold their teachers in high regard and increasingly value their expertise.

In addition to considering the importance of social and intercultural connections and the development of empathy regarding second language acquisition that was evoked throughout the program, the literature further highlights the close connection between sociocultural theory and second language acquisition (Ajayi, 2008; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 1995). A primary goal of the program was for experienced Spanish speakers to teach basic Spanish communication and literacy to non-Spanish speakers. From a sociocultural perspective, learning a second language (L2) goes far beyond merely memorizing the linguistic components of the language. The experience of learning the L2 is enhanced by both interpersonal and intrapersonal interaction (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 1995). Throughout the experience, the teachers provided this guided social interaction which helped the learners understand the new material at a deeper, more meaningful level. The connections the teachers were able to make by sharing personal stories and relating the information to the local community helped to scaffold the material for the learners in order to maximize their understanding and internalization of the new information. Effective scaffolding of information is an important element of sociocultural theory and is reflected through the Zone of Proximal Development which illustrates how a person’s learning capabilities can be maximized with social support from a more experienced or knowledgeable individual (Jaramillo, 1996; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 1995). In the Spanish Teaching and Learning Program, the Latina mothers provided this level of expertise and guidance for those who were learning Spanish. While the role of leader was generally unfamiliar for these women, they were a tremendous asset
Latina Women as Leaders

Throughout the literature on Latina feminist perspectives, several common themes emerged which were previously outlined in chapter two. These included the importance of language, maintenance of culture, identity development, and multiple forms of oppression (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002). These themes were also reflected throughout the program as well and, often, very connected to one another as well as the development of the Latina women as leaders in the program.

The importance of language was constantly in the forefront during every session and participant interview. All participants valued learning a language other than English. Teaching and/or celebrating languages other than English is often neglected within schools despite the depth and importance of learning additional languages. According to the literature, language is a reflection of an individual’s identity, culture, and spirit (Keating, 2009; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002). The Spanish Teaching and Learning Program fostered and celebrated the language of the Latina mothers, thus providing a platform for these mothers to share and connect over their language and culture. This opportunity to connect and reflect helped them voice the importance of their language and personal connections, and, in turn, develop enhanced confidence and increase their capacity as leaders within the school community. Anzaldúa (2007) describes the close connection between language and identity and goes so far as to say that they are one in the same. This was demonstrated in the program as the Latina mothers constantly referred to Spanish as “my language”. For example, Rita and Evalisa both discussed how they felt it was much easier to take on a leadership role because they would be teaching in their language and
about their culture. As Rita described, “In Spanish, I know my culture. I feel comfortable in my area; I know what I’m talking about. That’s the part that I feel [was] most different [about this program].” By focusing on an area through which the mothers were comfortable, their confidence when assuming the leadership role and when teaching the other mothers was enhanced. Evalisa expressed the following about her previous involvement within the school and how this experience differed:

> Usually when I’ve been involved, it was either volunteering for a school activity or just helping out at an event. This was different, because I knew what I was doing. I knew what I was talking about. I felt like it was close to home.

In addition to identifying the close connection between language, culture, and identity, Anzaldúa (2007) also indicates the importance of taking pride in your voice. This program empowered the Latina mothers and gave them a voice through their leadership role. During her post-program interview, Marcy shared how she felt this was especially true for Rita:

> I just really loved that there were actually Spanish mothers that could come to teach. I thought that was the coolest thing...especially Rita. I felt like it was really empowering for her, because maybe not knowing English really well was holding her back a little bit, but, she was like, this is something that I can really do, and I feel like that really empowered her. There was so much to do, and everything they did was big for us. So that was my absolute favorite part; seeing that was dynamic.

In addition to empowering the Latina mothers, the program also allowed the mothers to share about their culture through many personal stories, explanations, and examples. Maintaining their native culture is often a difficult task for many Latinos living and adapting to the mainstream culture in the United States (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002). This often becomes a
difficult family dynamic as the children of Latino parents quickly acculturate to mainstream U.S. culture, thus leaving behind many of the values traditionally held by Latino families, including communicating in Spanish. The teachers bonded over their shared experiences and frustration as they watched their children, second generation Latinos, lose much of the traditional cultural values and their ability to communicate in Spanish. This was often a frustration discussed among the Latina mothers, as they described their children refusing to speak Spanish or misunderstanding what their mothers were asking them to do in Spanish. These challenges associated with living between two cultures are frequently addressed within the literature on Latina feminism and illustrate the challenges these women have in constructing and developing their personal identities when living amongst two cultures (García, 2004; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002; Ruiz, 1998; Sanchez, 2009).

The program allowed for the Latina mothers to meet and collaborate with one another which reflected the cooperative, collectivistic nature of Latino families (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). As they slowly warmed to assuming the leadership role and eventually led the program with confidence, the teachers greatly leaned on one another and chose to lead as a team, rather than taking individual sections of the lesson. This idea to work collectively was expressed early on during the initial planning session. Collectivistic cultural values celebrate working as a group to complete a task (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2001). These collectivistic values were carried into the daily thread of the lesson through which the majority of the activities were conducted in a round table setting with free-flowing comments and ideas.

The collectivistic nature of the program also allowed for the risk-free sharing of personal narratives. Throughout the sessions, the Latina mothers felt comfortable supplementing the new information with stories. In the Latino culture, many homes rely on stories to help teach
important social morals and values to their children and were, thus, a very natural manner for the Latina mothers to express themselves and share their experiences (Anzaldúa, 2007; Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). These narratives often help Latina women define themselves as individuals (Guzik & Gorlier, 2004). For the participants in the program, the opportunity to share these stories and reflect at the end of each session fostered connections and increased confidence among the teachers. It also helped to bridge intercultural relationships with the learners as well. Rita mentioned that through her role as a leader, she had learned to accept other people’s views and positions on various topics, subjects, and ways of life. The learners also reported feeling much stronger connections with the teachers as well and shared that they understood aspects of their language and culture at a deeper level.

**Critical Multicultural Consciousness**

While the program provided the opportunity for the mothers to learn from each other and, ultimately, increase their linguistic capabilities, there was also an important element of cultural awareness and sharing that pervaded the program and created a heightened level of critical multicultural consciousness among the mothers in the group. Over the course of the eight sessions, a risk-free environment was established through which the mothers began to learn about one another on a more personal level. As described throughout the literature, developing a safe community of learners is critical for addressing cultural issues in adult education (hooks, 2003; Sheared et. al, 2010). This welcoming environment was developed through the physical layout of the room which featured a round table that fostered natural conversation. The risk-free atmosphere was further reinforced by the foundation of the program which celebrated the strengths of the Latinas, an often marginalized group (Garcia & Garcia, 2001; Moraga and Anzaldúa, 2002).
Through exchanges between the mothers, the learners were able to understand more about the Spanish speaking cultures represented within the community. In their final interviews, the learners described that through these personal connections and deeper levels of communication, they began to see the teachers in a different light and better understand some of the struggles and challenges they face. While recognizing that female oppression occurs regardless of culture or ethnicity, Moraga and Anzaldúa (2002) highlight that women of color have very different connections to racism and marginalization than white women. This can be related to the manner in which these mothers both culturally and linguistically differ from mainstream society, or the culture of power. As the program progressed, the learners began to develop an increased understanding of the marginalization experienced by the Latina mothers. As Marcy explained:

I realized how hard it is to learn another language. Just interacting with [the Latina mothers] more one on one, you see them more as individual people. You don’t see them as just faceless. I learned more about individuals and about their culture.

Marcy continued by revealing a deeper understanding of the daily struggle the Latina mothers have when communicating in society. She stated, “... they have it tougher because they need to learn English to communicate with almost everybody, really. And us, we kind of, we wanted to learn it.” As demonstrated through this comment, the empathy which evolved as a result of the program was directly related to communication and the reduced level of power surrounding the lack of opportunity for the Latina mothers’ to communicate within the school community. The mothers began to realize this division within the school and community and verbalized other stories which further illustrated these language barriers such as Melissa’s inability to talk to the clerk at the corner store and Maria’s story of being approached by another
mother from the school for the first time when one of the learners stopped to say “hola” to her while she was shopping at Wal-Mart.

The idea that a person’s individual ability to communicate leads to higher levels of power and access in society can be related to Maria’s story about her trip to Subway. Rather than exercising her autonomy and choosing what type of sandwich she wanted and what toppings she would like on her sandwich, she resorted to simply choosing what the person in front of her had ordered, because she did could not access the language to order for herself. Maria settled for something less than what she would have wanted, because of the communication barrier.

Participating in the program and experiencing the struggles associated with learning a new language led the learners to the important realization that their decision to learn Spanish was merely a choice; however, for their teachers, learning English was a necessary means to access the lifestyle that English speakers often take for granted. The teachers and learners bonded over their shared appreciation for the difficulties associated with learning a second language.

The camaraderie fostered among the Latina mothers in the program as well as between the teachers and the learners also provided a venue through which the Latina mothers felt confident to collectively share information specific to the challenges they have faced (Flores & Garcia, 2009). This collective strength helped to give the Latina mothers a voice through which they were able to connect with the learners on a level that forced the learners to consider the hegemonic structures behind their teachers’ experiences. Foucault highlights how these hegemonic structures are subtly woven into society and create a divide between the dominant culture and those holding less power (as cited in Brookfield, 2005). This divide may be exacerbated as individuals representative of the dominant culture fail to recognize the societal privileges from which they benefit and, in fact, may not be conscious of the unique qualities of
their own culture thus subscribing to the idea of colorblindness or false notion that all people are treated equally within society (Brookfield, 2005; Tisdell, 2001). Strengthening this awareness among the learners was positive step toward enhancing the critical consciousness among the white women in the group.

In addition to bringing forth stories that revealed the difficulties experienced by the Latina mothers, the material covered throughout the Spanish Teaching and Learning Program also lent itself to discussions that celebrated the culture of the Latina women in the group. Eliciting a person’s funds of knowledge is an important tenet of culturally-responsive teaching and helps create connections for those learning the new material (Gay, 2010). The basis of culturally responsive teaching should center on understanding the cultural biography and values of the adults in the group and using this knowledge to guide and extend conversations to create a space for higher level thinking and meaning-making surrounding new information (Herrera, 2010). Too often, adult education opportunities do not represent the lived experiences and cultural values of non-dominant groups and may primarily focus on white-supremacist, patriarchal values (hooks, 2003). These adult education experiences are often detrimental to the learning of culturally and linguistically diverse individuals (Gay, 2010).

Throughout the program, this heightened sense of inter-cultural awareness was prevalent. In the first session, JoEllen voiced appreciation for Spanish accent by describing how difficult it was for native English speakers to use appropriate pronunciation and prosody when speaking Spanish. Tashauna shared JoEllen’s appreciation for the complexity of the Spanish language through the following comment:

This is why people start learning this language when they are kids! There are so many different ways. I love it, but it’s just so [difficult], you know? The Spanish we get here is
mostly from Puerto Rico, so some things even that they teach you in school is from Spain, so it’s still, you know, a little bit different.

The mothers’ enhanced compassion and understanding of one another at a more critical level was promoted by their collective and consistent participation in the program which is further described through the connections to the literature on parent involvement.

**Connections to Parent Involvement**

The literature surrounding parent involvement illustrates a variety of ways parents may become involved in the K-12 school community (Epstein et al., 2002). Opportunities for parent involvement stem from a foundational belief throughout public education that parents are valuable assets in educating children and that actively involving parents in the school community can have positive effects on children’s academic success (Wei & Zhou, 2003; Henderson et al., 2007). Programs are also developed within schools to support parents directly with personal or familial needs and to create connections among parents within the school community. By supporting the adult(s) in each family, schools are ultimately able to better help students by providing services that benefit entire families. Unfortunately, the positive effects of parent involvement often do not reach culturally and linguistically diverse families, as these families experience significant language and cultural barriers which inhibit them from becoming actively involved in the school (Guo, 2006; Turney & Kao, 2009; Smith et al., 2008; Md-Yunus, 2008). Many CLD parents also hold beliefs about parent and teacher roles that differ from those of the mainstream school culture which may attribute to a different level of involvement than what the school may expect (Guo, 2006; Levine & Trickett, 2000).

The perceived lack of involvement from CLD parents is often misunderstood as these parents not caring for their children. In fact, one of the themes which surfaces in the literature
regarding CLD parent involvement describes how these parents tend to have a strong desire for their children to succeed academically (Epstein, 2001; Ryan et al., 2010; Quiocho & Daoud, 2006). This notion was reinforced by the Latina mothers throughout the Spanish Teaching and Learning Program. The mothers participating as teachers in the program wanted to be strong role models for their own children and placed a high value on education. These mothers were willing to face their own insecurities to volunteer as a teacher in the program and step outside their comfort zone in an effort to show their children the importance of education, helping the school, and taking risks. In addition to benefiting the mothers in numerous ways, the effects of this parent education program ultimately benefitted the children as well from helping establish homework routines to prompting conversations about the importance of education, upholding commitments, and responsibility.

The Latina mothers, while experiencing the language and cultural barriers mentioned, participated in their children’s schooling at varying levels. While each mother self-reported that she was involved in her children’s schooling, this looked very different among the group of mothers. Some mothers frequently volunteered in their children’s classrooms and came to evening family events at the school while some reported assisting their children with homework and coming to the school whenever they were contacted by a teacher. In considering these varying aspects of parent involvement, it becomes apparent that this term must be considered in a broad, multi-faceted manner to fully understand the scope of how adults are contributing to the school community and their children’s education (Daniel-White, 2002). Epstein et al. (2002) describe six types of parent involvement including parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaboration with the community. While touching on a number of these types, the Spanish Teaching and Learning Program highly focused on an
amplified version of type two, communicating. While communicating generally refers to the efficient transfer of ideas and information between the parent and her/his child’s teacher, the program focused on enhancing communication between parents, thus extending the definition of this type of parent involvement (Epstein et. al, 2002). This goal was achieved through teaching Spanish and working to reduce the language barrier which existed throughout the school community. The unique nature of this adult learning experience carried various implications for both theory and practice.

**Implications for Theory and Practice**

The Spanish Teaching and Learning Program used a strengths-based perspective to elicit the experience and leadership skills of the Latina mothers. The program enhanced intercultural relationships within the school community while also promoting the confidence and identity development of the Latina mothers. In addition to implications that aligned with sociocultural theory and Latina feminist perspectives, the program also enhanced the research base regarding critical multicultural education and culturally and linguistically diverse parent involvement. Overall, the program, which developed into an experience of reciprocal teaching and learning between all participants, revealed overarching implications for the field of adult education.

**Implications for Sociocultural Theory and Latina Feminist Perspectives**

This study existed within the framework of sociocultural theory and was enhanced through its foundation in Latina feminist perspectives. The program emphasized the social construction of knowledge within adult education. Through the program, second language acquisition became the focus of this social exchange of information over the eight-week course and, ultimately, revealed interesting findings regarding the Latina mothers’ role as leaders in the
program and the intercultural relationships that formed. These findings help to promote the existing knowledge and research related to these theoretical perspectives.

An interesting implication which arose from this study was the extension of the idea that adults build upon their existing funds of knowledge when learning new information (Jaramillo, 1996). This study suggests that individuals can, in fact, learn from the background knowledge and interests of others, and that these connections may be necessary for individuals to make broader and more well-rounded connections to their personal schemas or funds of knowledge that extend beyond their personal cultural values and experiences. The study suggests that an individual’s funds of knowledge may be limited to their own cultural background and upbringing and that great value can be found in meaning-making through the sharing of personal funds of knowledge and connections among people representative of different cultures.

This notion extends from the research regarding second language acquisition and sociocultural theory which explains how learning a second language is facilitated by both interpersonal and intrapersonal interaction (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 1995). This study places value on the relationship between these interpersonal and intrapersonal connections and illustrates how both are necessary for valuable social interactions within a cultural learning experience.

Throughout the program, there were numerous examples of how the stories shared by the Latina mothers prompted the learners to think about personal connections and then discuss how the information either complemented or differed from their personal Discourses (Gee, 1991). The mothers’ Discourses, which were related to their culturally-specific manner of thinking and acting, were frequently adjusted and re-shaped throughout this experience. The valuable conversations which occurred between the mothers promoted growth within the cultural schemas.
of both the teachers and the learners who frequently commented on their reflection forms how much they appreciated the stories and personal philosophies of the other mothers in the group.

A unique quality of this program was that the Latina mothers were organically sharing a part of their identity—their language, which took the experience to a deeper, more critically-based, level and allowed for authentic sharing and meaning making on behalf of the teachers and learners. Through sharing and discussing this important piece of their identity, the Latina mothers gained confidence in their role as leaders in the program. This complimented the research by Anzaldúa (2007) through which she explains the strong connection between language and identity. She identifies how it is impossible to have pride in yourself until you have pridefully accepted your language (Anzaldúa, 2007). As the mothers began to gain confidence in their abilities as teachers in the program, they started to recognize this level of pride related to their language. Having a safe space through which to validate and discuss the importance of their language was essential for building confidence, maintaining culture, and developing the identity of the teachers.

To amplify this notion of developing identity based on pride in one’s native language, this study suggests that cultural connections between individuals may help to develop a shared pride for a language, even if it is not a person’s first, or native, language. During the program, the learners also began to develop pride for a language that was not their first language which was developed and enhanced by the connections with the Latina mothers which shed light on their personal stories and the differences in their Spanish subcultures. The pride in a second language was connected to learners’ desire to socially connect with other adults in the community whether it was at the corner store, when dropping their children off at school, or through their jobs. This deep appreciation for learning a second language was also increased by
the connections made with the Latina teachers and the greater awareness and empathy which developed as a result of the conversations that took place during the sessions.

**Implications for Critical Multicultural Education**

In the Spanish Teaching and Learning Program, the power was intentionally shifted so that the Latina mothers who represented a typically marginalized population were given the power and teaching responsibilities associated with leading the group. This was in direct response to the literature on critical multiculturalism which highlighted the existence of hegemonic structures within society that perpetuate the marginalization of certain cultures (Brookfield, 2005). Freire (1990) describes how education has the ability to reduce the dominant ideology which allows for this marginalization to continue.

Through this study, the power structure was flipped and the expertise of the Latina mothers was highlighted. By altering the power structure, the learners were prompted to interact in a way that fostered understanding of the experiences of Latina women while learning basic elements of their language, an important aspect of their identity. As the program progressed, the learners were able to share in the lived experiences of the learners via their stories and began to understand the marginalization experienced by these women, especially with respect to their language. Providing a platform for these discussions strengthened the awareness among both the teachers and the learners of existing power structures and enhanced the critical consciousness among the women in the group. As Gay (2010) describes, cultural issues should not be avoided and must be directly addressed to empower non-dominant groups. This study promoted these discussions and demonstrated the importance of creating spaces for Latina women to have a voice and participate in leadership roles that center on their strengths and areas of expertise.
Empowering Latinas is a particularly relevant idea in the United States, due to the rising number of Latino families moving to this country (Passel et al., 2011; Ukpokodu, 2010).

In practice, opportunities should be deliberately created to both provide access to adult education and empower non-dominating groups. The Highlander School, founded by Myles Horton, offers a number of programs to reduce language barriers and promote social justice (Robin Easter Design, 2012). These programs highlight the importance of language and regard it as a central aspect of a person’s identity. The Highlander School provides opportunities that celebrate multilingualism and provide a space for effective collaboration between culturally and linguistically diverse adults so these individuals may be informed members of society. These programs are known for their effectiveness in promoting social justice and educational opportunities for marginalized groups (Horton & Freire, 1990). The Spanish Teaching and Learning Program complements the work that has been done at the Highlander school and also furthers this work by offering this type of opportunity within a public school, a hub for formal education within the community. This program also empowered the Latina mothers through a strengths-based approach by focusing on a central piece of their identity rather than focusing on skills or knowledge that the school system perceives these women do not already have. Furthermore, the program fostered intercultural connections between the Latina mothers and the learners which promoted deeper connections among adults within the school community and led to a deeper level of involvement from mothers typically not actively involved within the public school setting.
Implications for CLD Parent Involvement

In addition to the theoretical implications of this study and those related to critical multicultural education practices, interesting implications for CLD parent involvement were also found through analyzing the data and findings of the program.

As mentioned through chapter two, this study has the potential to largely impact schools struggling to effectively connect and involve culturally and linguistically diverse parents. CLD parents often experience barriers which prevent their involvement in the school community (Lingenfelter & Mayers, 2003). This ineffective connection between schools and CLD parents is often felt through my own practice as an administrator of an urban district. While school systems highly value parent involvement as a way to ensure the highest level of success for children, the benefits of effective parent involvement are often experienced by White, middle/upper-class students and families (Anfara & Mertens, 2008). While schools are seen as the hub of formal education within the community for children in grades k-12, they are also a place where parents of students turn when they have familial needs such as counseling or therapy or basic needs such food or warm clothing. The school is also a place where parents look to connect with one another. Many urban schools have embraced the idea of becoming a community school where community services that benefit families are located within the school. This may include medical clinics, dentists, after-school care, and parent classes. The shift of many urban schools to begin educating or helping the full family incites a need for increased understanding of adult education as well as more effective practices for successfully including culturally and linguistically diverse parents. This includes the development of programs that extend beyond those currently established from culturally deficit perspective which help parents learn “what they can do to be better”.
Schools systems are very experienced in educating children, but often do not have the background or understanding to effectively involve their adult family members. Research highlights the need for schools to engage and form meaningful relationships with the parents of the students and community they serve (Wei & Zhou, 2003; The National Center for ESL Literacy Education, 2002). In order to foster lasting connections, it is necessary to include parents from a strengths-based perspective rather than merely forming programs around what the school perceives as their needs or what schools perceive they cannot do.

Much can be learned from the Spanish Teaching and Learning Program which exemplifies a successful way to involve CLD parents, specifically Latina mothers, at a leadership level. Through this program, which was rooted in adult education theory and practice, mothers of students in a public elementary school were able to connect through a program that was devised based on the strengths of the Latina mothers. The concept of flipping the power structure and highlighting the expertise of marginalized cultures through parent involvement programs is not currently found in the research; however, as Melissa stated, this type of program “addresses a heartfelt need in the community.”

This parent involvement program empowered the Latina mothers to not only become involved in a parent education group but to take on leadership responsibilities within that group. Creating spaces for programs such as this that take on a strengths-based perspective and utilize the existing strengths of the adults present within the school community can have lasting effects on the school. As demonstrated through the study, the program had a ripple-effect throughout the community, as other parents began to hear what was occurring during the sessions. As Rita described,
Other families ask me, “Are you teaching?” Because they look at me like, “you don’t look like you help the school”. They notice when I speak Spanish to the “Gringa” mothers in the program. They hear about that. They hear about what you are doing, what the school is doing. We feel like part of the school, part of the program.

When Rita said, “We feel like part of the school,” she was referring to parents beyond the Latina mothers who participated in the program. She was describing the sentiments of all of the Latino parents who found out about the program and who approached her about it on the playground when she brought her children to school each morning. By creating spaces for this type of culturally-sensitive interaction between parents and the school, districts better achieve their goal of effectively connecting with CLD parents.

As described previously, the Spanish Teaching and Learning Program focused on reducing this language barrier which prevented parents from connecting to one another and the school staff while providing an adult education experience unlike those in other school districts. While districts with high Spanish-speaking populations frequently offer adult classes for learning English, these programs merely focus on mastery of the dominant language rather than the preferred language of a large population of parents.

There are few formal learning programs designed around the expertise of parents from marginalized groups. There are even fewer opportunities specifically designed for Latina mothers to connect with other women in the school community. As discussed in the findings of the program, Latina mothers have untapped resources which they are unable to unleash in the current societal climate of the U.S. By including programs that effectively involve Latino parents and other CLD parents, these untapped resources can be identified and utilized to benefit the community.
Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

While this study contributes to the knowledge and research associated with sociocultural theory, Latina feminism, critical multicultural education, and CLD parent involvement, several limitations must be noted. These limitations included the small sample size, the partial representation of the Latina parent population, and inconsistency in participant attendance. Other limiting factors included the time constraints of the actual sessions and the limited amount of time available for the teachers to collectively plan for and adjust the topics presented in the sessions.

This study involved eleven participants. This included six teachers and five learners. Out of this group, only three teachers and four learners participated in multiple sessions. Of these participants, few were able to attend all of the sessions due to family and work obligations and illness; however, most attended with consistency. Although the small sample size of this study may be considered a weakness, as it limited the participant field, the small-group setting in which the sessions occurred can also be considered a strength, as it allowed the women to get to know each other and connect at a deeper level. The intimate structure of the round-table and partner discussions fostered a risk-free atmosphere which allowed the mothers, specifically the teachers, to speak in a very authentic manner and not be overshadowed or overwhelmed as may have occurred in a larger group. This was especially important for the teachers, as they were very overwhelmed by and nervous about their teaching role initially. In the future, researching a similar program including more participants would be beneficial in order to see whether the mothers develop the same level of connectedness and whether the teachers would readily share their personal experiences and stories.
In addition to highlighting the small pool of participants, it is also important to note the difficulty in securing a group of Latina mothers willing to volunteer their time to help teach in the program. Overall, twenty-three Latina mothers were contacted to participate in this program. While I was able to establish a group of six teachers who agreed to volunteer, only three participated with consistency. The women who ultimately ended up teaching in this program likely may have been those who were more willing and able to participate in parent initiatives within the school community and may not be representative of the full Latina parent population in the school. Further research regarding parents’ reasons for not participating may yield interesting and helpful information schools as they attempt to effectively involve parents within the school community.

While the mothers made clear from the start of the program that they had very busy schedules and would try their best to attend all sessions, there was inconsistency in attendance throughout the sessions. Although this was expected, knowing which teachers and learners were available each week prior to the session may have been helpful in most effectively planning for the program. Throughout the program, I attempted to contact both the teachers and learners by phone when they did not attend sessions to share what had been covered and what pages they could study at home if time allowed so that they would be caught up for the next session. I also explained to the teachers what had been planned for the next session and asked for their input before printing the agenda. By connecting with participants who missed sessions, this somewhat helped to bridge gaps that may have occurred when sessions were missed.

Because the program was limited to eight, one hour sessions, the mothers frequently listed on their reflection forms that they felt the program would benefit from longer sessions through which additional material could be introduced. While the limited timing of the sessions
could have been a downfall of the study, it was extremely difficult to add additional time or sessions because of the mothers’ busy schedules including evening sports events for children and preparing for dinner within their homes. Even with the short sessions, the mothers still had a considerable level of difficulty making time for the program the way it was scheduled.

In addition to acting on the mothers’ suggestion and possibly lengthening the sessions to include more time for interaction and learning Spanish, a future study may benefit by adding in separate time for the teachers to plan prior to each of the sessions. While there was one planning session for the teachers prior to the start of the program, much of the schedule shifted from what was decided during the initial planning session. Although adjusting the sessions to meet the needs of the participants was expected and, in fact, an important part of the action research cycle, these adjustments to the schedule were made either at the beginning or end of the sessions. At times, the teachers, especially Rita, would call me throughout the week to make suggestions. Often, the agenda would shift in the midst of a session due to the timing of the various topics and the mothers’ needs. Future studies may consider including a separate, scheduled time for planning each week prior to the session. While advanced planning may have resulted in more smoothly run sessions (especially in the beginning of the program), separate planning sessions may highlight further connections among the teachers in the group as well.

Because the program took place after school, this prevented a number of potential participants from becoming involved in the program because of factors such as work and college/GED courses. Future studies may be done with program sessions offered at different times throughout the day in order to broaden the pool of available participants. Also, because this study focused on mothers, several populations of adults that also participate as caregivers were not included in the study. While other family members frequently attended sessions or
participant interviews, these family members were not actively involved in the program. Including other populations of adults such as fathers, grandparents, foster parents, aunts and uncles may add a valuable layer to the research on parent involvement and, thus, may be an interesting way to expand future studies.

In addition to including other adult family members, the mothers also expressed an interest in somehow involving their children in the program and requested that a future program be designed to include children or contain a take-home piece that could be completed interactively with their children. Studying the connections between parents and their children throughout a learning experience or studying the similarities and differences between adults and children in a shared learning experience such as the Spanish Teaching and Learning Program would also be a natural extension of the current study.

In addition to benefitting the children of the learners, this idea of involving children may have also benefitted the Latina mothers who described a loss of the Spanish language among their children. As Rita described, there is a disconnect between the parents (who think in Spanish) and their children (who think in English). The children of the teachers in the program did not maintain their Spanish even though many were born in a Spanish-speaking country and to Spanish-speaking parents. While the Latina mothers’ strong value of their language was very apparent throughout the study, it was very interesting that the Spanish language was not maintained within their homes. Future studies could enhance the research that has been done regarding this idea of language mortality within the homes of Spanish speakers and investigate how families can maintain their culture and linguistic identity with their children who have become acculturated into a number of elements characteristic of mainstream society.
Overall Connections to Adult Education and Final Reflections

At the conclusion of this chapter, it is important to highlight the implications of this study in regard to the overall adult education perspectives that governed the heart of this study. While contributing to the research demonstrating learning through the prior experiences of others, the Spanish Teaching and Learning Program highlighted the value of developing a social learning experience that was authentic to and relevant for the specific community in which the adult learners lived. Alfred’s notion that community education is a positively recognized context for adult education and that it is important to establish a risk-free, personally-meaningful context for a classroom community was especially relevant throughout the program (Alfred, 2009). The findings of the program imply benefits for the women in the group resulting from this safe learning space. While they constantly altered the program to effectively and practically meet their current needs, the mothers frequently vocalized that if the program did not meet their needs, they would not have taken the effort to make time for it in their busy schedules. These comments illustrated the mothers’ desire to experience personal benefit from participating in the program and to use the information presented in the program with immediacy. Future programs should consider this idea of developing programs for parents that are both practical and meaningful to the parents involved. These programs should also provide the possibility for reciprocal teaching between the teachers and the learners in the group.

This idea of reciprocal teaching was an interesting finding from the study and demonstrated an adults’ desire to learn even when participating in a teaching role. Although the Latina mothers were not the intended students in the program, these women described the prospect of learning English through conversation with the English-speaking learners as one of their primary motivators for volunteering in the program. Through their discussions, it was
evident that the teachers learned about themselves as well, particularly about their abilities as teachers and leaders within the school community. This study identified a need in the field of adult education to empower and provide opportunities for Latina women to assume leadership roles in education programs and an effective way to address this need in a location (the public school system) where this type of experience is sorely needed.

For me, the program was especially meaningful because of my personal journey in my role as an emerging leader in an urban public school system. While completing this doctoral program in Adult Education, I was concurrently completing a school leadership graduate program as well. Doing both programs helped to frame my awareness of the need for adults to effectively assume and navigate leadership roles within society. In addition to simultaneously navigating my personal identity development and leadership role at the time I was conducting this study, the program’s connection to my experience in urban education and my relationship with the mothers in the group was greatly amplified in comparison to the interactions I had with parents during past involvement programs. Furthermore, it was fascinating to see the interactions and strength present among the women around the table each week. Many comments the mothers made throughout the program were incredibly powerful and contributed to the notion that there are strong and talented voices among the community that have yet to be heard. Because this strengths-based program focused on the expertise of a group typically marginalized within society because of their gender, culture, and language, it differed from most parent involvement programs offered by schools. This is a program that I truly hope can be replicated and expanded throughout school districts across the country as schools strive to connect with CLD parents in meaningful ways. To close this summary of the research on the Spanish Teaching and Learning program, I would like to end with a beautiful quote from one of
the participants describing the potential societal impact of this type of adult education opportunity:

There are a lot of things that make a school strong, but it’s these kinds of things where people trust each other and feel like they can bring something and offer something [that are important]. Those are the kinds of things that make a school and community strong. I would go so far as to say that make people strong!


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Sánchez, P. (2009). Chicana feminist strategies in a participatory action research project with transnational Latina youth. *New directions for youth development, 123*, 83-


APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL

Date: September 14, 2012

From: Philip C. From, Compliance Coordinator

To: Katelyn D. Foulsh

Subject: Results of Review of Proposal - Expedited (IRB #38422)

Approval Expiration Date: September 13, 2013

“Latina parent involvement: An action research study exploring a Spanish teaching and learning program”

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed and approved your proposal for use of human participants in your research. By accepting this decision, you agree to obtain prior approval from the IRB for any changes to your study. Unanticipated participant events that are encountered during the conduct of this research must be reported in a timely fashion.

If signed consent is obtained, the principal investigator is expected to maintain the original signed consent forms along with the IRB research records for this research at least three (3) years after termination of IRB approval. For projects that involve protected health information (PHI) and are regulated by HIPAA, records are to be maintained for six (6) years. The principal investigator must determine and adhere to additional requirements established by the FDA and any outside sponsors.

If this study will extend beyond the above noted approval expiration date, the principal investigator must submit a completed Continuing Progress Report to the Office for Research Protections (ORP) to request renewed approval for this research.

On behalf of the IRB and the University, thank you for your efforts to conduct your research in compliance with the federal regulations that have been established for the protection of human participants.

Please Note: The ORP encourages you to subscribe to the ORP listserv for protocol and research-related information. Send a blank email to: L-ORP-Research-L-subscribe-request@lists.psu.edu

cc: Robin R. Wright
APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORMS

Informed Consent Form for Social Science Research
The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: Latina Parent Involvement: An Action Research Study Exploring a Spanish Teaching and Learning Program

Principal Investigator: Katelyn Poukish, Doctoral Student
Penn State Harrisburg
???? West Harrisburg Pike
Middletown, PA 17057
(717) 948-6000; kdp169@psu.edu

Advisor: Dr. Robin Redmon
Wright
Penn State Harrisburg
???? West Harrisburg Pike
Middletown, PA 17057
(717) 948-6000; rw13@psu.edu

1. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research study is to examine Latina mothers’ perceptions of their level of parental involvement and overall connectedness to the school community and to discover how these perceptions may be impacted through a Spanish teaching and learning program which promotes Latina mothers as group leaders.

2. Procedures to be followed: You will participate in a Spanish teaching and learning program once a week for nine weeks. During the last week, you will participate in a focus group interview. You will also complete a reflection sheet at the end of each session.

3. Discomforts and Risks: There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. All participant data will be securely locked in the office of the researcher to maintain participant confidentiality.

4. Benefits: You might learn more about yourself by participating in this study. You might have a better understanding of how you can participate in the school community.

This information could help schools plan programs more effectively and help more parents become involved in the school community.

5. Duration: It will take about one hour each week for nine weeks to participate.

6. Statement of Confidentiality: Your participation in this research is confidential. The data will be stored and secured at the office of Katelyn Poukish in a locked file. The Pennsylvania State University’s Office for Research Protections, the Institutional Review Board and the Office for Human Research Protections in the Department of Health and Human Services may review records related to this research study. In the event of a publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared.

7. Right to Ask Questions: Please contact Katelyn Poukish at (717) 381-9626 with questions, complaints or concerns about this research. You can also call this number if you feel this study has harmed you. If you have any questions, concerns, problems about your rights as a research participant or would like to offer input, please contact The Pennsylvania State University’s Office for Research Protections (ORP) at (814) 865-1775. The ORP cannot answer questions about research procedures. Questions about research procedures can be answered by the research team.

Page 1 of 2
8. Voluntary Participation: Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Refusal to take part in or withdrawing from this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits you would receive otherwise.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study. If you agree to take part in this research study and the information outlined above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

Participant Signature ___________________________ Date ________________

Person Obtaining Consent ___________________________ Date ________________
Informed Consent Form for Social Science Research  
The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: Latina Parent Involvement: An Action Research Study Exploring a Spanish Teaching and Learning Program

Principal Investigator: Katelyn Poukis, Doctoral Student  
Penn State Harrisburg  
777 West Harrisburg Pike  
Middletown, PA 17057  
(717) 948-6000; kdp169@psu.edu

Advisor: Dr. Robin Redmon Wright  
Penn State Harrisburg  
777 West Harrisburg Pike  
Middletown, PA 17057  
(717) 948-6000; rw122@psu.edu

1. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research study is to examine Latina mothers' perceptions of their level of parental involvement and overall connectedness to the school community and to discover how these perceptions may be impacted through a Spanish teaching and learning program which promotes Latina mothers as group leaders.

2. Procedures to be followed: You will participate in a Spanish teaching and learning program once a week for ten weeks. During the first and last weeks, you will participate in pre and post interviews. You will also complete a reflection sheet at the end of each session.

3. Discomforts and Risks: There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. Some of the questions are personal and may cause discomfort. To minimize all potential risks of participation, personal questions will only be asked during individual interviews and may be answered at the discretion of the participant. All participant data will be securely locked in the office of the researcher to maintain participant confidentiality.

4. Benefits: You might learn more about yourself by participating in this study. You might have a better understanding of yourself as a leader and how your strengths can help contribute to the school community.

This research might provide a better understanding of Latina mothers' perceptions of parent involvement. This information could help schools plan programs more effectively and help more parents become involved in the school community.

5. Duration: It will take about one hour each week for ten weeks to participate.

6. Statement of Confidentiality: Your participation in this research is confidential. The data will be stored and secured at the office of Katelyn Poukis in a locked file. The Pennsylvania State University’s Office for Research Protections, the Institutional Review Board and the Office for Human Research Protections in the Department of Health and Human Services may review records related to this research study. In the event of a publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared.

7. Right to Ask Questions: Please contact Katelyn Poukis at (717) 381-9926 with questions, complaints or concerns about this research. You can also call this number if you feel this study has harmed you. If you have any questions, concerns, problems about your rights as a research participant or would like to offer input, please contact The Pennsylvania State University’s Office for Research Protections (ORP) at (814) 865-1775. The ORP
cannot answer questions about research procedures. Questions about research procedures can be answered by the research team.

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You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study. If you agree to take part in this research study and the information outlined above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

Participant Signature ___________________________ Date ___________________________

Person Obtaining Consent ___________________________ Date ___________________________
APPENDIX C
PROGRAM OUTLINE
Spanish Teaching and Learning Program: Outline of Topics
(Updated throughout program due to participants’ input)

- Week 1: Individual interviews/planning session with teachers (data collection information uploaded)
  - Week 2: First Spanish lesson
    - Topics:
      - Introductions (English and Spanish)
      - Spanish words that are similar to English words
      - Secrets to sound making
      - Alphabet
      - Family vocabulary
  - Week 3: Second Spanish lesson
    - Topics:
      - Review and expand on introductions
      - Numbers and colors
      - School vocabulary
      - El/la; un/una
  - Week 4: Third Spanish lesson
    - Topics:
      - Popular phrases
      - Expanding basic conversations
      - Questions
      - City vocabulary
  - Week 5: Fourth Spanish lesson
    - Topics:
      - Who’s who?
      - Conversation practice
      - Telling the time/the date
      - Weather vocabulary
  - Week 6: Fifth Spanish lesson
    - Topics:
      - Ser/estar
      - Parts of the body vocabulary
      - Medical vocabulary
  - Week 7: Sixth Spanish lesson
    - Topics:
      - Nature and animal vocabulary
      - Food and restaurant vocabulary
      - Verb conjugation
  - Week 8: Seventh Spanish lesson
    - Topics:
      - Job vocabulary
- Clothes/shopping vocabulary
- House vocabulary

- Week 9: Eighth Spanish lesson
  - Topics:
    - Commands
    - Review

- Week 10: Individual post interviews for teachers; focus group interview for learners (data collection information uploaded)
### September 2012

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#### Notes:
- 20: Planning Session with Teachers
- 21: Individual Interview with Teachers
- 23: Individual Interview with Teachers
- 25: Session 1
  - 3:30-4:30
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APPENDIX E

WEEKLY REFLECTION FORM (TEACHERS)

Reflection Questions for Teachers

(Completed at the end of each session)

1. How were you able to contribute to this session?

2. Did this session meet your expectations? Why or why not?

3. What can we do to improve or change future sessions?

4. What would you like to see included in future sessions?

5. What did you learn about yourself as a teacher throughout this session?

6. Would you recommend this program to others based on today’s session? Why?
APPENDIX F

WEEKLY REFLECTION FORM (LEARNERS)

Reflection Questions for Learners
(Completed at the end of each session)

1. Did this session meet your expectations? Why or why not?

2. What can we do to improve or change future sessions?

3. What would you like to see included in future sessions?

4. What was the most valuable thing you learned in today’s session?

5. Would you recommend this program to others based on today’s session? Why?
APPENDIX G

PRE-INTERVIEWS (TEACHERS): GUIDING QUESTIONS

Data Collection (Guiding Questions for Teachers)
The following statements or questions will be used to guide both the pre and post interviews for teachers. These interviews will be completed in a semi structured format.

Pre Interview:

- Describe the ways your parents encouraged your schooling.
- In what ways have you been involved with your children’s school community previously?
- In what ways have you been contacted about parent involvement activities in the past?
- Can you tell me a story about your reaction to being asked to assume a leadership role in a school program?
- In the past, what was the most positive experience you have had when contributing to a project?
  - Can you elaborate?
APPENDIX H

AGENDA: PLANNING SESSION

Spanish Teaching and Learning Program, Planning Session

3:30-4:30

1. Introductions
2. Program overview
   a. Structure of program
   b. Partners/collaboration
   c. Teaching
3. Brief interviews (schedule)
4. Plan sessions (8 total)
APPENDIX I
AGENDA: SESSION 1
Spanish Teaching and Learning Program
3:30-4:30

1. Program Information/Introductions
2. Secrets to sound making
3. Alphabet
4. Introductions (Spanish)
5. Family Vocabulary
APPENDIX J
AGENDA: SESSION 2
Spanish Teaching and Learning Program
3:30-4:30

1. Review sound making, using *La Cartilla*
2. Introductions, review from last week and practice with a partner
3. Family Vocabulary (p. 64 and p. 65)
   a. el/la
   b. Family photo activity
4. Numbers and Colors (p. 23)
5. School Vocabulary
   a. Label the room
APPENDIX K
AGENDA: SESSION 3
Spanish Teaching and Learning Program
3:30-4:30

1. Expand on Introductions using family vocabulary
2. Review sound making (La Cartilla)
3. El/la, un/una (p. 26 and 27)
4. Higher numbers and Colors (p. 23 and handout)
5. School/House Vocabulary (p. 23 and 72)
   a. Label the room
   b. Label your home
6. Making sentences with new vocabulary
7. Asking Questions (p. 34-38)
1. Review sound making (La Cartilla—“t”)
2. Expand on Introductions
   a. Use sentence frames on p. 24 to use new vocabulary
   b. Use “Yo tengo un/una ______.
3. Asking Questions (p. 34- 38)
   a. Also refer to p. 44
4. Who’s who? (p. 39)
5. Telling the time/the date (p. 51-54)
6. City vocabulary (p. 76-79)
AGENDA: SESSION 5
Spanish Teaching and Learning Program
3:30-4:30

1. Practice reading passage (worksheet p. 29)
   a. Practice days of the week
2. Expand on Introductions
   a. Say your address
   b. Use the city vocabulary from p. 76-79 and color words to create sentences
3. Telling the time/the date (p. 51-54)
4. Weather vocabulary (p. 55)
5. Parts of the body, activity (p. 62)
6. Homework: Do the number making activity on p. 48, label the parts on your person
APPENDIX N
AGENDA: SESSION 6
Spanish Teaching and Learning Program
3:30-4:30

1. Practice reading passage (worksheet p. 14)
2. Expand on Introductions
   a. Telling the time/the date to your partner (p. 51-54)
3. Review parts of the body homework
   a. Activity
4. Clothes vocabulary (p. 86)
5. Weather vocabulary (p. 55)
6. Ser vs. estar (p. 95, 96 and 58)
7. For next time, what type of vocabulary do you want to learn?
APPENDIX O
AGENDA: SESSION 7
Spanish Teaching and Learning Program
3:30-4:30

1. Practice reading passage (worksheet p. 19-20)
2. Expand on Introductions
   a. What are you wearing, and what color is it?
3. Medical vocabulary—flash card activity
4. Job vocabulary (p. 67-68)
5. Continue ser vs. estar (p. 95, 96 and 58)
6. For next time: vamos a tener una fiesta 😊
   a. Puede traer su comida favorita.
APPENDIX P
AGENDA: SESSION 8
Spanish Teaching and Learning Program
3:30-4:30

1. Practice reading passage
2. La cultura Hispánica (p. 134-135)
3. Food and restaurant vocabulary
   a. Las comidas tradicionales (p. 137-138)
   b. Restaurant vocabulary list (handout)
   c. Restaurant flash cards (handout)
4. Quiz!
APPENDIX Q

POST INTERVIEW (LEARNERS): GUIDING QUESTIONS

Data Collection (Guiding Questions for Learners)
The following statements or questions will be used to guide the focus group interview for learners at the end of the program.

Post Interview:

- Can you describe your experience as a learner in this program?

- What was the most rewarding part of this experience?
  - ...the most challenging?

- How was this experience different than other ways you have been involved in the school community?

- How will this experience affect your decision to become involved in the future?

- Can you give me an example of how this experience may have expanded your connections with other mothers?
APPENDIX R

POST INTERVIEW (TEACHERS): GUIDING QUESTIONS

Post Interview (Guiding Questions for Teachers):

- Can you describe your experience as a leader in this program?

- What was the most rewarding part of this experience?
  - …the most challenging?

- How was this experience different than other ways you have been involved in the school community?

- How will this experience affect your decision to become involved in the future?

- Can you give me an example of how this experience may have expanded your connections with other mothers?
VITA

Katelyn D. Barlet

Formal Education

2014 D.Ed., The Pennsylvania State University, Adult Education
2014 M.Ed. (in progress), Millersville University, Leadership for Teaching and Learning
2009 M.Ed., Millersville University, Language and Literacy Education
2006 B.S.Ed. Bucknell University, Elementary Education

Pennsylvania Certifications

Principal/Supervisory K-12 (expected summer 2014)
Instructional II Reading Specialist K-12
Program Specialist, English as a Second Language (ESL) K-12
Instructional II Elementary K-6

Professional Experience

2011-present   Coordinator of English as a Second Language (ESL), School District of Lancaster
2006-2011      English as a Second Language (ESL) Specialist, School District of Lancaster

Selected Presentations


