

LATINX PARENT AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT WITHIN THE BILINGUAL
COMMUNITY: INVITING LA LOCA TO INFORM THE
IGNORANT SYSTEMS

by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work and study to my mother, Evangelina Gallegos Narváez, to my father, Jose Angel Narváez, and to my son, Maurice Narváez-Patterson and my siblings, Jose Juan, Rita, and Veronica.. Without the inspiration of my parents, the support of my siblings, and the words of my son, “don’t quit mom,” I would not have reached this personal dream of finishing my doctoral degree.

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Our journey for higher education began at the kitchen table, where we watched our mother cook and help us with homework. She was so engaged with our education, using culturally aligned methods, and my father's work ethic and consejos guided us forward. Our parents fostered a love for learning in all of us—my father is a ranch hand and my mother was a custodian—their hopes and dreams were for us to strive to have a better future, an education and a better life.

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LIST OF SPANISH WORDS AND PHRASES

Spanish	English Translation
<i>Consejos</i>	“Cultural narratives” and “nurturing advice” that “guides children across cultures . . . consejos implies a cultural dimension of communication sparked with emotional empathy and compassion, as well as familial expectation and inspiration” (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994, pp. 298–300).
<i>Educación</i>	“Educación is the cultural ideology that an individual is educated at home just as they are in the school setting” (Arellanes et al., 2017, p. 342).
<i>Familismo</i>	Traditional Latinx cultural value “defined as an individual’s strong identification and obligation to family (familism obligation), reliance on family for support (familism support), and prioritization of familial needs over individual needs (familism referent)” (Azpeitia & Bacio, 2022, p. 3).
<i>Pláticas</i>	“An expressive cultural form shaped by listening, inquiry, storytelling, and story making that is akin to a nuanced, multi-dimensional conversation” (F. Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013, p. 160).
<i>Testimonios</i>	“A participant’s recollection of their significant, multilayered personal accounts of life events and experiences in their own voices” (Jasis & Ordonez-Jasis, 2012, p. 71) that capture their challenges and aspirations.

ABSTRACT

This study examined the conceptual framework of the Community Learning Exchange (CLE) in practice at a Title I bilingual campus, Faith Elementary (a pseudonym). The aim of this study was to inform readers of the non-visible parent engagement that exists within culturally aligned methods. The research questions that helped to guide the study were: What are the *testimonios* of immigrant Latinx parents who have children in a bilingual program in defining parent and family engagement? What are the parent narratives shared to effectively bridge the gap between conventional forms of engagement and cultural practices with Spanish-speaking only Latinx parents and families? How can we implement institutional (systemic) cultural change and build an inclusive environment to better serve our marginalized Spanish Latinx parents of emergent bilinguals? This study was inspired based on the lived experiences of the researcher's parents and the parent experiences shared with the researcher as a bilingual director in three districts. The literature analysis included current literature on parent engagement, data on Hispanic families, barriers that exist for Latinx parents, and understanding Latinx through a cultural perspective and not a marginalized group. The methodology used for this study was group and individual *pláticas* to capture the testimonios of three Latinx Spanish-speaking parents and their view of parent engagement through the lens of a parent of a student participating in the bilingual program. Results of the data analysis showed parents are highly involved and engaged through the ecologies of knowing and the axioms, specifically in the area of parental engagement. Home-based involvement was predicted and seen throughout the data, thus informing the readers to consider culturally aligned methods when making efforts to include Latino parents in their children's schooling. The recommendations and implications will add value to the culturally aligned methods used within the homes of Latinx parents and the

suggestions for schools to practice, helping to close the gap between schools and Latinx Spanish-speaking parents. The process of rendition was used throughout this study showcasing what parents were saying during the *pláticas*.

Keywords: parent engagement, *pláticas*, *testimonios*, culturally aligned methods

I. INTRODUCTION

Looking at the past must only be a means of understanding more clearly what and who you are-so you can more wisely build the future. (Freire, 2000, p. 72)

Understanding Self Through my Parents' Involvement in my Education

I am an emergent bilingual (formerly English learner [EL]) who journeyed through the educational system within Texas and never knew I was labeled as such until I was sitting in an education class at Angelo State University in 1990. Both of my parents are foreign born and Spanish speaking yet neither were aware of the empowerment or voice they held in the decision-making process when it came to their children's education within the U.S. educational system. In addition to my parents being unaware of their voice, my siblings and I were unaware of the labels we were given because we came from a Spanish-speaking culture. Within our culture, when I was trying to find myself, the values of *familismo* such as loyalty, commitment, and dedication that were passed down from generation to generation helped me to understand that my lived experiences allowed me to develop my own story and my own vision of advocating for change (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2019). Through *familismo*, we learned to communicate with one another, as a family we learned to seek family input when making important decisions, and we embraced shared ideas and family over individual needs (Chavez-Korell et al., 2013; Smith-Morris et al., 2013). Communication in our collectivist culture was a major factor in our upbringing, whether by phone, mail, or gatherings, as we focused on family and relationships.

Though communication is important among Latinxs, it does not occur in education simply because conventional forms of communication (e.g., notes, calls, or parent conferences) are used (Gaitan, 2004) with the expectation that the Spanish-speaking parent will understand the message. When any parent, to include my parents, does not respond to conventional forms of

classroom communication, the perception was and is that the parent does not care about education (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Quirocho & Daoud, 2006; Valdés, 1996). On the contrary, this failure to respond results from the fact that Latinx parents hold the teacher in high authority and respect their position in teaching. My parents had faith in the education system and believed in the teachers making the decisions for their children's education and never viewed themselves, nor were they considered, as working in a partnership and engaged with educators. My parents never thought of themselves as contributors to our productivity and success; instead, they gave all the credit to our teachers. My parents' journey in raising my three siblings and myself is what inspired me to give of myself as an educator to the Spanish-speaking Latinx parents and bilingual community.

In the United States, there is diversity among Latinx parents, and for the purpose of this study, I focused on those arriving as immigrants, with little or no education and being Spanish speaking. Our parents must navigate an educational setting that is foreign to them, yet they value education; their responsibilities within the home are seen as an extension of their values and teaching (Gaitan, 2004), "yet many of their activities are outside conventional understandings of involvement" (G. López, 2001, p. 418). My immigrant Spanish-speaking parents, just as those discussed in research, were actively engaged in my education through providing motivation and support in the home setting (G. López, 2001; Viramontez Anguiano et al., 2010). Immigrant parents are involved in their children's education, many times asking about their day or even providing a space for homework (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). I recall coming home after a long bus ride and my mother asking us in Spanish, how our day was and if we had homework and as she set a place on the table for us to do our work, she would also bake a cake, pie, or

pastry to help us stay on task; these were all reflections of culturally aligned forms of involvement by my marginalized parent.

Spanish-speaking Latinx parents, like my parents, vocalize constantly to their children the importance of being educated and moving ahead in life, as “*educación* [education] means more than mere schooling” (Gaitan, 2004, p. 4). Arellanes et al. (2017, p. 342) defined *educación* as the “intangibles that parents provide children to become a person with strong morals.” My parents gave us advice or shared stories, declaring to us, their four children, the importance of breaking the cycle of poverty (Bohon et al., 2005; Marschall, 2006; Payne, 1996) and the fact that many Latinx parents immigrated to our country for the betterment of their children (Fry & Gonzalez, 2008), just as they did, as a means of “striving towards upward mobility through the lives of their children” (Arellanes et al., 2017, p. 339). Just because my parents did not sit down with us and lay out our college or career paths, or visit our high school counselors to set or discuss our schedules, this did not mean they were not involved as parents. They were involved in our education in culturally aligned forms, they just did not realize they were part of a marginalized culture. Sadly, “schools consider visible presence at schools as the only legitimate form of parental involvement” (Larrotta & Yamamura, 2011, p. 75).

Mi sueño (my dream) is to share the story of my parents and to help educators working with students in a bilingual program to understand that Latinx parents may not have a visible presence, but they respect the system, the campus, the teacher, and the classroom and they are involved in their children’s education. The campus, and more importantly the classroom, is a place where learning occurs and, just like my parents, Latinx parents *apoyan* (support) y *respetan la educación de sus hijos* (and respect the education of their children). In sharing the story of my parents in this study, my hope was to look at the invisible presence of parent and family

engagement. It is assumed that Latinx parents, like mine, know and understand the U.S. educational system (Larrotta & Yamamura, 2011), when in reality they may not. By sharing the information that parents request of me in this study about our educational system, my hope was to promote agency and to build *confianza* (confidence) in their voice so they can advocate for their children.

Understanding the Educational Setting: Parents of Emergent Bilinguals

Every district has a different mission and vision, but throughout my career in education I have found there is one common goal across districts—increasing Latinx parent and family engagement in schools. *Uniendo familias, las escuelas y la comunidad* (uniting families, schools, and communities) became a personal goal for me as I discovered my passion—increasing Latinx parent and family engagement—when working in various Texas district bilingual programs. Over the last 15 years I have spent serving as an administrator on a campus and in a district office, I have had the opportunity to implement parent and family engagement events for Spanish-speaking parents, especially those with children in the bilingual program. Over the years, parent events began to evolve and gave me clarity on my goal, which then led me to research best practices in Latinx parent and family engagement within a bilingual community.

Research shows “parental involvement has been described as an important aspect of the relationship between schools and children’s families” (Arar et al., 2014, p. 133). Parent and family engagement is a key aspect in education, and within the United States this topic has been researched since the 1980s to the extent that policymakers even made it a statutory priority (Baker et al., 1998). The literature also shows there is a connection between schools and parents, as the more parents are involved in their children’s education, the higher students achieve (Epstein, 1986; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1995; Peterson, 1989; Vassallo, 2000). In addition,

research reveals stronger bonds are created between schools and parents when students feel there is a harmonious correlation between the values at home and the values at school (Arar et al., 2014; Frydenberg, 2008). These positive interactions help to shape parents' attitudes about their children's schools (De Gaetano, 2007; Williams & Sánchez, 2012).

Parent and family engagement is key and the more parents interact with the school and understand about the educational goals of their children, the more willing they are to become involved with their children and the schools (Arar et al., 2014; Frydenberg, 2008; Schecter & Sherri, 2009). Positive parent and family engagement is an area that is overlooked, yet plays a large part in a Latinx student's achievement level (Ceballo et al., 2014). In my experience as a bilingual director, it became clear that many parents with students in the bilingual program did not understand or did not know how their children were identified for services, nor did they understand the program, the models, or the components. In conversations with parents across districts, it became clear to me they did not realize they had a voice in the education of their children and they lacked information and understanding of the system (Marschall & Shah, 2020) because of the barriers that kept them from attending events, visiting schools, communicating with schools, or even understanding the programs offered by the state.

As I continued to work with districts and their administration, I came to realize that not only did parents not know or understand the bilingual program, most key decision makers did not know how students came to be labeled as bilingual, limited English proficient (LEP), English learner (EL), or emergent bilingual. It became apparent that in order to understand Latinx parent and family engagement, and in order for those working within the schools to view Latinx parents as collective leaders, we needed to help parents understand the bilingual programs in Texas and the goals students need to meet for language acquisition in English.

Brief Historical Context of Bilingual Education in the United States

The following sections focus on the historical context of bilingual education and relevant quantitative data sets that support the importance of this inquiry. The data show there has been an increase in the number of students enrolling in bilingual programs and the need for educators to understand the particular needs of this parent population in relation to their children's educational opportunities and academic progress.

Bilingualism is not a Spanish phenomenon, as bilingual programs exist in countries such as the United States, Spain, and India where part of the instruction is in a language other than the students' native language. For example, India has schools that teach English (Anghel et al., 2016). In Spain, learning English as a second language opens up new perspectives as "students need to acquire more and better communication skills in different European languages" (Anghel et al., 2016, p. 1205). In the U.S. educational system, bilingual education is offered with the intent of meeting the needs of students who speak a native language other than English. It has been stated that parallel patterns exist in language acquisition between Hispanics and the European immigrants who came to the United States in the earlier years (Hempel et al., 2013). As the population of emergent bilinguals increases with the arrival of immigrants, language acquisition becomes more important and bilingual education should be perceived as additive (DeNicolo, 2016). Language acquisition is more effective academically for students when they receive instruction in their first language and develop English proficiency along the way, thus making it an additive program (Genesee et al., 2006; Ramirez et al., 1991; Rolstad et al., 2005; Slavin & Cheung, 2005; Thomas & Collier, 1997).

Currently, one in every eight individuals living in the United States is an immigrant (Israel et al., 2017) and the population of emergent bilinguals continues to increase across the

nation as well as in the State of Texas. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES; Snyder et al., 2019), in 2017 there were over 5,000,000 emergent bilinguals in the United States. The data show 2% growth in the number of emergent bilinguals from the year 2000 to the year 2017. The number of emergent bilinguals was the highest in 10 of the 50 states in 2017 with Texas being second to California. The other states with a high percentage of emergent bilinguals, in numerical order, are Nevada, New Mexico, Alaska, Colorado, Washington, Illinois, Kansas, and Florida. Out of the entire United States and with a growing population of emergent bilinguals, only 10 states mandate bilingual education (F. López et al., 2015); all the others just support language acquisition. Figure 1 demonstrates the fast-growing population of emergent bilinguals in the nation (NCES, 2017).

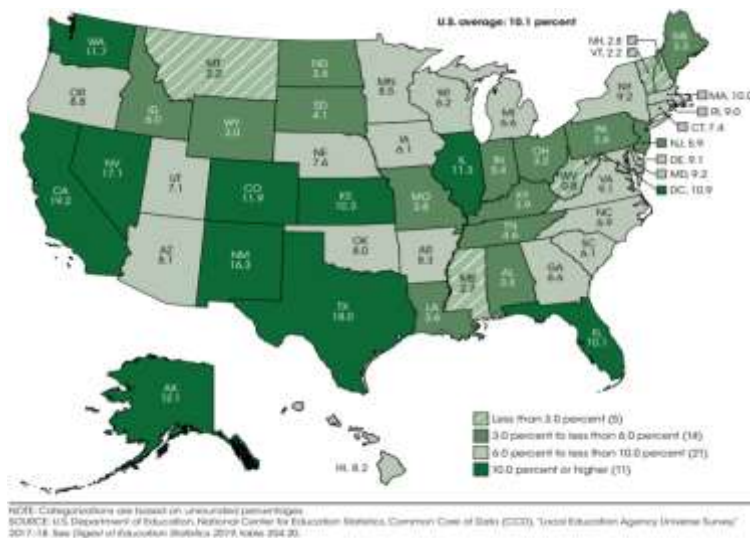


Figure 1. Percentage of Public-School Students who Were English Language Learners, by State: Fall 2017.

The Bilingual Education Act (BEA) was enacted in 1968 and was the first law addressing the needs of Spanish-speaking students (Chin et al., 2013), as at that time, it was believed an estimated 1.75 million emergent bilinguals were present in the United States. In 2018, the United States had over five million English language learners, and when comparing the numbers between 1968 and 2018, the commonality is that 85% of students in a bilingual program speak

Spanish (Escamilla, 2018, p. 383). According to the NCES, 76.5% of the emergent bilingual population in the United States speaks Spanish and Texas mirrors the nation not only in the percentage of Spanish-speaking emergent bilinguals in the bilingual program (NCES, 2017) but also in overall emergent bilingual population growth.

Bilingual Programs and Emergent Bilinguals in Texas

In Texas, where the population mirrors the nation's statistics in terms of Spanish-speaking emergent bilinguals, there are two statutes that protect the 1.1 million students participating in the state's bilingual program: Texas Education Code (TEC) §29.051 to 29.064 and 19 Texas Administrative Code (TAC) Chapter 89 Adaptations for Special Populations, Subchapter BB Commissioner's Rules Concerning State Plan for Educating English Learners.

Statute TEC §29 established bilingual programs with equity and educational opportunities as a target for all emergent bilinguals. Even though the statute indicated English was the state's language, the education code was written to assist in the identification of students who were unable to read, write, and speak the English language. This statute outlines the services to be provided for students within districts, the bilingual program requirements, and the identification processes. This statute also defines an LEP student as one who struggles in the educational setting with the English language and whose first language is noted as not being English. Overall, the statute targets growth in three areas: affective, cognitive and linguistic. Students identified in the approved program are most known as ELs, LEP students, or most recently as emergent bilingual students.

Texas has seen a rise in the emergent bilingual student population in the state-approved bilingual program. Data from the Texas Education Agency (TEA, 2020) representing enrollment in Texas public schools show there are over 5.4 million students enrolled in Texas schools and of

those, over 1.1 million are identified as emergent bilinguals (p. 4). In the 2009–2010 school year, 16.9% of the state population enrolled in public schools were identified as emergent bilinguals (TEA, 2021). The TEA’s August 2020 report showed that in the 2019–2020 school year, 20.3% of students were identified as emergent bilinguals, and there was an increase of 297,556 students in the bilingual program (TEA, 2021, p. 26). In the 2019–2020 school year, of all the identified emergent bilinguals in Texas, 88.6% were Hispanic and 89% of the emergent bilinguals in the bilingual program spoke Spanish. Data collected (Migration Policy Institute, 2015) from 2012 to 2016 in Texas demonstrate that 78.5% of students identified as LEP were natives and born in the United States.

The instructional needs of emergent bilinguals vary and developers of the bilingual program in Texas have had to adapt the program to these needs as well as those of Latinx parents. If 89% of the emergent bilingual students speak Spanish in Texas (TEA, 2021), then we need to consider the needs of their Spanish-speaking parents and start to implement strategies to increase Latinx parent engagement. The goal within the bilingual program is to “promote full conversational and academic proficiency” (Estrada et al., 2009, p. 56) among students, yet the bilingual program is also geared toward the importance of building relationships with Latinx parents.

Bilingual Program Models in Texas

In Texas, there are six models for language acquisition within the bilingual program umbrella: two-way dual language, one-way dual language, transitional late exit, transitional early exit, content-based English as a second language, and pull out, as demonstrated in Figure 2.

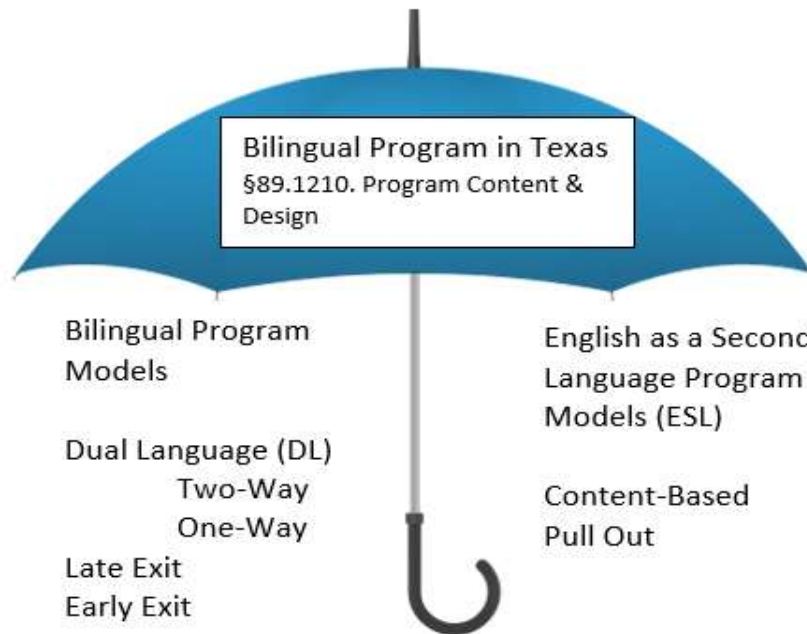


Figure 2. Bilingual Programs in Texas (TEA, 2020).

Texas offers a variety of required bilingual programs as described in 19 TAC Chapter 89. There are six models within the bilingual program—four models for bilingual and two for English as a second language (ESL)—and all of the models fall under the same umbrella. All of these models are designed to meet the language and instructional needs of students identified as LEP in their affective, cognitive, and linguistic growth as individuals. The bilingual programs offered from kindergarten to the elementary level are early exit, late exit, dual language two-way immersion, and dual language one-way immersion. Those offered after elementary and up to 12th grade are ESL pullout and ESL content-based.

In the early exit model in Texas, an LEP student can meet the bilingual program exit criteria no earlier than first grade, thus transitioning within 3 years (Garcia, 2009). On the other hand, a student in a late exit model can begin to meet the state exit criteria after being in the program for 6 years or more. Transitional bilingual program models are referred to as subtractive

models because the goal is not bilingualism, it is English language attainment (Crawford, 2004; DeNicolo, 2016).

A one-way dual language program is intended for non-English speaking students as opposed to the two-way dual language program that is intended for the combination of non-English and non-Spanish speakers. Students in either of these immersion models can exit after being served for 6 years or more in the program. In either of these models, students are learning language, acquiring English while maintaining their first language (Lindholm-Leary, 2001), and are in the program longer, thus students have “sustained bilingualism, biliteracy, multiculturalism, and high levels of academic achievement” (Pimentel, 2011, p. 337).

In the ESL models, if a student is served under the content-based model, all the teachers in their content area are teacher certified under ESL and within the pull out model, students can be removed from the classroom setting to receive services. In either of these ESL services, a student can be reclassified after meeting the state criteria in first grade or above. Students in these models often have to catch up to their peers (Schecter & Cummins, 2003) and most often in the beginning sit in a classroom not comprehending the content (Pimentel, 2011).

In 2019–2020, the TEA Division of Research and Analysis demonstrated the program breakdown over an 11-year span in the State of Texas. Currently, there are over one million emergent bilinguals in Texas and Figure 3 shows 14.8% of students participated in early exit and 3.5% in late exit programs. In the dual language programs, two-way immersion had 6.1% participation and one-way had 15.1%. ESL programs had 31.2% participation in pull out and 14.2% in content-based (TEA, 2021, p. 27). Beginning in the year 2019, the state now considers students in a program without a properly certified teacher to be in an alternative setting.

Enrollment of English Learners, by Special Language Program Instructional Model, Texas Public Schools, 2009-10 Through 2019-20

Services received by English learners										
Bilingual education programs										
Year	Transitional bilingual/early exit		Transitional bilingual/late exit		Dual immersion/two-way		Dual immersion/one-way		Bilingual alt. lang.* program	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
2009-10	179,153	21.9	108,671	13.3	23,713	2.9	144,514	17.7	n/a ^b	n/a
2010-11	185,157	22.3	98,079	11.8	28,386	3.4	158,101	19.0	n/a	n/a
2011-12	182,622	21.8	88,176	10.5	33,518	4.0	172,981	20.6	n/a	n/a
2012-13	196,590	22.7	73,414	8.5	38,732	4.5	179,160	20.7	n/a	n/a
2013-14	196,077	21.8	69,344	7.7	42,874	4.8	186,667	20.7	n/a	n/a
2014-15	201,739	21.3	64,512	6.8	47,968	5.1	189,847	20.0	n/a	n/a
2015-16	188,115	19.2	60,824	6.2	52,193	5.3	199,401	20.3	n/a	n/a
2016-17	190,455	18.8	58,062	5.7	56,865	5.6	191,423	18.9	n/a	n/a
2017-18	198,812	19.6	56,841	5.6	60,359	5.9	164,890	16.2	n/a	n/a
2018-19	186,607	17.7	48,141	4.6	64,869	6.1	165,271	15.7	n/a	n/a
2019-20	164,271	14.8	38,747	3.5	67,832	6.1	168,348	15.1	70,283	6.3
10-year change	-14,882	-8.3	-69,924	-64.3	44,119	186.1	23,834	16.5	n/a	n/a

Services received by English learners										
ESL* programs										
Year	ESL/ content-based		ESL/ pull-out		ESL alt. lang. program		No services		English learners	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
2009-10	193,432	23.7	117,293	14.4	n/a	n/a	50,298	6.2	817,074	100
2010-11	189,011	22.7	123,305	14.8	n/a	n/a	49,773	6.0	831,812	100
2011-12	194,123	23.2	119,492	14.3	n/a	n/a	47,506	5.7	838,418	100
2012-13	199,032	23.0	129,760	15.0	n/a	n/a	47,994	5.6	864,682	100
2013-14	209,060	23.2	148,203	16.5	n/a	n/a	48,251	5.4	900,476	100
2014-15	221,601	23.3	175,740	18.5	n/a	n/a	47,667	5.0	949,074	100
2015-16	243,172	24.8	190,013	19.4	n/a	n/a	46,789	4.8	980,487	100
2016-17	260,916	25.8	207,272	20.5	n/a	n/a	45,763	4.5	1,010,756	100
2017-18	264,301	26.0	225,643	22.2	n/a	n/a	44,526	4.4	1,015,372	100
2018-19	198,671	18.8	346,926	32.9	n/a	n/a	44,687	4.2	1,055,172	100
2019-20	158,543	14.2	347,252	31.2	52,476	4.7	45,784	4.1	1,113,536	100
10-year change	-34,889	-18.0	229,959	196.1	n/a	n/a	-4,514	-9.0	296,462	36.3

*Alternative language. ^bNot available. ^cEnglish as a second language.

Figure 3. Enrollment of Emergent Bilinguals.

Texas Education Agency Guidance for Parent and Family Engagement

In 2016, in the State of Texas, 17% of the emergent bilingual population was foreign born and 36% of these children had at least one parent who was not born in the United States (Migration Policy Institute, 2018). The question becomes, how are foreign-born parents made aware of the empowerment they hold in their participation in their child's education? If the expectations within the school system are to prepare students to be lifetime learners and pursue

various careers (Texas Association of School Administrators, 2008), then our goal as leaders is to empower parents with the same vision as the State of Texas.

Relationships with parents are key in any district. Teachers, administrators, and parents do not function independently within a school. Latinx parent and family engagement within the emergent bilingual community and bilingual program is crucial to ensure parents are empowered within district education systems and that district leaders do not fall short in providing the required services to emergent bilingual students. Maintaining equity within a school and access to the school system should be a goal of building sustainability in parent–educator relationships (Agirdag & Van Houtte, 2011), especially in bilingual programs where 20% of the population in Texas schools are emergent bilinguals (TEA, 2021).

In our current system, in which leaders in the TEA profess to seek inclusiveness and empowerment in supporting emergent bilinguals, we must consider whether all parents or guardians of students in the program are included in the decision making for their child’s education. I ask again, if many of our emergent bilingual students have one or both parents who are foreign born and 90% of the state’s bilingual population speaks Spanish (TEA, 2021), how is information about the program, parental rights, and parent engagement disseminated in a language the parents understand?

If school leaders embrace the development of the whole child, then one goal should be to empower parents and cultivate partnerships. School leaders and parents can unite in the development of the whole child and their English language. As partnerships are cultivated and school leaders and Latinx parents are uniting in an effort to ensure the success of their students, are we as educators providing opportunities to share and review information with parents? If foreign-born parents are not familiar with the U.S. educational system, will they understand the

information and engage in their child's education? How do parents of emergent bilinguals know when their child has mastered the English language if open dialogue does not exist? Does simply providing information in English and Spanish for Latinx parents of emergent bilinguals align with and meet federal requirements surrounding parent engagement?

Problem Statement

There are over 1,000,000 bilingual students in Texas and over 900,000 speak Spanish (TEA, 2021). Are Latinx parents able to understand bilingual education and make informed decisions regarding their children's education? Are school leaders effectively engaging Latinx parents of students within the bilingual program in a way that helps bring awareness, ensures inclusiveness, and gives them a voice?

Data show the number of students in Texas bilingual programs is increasing and as the numbers in Texas continue to rise, it becomes apparent that an important factor in institutional system change is parental engagement (Yoder & Lopez, 2013). As research shows there is a correlation between academic achievement and parent and family engagement (Baker et al., 1998; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001; G. López, 2001), "there will be a need to engage families and communities as partners" (Machen et al., 2005, p. 13) within the bilingual community. When we begin to take a closer look at parent engagement, we as educators must remain cognizant that meaning is personally constructed and much of how we learn or comprehend is linked to our experiences and culture (Noddings, 2012). Thus, are our school leaders making an attempt to implement cultural changes to better serve the Latinx parents of emergent bilinguals?

If thoughts, reality, and emotions are socially constructed and people come to view the world through the lens of the culture in which they were raised (Crotty, 1998), and if parent engagement is a critical factor in improving schools and building relationships, are we taking

into consideration culture when working on improving schools and the quality of relationships among Latinx parents? Once we start considering culture as a bridge between parents and school, then our next step will follow—to accept those who speak a different language as bringing an asset to the table (Petrzela, 2010) and to validate the culture and language (González, 2001; F. López, 2016; Matthews & López, 2019), rather than immediately perceiving language as a deficit. “Language is at the heart, literally and metaphorically, of who we are, how we present ourselves, and how others see us” (González, 2001, p. xix). Are we using the spoken language, culture, and knowledge of foreign-born Latinx parents as an asset in our parent engagement strategies?

The fact that the BEA of 1968 has gone through various changes over time reflects the varying needs of bilingual programs, their students, and their parents, and one of those needs is to overcome the disengagement of a marginalized population within our schools and to increase Latinx parent engagement. DeMatthews and Izquierdo (2020) stated, “The marginalization of Mexican American immigrant communities necessitates culturally responsive leadership to promote system and equity-oriented reform” (p. 363). Thus, my story, what I believe is my gift and *mi sueño* (my dream), is to empower Latinx parents and guardians of students in bilingual programs to be the voice for their children, to bring value to culture and culturally aligned parent engagement, and to unite with schools, educators, and the community to enhance the education of children in bilingual programs in Texas. According to Grijalva (2019), analyzing why parents participate allows for a better understanding of the driving forces and reasons behind their efforts. Without this analysis, we fail to explore how perceptions, attitudes, and stereotypes are shaped by educators, politicians, and advocates of certain parents of different ethnicities, cultural backgrounds, and economic conditions.

Emergent bilingual students enter school in kindergarten with academic gaps and as they progress through the grade levels, they are not assessed on what they can accomplish, but judged on what in fact they have not learned to do (Ivey & Broaddus, 2007). DeMatthews and Izquierdo (2020) stated “schools often fail to capitalize on strengths, resilience, and transnational capital” (p. 365), thus creating gaps in attempts to build relationships with the community. Gaps not only exist when students enter kindergarten, they also exist when members of Mexican American communities do not feel connected to the school.

Many definitions of parent engagement exist in the literature. Epstein et al. (2009) considered parents as being engaged through attending conferences, volunteering at school, helping children with their homework, or even discussing school with their children, all of which reflect conventional forms of engagement in which Latinx parents do not engage. Nevertheless, research shows that culturally aligned forms of involvement, similar to what my parents displayed, can include providing assistance with homework, giving advice, encouraging behavior, continuing to learn, and comforting children when they have a rough day (Araque et al., 2017; LeFevre & Shaw, 2012). G. R. López et al. (2001) defined parent and family engagement as follows:

“Parental involvement” is defined as participating in organized activities at school, parents—particularly marginalized parents—view their contributions to school success in terms of informal activities such as providing nurturance, instilling cultural values, talking with their children, sending them to school clean and rested, checking homework, and a variety of other nonconventional activities. (p. 256)

For the purpose of this study, I use the term parent and family engagement, as it encompasses the involvement of all family members in the formation of a child’s schooling experiences.

Purpose of the Study

The Spanish-speaking emergent bilingual population continues to increase in the United States and in Texas (see Figure 3). Though the term parent is present throughout state and federal requirements, in my various roles in bilingual education, I have noticed that within our schools and districts, parents of bilingual students are serving in a quiet, non-participatory role and are not seen as collaborators or partners. On the contrary, Latinx parents are already involved, just “not involved in conventionally sanctioned ways” (G. López, 2001, p. 420). In addition to being involved, Latinx parents bring forth funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) that go untapped, as well as a rich culture and heritage.

One of the federal mandates for schools receiving Title I or Title III grant funding requires the participation of parents when developing strategies to encourage and increase parental engagement. The purpose of this study was to collaborate with bilingual campus, a Title I school in a district whose emergent bilingual population has increased 300% in the last 5 years. This elementary campus currently offers a one-way dual language bilingual program in kindergarten to Grade 5. I used strategies learned from my previous experiences in other districts and incorporated new strategies to improve parent engagement. The use of these strategies was intended to promote an inclusive environment where parents felt welcomed.

Some of the shortcomings in the research show Latinx parents are involved in culturally aligned ways and parent and family engagement can occur in the home (Bower & Griffin, 2011), yet it can seem invisible to school personnel; nonetheless, it happens during conversations about life, the sharing of beliefs or values, oral history, or even during church or community events (Geenen et al., 2001; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). This study was designed to build on home involvement practices; by opening up dialogue in the Spanish home language, *pláticas* included

conversations on removing barriers; bridging the gap between schools, parents, and community; and increasing parent voice in the educational decision making that affects their children.

The goal in this study was to promote parent and family engagement at an elementary campus as well as in the bilingual program. Furthermore, the study was designed to use *testimonios* and *pláticas* to give meaning and value to parent experiences and their understanding of the school system along with their culturally aligned and conventional involvement as parents of students in a bilingual program.

Research Questions

The focus of this research centered on district-identified bilingual students and, by extension, included the bilingual students' parents and their engagement in the education of their emergent bilingual students. The research questions guiding this study included the following:

1. What are the *testimonios* related to parent and family engagement of immigrant Latinx parents who have children in a bilingual program?
2. What are the parent narratives shared to effectively bridge the gap between conventional forms of engagement and cultural practices with Spanish-speaking Latinx parents and families?
3. How can we implement institutional (systemic) cultural change and build an inclusive environment to better serve our marginalized Spanish Latinx parents of emergent bilinguals?

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

In an effort to bridge the gap between what we currently practice and the existing knowledge surrounding parent and family engagement, I used the Community Learning Exchange (CLE) theory of change to demonstrate the connection and relationship building

between Latinx parent and family engagement and the school (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016). The theory of change shows how the CLE weaves within the initiated efforts and its components to reveal that Latinx parents, a marginalized group, are involved in culturally aligned forms of parent engagement.

In 2016, M. A. Guajardo et al. wrote a book titled, *Reframing Community Partnerships in Education*, in which they wrote “pedagogies that are community-centered value people and tend to identify and build the agency they bring with them” (p. 5). By using the CLE, I attempted to not only bring parents of emergent bilingual students together, but to focus on their needs as a bilingual community and how we can build partnerships as well as teach and learn from each other. Within this framework, I provided the parents with time and we worked toward building a space of trust where parents felt safe to engage in *pláticas* (conversations) and share their life experiences, knowledge, struggles, and dreams for their children. The CLE theory of change also allowed us to weave together the ecologies of knowing, the five axioms, and the data collected through the relationships, assets, stories, place, politics, and action (RASPPA; M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 36) as we built partnerships with the parents and campus leaders.

Bridging the gap is similar to the circular bridge in Uruguay, as seen in Figure 4. On one end of the bridge lies Epstein and the conventional and accepted forms of parent and family engagement. On the other end lie the culturally aligned forms of involvement within collectivist culture, thus the culture tree. The water within the circle expresses the ecologies of knowing, self, organization, and community. The axioms are working around the ecologies in a circular motion as well and the bridge lies over the CLE body of water. By using this visual, Figure 4 helped me to understand how the CLE could work toward bridging the gap between parents and schools.



Figure 4. Conceptual Framework.

I used the five axioms within the CLE in a tiered format to guide my study of Latinx parent and family engagement. This tiered recommendation (see Table 1) enabled me to look at the five axioms and place parents within three categories: parent involvement, parent participation and parent engagement. My goal was to use the axioms to build relationships, together with the parents, and embrace a space for parents to practice *pláticas* while thinking of the school and bilingual community.

Table 1. Axiom Tiers to Help Bridge the Gap.

	Parent Participation	Parent Involvement	Parent Engagement
Guiding Questions: Where are our tiers embedded in axioms?	Evidence: Parents have never been asked what they would like to see in their child's education. Evidence: No responses to questions asked.	Evidence: Parents participate in circle group activities, but are somewhat hesitant to speak out.	Evidence: Parents providing input; parents asking questions about particular issues related to decision making.
AXIOMS			
Learning as leadership and action; dynamic social process Participants contribute and are active in their learning; stories, conversations, questions, action plans they construct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listen to information Accepting of what is presented Trusting educators/system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents begin to participate and request the next topic to be discussed Parents begin to share stories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents contribute information (informs agenda) Using funds of knowledge by sharing customs, traditions and consejos
Conversation and dialogue are critical and central for relationships and pedagogy Safe space; healthy relationships; inviting, authentic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents do not have answers to questions Parents are observants and not participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents begin to open up and respond to questions. Parents begin to form relationships with other parents present 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents have conversations that impact their children inside and outside of the school setting Incorporating parents' personal stories
Local knowledge and action; best situated to discover answers to local concerns Local residents have first-hand knowledge of issues and concerns; collective ownership;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trusting of educational system Parents do not ask any questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents start to form their own questions about the educational system (Why is my child failing?) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educators listen to challenges Parents feel valued when their questions are answered. (Are tutorials offered? If so, when and where.)
Encourage crossing borders; enriches the development and educational process Geographically, economic, age, culture, racial, gender, faith, differing abilities; crossing of ideas, questions, learning process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Logistical challenges Times not aligned with parent availability In a school setting Translated documents available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Setting a time in the morning and afternoon No questions asked by educators in reference to logistical challenges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Logistical challenges considered, parents are asked when are you available? Informational gatherings are all in Spanish
Assets and hope; hope and change are built on assets and dreams of locals and their communities Shifts mindset to hope; a different way of looking at world; community members develop a language to express themselves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academic driven from a educators perspective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good grades Parents share their hopes for their children (having friends, not being bullied, behaving, graduating) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents make informed decisions based on understanding the educational system Parents express to educators the values within the home and the importance of their child being protected within the educational system

Table 1 lists the axioms that emerged from the literature, which are the “beginning or starting point” (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 22). I asked parents about their lived experiences with school involvement, and their responses brought the table above to life. Their responses enabled me to place parents into one of the three categories. The first category, emerging/evolving, indicated the parent had never come across such a question or had not been asked about their experiences. In the second category, proficient/developing, parents were involved in circle activities but were expected to be afraid to speak and share their experiences. In the last category, inclusive environment, the parents were involved in providing feedback, making decisions, and other activities.

Importance of the Study

Parent engagement standards within the bilingual program in Texas were put into place to help support families and the learning and success of students and to recognize and respect the parents’ voices, all while building relationships. Yet, it is perceived that parents of children of color are not interested in their children’s education as evidenced by their lack of participation in conventional school activities (e.g., volunteering in class or on field trips, attending parent–teacher conferences, helping with classroom projects, attending school events, fundraising, etc.; Gonzales & Gabel, 2017, p. 64). Systemic and conventional parent and family engagement is viewed through the lens of the dominant culture, thus allowing the dominant culture to construct acceptable definitions of and expectations for parent and family engagement.

This study was designed to enhance parents’ involvement through the dissemination of information about various activities for parent and family engagement, offered in Spanish, instituted across districts that affected learning partnerships with Latinx parents. In bridging the gap between schools and parents, “it is critical that educators recognize the role language plays”

(González, 2001, p. 36) and these activities helped to break down barriers, engaged parents and families, and opened up dialogue with parents about their children's education and their involvement as parents through culturally aligned activities. We already know that Latinx parents value the education of their children (Hill & Torres, 2010); nevertheless, "Latinx parents lack knowledge of the school environment and awareness of the steps that need to be taken for their children to access higher education" (Pstross et al., 2016, p. 652).

Many Latinx parents, like my own, lack knowledge about their children's education. The status of parents has been marginalized and we need to step up to the plate and break the barrier and create empowering environments for these parents. Research shows the Latinx culture coupled with experiences and background is what enables parents to identify with culturally aligned methods of involvement. Communities, relationships, stories, "instilling the value of education" (G. López, 2001, p. 416), hard work, and *consejos* (advice) are just a few of the effective, invisible, culturally aligned methods of parent engagement.

In practicality, as an educator, leader, and change agent, I have worked with parents across districts and, in conversations, I echoed how important their words of encouragement were to their children. In one district, I would have monthly meetings with parents, in Spanish, in which I shared with them information about the educational system that they requested. In addition to the sessions, we would have small group discussions about their hopes and what we as a district could provide for their children. I would share my story and the story of my parents and their involvement through culturally aligned means, validating what they as parents were currently doing at home. Each session increased the parents' confidence in themselves, empowered them with a voice, and provided them the knowledge they needed to understand the school system, thereby closing gaps and enabling them to serve as advocates for their children.

In this study, culturally aligned methods of parent and family engagement were used to work with parents in a setting where *pláticas* (genuine conversations) could provide experiences and information that leaders in other districts can use to promote, encourage, and engage parents. The findings help with the understanding of how we can promote and support parent and family engagement in education.

Assumptions and Limitation

I anticipated that the results of the research would support and validate how we can bridge the gap between what we currently practice in schools to the existing knowledge of parent engagement. It is my hope that once we implement a systemic change, Latinx parent engagement will align to student achievement and help us understand how the process improves our ability to build relationships with our Latinx community. An assumption was that parents responded honestly to the data collection methods.

Limitations existed for this study, such as just including one elementary campus (Creswell, 2013) and accessibility to the three parents. Other limitations included the accessibility of the three parents for an individual *plática* and a group *plática*, including building relationships and establishing a common time with participants to interview. Other limitations within this study were dependent on building parent trust and parents understanding that their responses would remain confidential and anonymous.

Last, I needed to ensure all data collected were protected within a home office. I used an office computer to store data within a storage finder tool (e.g., the Data Management Planning Tool at Texas State University).

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of clarification, the following terms have been defined.

Emergent bilinguals (formerly known as ELs) are students who are becoming proficient in the English language. These students often come from non-English speaking homes or backgrounds (S.B. 2066, 87th Legislative Session, 2021).

Parent and family engagement refers to the participation of a parent in their child's education and the terms are used interchangeably in research. Grijalva (2019) defined it as:

Although the term parent involvement continues to be used to define the efforts of parents, the term has evolved and adapted to represent the realities of the current conditions in the field of education. The most common terms used to define and label the efforts of parents in their children's educational experiences are parent involvement; parent participation; parent engagement; parent, family, and community engagement; and family engagement. (p. 17)

Road Map

In Chapter I, I discussed the bilingual program and the growth of emergent bilinguals within Texas as well as listed the problem statement and purpose of the study. Chapter II, the literature review, includes data on Hispanic families, barriers within the educational system for Spanish-speaking parents, our cultural perspective, and parent engagement through the lens of culturally aligned forms. Chapter III consists of the methodology and data collected, with Chapter IV showing the results followed by Chapter V, the closing chapter, which includes conclusions and implications.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Equity is not solely something that you do. Equity is who you are. Equity is a reflection of the educators' humanity toward the students they serve. (Kafele, 2021, p. 18)

Growing up in the hill country, *mi familia* (my family) lived 23 miles from town. This meant our bus ride to and from school was around 30 minutes. Every morning, *mi madrecita* (my mother) would wake us up, help us get dressed, cook us breakfast, *y nos decía* (and she would say), “*portense bien en la escuela* (behave well in school), *haganle caso a la maestra* (listen to the teacher), *y trabajen duro* (work hard).” My siblings and I would spend the day in school, remembering *las palabras de mi madrecita* (the words of my mother), *y trabajamos duro* (and we worked hard). At the end of the day, we could not wait to get home, sit at our table, and share our day with *mi madrecita* over a glass of milk and a homemade pie, cake, donuts, or *pan dulce* (sweet bread); this is how my mother rewarded us for having a good day. *Mi madrecita* was very active in our education through culturally aligned methods such as by following our cultural values through *palabras y esperanzas* (words and hopes).

Mi objetivo (my objective) was to research how culture shapes Latinx parent engagement through the lens of culturally aligned, home-based engagement. Changing the perception of Latinx parent engagement within schools can affect the teaching and learning environment and enable Latinx parents to participate in the educational process of their children as they gain knowledge and a voice in our educational system. Presented in this literature review are the following topics: parent engagement mandates, data on Hispanic families, barriers Latinx parents face in the public education system, understanding Latinxs through a cultural perspective, parent and family engagement through the lens of conventional and culturally aligned forms, and making meaning of the axioms and ecologies of knowing.

Parent Engagement Mandates

Parental involvement has been a part of the U.S. educational system for over 100 years; in fact, the education of students began with parents and communities having control over hiring teachers, the curriculum that was taught, and school government. This was particularly true in schools that were created for religious purposes (Hiatt-Michael, 2011). In 1965, under President Johnson, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was signed into law in an attempt to contribute additional funding for the education of low-income children (Jennings, 2015) and make the education of low-income children a goal nationally. Due to his experiences as a son of educators and as an educator himself in the small, impoverished town of Cotulla, Texas, Johnson referred to this act as “The Education Congress” because of the other doors it opened for amendments and acts in education in addition to the provision of \$5 billion in spending through five federal titles (Casalaspi, 2017, pp. 253–254).

In 2001, the ESEA was reauthorized as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in an “attempt to bridge homes and schools through a variety of mechanisms that aimed to partner with families and communities” (Baquedano-López et al., 2013, p. 152). This reauthorization continued Title I funds being granted for schools with high numbers of economically disadvantaged students and Title III funds for bilingual education. Title I required districts receiving funds to create parent policies to ensure parents were included in the decision-making process, thus creating partnerships and closing the achievement gaps for low-income students.

Attempts to increase parent and family engagement have evolved from the 1960s with a focus on interventions within the home, to a shift in the 1970s emphasizing the socialization process, to the present day with a move toward empowering parents and increasing their participation (Olivos et al., 2011). Parental involvement continues to be a critical factor in

education, as evidenced by the enactment of various federal mandates, such as the ESEA of 1965 through Title I Part A, NCLB of 2001, and currently, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

Initially, the ESEA did not include any mention of parent and family engagement, but with the addition of the Title I program in 1968, parents were to be included in the planning, operation, and evaluation of educational programs. Title I was implemented to emphasize the instruction of disadvantaged students, involve parents in school improvement through the education of their children, and strengthen parent capacity through involvement in parent advisory councils, the primary decision-making body (Stonehill & Groves, 1983).

Fifty years after the enactment of the ESEA, President Obama reauthorized the act as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), continuing with the goals of making education equitable; building partnerships with parents, schools, and communities; closing achievement gaps; increasing accountability to standards and assessments; and ensuring students are ready for their future in college or a career (ESSA, 2017). Though the focus and intent have not changed, most recently the ESSA altered the wording to reflect parent and family *engagement* rather than *involvement*.

Below are the federal title programs and their intent as listed by Skinner (2019) in their summary of the ESSA amendment:

- Title I: Programs for disadvantaged students, student assessment, migratory students, and neglected and delinquent students.
- Title II: Programs for teachers, principals, and school leaders; literacy; and American history and civics education.
- Title III: Programs to support English language acquisition for emergent bilinguals.

- Title IV: Programs to support a well-rounded education, safe and healthy students, and technology; after school instruction and care; charter schools; magnet schools; family engagement in education; and various national activities.
- Title V: Programs to support rural education.
- Title VI: Programs for Indian education, Native Hawaiian education, and Alaska Native education.
- Title VII: Impact aid programs.
- Title VIII: General provisions.

Under federal guidelines, Title III is for emergent bilinguals and immigrants in their language. Along with English language attainment, this title “promotes parental, family, and community participation in language instructional educational programs for the parents, families and communities of ELs” (Skinner, 2019, p. 12).

The Title III program under the federal guidelines is designed to support the education and services provided to emergent bilinguals as well as to increase parental engagement. Schools have been given federal funds to assist with increasing parental engagement, though the questions remain: How are parents of emergent bilingual students being engaged and made aware of the empowerment they hold in their children’s educational success and development of the English language? Under federal guidelines and with an increase in the number of Hispanic families, how are leaders in school districts in Texas reaching out to Latinx parents to give them a greater voice in the education of their children?

Data on Hispanic Families

In July of 2016, the U.S. Census Bureau (Bauman, 2016) reported there were 57.5 million Hispanics living in the United States, comprising 17.9% of the nation's overall population. The Bureau estimated that by the year 2060, a total of 119 million Hispanics will be living in the United States. Currently, nine states average over one million Hispanics living within their borders: Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, and Texas. The Bureau also reported that 16.7 million Hispanic households exist in the nation, and there are over 40 million individuals age 5 years and above who speak Spanish in the home. This reflects a 133.4% increase from 1990 when only 17.3 million spoke Spanish in the home. Of the 40 million reported individuals who speak Spanish, an estimated 10 million do not speak English well or at all (Bauman, 2016).

In 2014, the Pew Research Center reported that 10,405,000 Hispanics lived in Texas, comprising 39% of the population; 30% of these individuals were foreign born and 76% spoke a language other than English at home. The TEA reported in the 2016–2017 school year that of the 5,359,127 students in Texas, a total of 2,809,386 were Hispanic, which represented 52.4% of the total enrollment in Texas schools, and 1,010,756 were identified as emergent bilinguals, of which 901,315 were of Hispanic origin. As educators, we have to ask ourselves, if 76% of the students in Texas speak a language other than English and 18.9% of the student population are emergent bilinguals, formerly known as ELs, are we as educators and organizations forming partnerships with Latinx parents and engaging them in their children's education?

Even though parent engagement has been in existence for over 100 years, the crucial difference today is the Latinx population influx, which is currently shifting school demographics not only within the State of Texas but the nation as a whole. In attempting to understand the

demographic shift and Latinx parent engagement within the schools, I undertook an in-depth review of literature that mentioned engagement among Latinx parents. The Latinx population brings challenges to many schools, some of which include understanding Latinx culture (collectivism), funds of knowledge (the knowledge we each bring with us), language barriers (speak Spanish only), and Latinx parents' lack of knowledge about the U.S. educational system (how the school system works).

Yo creo que la experiencia (I believe the experience), coupled with the element of capitalizing parent engagement with the educational process, will strengthen the opportunities *para los padres y estudiantes* (for the parents and students) to not only gain knowledge but to develop a voice. In addition, if students are actively engaged in their own learning, not only are they developing a voice, they are also constructing experiences (Noddings, 2012). As organizational leaders and educators, we have an opportunity to be change agents and bridge the gap between conventional and culturally aligned parent engagement.

Sergiovanni (1994) argued that “change that counts is change that affects teaching and learning, helps students developmentally, helps teachers be more effective and improves the civic life of students in school” (p. 150). If we are meeting the purpose of education as change agents who are building capacity and creating opportunities for students to learn, then we must also be involving the voices of parents, teachers, students, communities, and all the stakeholders involved in education. According to the National PTA (n.d.), in 30 years of research, the program found that transformational change within the realm of parent engagement has more potential than any other reform.

Barriers Latinx Parents Face in the Public Education System

Como maestros y directores (As teachers and directors), we should be open to seeking, identifying, and tackling the various changes and barriers that exist for Latinx parents if we plan on building collaboration and bridging the gap between parents, educators, and schools. As a parent, how would you react if you had to learn a new language, move to a new country, find a new job, and learn a new educational system? As an educator, how can you engage parents if you do not understand the barriers that keep parents from visiting school? As a school leader, how can you unite parents, teachers, and community if you do not know that a gap exists?

A school leader's responsibility is to foster collaboration between parents and the school community in an effort to increase parent engagement. Research has shown there are many barriers to Latinx parent engagement in school and some of the most common issues these parents face when they are in the U.S. educational system are (a) language, (b) logistical factors and socioeconomic status, (c) lack of familiarity with U.S. schools, and (d) a feeling of unwelcomeness. These and many other barriers exist for parents who are non-English speakers, and as educators, we have the ability to break down these barriers by offering informational sessions in Spanish, setting up meetings around the parents' work schedules, introducing parents to components of the educational system in Texas, and welcoming parents by inviting them to share their culture and knowledge.

Language

Spanish is spoken in many Latinx homes, and Spanish-speaking parents often feel unheard due to the language barrier. "Parents may feel that no one in the school will listen to them if they cannot communicate in English" (Quezada et al., 2003, p. 32). Parents are deemed as uninvolved (Alfaro et al., 2014; G. López, 2001; Moles, 1993) when in reality, even if they

wanted to be involved, schools do not provide a solution to overcome the language difference (Chu & Garcia, 2014; Torres-Burgo et al., 2010; Trainor, 2010; Zhang & Bennett, 2003). This causes Latinx parents to be categorized as disinterested in their children's education. In 2016, Petrone conducted a study comparing parent engagement in two countries, Mexico and the United States (i.e., North Carolina). A father in the study shared that the communication materials sent home were seldom in Spanish, with the exception of surveys, which were typically written in both English and Spanish. Another interviewee shared that her mother always wanted to help, but because she did not speak English, she could not. Throughout the literature are stories about the perception of non-involvement (Araque et al., 2017; Fine, 2014), yet Petrone's (2016) participants' stories reflected that the schools did not do enough to promote parent and family engagement (e.g., not assisting the father by sending home communication in his first language or not helping a mother who wanted to help her child).

Latinx parents do not deny that they often do not have adequate English proficiency to communicate properly with schools and the reality is that schools do not always have enough bilingual teachers or translators to assist parents with communicating (Good et al., 2010). Latinx parents would be more involved in parent-teacher conferences if language was not a common barrier. Alexander et al. (2017) noted in their study testing non-involvement among Latinx families that Latinx parents were 5.5 times more likely than their White counterparts to state that language was a barrier. These researchers used a convenience sample to gather information from 343 adolescents. Among their student participants, 43.8% agreed that their parents were not involved due to the language barrier.

Latinx parents with students in special populations are also affected by language barriers in the school system. Working together to make communication accessible in the first language

of families is crucial to enhance efforts and practices that can connect the school and family. If parents do not have the language, how can a parent with a child in special programs overcome the language barrier and the program jargon that is unknown to parents (Goss, 2019), yet used in education? Not only does the comprehension of the program jargon interfere, but Olivos (2009) stated language interferes within special education programs because Latinx parents are viewed as culturally and linguistically diverse families. Research also shows that in these situations, language constitutes a barrier and within special programs, committees are a means of advocacy for parents, a chance for shared voices. Language is a barrier for parents when participating in individualized education program (IEP) committee meetings and Olivos wrote in her research that parents indeed expressed their feelings and shared their experiences with the meeting process. One Mexican mother shared she felt alienated and disrespected because those present in the meeting did not appear to hear her voice due to language being the barrier, but the parent was willing to participate and share her voice regardless of whether she was able to speak English.

In their home country, Latinx parents are able to share their voice in meetings and they are able to communicate with the schools and educators. According to Petrone (2016), the results of his study showed Latinx parents were involved in Mexico through culturally aligned and home-based activities, but here in the United States, these activities did not meet the conventional standard of parent engagement. Petrone went on to write, “The skills and cultural capital of Mexican parents who did not speak English were rarely tapped into as a result of the language barrier” (p. 80).

In a study by Poza et al. (2014), parents indicated they began to feel unwelcome at their children’s schools, especially when all of the information was given in English (p. 143). One way in which schools can overcome the language barrier is simply by sending communication

home in English and Spanish and having bilingual staff accessible to parents when they attempt to reach the school. This would help bridge the gap between non-English speaking parents and schools.

Logistical Factors and Socioeconomic Status

Logistical or socioeconomic barriers can also hinder the efforts of Latinx parents who want to be involved. In a study on strategies to increase parent and family engagement, one of the barriers revealed was that though parents were given information by the school, their hours of work did not allow for time to attend meetings or participate in events (Poza et al., 2014, p. 143). Alexander et al. (2017) also found a top barrier chosen by 64.9% of their sample was working hours and schedules. If educators and school leaders are making an honest effort to increase Latinx parent engagement, are family responsibilities considered when scheduling meetings or events? Oftentimes, meetings, events, engaging activities, or sessions for parents are scheduled when parents are working. The challenge to attend meetings comes when parents are working (Williams & Sánchez, 2012) and not only is a working parent a challenge, they may have a strenuous job and once they arrive home, they are exhausted and cannot attend a meeting (Quezada et al., 2003).

How often do educators know whether one or both parents work or if they work one or more demanding jobs? Many Latinxs move to the United States to provide a better life for their children and their employment can become a barrier to their ability to attend meetings, conferences, or school functions. In one study, an immigrant, who was also a teacher, spoke of parents and their urgency to find work in order to survive and provide for the family (Good et al., 2010). He went on to explain that it was not that the parents were not interested in the education

of their children, as indeed they were, but their main priority was to put food on the table (p. 333).

Latinx parents fulfill their family responsibilities by working to meet the economic needs of their families and often work one or more jobs. Parents will also work jobs with inflexible hours, working from sun up to sun down. Demanding jobs, long hours, and inflexibility are part of the logistical barriers that keep Latinx parents from engaging in U.S. schools and their children's education. School leaders can collaborate with Spanish-speaking Latinx parents to agree on a time for working parents to attend a meeting at school.

Lack of Familiarity With U.S. Schools

Along with logistical barriers, parents who are new to the United States must also learn a new school system that is different from the one in countries like Mexico (Good et al., 2010). A parent in the Good et al. (2010) study shared her view of this issue:

In Mexico, teachers consider students as an extension of their own family and refer to them as my children. They not only see themselves as educators, but also as parents, counselors, grandparents, and even mothers, especially when they act as caretakers for sick students. As parents, we trust their judgment: we believe what they tell us. So when the teacher requires our cooperation, we cooperate. This seldom happens here. (p. 330)

Not only do the cultures of parents and the U.S. system clash, but by failing to communicate with parents in their first language, school leaders close the door on finding out about parents' culture and what they know and need within the educational system, thus failing to explore their funds of knowledge.

Though parents might not understand the U.S. education system or know little about it (A. López & Viramontez Anguiano, 2013; Pstross et al., 2016), they continue to encourage their children to succeed. Ceballo (2004) completed a qualitative study of 10 Latinx students at Yale. Even though these students were at an Ivy League school, they acknowledged that their parents knew little of what was required in education, what their educational goals were, or what was

needed to attend Yale. Two of the interviewees revealed they felt isolated throughout high school because they knew their parents could not support or help them, as they did not understand the school system.

In a study of parents participating in the American Dream Academy, their graduation speeches were analyzed over a span of 2 years (Pstross et al., 2016). In addition to over 8,000 speeches, 258 testimonies from parents were collected using an inductive approach. Open, holistic, and initial coding of the speeches revealed parents found a way to navigate through the system with the help of the American Dream Academy program. The mission of this program, in collaboration with Arizona State University, is to empower Latinx parents from target schools. Within the study, one parent stated that the program “helped create an awareness of how school requirements affect one’s opportunities in life” (Pstross et al., 2016, p. 662). Parents in the study were also made aware of tools and resources available to their graduating students, such as financial aid. Parents walked away understanding that partnerships were both needed and possible. Understanding the school system was enhanced by providing parents with information regarding different functions within the system (e.g., curriculum, enrollment, assessments, etc.), thus empowering the parents to become advocates.

Change is needed in assisting parents to understand the nation’s educational system, how to navigate through the opportunities for their children, and an awareness of what is required by their children in order to graduate, thus making them feel welcome, and connecting both cultures and educational systems.

Feeling of Unwelcomeness

Though school leaders do not intend to make parents feel unwelcomed, they often fail to collaborate with parents as equal partners in the educational system. Not only are parents left feeling as though they are losing their home country's conventional values in education as their children are transferred from one culture to another (Good et al., 2010), they also feel educators neither respect them nor do they wish to hear their input. A mother in one study summarized how her husband felt after attending what he considered his first and last meeting: "No. A mí no me gusta. Ver pura gente güera y puro inglés [No. I do not like it. Seeing only white people and all English]" (Poza et al., 2014, p. 143). To add to the level of discomfort, within the same study, one parent recalled when her daughter was told in high school that she would not be able to manage the advanced placement courses she was requesting, and there were no Latinas in those courses. Is this how we minimize the level of discomfort? Is this how we help parents trust our school system?

Whether in private or public schools, parents not only feel unvalued and unwelcomed (Alfaro et al., 2014; Jasis & Ordoñez-Jasis, 2012), they feel as though they are unequal partners and are treated in demeaning and condescending ways (Vera et al., 2017). Schools and parents are on this journey together and parents will visit the schools once the organizations start to treat parents as equals and give them a voice.

Pláticas are a start for schools and educators to begin the collaboration process with Latinx parents and schools. In order to bridge the gap, leaders and educators in the U.S. educational system need to work together with Latinx parents, as equal partners, to break down barriers and begin building on our parent engagement.

Barriers exist, and the unwelcome, unvalued feeling in our schools is an important one to know and understand. If parents do not feel the door is open, school leaders and educators lose the opportunity to build trust and relationships with Latinx parents. In addition, we neither gain nor exchange knowledge from home to school.

Understanding Latinxs Through a Cultural Perspective

Research shows the various barriers that exist in the U.S. educational system for Latinx parents, such as language, logistics, and a feeling of unwelcomeness. In general, there is a need to understand Latinx culture and shift our thought process to understand the importance of viewing Latinx parents as assets in the educational system. One question to keep in mind as we read through the research is how well do educators know and understand our Latinx parents and forms of parent engagement through our culture?

“The reason things stay the same is because we’ve been the same. For things to change, we must change” (Jensen, 2009, p. 46). Change includes broadening our lens and how we view the relationship between culture and parent and family engagement. Culture allows us to construct meaning of the world around us—this is how we learn and experience our environment. Hammond and Jackson (2015) made note of three levels of culture: surface, shallow, and deep culture. Surface culture includes holidays, special foods, attire, and other factors. Shallow culture is where rapport is built, and socialization processes and emotions fall within this level. Last, deep culture “governs how we learn new information, our brain is encoding itself with the particular worldview we will carry into our formative years” (p. 23).

Understanding culture and its practices is the key in increasing parent engagement, yet more often than not, school leaders and personnel misunderstand the impact of culture on education. Understanding how Latinx parents view their culture, their use of language, and their

interactions with others and the community will allow us to leverage these cultural characteristics into parent and family engagement activities (Poza et al., 2014).

In the Latinx collectivist culture, one area that is often misunderstood by educators is that autonomy is granted to children as they grow older as a way of training them to become more responsible (Guerra & Nelson, 2013) for their own decisions. Latinx parenting allows for granting freedom to children as they grow older as this builds responsibility and moral guidance. Similarly, in their study, Poza et al. (2014) stated autonomy plays a supportive role in Latinx culture, allowing children to explore within their own environment. This is also part of the family sense of culture.

Likewise, in understanding culture, McWayne and Melzi (2014) used an emic approach to demonstrate that Latinxs share experiences within their cultural groups, such as Catholicism, family, or extended networks of kinship. From a collectivist standpoint, family, community, and outreach are important. This was described by Hammond and Jackson (2015) as deep culture and the family concept is seen throughout the parent and family engagement literature.

The typology of parent and family engagement standards was created by the dominant White culture in the United States and focuses on school-based activities (Bower & Griffin, 2011; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Scribner et al., 1999; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005), not on unnoticed home-based activities (Bower & Griffin, 2011). The standards only consider the physical presence of a parent as a sign of involvement, such as attending parent–teacher conferences or volunteering (Gonzales & Gabel, 2017).

Though the literature still focuses on visible and conventional parent participation within schools and not invisible home-based activities, Calzada et al. (2015) explored predictors of parent and family engagement for Afro-Caribbean and Latinx families. The researchers noted

that “culture shapes parenting beliefs, attitudes, values and behaviors” (p. 873). Latinx parents, through culture and parenting at home, emphasize the importance of education, the value of respect, and the importance of becoming educated (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). This, in turn, enables children to move out of poverty and experience a better life than their parents (Calzada et al., 2015; Guerra & Nelson, 2013). Latinx parents want what is best for their children and this means having a better life compared to their current family status.

Ceballo (2004) conducted a qualitative study of 10 Yale students who had come from low-income homes where Spanish was spoken. She found the parents of these students all emphasized the importance of education. The students knew their parents were committed to seeing them educated and though their parents were not involved in conventional avenues within their schools, the students were verbally motivated at home to continue their education. Again, the results reveal the importance of family and oral motivation, which are cultural forms of parent and family engagement.

In understanding culture, I intentionally looked at culture through the lens of a collectivist in the hopes of investigating various approaches to increasing Latinx parent and family engagement in order to build learning communities and authentic relationships between parents and schools. Within this lens, Latinx parent and family engagement leads us to rely on the resources and shared funds of knowledge that Latinx parents provide.

Lo que es y no es la Cultura de Latinx (What is and is not Latinx Culture)

Noddings (2012) explored the construction of meaning through how we learn and stated our experiences and culture are inextricably linked to what and how we comprehend. As individuals, we have our own beliefs and we come to view the world through our cultural experiences; it is our brain along with our own culture, “especially one’s deep cultural roots”

(Hammond & Jackson, 2015, p. 23), that allows us to make sense of the environment in which we live. The Latinx culture fosters a sense of family (Araque et al., 2017), which entails loyalty, trust, and seeking input from relatives or others.

If we view the world through the lens of culture as noted by Crotty (1998), and Latinx parent and family engagement is a highly researched topic, why not investigate how culture influences and shapes the definition of parent and family engagement through the lens of culturally aligned involvement? When viewing parent and family engagement through the lens of the Latinx culture, it becomes clear that moral support and nurturing advice are a few of the things we seek and receive from our families (LeFevre & Shaw, 2012; G. R. López et al., 2001) through culturally aligned forms.

Acknowledging that there are two cultural archetypes, Hammond and Jackson (2015) considered how the brain organizes itself through collectivism or individualism connected with an individual's deep-seated culture. Hammond promoted culturally responsive teaching, yet in her book, she gave features of individualism and collectivism (see Figure 5). Again, keep in mind that a Latinx is born and raised in a collectivist culture surrounded by family and relatives who provide support through various methods.

Individualism	Collectivism
Focused on independence and individual achievement	Focused on interdependence and group success
Emphasizes self-reliance and the belief that one is supposed to take care of himself to get ahead	Emphasizes reliance on the collective wisdom or resources of the group and the belief that group members take care of each other to get ahead
Learning happens through individual study and reading	Learning happens through group interaction and dialogue
Individual contributions and status are important	Group dynamics and harmony are important
Competitive	Collaborative
Technical/Analytical	Relational

Figure 5. Features of Individualism and Collectivism (Hammond & Jackson, 2015).

Thinking about collectivism and the increase in Latinx population in Texas, it is important to look at the numbers of students in schools who are from a collectivist country. In the 2016–2017 school year, 52.4% of students in Texas schools were Hispanic, and over one million (approximately 20%) were emergent bilinguals. Of the four million foreign-born individuals living in Texas, over three million come from Latin America (Migration Policy Institute, 2015) and were raised in a collectivist culture. Figure 6 shows the breakdown of foreign-born individuals living within Texas.

Place of Birth	Foreign Born	
	Number	%
Region of Birth (excluding born at sea) ⁱ	4,671,295	100%
Born in Africa	218,959	4.7%
Born in Asia	987,344	21.1%
Born in Europe	189,256	4.1%
Born in Latin America (South America, Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean)	3,207,913	68.7%
Born in Northern America (Canada, Bermuda, Greenland, and St. Pierre and Miquelon)	54,592	1.2%
Born in Oceania	13,231	0.3%

Figure 6. Places of Origin for Foreign Residents of Texas in 2015 (Migration Policy Institute, 2015).

Parent and family engagement was created by the dominant White individualistic culture without taking into consideration that Latinx families are raised in a collectivist culture. Looking at the data by the Migration Policy Institute (2015) and pairing them with cultural psychologist Geert Hofstede who scored countries based on individualism (Gouveia & Ros, 2000), the data show the United States ranks high as an individualistic country. If in our country school leaders are trying to increase parent engagement and the framework created is based on individualism, when will we as educators start seeking collectivist views and recognize culturally aligned forms as ways of parent and family engagement?

Given the data shown in Figure 7, countries scoring high favor individualism and the lower score shows more collectivism. The data show that Latin American countries (as well as China and Taiwan) score low in individualism. The collectivist culture in Latinx countries offers support and encouragement through family and at home.

Country	Score	Number Foreign Born in Texas, 2015	Region
United States	91	n/a	European
United Kingdom	89	46,863	European
Italy	76	6,740	European
France	71	8,264	European
Ireland	70	2,526	European
Germany	67	36,290	European
Japan	41	16,141	Asian
Jamaica	39	14,662	Latin America
Brazil	38	18,895	Latin America
Mexico	30	2,564,694	Latin America
China	20	138,381	Asian
El Salvador	19	201,775	Latin America
Taiwan	17	28,713	Asian
Colombia	13	47,935	Latin America

Figure 7. Cultural Dimensions Index (Gouveia & Ros, 2000; MPI, 2015).

Parents have the opportunity to contribute what they have gained through their life experiences. As the Latinx population continues to shift in Texas and the nation, we need to look at our Latinx parents as assets and contributors to their children's educational success. Funds of knowledge is a type of learning that is constructed based on experiences and relatives, and Latinxs represent untapped bodies of knowledge.

Funds of Knowledge

Moll et al. (1992) defined funds of knowledge as “the essential cultural practices and bodies of knowledge and information that households use to survive, to get ahead, or to thrive” (p. 133). Funds of knowledge are areas of knowledge, skills, and information, as well as resources, acquired by the family. These resources help parents navigate the U.S. school system and its structure. These bodies of knowledge are constructed through the experiences of the individual as well as lived communal cultural experiences. Latinx households contain cultural and cognitive resources that go untapped when school leaders attempt to encourage the involvement of Latinx parents through conventional means.

If we as educators are to intentionally attempt to connect culture with learning, then we cannot overlook the funds of knowledge that Latinx parents bring to the table. We have to acknowledge that parents, even if not formally educated, have skill sets and knowledge in many areas. If we use these household funds of knowledge in our communication to Latinx parents as a means to encourage their participation, then we can begin to build bonds between home and school (Gregg et al., 2012). If we successfully build these bonds, then we can use the parents’ strengths and resources for our learning partnerships.

Using a constructivist approach and ethnographic research, Poza et al. (2014) identified the strengths within a household to help families and teachers connect the lived experiences of families and students into lesson plans. The ethnographic studies by these scholars showed the “shared knowledge acquired by relatives” (p. 124), also known as collective wisdom, benefits Latinxs as they navigate through daily life. Nelson and Guerra (2013) listed funds of knowledge as “strategies, skills, abilities, practices, and bodies of knowledge essential to a household’s

functioning and well-being” (p. 435). Again, many of the funds of knowledge within minority communities, including the Latinx culture, go unrecognized, unseen, and unused within schools.

Though Luis Moll and his colleagues referred to funds of knowledge as bodies of knowledge used for survival at times, Hammond and Jackson (2015) called these areas of knowledge that individuals carry with them a mental model schema. Hammond and Jackson described the mental model as a “tree of knowledge” (p. 23) and schema as “a set of conceptual scripts that guide our comprehension of the world” (p. 23; see Figure 8). Collectivist cultures and their schema make up 80% of the world and common values exist at the root of the tree of knowledge.

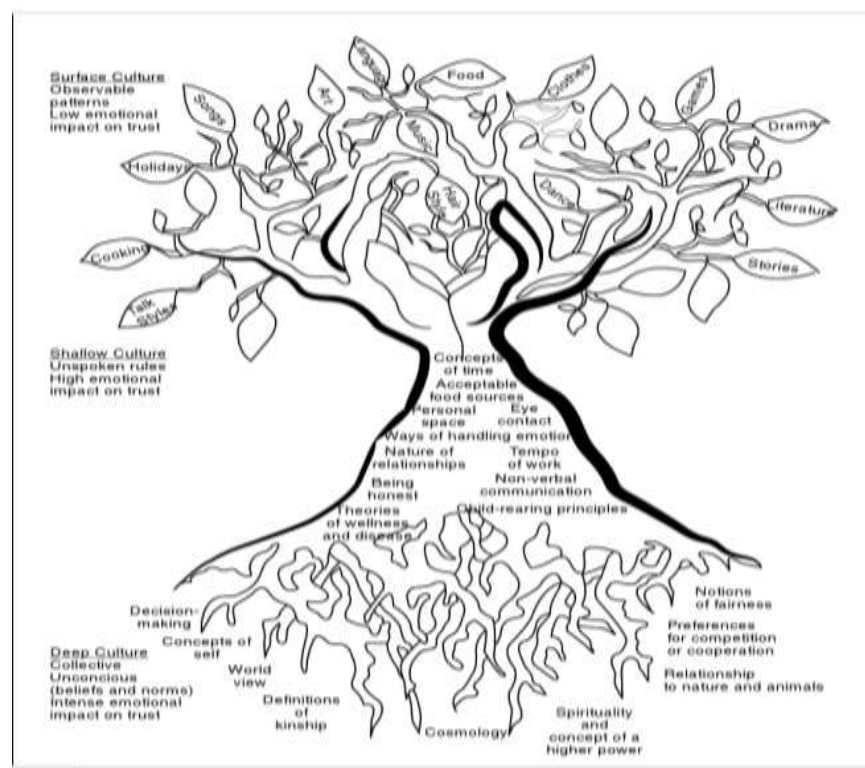


Figure 8. The Culture Tree. Illustration by Aliza Maynard; Featured in Hammond and Jackson’s (2015) *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain*.

Orozco (2008) used an innovative approach to understand individual areas in the tree of knowledge. She widened her research to include phone calls from Latinx parents into a live radio show. Based on her research, Orozco affirmed that low-income immigrant Latinx parents possess

funds of knowledge that hold the potential to contribute to the education of their children. Again, by using the mental model of tree of knowledge, the deep culture and experiences of Latinx parents go untapped by school systems. Interestingly, Orozco also discovered how willingly parents used the opportunity to call into the radio show and share their lived experiences.

The scholars discussed in this section on knowledge would agree with Moll that funds of knowledge are developed culturally (Moll et al., 1992). Nevertheless, if these funds of knowledge go unnoticed and are perhaps even misunderstood, negative perceptions arise, and Latinx parents are blamed for not caring about their children's education (G. López, 2001). Again, we see the dominant culture adopting avoidance behaviors rather than understanding the Latinx culture. Understanding requires effort and a willingness to change; it is much less demanding to continue to blame Latinx parents for not being involved in school through traditionally sanctioned activities and roles, when in reality, Latinx parents are involved in ways not considered formal (LeFevre & Shaw, 2012; Pstross et al., 2016).

Research conducted at Arizona State University (Pstross et al., 2016) contributed to the effort to debunk the perception that bodies of knowledge are nonexistent within the uninvolved, uncaring Latinx parent. The university offered a program to parents whose children attended targeted schools. The program empowered parents; through collaborative efforts, the parents gained confidence in the knowledge they possessed. One parent became so confident that they expressed their need to have a voice in their child's education to make sure their child's needs were recognized and met (Pstross et al., 2016). Once parents learn how to navigate through the educational system, they understand the academic requirements and are aware of the resources that exist to help their children advance in their education (Pstross et al., 2016).

Parent and Family Engagement Through the Lens of Conventional and Culturally Aligned Forms

Berger (1991) wrote of parent and family engagement during ancient times, where the cultural environment allowed for the clan to seek help from the family. During this time, parents were not only the educators but also the nurturers, they modeled and guided their children, imparting not only skills but also value onto their children. The first education was in the home. Stories influenced one's character in Egypt and in Roman society. The mother was involved in educating the child at a young age and once the child was older, it became the father's turn to educate the child.

Culturally aligned forms of parent and family engagement existed in the beginning. Now, throughout literature you see researchers and authors like Joyce Epstein, who created a conventional framework that is common and widely used in the United States and G. López, Sarah Nelson, and Patricia Guerra who researched culturally aligned forms of parent and family engagement. Both forms of parent and family engagement are discussed and compared in this section.

In order to help institutional leaders involve parents in the educational system, in 2002, a second edition handbook by School, Family, and Community Partnerships shared a framework with educators on actions that need to be in place in order to involve parents. These scripted recommendations would become known as Joyce Epstein's six types of involvement. The framework includes parenting, communicating, collaborating with community, volunteering, learning at home, and decision making (Epstein, 2004).

Though these types were a starting point, they became formal expectations and were socially sanctioned; parent and family engagement was defined as parents participating in formal

activities (Scribner et al., 1999). Parents who were adhering to the formal expectations were considered involved, whereas parents participating in “unrehearsed activities that parents and other family members routinely practice” (G. López, 2001, p. 417) were considered as not caring about their children.

These scripted, formal, conventional methods of involvement became the norm and the culturally aligned, informal ways of involvement used by the marginalized group of Latinx families were not recognized. If we are to create change and foster an environment of culture, respect, and collaboration, we have to bridge the gap between what we know is effective with parents and what we do in practice that is effective. The question becomes, how do we build this bridge between conventional and culturally aligned?

Parenting With Consejos (Advice)

Traditionally, Epstein’s Type 1 indicates schools are to assist families with activities to help them understand their child’s growth, incorporate strategies to communicate, and engage in practices that interest the families (Epstein et al., 2002, p. 44). This creates opportunities that are suitable for parents (e.g., attending discussion groups) or establishes ways to assist parents (e.g., providing immunization shots). What is not mentioned in the handbook are culturally aligned ways of involvement within a Latinx family.

Latinx parents value the education of their children and the parents’ responsibilities within the home are just an extension of their values (Gaitan, 2004). My parents taught my siblings and I to value school, *portate bien* (behave), and *haz tu tarea* (do your homework), and they also motivated us to continue our education. *Que no se te olvide* (don’t forget), *tienes que acabar la tarea* (you need to finish your homework), are words my mother would use and she would provide us a warm snack along with a space to finish our homework. Our parents were not

provided the opportunity to finish school, as they had to fulfill family responsibilities, but they assisted the schools by encouraging us and asking of us, *has lo que te diga la maestra* (do what the teacher tells you to). G. López (2001) mentioned in his research article, “The Value of Hard Work: Lessons on Parent Involvement From an (Im)migrant Household,” that it is Latinx culture, coupled with experiences and background, that considers this culturally aligned method as part of parent and family engagement. Moral capital (Auerbach, 2004), work ethic, and *consejos* (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994) were a few culturally aligned forms of parental involvement listed by G. López (2001).

Communication With Latinx Parents

In Type 2 practices, school leaders should find a way to communicate between school and home and vice versa. This means finding easier ways to communicate between teachers, families, administrators, or anyone within the school. Some of the ways in which this communication can occur include parent–teacher conferences, phone calls, newsletters, and today, text or email, all of which are conventional forms of involvement.

Communication with Latinx parents is not occurring simply because some conventional forms of communication are sent home in English or the preferred language of the family, in this case Spanish (Gaitan, 2004). When parents do not respond to conventional forms of classroom communication, such as notes, calls, emails, or parent conferences, the perception becomes that the parents do not care about their children’s education. On the contrary, this failure to respond results from the fact that the parent holds the teacher in high authority and respects their position in teaching. In terms of culturally aligned forms of communication, G. López (2001) shared from his research that parents encourage students at home, they talk with their children about school and continuing their education. Guerra and Nelson (2013) mentioned that communication can

occur in culturally aligned forms of home-based involvement, such as when parents drop off or pick up their child or while visiting school. A Latinx parent is interested in communicating with teachers, and they make themselves available, just not in the conventional ways known to educators.

Volunteering, a Culturally Aligned Perspective

This type of scripted involvement reflects strategies or ways for schools to involve families as volunteers. These opportunities are mainly provided at the school and parents can help out in places like the classroom or by making items for teachers in the workroom, or even helping with afterschool programs. All these opportunities require parents to have some time and knowledge of how schools function or how to help with the activities they are assigned.

Where in the description given for volunteering is funds of knowledge included? Latinx parents come with a rich background and experiences, yet school leaders are not tapping into this knowledge. My father could have volunteered when it came to raising animals in the agriculture class. My mother could have volunteered in home economics when we had to learn how to cook or bake. Again, schools follow a scripted description, such as written in the handbook, “Family volunteers may assist individual teachers or help in the library, family room, the computer room, the playground, the lunchroom, after-school programs, or other locations” (Epstein et al., 2002, p. 64). To shift this paradigm, we must consider the home as a location, though culturally aligned as designed by parent and family engagement frameworks, and “the family is an instrument of the school’s curricular goals” (Gonzales & Gabel, 2017, p. 72).

Learning at Home

Contrary to institutional beliefs, Latinx families and parents vocalize constantly to their children at home the importance of being educated and moving ahead in life, as “*educación* means more than mere schooling” (Gaitan, 2004, p. 4). Parents and families give their children advice or share stories, declaring to their children the importance of breaking the cycle of poverty (Payne, 1996), and many Latinx parents risked their lives to immigrate to the United States for the betterment of their children.

Demonstrating Support of Academics

Guerra and Nelson’s (2013) research showed Latinx parents support academics, just not through conventional forms known to teachers. Latinx parents respect the classroom as a place where learning occurs; therefore, they support the learning environment by enforcing respect and proper behavior in their children. The authors also noted that verbal encouragement and signs of affection are other ways in which Latinx parents encourage academics. Another example they provided was that parents may not be able to help their children with homework due to language barriers, but they show support by providing a place to complete homework at home.

Conveying Trust Through Autonomy Granting

Developing self-sufficient children is a goal of Latinx parents. Often these parents will afford their children the opportunity to become responsible time managers when it comes to completing homework at home. While instilling autonomy, parents are also building trust with their children. Latinx parents believe their job is to be the parent; in this manner, they expect teachers to teach, and parents to parent. Education and supportive parenting ensure a child exits poverty (Gaitan, 2004).

Collaborating With Community

Every community has different methods of outreach and resources when they reach out to families. Collaboration between schools and communities should not be designed in an attempt to change the families themselves, but reflect an effort to create change within the schools.

Guerra and Nelson (2013) stated it best when they indicated developing the community is the goal when working with all stakeholders within the community; building parents as leaders and empowering them in their child's education is done with the purpose of improving the community, the school, and most importantly the child. Our communities shape us and they are also "formal textbooks for learning" (Militello et al., 2017, p. 1) because we are able to gain knowledge through the experiences of their members.

In order to make sense of the six types of conventional involvement, Figure 9 shows Epstein's framework in comparison to that of Guerra and Nelson, which includes culturally aligned forms of involvement.

Epstein's framework		Guerra & Nelson's expanded framework	Parent and family engagement behaviors: Collectivist lens
Parenting	Assist families with parenting skills, family support, understanding child and adolescent development, setting home conditions to support learning at each age and grade level. Assist schools in understanding families' backgrounds, cultures and goals for children	Parenting	Parents rarely initiate contact; parents believe educators are experts in their child's education and they have their best interest in mind; parents respond to school communication; willingness to communicate through actions, example sending food, accepting invitations to events
Communicating	Communicate with families about school programs and student progress. Create a two-way communication channels between school and home.	Communicating	Job is to work on socialization process; the teachers job is to teach. Involvement is seen through participation, for example walking children to school, eating breakfast with children at school so siblings can also join; instilling values of respect; sharing oral stories about families
Collaborating with community	Coordinating resources and services for families and various stakeholders; enable all stakeholders to contribute service to the community	Collaborating with community	Collective outreach is important. Belief that it takes a village to raise a child. Use the funds of knowledge and resources of parents
Volunteering	Improving recruitment, training, activities and schedules to involve families as volunteers. Enable educators to work with volunteers who support students and the school.	Demonstrating support of academics (volunteering)	Words and actions are used to communicate the importance of education. Parent constantly reminds child of the importance of education, regardless if the parent can't assist with things such as homework. Goal is to help end the cycle of poverty and use family stories, dichos & consejos.
Learning at home	Involve families with their children in academic learning at home, including homework, goal setting and other curriculum areas. Encourage teachers to design homework that benefits students.	Declaring the importance of education (student learning)	Primary responsibility is for the children to have food, clothing, etc., all items needed to help child focus on education. Do not interfere with instruction, believe the teachers role to teach. The job of the student is to learn, so parents encourage and support their children.
Decision-making	Families are included as decision-makers, advocates on committees and parent organizations.	Conveying trust through autonomy granting (school decision-making and advocacy)	View educators as the ones qualified to make decisions and run the school. The parent and family engagement lessens as the children grow older, leading to autonomy given to the child. The child becomes the decision maker in their education.

Figure 9. Comparison of Traditional and Non-Traditional Involvement (Epstein et al., 2002; Guerra & Nelson, 2013).

Making Meaning of the Axioms and Ecologies of Knowing

Relationships are a focal point in the CLE theory of change and parents in this study were able to bring their experiences, their *testimonios* (testimonies), and their questions to the *pláticas* (conversations). This process also helped the parents make meaning of their experiences, and through the process, they were able to grow and act upon their learning (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016). The axioms are the core value of the CLE and framed the process when working with Latinx parents and their reality of parent and family engagement (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016).

Latinx parent and family engagement, the way my parents were involved, happens in the home and the axioms and the ecologies are their reality. As parents continued to grow through the process, their involvement moved from parent participation to parent engagement and is noted in the table of Axiom Tiers to Bridge the Gap (see Table 2). The axioms are listed in Figure 10.

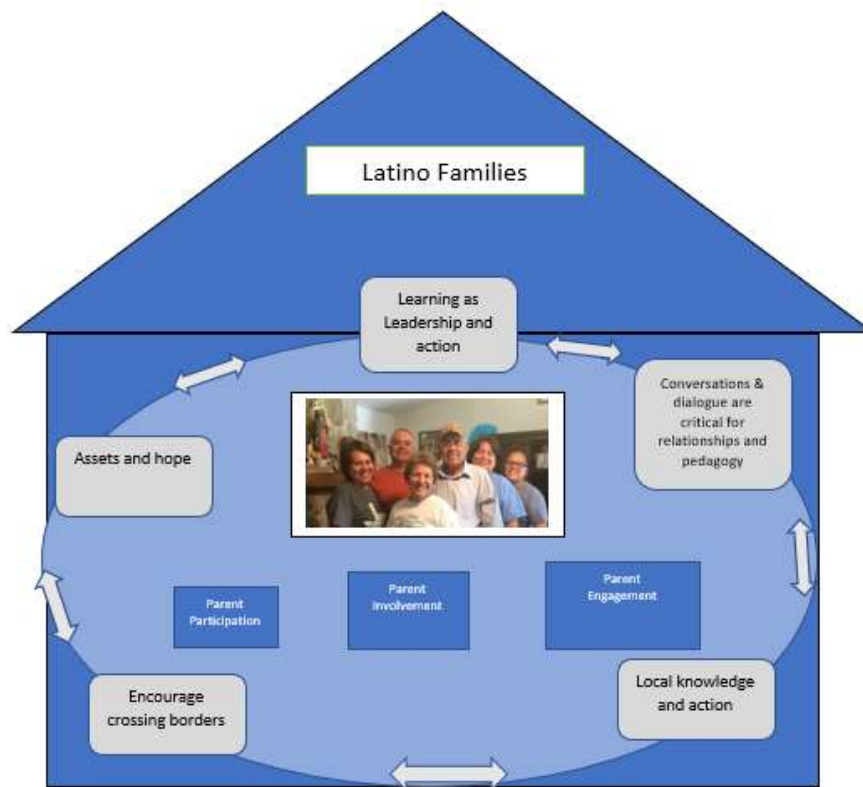


Figure 10. Making Sense of the Axioms (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016).

The axioms and ecologies were my parents' reality and I recall our family gatherings around the fire (see Figure 11) and the sharing of stories that helped us identify with ourselves and our culture. As we gathered in a circle around the fire, we paid attention, we listened, we learned (F. Guajardo et al., 2012). As a family, we were gathered in the safe space, and through the sharing of stories, we were being taught by my parents about how to make *pan de campo* (camping cornbread). Through the making of the pan in Figure 12, we learned the importance of the cornbread in their upbringings, especially my father's. The pan brought back memories of his

hard work at a young age, the collaborative efforts of the men to watch over their families, the importance of family, overcoming challenges that arose, seeking input to problem solve, the sharing of stories in a safe circular space, and the trust each one had for one another.



Figure 11. Ecologies of Knowing (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 28).

Every family has their own recipes, yet the result and intent are the same—to make cornbread for others to enjoy with the family around the campfire. The bread mixture that goes inside the *acero* (cast iron) is my self-identity. Through this lived experience within our Latinx family is where my culture was formed (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016). In this safe space around the campfire, we learned about familial relationships, though little did we know that our elders were teaching us how to lead through their stories.

The amount of cornbread that was cooked depended on the size of the cast iron and the amount of mixture. Similar to organizations, some are larger than others and some are more fluid. The *acero* (cast iron) is critical to how the *pan de campo* will cook and it involves an understanding of my father's origins: where and how he learned to make the pan. While learning of his origins, it stirred up engaging conversations and lots of questions to his stories. In this safe

space, the conversations were critical, and the stories had value and were authentic. For example, my father recalled that when he first learned of *pan de campo*, he was around 5 years old and lived in Mexico. He would go with the *pastores* (animal herders) and they would spend the nights in the mountains guarding their stock and cooking by the fire, which always included *pan de campo*.

Just like an organization, as described by M. A. Guajardo et al. (2016), the image of my father and how he cooks *pan de campo* in an *acero*, he is the one closest to what was going on within the process of making bread in the campfire. If any issues arose while making the cornbread, he would look for people within his trusted space to find the resolution to his concern. Similar to an organization, the intent is to make the cornbread, and the sharing of the same intentions allows for each of us to have a voice in the final product, the cornbread.

I can learn how to put ingredients together for a cornbread mixture just as I can learn to work within an organization, but it is the community that sets the temperature of the fire. The fire determines how hot the *acero* will be, and how much power it will have to form the cornbread. How hot a fire burns can influence change within the process. Invisible to us is the dialogue occurring from the *pan* (self) to the *acero* (organization) to the one facilitating the amount of fire (community) needed, as demonstrated in Figure 12.

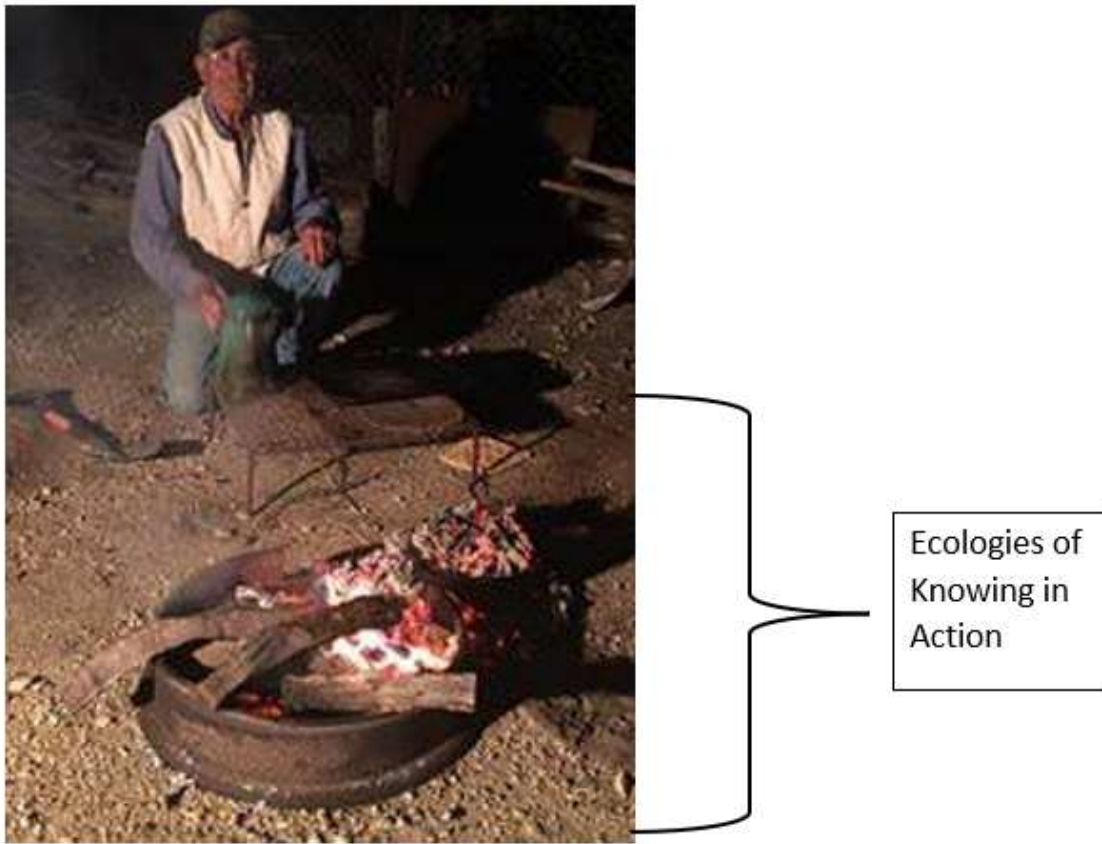


Figure 12. Sharing Stories of Lived Experiences (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016).

The picture shown in Figure 12 reframed my thinking when I was reading *Reframing Community Partnerships in Education* by M. A. Guajardo et al. (2016). This picture would stir up curiosity, yet it would invite participants sitting around the fire to form questions and engage in conversation. Sitting within a circle, having *pláticas*, the conversation would create a safe space as others could relate to the campfire and their lived experiences, thus crossing boundaries within a meeting place, where the language would be the same and hope would be built.

Language is powerful, it can create a voice to help share the hopes, dreams, and endless possibilities in the ecologies. The axiomatic principles (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016) of family gatherings by the fire, learning and leading from our authentic stories and lived experiences, the shaping of our identity by a simple recipe of *pan de campo*, to now having additional knowledge

to share and pour out to others in the world. It was woven together and “we learn from real lived experiences, and authentic and honest relationships” (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 30).

Relationships and culture organize our thinking and our lived experiences inform our schema. Whether the perspective is from a side view or a top view as seen in Figure 13, the “family is the original learning exchange . . . our family shapes who we are” (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 29).



Figure 13. Perspective Lens.

III. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This chapter highlights the research design and methodology I used in this study of Latinx parent engagement and culturally aligned practices. The research questions that guided the study were:

1. What are the *testimonios* related to parent and family engagement of immigrant Latinx parents who have children in a bilingual program?
2. What are the parent narratives shared to effectively bridge the gap between conventional forms of engagement and cultural practices with Spanish-speaking Latinx parents and families?
3. How can we implement institutional (systemic) cultural change and build an inclusive environment to better serve our marginalized Spanish Latinx parents of emergent bilinguals?

I selected three parents from a Title I campus that offers a one-way bilingual program for Pre-K to Grade 5. The parents were all Spanish speaking and came from Mexico. These three parents had a student or students who at the time of the study attended or had previously attended the elementary campus, and their child was a participant in the bilingual program.

I used narrative stories and a visual research method, photostories, to capture the lived experiences (Gomez, 2020) of Latinx parents in one district in Texas and their involvement in their children's education. In using narratives, I was able to gain an understanding and learn through the lived experiences of the three Spanish-speaking parents. Narrative stories allowed me to gain a deeper awareness for this study, and as stated by Bruner (2002), "Telling stories is an astonishing thing. We are a species whose main purpose is to tell each other about the

expected and the surprises that upset the expected, and we do that through the stories we tell” (p. 8).

Data Collection

The data strategies I used in collecting narrative stories were *pláticas*, *testimonios*, and photostory. Figure 14 shows the collection strategies used in this study.

Group <i>Pláticas</i>	One-on-One <i>Pláticas</i>	Testimonios	PhotoStory
Three Spanish-speaking parents who have or had a student participating in the Title I elementary school bilingual program 60 minutes	Parent 1 Parent 2 Parent 3 30–45 minutes each	Parents shared their lived experiences during the group and one-on-one <i>pláticas</i> Collect during <i>pláticas</i>	During the group <i>plática</i> , asked parents to draw a reflection of their experience of the <i>plática</i> . A reflection through the lens of a parent. Within the 60 minutes
Transcribe audio recording	Transcribe audio recording	Collect <i>testimonios</i> during transcription	Include in the data analysis

Figure 14. Data Collection Strategies.

I used guiding questions for the interviews to collect individual perceptions, giving meaning to the experiences of individuals through the lens of the participants. In addition, I used a protocol for group *pláticas* (conversations) and individual narratives or *testimonios* (testimonies) to provide a glimpse into how parents view parent and family engagement and the educational system around them. Data were triangulated to include interviews, conversations (*pláticas*), and narratives (*testimonios*). Using triangulation enriches authenticity and strengthens the validity and reliability of the data. Creswell (2014) recommended using multiple approaches for accuracy in the findings and mentioned eight strategies for validity and reliability, one of the most common being triangulation of different data sources (p. 201).

Through the gathering of data for our narrative approach, I relied on *testimonios* (testimonies). *Testimonios* have been used as a methodological approach to understand how

marginalized communities have overcome challenges and they also helped to share the parents' "collective experience marked by marginalization" (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012, p. 363). By using *testimonios* coupled with visual imagery, I anticipated seeing the building of solidarity among the Latinx parents who participated in this study.

Visual research, more specifically photostories, aligns closely with photo elicitation, where both empower community through the powerful images and their meanings (Gomez, 2020, p. 49). These photostories will allow the participants to share their lived experiences through images. These images collected elicited conversations between me and the participants for added depth and insight (Gomez, 2020).

Pláticas, testimonios, and photostories helped me capture the experiences of Spanish-speaking Latinx participants who had little to no knowledge of the U.S. educational system and who had been involved or attempted to be involved at their child's campus. When I think about these narratives, I reflected on how our experiences are socially constructed (Crotty, 1998) and wanted to acquire knowledge from the participants through interviews how their experiences gave them a sense of empowerment through parent and family engagement.

Using the guiding questions, data collection included interviewing three parents (participants) individually who were in the process of attending parent meetings to learn about the district's educational system and expectations. The interviews were conducted face-to-face to enable me to collect *testimonios* (testimonials) of their experiences in parent and family engagement through their lens (Creswell, 2014). Interviews were audio-taped and transcribed, and thematic coding was used to evaluate the experiences of parents to find similar categories (Gibbs, 2008). The images collected added insight and perspective to the research. Permission from each participant was sought to participate in the study.

I used a specifically designed protocol for *pláticas* to gather data on the culturally aligned forms of parent and family engagement and the perspectives of the parents. I used thematic coding for the *pláticas* and the coding took about 2 weeks, for both the individual *pláticas* and the group *plática*. The *pláticas* were audio taped and the recordings were transcribed (Creswell, 2014).

I asked the group of parents to share narratives of their experiences with breaking the boundaries of tangible barriers and marginalization (Yoder & Lopez, 2013). Narratives were accepted in their first language, Spanish. These narratives convey the parents' personal experiences and challenges, and can be used as *consejos* (advice) moving forward.

The following are the guiding questions I used for the individual interviews to capture participants' experiences and how they made meaning of parent engagement through a *plática* (conversation):

1. What is your definition of parent and family engagement?
2. Do you view yourself as a participant of parent and family engagement? Why or why not?
3. Do you view yourself as helping the school through home-based activities?
4. Did you know your child was identified as an emergent bilingual and were you given a program description?
5. What were your fears when you first began to engage with the teacher/campus administrator?
6. As a Latinx parent, when you felt you did not know what to do, who did you feel comfortable asking for assistance and why?

7. In what ways can educators improve and implement changes to include parents of bilingual students in the educational decision-making process?
8. As a parent, do you feel empowered by your parent's voice? If so, how and if not, why not?
9. What have you learned about your advocacy of educational rights for your child?

The following are the guiding questions I used for the group interview to capture participants' experiences and how they made meaning of parent engagement through a *plática* (conversation):

1. Who are you and where are you from?
2. Why did you accept the invitation to come today?
3. What is community to you?
4. What would you like to see in this district to assure your child's success?

I used convenience sampling to select the three participants (parents of emergent bilingual students). In addition to convenience sampling, I used open coding for the responses to the interview questions to identify similar experiences (Gibbs, 2008).

Data Analysis

I analyzed, organized, and categorized the data by identifying themes and patterns (Arar & Oplatka, 2018). I categorized the data through the lens of self, organization, and community as defined by the ecologies of knowing (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016). I used the data collected from the *testimonios* (testimonials), *pláticas* (interviews), and photostories and filtered them through the tiered axiom categories: (a) learning as leadership and action, dynamic social process; (b) conversation and dialogue are critical and central for relationships and pedagogy; (c) local knowledge and action, best situated to discover answers to local concerns; (d) encourage

crossing borders, enriches the development and educational process; and (e) assets and hope, hope and change are built on assets and dreams of locals and their communities (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 70).

In analyzing the data, because I read, write, and speak two languages, I transcribed the *pláticas* from Spanish to English and then I would refer to both the written transcripts and the audio recordings to help me capture the emotions and nuances of the moment. This involved hours of work in front of two computer screens and keeping a phone nearby to listen to the audio to help identify and analyze the recurring themes and patterns. In this process, I not only gained a deeper understanding of the data, I was able to place the responses within the axioms and ecologies of knowing. The mothers' text was translated into English and when presented in Spanish, a brief English rendition was presented for the readers' benefit. Using this form of analysis helped "at identifying central themes in the data, searching for recurrent experiences, feelings and attitudes, to code, reduce and connect different categories into central themes to help answer the research questions" (Arar & Oplatka, 2018, p. 179). This strategy was for both accuracy and capturing the insight and passion of the mothers' voices and contribution to learning.

Trustworthiness

One job of a researcher is to ensure their study is trustworthy. I captured multiple realities surrounding the experiences of Latinx parents. Triangulation was used as a way of proving validity as I used this validation strategy to examine all of the sources (Creswell, 2013). I reviewed the documents, the *pláticas* (interviews), and the group *pláticas* to ensure trustworthiness in the themes established.

Limitations

Limitations existed for this study. This qualitative study was limited to three participants, all from one elementary campus with a bilingual program. In addition to the size of the group, the selection of participants through the form of volunteering presented a limitation on time agreement to gather for the group *plática*. Last, this was the first *plática* at the campus for two of the participants, one had been to a previous *plática* prior to the study.

IV. RESULTS

Parent engagement is crucial for educational success, especially with the increasing number of emergent bilingual students in our country. In Chapter I, it was noted that in Texas alone, there are over 1.1 million emergent bilinguals, and the need for parent engagement is even more pressing in districts with high growth in terms of their bilingual populations. I designed this research to examine the challenges faced by Spanish-speaking parents who at times feel lost in our educational system, especially when it seems foreign to the parents because the system operates differently than in their country of origin. In addition to the challenge of adapting to a foreign system, Latinx parents face language barriers that can prevent them from actively participating in their children's education through conventional forms.

In this study, I explored the use of alternative and innovative approaches, like *pláticas*, to increase Latinx parent engagement, recognizing that conventional methods may not always be effective among Spanish-speaking parents. Through the captured *pláticas*, *testimonios*, and visual research of three Latina parents selected by convenience sampling, I aimed to expand our understanding of parent engagement through their lived experiences and perspectives. I wanted to uncover, through their lens, what constitutes parent engagement and how non-conventional methods that are culturally aligned play a crucial role in fostering parent engagement. Through the group and individual *pláticas*, I used a protocol and questions to capture the parents' insights and understanding of parent engagement in education and how they navigated the challenges they faced as Latina parents within the bilingual program and school environment.

The challenges, barriers, and research questions posed in Chapter II showed that the current conventional methods of parent engagement are viewed through the lens of the dominant culture, which has resulted in the marginalization and limited participation of Latinx parents.

The importance of the study is to challenge our audience and readers to change the marginalized perception that Latinx parents are not invested in their children's education. When it comes to conventional methods of engagement, Latinx parents can have limited participation within our schools, as reflected in the literature review. The data I collected from three Latinx parents can help break down barriers and bring to light culturally aligned methods used within the home that can be recognized as forms of engagement. Additionally, the research findings presented in the literature review highlighted that within the Latinx culture, experiences and *familismo* play a significant role in shaping a child and their lived experiences. With the gathered data, I hoped to dispel the false notion that a lack of parent engagement in our schools, through the use of conventional activities, equates to a lack of interest in education among Latinx parents. It was important within this study to promote the understanding (and identification) of culturally aligned methods of engagement by considering the uniqueness of our collectivist culture, thus giving parents a voice and creating empowering environments for our Latinx parents within our schools.

Chapter IV not only covers the data analysis of the individual and group *pláticas*, it allows me to effectively present the findings to the reader using *testimonios*, tables, and illustrations. My goal was to present the data gathered in a clear and concise manner, making relevant connections to the conceptual framework and CLE. I organized this chapter into five sections, each with a specific focus, to help with conciseness and provide clarity of the analysis. The first section is an overview of the parents who participated in the group and individual *pláticas*. The second section includes the ecologies of knowing along with *testimonios* from the group *pláticas* to provide an in-depth understanding of the parents' experiences. The third section includes *testimonios* that emerged from the individual *pláticas* and how they relate to the

axioms. The fourth section consists of the overarching themes that emerged from both the group and individual *pláticas* and the last section presents the findings and recommendations as they relate and connect to the research questions. In the recommendations are Figure 17 and Figure 18, photostories drawn by two of the participants, a reflective piece and summary of their group *plática*.

Overview of the Participants

This study featured three Latina women who were parents of students who attended at the time of the study or had previously attended Faith Elementary School (a pseudonym). The women were selected through convenience sampling and all three identified Mexico as their country of origin and described themselves as married, having met their husbands in the United States.

As I drove to Faith Elementary, I had forgotten my conversation starter and then I looked down at my cup holder to see the small wooden cross that remains in my car for safe travels. I wondered if I could use my faith and my Catholic upbringing to introduce myself and the possibilities buzzed through my mind as I pulled into the parking lot; after all, I was a researcher and not an educator at this point. During the group *plática*, I did use the wooden cross as a conversation starter and there appeared to be an instant bond among the three women, Margarita, Paula, and Eva (pseudonyms). The women quickly bonded and you could hear it in their voices that their shared values of faith and family allowed them to build that trust. Overall, my use of the wooden cross served as an effective means of initiating the *plática* and establishing trust and a safe space among the women.

Ecologies of Knowing Through Group Pláticas

The instant bond within the circle allowed for a natural flow of conversation, like a rhythm, within the *plática*. This shared space united the women, giving them the freedom to share their lived experiences in an environment that was “the power of place” and “the wisdom of people” (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 9). The references of “the power of place” and “the wisdom of people” are represented in Figure 15, as presented in Chapter II. Figure 15 represents a metaphor of the ecologies of knowing where the *acero* (cast iron) is used to bake *pan de campo* (camp cornbread). The bread is the self, the *acero* is the organization, and the fire laid between the *acero* and outer iron (circle) represents the community. My father used this *acero* to make his *pan de campo*.



Figure 15. Acero (Cast Iron) Representing the Three Layers of the Ecologies of Knowing.

During the *plática*, the parents shared their lived experiences, and it was evident that they started to organize their thoughts through the micro level within the self, the meso level within the organization, and the macro level within the community (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016). This

demonstrated that as they became more aware of the intersections among the three levels, they continued to articulate their perspectives and understanding, noticing commonalities among the three; similar to the *acero* and its varied perspectives.

As the *plática* continued, it was apparent that the women were each reared in a faith-based home and the women and I all expressed how faith played a part in our upbringing. There was one affiliation to a spiritual group mentioned by two of the parents, and all three expressed the importance of incorporating faith into their children's upbringing. One parent, Eva, said, "Es bien importante también tener en quién confiar, en quien tenemos esa fe de verdad, porque nada más es crear hijos por crear, sino también hay que saberlos dirigir." In other words, she said, it is important to have someone to confide in, to have genuine faith, because faith has helped her guide her children. Another parent, Margarita, said, "Pero que la base de nuestros hijos sea la fe, porque si ellos tienen fe van a tener sueños, van a querer lograrlos, van a querer lograr cosas que nosotros no logramos." She also stated faith was the base of their household and if her children had faith, then that would lead to dreams, which in turn would lead to accomplishing those dreams. These are things she did not have or accomplish herself. In closing the micro level, the women understood their roles as mothers and believed families and faith play a significant role in shaping us and it is within our families that we are provided the original learning exchange (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 29) because we learn and grow together. All three Latinx parents left their country and came to the United States with hopes for a better life and more opportunities for their children, which aligns with the research by Calzada et al. (2015) and Guerra and Nelson (2013), who indicated parents want a better life for their children so they can move out of poverty.

Within the meso level, the parents reflected on the importance of the organization in shaping the lives of their children. I asked the parents what they wanted to see within the organization that would ensure the success of their children. Margarita stated she wanted the organization to follow, guide, and encourage her children to obtain a career and continue moving forward. Eva agreed that students needed encouragement from a young age, because “en la escuela reciben enseñanza y en nuestra casa, pues la educación.” She believed students learn in school but receive education at home. Paula agreed and added that her children needed to take advantage of the benefits because unfortunately, she did not have the same opportunities in her home country.

Within the macro level, all three parents agreed that they expected the school to encourage their children to excel and reach a point of recognition and believe that they too had the ability to bring change within their home and school. Participants were asked how they defined community. Margarita commented that through her lens, community was a group of people, whether it be family, the town, the school, or the people we surround ourselves with. She said she liked to be involved in the community, where people help each other, if necessary. Eva stated, “Community is like what we are doing now in the *plática*. Community is what surrounds us and coexists with the parents of our families.” Paula agreed that community surrounds us and said,

Es como, como forma de desenvolverse donde uno pueda sentirse que dan apoyo, no nada más apoyo de dar, sino también nosotros apartar algo para la comunidad. Sembrando buenas en nuestros hijos, este como buenos consejos. A veces nos toca que ser también fuerte en algunas áreas, no, no dejar que por que estamos en este país todo es más fácil, sino que ellos puedan aprender que lograr algo no es como por que tengo verdad, sino porque hay un esfuerzo, se tiene que hacer un esfuerzo.

In other words, Paula agreed that community is a place where one can not only contribute, but also receive help if needed because it is a valuable source of support. She went on to recognize

the importance of instilling in her children the need to give back to the community and to put forth effort into the community, because it is with that effort that they will accomplish their goals and dreams.

As the parents reflected on the group *plática*, I asked if they had any more questions or comments. Eva made an observation and shared it with us, and Margarita agreed:

Esta plática para mí pienso que sí va a tener un resultado a futuro, pienso que es el tipo de pláticas que deberían de tener con todos los papás, no nada más con nosotros, verdad? Y si un maestro se sienta con todos los papás de su grupo y les pregunta este, qué les gustaría que la escuela haga para ustedes para tener mejor comunicación, todos los papás se van a abrir y van a empezar a fluir las dudas y las respuestas. Entonces yo pienso que es la mejor manera de que los maestros se relacionen con los papás.

Eva suggested for classroom teachers to host *pláticas* with their classroom parents to open up avenues of communication and help the teachers and parents bridge the communication gap.

Margarita also made some closing comments and Eva agreed, indicating that at times, parents are afraid instead of being confident. Margarita clarified, stating she had a fear of being taken away (by police or immigration), as she said, “I have no license, therefore I may be detained.” She also went on to say:

Porque a veces estamos muy herméticamente, no sé que aunque nos avisen, o nos digan, no nos da miedo . . . Abrirnos como dice (researcher) en confianza. Sentirnos en confianza nos ayuda a expresar, a darnos cuenta que a veces se falta a darnos cuenta qué podemos hacer, porque si no, a veces somos tan ignorantes que no sabemos ni qué ni qué pasa y (no sabemos cómo ayudar, Eva), si como no sabemos cómo ayudar. Quiero ayudar pero no sé, no sé lo que no sé. Si puedo hacer algo soy yo, si me aceptan mejor, soy indocumentado, no me van a querer (Eva agrees) sin presentar una identificación y no sé todavía o no sé ustedes, pues no sé el idioma o no sé ni hablar ni expresarme, porque muchas veces nosotros, muchos no podemos ni estudiar ni en la primaria, entonces no sé ni cómo expresarme, a me da vergüenza o todas esas cosas. Y así, ya en confianza, nos abrimos con todos y vamos dándonos más. Y nada más con los maestros. También con ser un policía nos da una práctica. Así también nosotros mismos hablamos con la comunidad. Sabemos más sobre las leyes, sabemos más sobre cómo se trabaja en la comunidad. Como que tenemos que tener confianza con la policía para hablarles si tenemos un problema.

Eva shared in the *plática* that she believed communication and parent involvement are two key factors when it comes to bridging the gap between schools and parents. By providing bilingual communication, the needs of parents are being met, and Eva believed this reduced fear and increased confidence, leading to a stronger partnership between the school and parent.

Figure 16 illustrates how I analyzed the parents' responses within the ecologies of knowing and how each one of the parents perceived themselves in the self, organization, and community.

Ecologies of knowing	Margarita	Eva	Paula
Self- where from	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● From Mexico ● Arrived alone ● Parents live in Mexico ● Met husband in States ● 2 boys, one at Faith Elementary one at Middle School 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● From Mexico ● Grew up in a place with many deficiencies ● Met husband in States ● Arrived with 2 girls ● 3 boys in school, one just left Faith Elementary and at Middle School, two at High School 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● From Mexico ● Parents live in Mexico ● Met husband in States ● 2 boys and one girl ● Daughter at high school, son at middle school and son at Faith Elementary
Self- faith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Was raised with faith in the household (Catholic) ● Tells her children, have faith, when you think you can't, pray ● During a test, pray that all goes well 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Trust that we are true to our faith ● Faith helps raise my children, to guide them ● If my children don't fear God, then I feel they won't be good citizens in this country 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Was raised with faith in the household (Catholic) ● Faith is the base of their household ● If my children have faith, then they have dreams and will want to accomplish those dreams. Dreams that we didn't have
Self- why accepted invitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I like to be involved in my child's school ● I like to learn what I can to help my children ● I want my children to continue studying and participating in activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Because I have struggled a lot with my sons in the schools ● I have battled a lot and communication with teachers was hard at first because I knew no English ● I would attend conferences with the teacher or meetings, and I would be sitting there, listening, but not understanding anything 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I heard about the study when you came with the principal, stayed on my mind ● Sometimes as Latinos we don't ask enough questions ● I told myself, I am being invited to participate, wanted to come to see what I could learn to benefit my home, for my children
Organization ¿Qué quiere ver en el distrito que asegura el éxito de su hijo o de su hija? What would you like to see in this district to ensure your child's success?	Ensure the success of my children, guide them and work with them to have a career and continue to move ahead. Not think that once finished elementary, then middle school and that's it, no high school. To have my children participate in activities or sports, things to help them remain healthy.	To see the support, to guide them when young. Guidance that I can't give them at school, that they learn because school is a place for learning. In school they receive instruction and in our home, education.	To see the success of my children. This country has blessings, if one seeks to accomplish, one will. To show our kids that when the school helps you, to take advantage because in our country we didn't have that opportunity.
Community ¿Qué es comunidad para ustedes? What is community to you?	Community to me is a group of people, my family, the town, the school, the people we surround ourselves with. I like to be involved in the community, where we help one another when we can or when necessary.	Community is like what we are doing now in the <i>plática</i> . Community is what surrounds us and coexist with the parents of our families.	Community is a place where we can receive support, not just in giving, but also giving to the community. Planting advice in our children. Being strong in this country, not everything is easy, but for my children to learn, you have to make an effort.

Figure 16. Ecologies of Knowing Created by Participant Responses in the Group Plática.

Individual Pláticas

My goal as the researcher was to build a partnership, a relationship, with the participating parents and create a space for them to share their unique stories and experiences with parent engagement. In addition to creating a space of trust through *pláticas*, I wanted to encourage the parents to reflect and define their own understanding of how they were involved in their child's education. Through this lens, I could start understanding how to bridge the gap between Spanish-speaking parents and parent engagement within schools.

I designed the questions posed to the participants during the individual *pláticas* to help bridge the gap between schools and parents. Two educators, given their experiences, helped design Table 1, a starting point in the conceptual framework, and now with the parent responses, as the researcher, I designed Table 2 based on the stories and narratives of the parents interviewed.

Table 2. Axiom Tiers to Help Bridge the Gap Through the Lens of Latinx Parents

	Parent Participation	Parent Involvement	Parent Engagement
Guiding Questions: Where are our tiers embedded in axioms?	Evidence: Parents have never been asked what they would like to see in their child's education. Evidence: No responses to questions asked.	Evidence: Parents participate in circle group activities, but are somewhat hesitant to speak out.	Evidence: Parents providing input; parents asking questions about particular issues related to decision making.
AXIOMS			
Learning as leadership and action; dynamic social process Participants contribute and are active in their learning; stories, conversations, questions, action plans they construct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attended <i>plática</i> to learn more • Hesitant at first, but decided to come, especially if it would help their children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents share stories with one another; similarities (e.g., each met their husband in the states) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents ask if these <i>plática</i> sessions can continue • Parents envision themselves participating in engaging activities at school • Give their children <i>consejos</i> (advice) from lived experiences
Conversation and dialogue are critical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Plática</i> was inviting • Wooden cross helped 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents begin to open up and respond 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents feel they can communicate with the

	Parent Participation	Parent Involvement	Parent Engagement
Guiding Questions: Where are our tiers embedded in axioms?	Evidence: Parents have never been asked what they would like to see in their child's education. Evidence: No responses to questions asked.	Evidence: Parents participate in circle group activities, but are somewhat hesitant to speak out.	Evidence: Parents providing input; parents asking questions about particular issues related to decision making.
and central for relationships and pedagogy Safe space; healthy relationships; inviting, authentic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • build a safe space • Trusting environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to questions • Parents begin to form relationships with other parents present 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • school when there is someone there to translate or understand the language • Parents feel welcomed at school
Local knowledge and action; best situated to discover answers to local concerns Local residents have first-hand knowledge of issues and concerns; collective ownership;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drop of their child everyday at school, trust they are learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents start to form their own questions about the educational system. How can I help my child? I didn't know we could ask questions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents feel valued when they are asked to join <i>pláticas</i> or activities • Parents want to be partners with the school, don't know how to ask or approach
Encourage crossing borders; enriches the development and educational process Geographically, economic, age, culture, racial, gender, faith, differing abilities; crossing of ideas, questions, learning process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home foundation based on faith and hope • Parents want to be involved, hard with work schedules at times • Event flyers translated; if I don't understand what it is, I don't go 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If more meetings or conferences were scheduled around my availability, I would attend • Value our culture, like music and holidays 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principal/Director holds <i>pláticas</i> in Spanish for parents, they feel welcome; want consistency • If my child is raised in faith, then they will learn how to respect others, how to work hard and be successful • Collective culture, families, each help in raising their children
Assets and hope; hope and change are built on assets and dreams of locals and their communities Shifts mindset to hope; a different way of looking at world; community members develop a language to express themselves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They didn't have an opportunity to finish school in their home country, they hope to provide an opportunity for their children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family & community are responsible for being involved in school • Community- do for others, they also do for you • Value what I do to help my child succeed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents realized that they too are engaged in their child's education at home • Parents are inspired, they learn they can ask questions and advocate for their children • Parents realized they are engaged, through culturally aligned activities within the home

Parents' Understandings of Parent and Family Engagement

Margarita emphasized the significance of parent engagement, as she believed it is important and crucial in creating a nurturing environment. As important as the role of family;

family support within the schools and while attending children's events. She went on to say that if parents not only participate but help and are involved, the more they can come to know of how a school functions. She said "sometimes because of work or for other reasons, we know as parents that our children are at school, but don't know if our children are learning or growing." She said that for her, "es demasiado importante para mi involucrarse en lo más que se pueda, todo lo que se pueda," meaning it was important to know what was going on at school, to be involved, and to make time to be involved, not only in support of her children, but of the teachers as well.

Eva's responses were similar to those provided by Margarita and she described how she empathized with teachers and their many challenges, such as the number of students within a classroom. In order to support her children's teacher, she made time at home to check on their schoolwork, even if it took time away from her household chores. She also expressed her belief that as a parent, she needed to make sure her children were behaving in school, listening to the teacher, and demonstrating respect toward the teacher because she felt that in today's world, teachers are dealing with a lot of disrespect and misbehavior in the classroom while at the same time creating a learning environment for all students.

Paula had similar views and stated that at times, it was normal to be that parent who just drops off their child and depends on the school to teach them, but that it was very important to involve both parents and families. She said if parents and families are participating, then that means "la escuela este nos toma en cuenta, por ejemplo, en las decisiones referente a las diferentes culturas, a las diferentes religiones, y es una forma de que . . . nos dan ese derecho de participar [the school takes us into account, for example, in decisions concerning different cultures, different religions, and is a way of . . . they give us that right to participate]."

Based on the responses to Question 1, it was evident that the three Latinx parents had first-hand knowledge of home-based parent engagement, and collectively they felt both parents and families should value parent engagement, as increased involvement and participation will lead to more opportunities to not only learn about the function of a school but also to be involved in the decision-making process within the school. Research shows “parental involvement has been described as an important aspect of the relationship between schools and children’s families” (Arar et al., 2014, p. 133).

Helping the School Through Home-Based Activities as Engaging Parents’ and Family

All three parents expressed a strong belief in parent engagement, both from themselves and their families, whether at school or within their homes. Regardless of how strong they felt, they also acknowledged facing barriers that hindered their level of participation at their campus.

Paula stated,

Sí, me veo como una participante, porque creo que eso es importante para la educación de nuestros hijos, que ellos vean que nosotros como padres somos o estamos interesados en su aprendizaje más que nada en como la escuela está enseñando, cómo la escuela está trabajando.

She did feel she was engaged and felt it was important for her children to see that the parents were involved in their learning and education. Paula said she liked to see her children working at home, whether they were reading or working on math, an area they were performing low in, noting it was her job to help her children at home and remove distractions so they could advance in the areas needed. She noted that though at times she saw herself as connected, her level of involvement depended on proposed meeting times and her availability. She felt parents wanted to be involved but were limited due to their working schedules. In her case, she may not have been able to attend a 3:00 p.m. meeting, but she could attend one if scheduled at 6:00 p.m.

Margarita replied that she tried, but she also discussed different barriers, such as logistical, language, and not being fully understood, work schedule, and sometimes health. When she spoke of the language barrier, she mentioned they (school personnel) might understand what she was trying to say in Spanish, but doubted they would truly understand due to language:

Trato. Trato de envolverme, participar en lo que se pueda. Muchas veces a sí siento cómo es que no me van a hablar español y a lo mejor les entiendo, pero no puedo expresar lo que yo quiero decir o sea, del lenguaje. No puedo tal vez expresar tanto. O ahorita mis niña están en esta escuela pero si nos toca xxx, que es en xxx, entonces muchas veces por lo lejos, que porque está más lejos, entonces aquí como que rapidito vengo y ya me regreso a mi casa a hacer mis cosas o vengo ahora del trabajo. Entonces allá, me sentía que menos participaba, porque luego por lo lejos saliendo del trabajo ya voy por allá y luego otra vez de manejar y todo eso, ver este tal vez no, no estoy tan involucrada, no estoy como voluntaria, quisiera hacer más y como le digo, pero claro que me veo así como ayudándole quizás a una maestra leyendo un libro a los niños, aunque sea. Pero el trabajo y las horas sí, la necesidad de trabajar y las horas también es algo el lenguaje y a veces la salud también, que no todos los días están muy bien.

Margarita was involved as a parent when she lived in an urban city through participating in a parent program and committing herself to being involved with her children and their school. She described herself as enjoying reading to her children, but not just simply reading. She interacted with her kids at home, acting out the various characters and using puppets. She also called her home a mural, as she allowed her children to self-express through painting and drawing, despite some people criticizing her for this environment. Margarita also taught her children letter recognition through the labeling of objects within the home (e.g., refrigerator) or by writing the child's name on a toy. She extended her children's knowledge by teaching them during grocery shopping. She recalled teaching them the names of fruits, colors, and even the store's logo. Nevertheless, she was worried that others around her would consider her to be the "crazy lady" because of her approach to teaching her children:

Desde chiquitos traté de involucrarlos cuando vivía en [city] e estuvo en un programa [name of program], sí, porque quería, como desde chiquitos, ver qué se puede hacer. Entonces, desde que leerles un libro, no simplemente leer, sino hacer mímica o buscar muñecos para cuando se los leo, antes de que empezaran a leer. Mi casa era un mural. Y a

veces hasta había personas que dician, por dejás que tus hijos rayen. O sea, a veces no es que no los deje, sino que para mí eso son este algo expresándose, expresando y yo misma a veces en la mesa les ponía, mesa o refrigerador o así notas, no. Incluso a con lo que más jugaban en los juguetes, por ejemplo, el niño siempre le ponía todo, Juan, Juan, Juan. Le digo, para que vaya acordándose que ahí dice, que es este su nombre. Entonces, para cuando ya vaya a la escuela ya va a saber cuál y cómo es su nombre. Y a todo Juan, Juan y cómo lo va a ver tanto en los juguetes y es que este es tu nombre, tu nombres. Y si un día este, es este HEB, eso es Walmart, allá dice esto así, siempre en esto, o vamos a ir a la tienda y manzana roja, verde, jitomate y siempre decir cuál es la manzana? Cuál es el jitomate? Como me sentía a veces como quizás la loca de la tienda hablando tonterías, la leche mmm y este y en una vez mi niño es no sé, que estaba un logo de HEB en algo, el HEB, donde, ahí. Entonces ya está bien, o sea, están aprendiendo. Ahora más grandes pues, sí igual siempre con la tarea, estar al pendiente de que hagan la tarea y te puedo ayudar, si te llevo a la biblioteca para que esto busques ayudas si yo no puedo, o a leer, a ponerlos en actividades como los que hacen también en las bibliotecas, llévalos a algún museo, a parques o que si quieren participar yo siempre les digo participa si hay esto, ándale, métete, métete, que el proyecto de ciencias yo tampoco tengo idea como se hace una cosa, pero quiero que participes. Aunque nada más y lo que sea, porque si no ya vamos a hacerlo. Pero involúcrate, involúcrate entonces. Y qué te compro que te ayudo? O qué hacemos entonces, tratando de involucrarme creo que así.

Eva also stated participating was important, especially for Hispanics whose children were in the bilingual program. When her children brought home schoolwork that was in Spanish, she would sit down and help them. Not only did Eva help, her husband was also able to help at home because they both understood the language:

Yo podía ayudarles y yo me sentaba y entonces comparaba los papeles. Verdad que de un lado venían en español y del otro lado venían en inglés, y ahí también yo aprendí bastantes palabras porque eran como las primeras palabras de los niños. Entonces cómo había libritos en español y en inglés y me decía por ejemplo, va al cacao, y ya cuando empiezan a juntar palabras también, y eso es bastante bueno para nosotros también, porque yo ahí pude ayudarles bastante, porque rápido leía la parte de español y luego me venía con la de inglés. Y fue una forma para mí muy buena porque yo pude ayudarles bastante y su papá también lo da, porque él también es hispano y también pues la lengua.

Despite the language barriers these three participants faced, all emphasized the importance of parent engagement and described how they contributed to their children's learning at home. Even if these women could not be physically present at school or school functions, their intentions remained the same—to help teach their children at home. Latinx parents, through their culture and parenting at home, emphasize the importance of education, the value of respect, and

the importance of becoming educated (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991), and as stated by Guerra and Nelson (2013), communication can occur in culturally aligned forms of home-based involvement, such as those described by the current study's participants.

Program Awareness

Each of the three participants individually answered that they were aware their students were in a bilingual program and leaders at Faith Elementary had explained the dual language program model at their campus.

My Fears as I Began to Engage With Teachers, Administrators, and the Campus

The next question related to the parents' fear of engaging with their child's campus. Each of the women knew their child was enrolled in a bilingual program, yet they each had the same barrier, language.

Eva expressed she often felt a sense of fear, but attributed this sense of fear to communication barriers. Communication was very difficult because she had so many ideas, so many questions and anguish as a parent, yet she could not communicate this with her children's teacher or director. "Y a veces cuando hablan puro inglés, nos quedamos con las ideas guardadas y nos quedamos con nuestras inquietudes," meaning

who will answer my questions if I could not even communicate or express myself. Therefore, many times I did come to a teacher conference, but it didn't make a difference because I wasn't understood. But when we did have a translator, I felt comfortable, at least I would walk away knowing what was said and what it was about.

Eva closed out her response to this question by saying, "y muchas veces hay esa barrera de comunicación porque no tenemos la confianza ni para preguntar [the communication barrier will exist because we don't have the confidence to ask]."

Margarita stated her fear was "el idioma que no se," or the language she did not know and Paula stated, "el idioma [language]." Language was the fear that kept all three participants

from physically being at school participating. Paula said that even though the school may have had someone there who could translate, the parents never knew if the translator would be present, and therefore Paula told herself, “tomorrow I will stop by, then again . . . tomorrow never comes.” Fear of not knowing English keeps parents away, as you see both Margarita and Paula telling themselves they will stop by eventually. Guerra and Nelson (2013) noted parents rarely initiate contact, and at the same time, participating can come in the form of walking a child to school or even eating breakfast with the child. We as educators need to value all efforts, as parents are overcoming the language barrier and are being physically present, which is a big step forward.

Forming a Level of Comfort, Knowing Translation is Available

Interestingly, as the parents answered this question, the same barrier continued to arise, language. For example, Paula stated she knew she could call the school, but she worried what would happen if the person answering the phone only spoke English. This changed, she said, when she started to come to the *pláticas* the principal was hosting. As she started to attend, she felt she started to meet more parents and more staff, like Ms. C, who ran a program on campus. It was here that Paula felt comfortable enough to ask questions and it was here in this space that she learned who could help her when she had questions. Paula said, “me senti tan a gusto,” when she came to visit the school and they understood her request in Spanish.

This same comfort level was felt by Margarita, as she knew that in Faith Elementary, “aquí en esta escuela ahora si me siento agusto en la oficina [here in this school I now feel comfortable in the office],” because if she called, she received help from the Spanish-speaking staff. Eva expressed the exact same feelings in her *plática*, as the office now had Spanish-

speaking staff and no matter when she called, there was always someone there to answer her questions or even give the teacher a message on her behalf.

“Parents may feel that no one in the school will listen to them if they cannot communicate in English” (Quezada et al., 2003, p. 32). All three participants expressed how comfortable they were calling the front office now knowing there was a Spanish-speaking staff member answering the phone. They felt the language barrier had been broken just by having staff who could communicate with them, especially when they had questions about their child’s education. Parents felt their voice was valued.

Voice, Agency, and Advocacy

One reason Eva felt empowered with a voice was that her confidence grew in communication. Another reason was that a teacher told her to meddle in her children’s education, “tiene que ser metiche senora.” Prior to the teacher’s advice, Eva did not realize she could ask questions or question the teacher, but she literally understood what “*metiche*” meant as a Latinx parent:

La confianza de comunicarme, de poder comunicarme. Y gracias a la maestra de hace muchísimos años en el kínder fue de mis niños que me dijo no importa señora, usted metase, usted pregunte, hable con los maestros y yo decía ay pero y si no me entienden? Y decía busque quién le traduzca, si hay siempre, me decía siempre va a haber una persona aunque sea en la oficina, pero va a haber alguien que le pueda traducir. Y me dijo usted tiene derecho a hablar con los maestros, usted tiene derecho a preguntar cómo va su hijo? Incluso me decía, verdad en el kínder y en la primaria decía si usted quiere un día venir, sentarse a ver cómo está trabajando su hijo, dice usted tiene ese permiso en la escuela para venir, sentarse y observar cómo está trabajando su hijo. Entonces yo sentí que sí podía, como hacer muchas cosas como padre y yo no sabía. Entonces cuando ya me animé porque perdí la vergüenza también, siempre me daba mucha pena y traté de perderlo porque dije o nado o me ahogo. Entonces dije No, prefiero nadar que ahogarme, verdad? Entonces eso fue lo que me impulsó a perder el miedo.

Years ago, when one of her children was in kindergarten, Eva received the following words of advice: speak to teachers, ask questions, and visit classrooms. The former teacher empowered

Eva to want to know more about her children's education. She chose to swim and not drown, and she lost her fear.

Paula reported something similar to Eva, as there was an event where she felt her voice, even though she did not know she had any educational rights as a parent. She spoke of having the privilege of being included by the principal in an event where teachers would be thanked for all of their hard work and accomplishments during the pandemic. She stated,

Algo que hace sentir bien al padre porque le dan la libertad de expresarse. Fue algo muy bonito para mí porque puede expresar lo que tal vez en nombre de todos los padres que no vinieron y hacerlos sentir que son importantes para la enseñanza de nuestros niños.

She was thankful for being able to represent parents in expressing appreciation to the teachers on campus who taught her children.

On the contrary, Margarita did not feel as though she had a voice, she felt "ignorante [ignorant]." She said that even though she was trying to be physically involved in Faith Elementary, she felt ignorant, like she lacked knowledge and information. When asked whether she knew her children had rights for an education, she said, "en realidad, no, no se nada sobre los derechos educativas [in reality, no, I do not know anything about educational rights]." In reality, she did not realize her children had a right to an education in the U.S. educational system.

Implementing Systemic and Institutional Change

After hearing the participants' responses on voice and empowerment, I wanted to ask if there was anything that we as educators could do to implement change. I asked if they had any *consejos*, or words of advice.

Eva was vocal in stating that she believed not only should the students have a bilingual program, but also the parents. In other words, when having programs, conferences, or any event, knowing it would be translated or having someone available to translate gave her confidence. When a program or event was only offered in one language, one she did not understand, she felt

rejected, marginalized, and kept in a corner. Whereas when programs were in Spanish, she felt she could express how she felt and ask questions without feeling inferior:

Yo pienso que es eso, esté traer, el traer el programa bilingüe no nada más a los hijos, sino a los padres también. Porque cuando uno se siente en confianza de que me están entendiendo, si me van a entender qué opino o que quiero. Entonces ya uno pierde el miedo a opinar y ya uno dice ah, pues sí, me está entendiendo, verdad? Y ya uno opina o participa con más confianza, porque sabemos que nos están entendiendo y que nos están poniendo atención en nuestro idioma. Porque cuando no hablamos del idioma yo antes sí me sentía incómoda porque quiere uno decir algo, no puede. Y la gente rápido volteo y mira. Uno como no sabe ni lo que está diciendo, sí sabemos, no podemos expresarlo, pero si sabemos lo que queremos. Entonces, cuando nos dan esa confianza de que hay un traductor o hay una persona que está traduciendo para nosotros, o la junta [stresses this word] es bilingüe también, ahí es cuando nosotros sentimos esa confianza y podemos opinar y podemos a participar en tomar decisiones en la escuela también. Porque en mi caso yo me sentiría bien, cómoda, que me están entendiendo y me están tomando en cuenta como papá y en un solo idioma yo siempre me sentí como, cómo se diría, rechazada, marginada o como a la orilla y así no, porque yo voy a sentir que yo también estoy incluida en esa, en esa decisión o en cualquier cosa que, que un papá pueda opinar.

Paula suggested the campus director have more *pláticas*, more consistently and more often. She also stated parents needed to have more liberty to ask questions. She said, “no sabemos todas las áreas verdad, como trabaja la escuela, pero cómo nos pregunta, me gusta que opinen esto, o que opinan de esto, entonces sí ya podemos.” Meaning, parents may not know all of the areas or functions of a school, but once she understood how the school functioned, she could then give her opinion.

Lack of information can also be a barrier, as Margarita pointed out. Parents do not know what they do not know, and parents tend to believe everything they are told. She believed all of this could bring fear, but when there were programs that gave information, or resources, such as with firefighters or policemen, they were learning and the more that they learned, the more they would want to ask questions. During these times, they also learned to value that they as parents needed to be involved more in their child’s schooling. All the information they received was

helpful, and what was also helpful was when they were asked what time worked best for them, taking into consideration their working schedules:

Depende de mucha información, principalmente información. Porque creo que esa es la barrera principal. Que estamos tan fregados que no sabemos, qué creemos todo. Quizás todo nos da miedo. Entonces con esos programas que van las personas y nos dan información sobre la policía, información sobre los bomberos, información sobre diferentes tipos de organizaciones, no simplemente eso. Entonces, sabiendo más sobre organizaciones, estamos como igualmente nosotros mismos aprendiendo más, abriéndonos más y aprendiendo a valorar que tenemos que estar más constantes en las escuelas. Tenemos que estar más en apoyo porque quizás leemos el mensaje que va a haber esta reunión para esto y esto, pero yo no sé de qué se trata y no voy, es así. Entre más nos recapacitemos, tal vez para ese entonces, como ese tipo de programas donde nos dan capacitaciones y todo eso de información de organizaciones, podría ser un ayudante . . . Por ejemplo, vamos a tener su programa de bomberos, pueden venir a ustedes en la tarde o que es la hora mejor para ustedes, porque muchos trabajan. Si les preguntan de eso, del horario o cómo se hacen esas preguntas del horario . . . Yo si me he dado cuenta que si tratan de de abrir horarios en la mañana o de abrir en la tarde, porque así se manda la invitación y no responde la gente porque es que trabajo o usted trabaja . . . pero pues a veces tampoco nos dan información sobre algo para preguntarles, en la mañana, o por la tarde es cuando pueden venir?

The participants' responses to the questions provided insight into their experiences and narratives. There are barriers that prevent Latinx parents from physically participating in parent engagement; nevertheless, parents continue to participate within the home. Home-based participation allowed the three parents to engage with their children around their work schedules and without the fear of the language barrier, as their children understood Spanish. The parents were ensuring their children received their support and guidance in their education.

Axioms Through the Lens of Parents

As I continue to present the results of my research, it is important to address the barriers and gaps that keep schools and educators from increasing parent engagement. It is equally important to highlight the culturally aligned engagement that happens within the home.

Earlier in the conceptual framework, I detailed the five axioms through the lens of a CLE to guide Latinx parent and family engagement. The goal continues to be to use the axioms to

build relationships and, together with parents, embrace a space for *pláticas*, *testimonios*, and culturally aligned parent engagement. Table 2 shows the parents started at being involved, then moved to parent participation and were moving toward parent engagement. In each of the axioms, the CLE framework allows us to see “the people closest to the issues are those best situated to address those issues” (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 30). The CLE brings to the surface the lived experiences and *testimonios* of the participants, weaving in the ecologies of knowing with the foundation of the axioms (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016).

The parents automatically connected in the group *plática* when I used a wooden cross as the object to begin the conversation. The sharing of their faith and the similarities within their faith-based homes allowed for critical dialogue to occur, creating a safe space.

The parents had first-hand knowledge of culturally aligned engagement and shared their lived experiences, and all three felt collective ownership within the *plática*. They shared their narratives, their stories, and their *testimonios*, and added *consejos* (advice).

One of the most interesting observations was that the parents were contributing their lived experiences and were not holding back. They started to reflect individually, envisioning themselves as engaging parents in the future, guiding their children and teachers with *consejos*.

Overall, the parents’ mindset shifted. Margarita no longer saw herself as “ignorante,” on the contrary, she saw herself as learning and sharing her knowledge with other women. She believed that if she shared her knowledge, the cycle and tradition of Latinx women marrying young with no dreams would end. Knowledge is powerful, enough to break cultural cycles. All three women were looking at the world differently, each expressing themselves, and each looking at what assets they could bring to their campus.

Recommendations

When considering the ecologies of knowing, “we learn best from real, lived experiences, and authentic and honest relationships (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 30). In self-identification, it is beneficial to invite parents to group *pláticas* within their specific grade level and more specifically, within their home room or classroom. In our group *plática*, Eva stated she would have appreciated time to meet other parents from her children’s class so they could help each other get through the year and have someone to talk to about anything related to the class. As an organization, a recommendation was to offer *pláticas* in Spanish, with information in reference to the U.S. educational system and college. Paula had a daughter in high school and said she would like to have information to ensure her daughter continued higher education and that her family’s hopes and dreams came to fruition through her daughter having a better future. The community is key in helping keep parents engaged, as Margarita shared in her individual *plática*. She was engaging her children throughout her home, teaching them self-expression, letter recognition, and colors through her cultural instincts. Margarita considered herself ignorant as she traveled throughout the community using her teaching methods with her children, yet considered herself “la loca,” the crazy one, because she did not notice anyone else in her environment doing the same.

These three Latinx women weaved through the axioms, moving from parent participation, to parent involvement, and were now on their way to parent engagement. The *pláticas* within the CLE framework helped build their *confianza* (trust) and at the end of our research, the three parents asked if they could continue these *pláticas* among themselves so they could continue to learn; they appreciated the opportunity for their voices to be heard. In building relationships with parents through *pláticas*, the cultural value of *familismo* will now include

parent engagement within the schools, and the concept will continue to pass down from generation to generation, opening doors to the future adults currently sitting in our schools.

Closing: CLE Connects Conventional and Culturally Aligned Forms of Parent Engagement

The findings demonstrated the connections and relevance to the CLE framework, the axioms, and the ecologies of knowing. In addition, they provided answers to the research questions that were posed at the beginning of the study, highlighting how the findings connected and related to the study. Using a structured approach to present the findings ensured the data were presented in a clear, concise, and organized manner, making it easier for the reader to understand.

Two of the participants drew a summary of the *pláticas* and shared their experience. All three requested that the *pláticas* continue and all three envisioned themselves as engaged parents within the home and looked forward to engaging physically on campus. Eva summarized her experience through the drawing shown in Figure 17. She saw the home as a place where she offered support and participated. Her children went to school, together they gained confidence, and the school communicated with both her and her children. The school offered a bilingual program and through this campus, her children would be led to exit (*exito/success*).



Figure 17. Eva's Summary of the Group Plática.

Margarita stated she enjoyed reading and saw herself as participating by reading to younger students at Faith Elementary (see Figure 18). Through reading, they could visit many places using their imagination. Reading took them to many places.



Figure 18. Margarita's Summary of the Group Plática.

Bridging the gap is similar to the circular bridge in Uruguay, as was seen in Figure 4 earlier in this dissertation. On one end of the bridge lies Epstein and the conventional and accepted forms of parent and family engagement. On the other end lie the culturally aligned forms of involvement within collectivist culture, thus the culture tree. The water within the circle expresses the ecologies of knowing: self, organization, and community. The axioms are working

around the ecologies in a circular motion as well and the bridge lies over the CLE body of water. By using this visual, Figure 4 helped me to understand how the CLE can work toward bridging the gap between parents and the schools, as seen through the lens of Paula, Eva, and Margarita at Faith Elementary School.

In closing, the three participants each had a story to tell and each story emerged as we continued with our *pláticas*, allowing for the building of community. “The CLE theory of change values relationships, assets and places” (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 32) and this research was anchored in a community-building approach, where a safe space was created and the participants were able to speak honestly about their perceptions and lived experiences with parent engagement.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, I summarize my study of parents of bilingual students who are not seen as collaborators or partners because they engage through culturally aligned methods of participation. Results of the study demonstrate parents within bilingual programs are indeed involved, just “not involved in conventionally sanctioned ways” (G. López, 2001, p. 420), and they bring a wealth of information, known as funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992), rooted in the Latino culture and heritage.

I designed this study to give value to parents’ experiences and to uncover their understanding of the U.S. educational school system through the use of *pláticas* and *testimonios*. Results affirmed parents’ engagement through culturally aligned methods, and I ask school leaders to embrace and support these culturally aligned forms of parent involvement.

Summary of the Study

This study brought affirmation to the research about home-based, culturally aligned engagement practices, such as conversations about life; the sharing of beliefs, values, and oral history; and even through church and community (Walker et al., 2011). The methodology used for this study was the CLE and the theory of action. The CLE demonstrated the effort to bridge the gap between what we currently practice in schools and the components that were intertwined in the study that revealed the Latinx parents in the study were involved in culturally aligned forms of parent engagement. The CLE ecologies of knowing and axioms were weaving connections and relationship building between parents and Faith Elementary, a Title 1 bilingual campus.

Findings Related to the Literature and Unexpected Findings

The CLE assisted in bridging the gap between parents of students participating in a bilingual program and the school. In Chapter IV, as the participants answered the questions, I noticed the *plática* was an opportunity and avenue for them to communicate in a more culturally relevant environment. This circle space allowed them to answer the questions by having a conversation as opposed to an interview. During the *plática*, there was an intercultural level of engagement, consciousness, and awareness where the participants felt supported with each other, which allowed for a better response to the needs of their children within their bilingual program.

Unexpectedly, in our group *plática*, minutes after meeting each other, one parent, Eva, shared her *testimonio*, in tears, as she defined her engagement during a *plática*, when we were in a safe space:

Lo que estamos haciendo ahorita. Convivir con los padres de familia, la comunidad y los que nos rodean. Y yo pienso que en nuestra cultura nos hacemos a un lado por el lenguaje, porque vemos otras personas que están a lo mejor en apariencia mejor que nosotros y no sentimos cohibidos y no nos sentimos cómodos en estar junto con esas personas en una junta o con los maestros. Entonces esa es una barrera bien grande que tenemos los Hispanos, verdad que no nos sentimos en confianza. Siempre sentimos como que alguien es más que nosotros y no nos vamos a poder comunicar. Pero yo, gracias a la fe que tengo en Dios, yo he aprendido que Dios dice que todos somos iguales y para Dios no hay diferencias ni de raza, ni de color, ni de lenguaje, ni de nada. Dice que ante Dios todos somos iguales y eso es lo que me ha dado el valor de decir okay todos somos iguales. Entonces yo voy a hablar porque yo también soy igual que todos y voy a pedir porque aquí puedo pedir mi opinión cuenta mi opinión vale. Y ese es el motivo por el que yo me he involucrado. Y la maestra Maria Martinez, yo creo que se dio cuenta que cuando me conoció yo estaba escuchando, estaba mirando, estaba sabiendo de qué se trataba su conferencia. Pero yo creo que ella notó en mí que yo no me quedé sentada nada más escuchando. Yo me acerqué y yo pregunté cómo podía ayudar mejor a mi hijo y yo tomaba notas, al principio, verdad, de esto, dijo esto, yo después voy a la escuela y pregunto por eso. Y esa es una forma de que yo aprendí a comunicarme y relacionarme con los maestros, y aprendí que los maestros no están en un nivel allá inalcanzable. Al contrario, tenemos que estar al nivel porque tienen a nuestros hijos bajo su cuidado y ellos son bien importantes, los maestros porque están enseñando a nuestros hijos y nuestra casa es donde educamos, corregimos, exigimos y sí apoyamos bastante, porque yo como mamá no conozco las materias, no conozco, todo es diferente a nuestro país, entonces para mí es como que me doy una enfrenon ahí porque digo y a ti cómo te puedo

ayudar si no se parece a lo que yo aprendí? [What we are doing right now. Living with parents, the community and those around us. And I think that in our culture we stand aside for language, because we see other people who are at best in appearance better than us and we don't feel self-conscious and not comfortable being together with those people at a meeting or with the teachers. So that is a very big barrier that Hispanics have, a truth that we do not feel in confidence. We always feel like someone is better than us and we are not going to be able to communicate. But I, thanks to my faith in God, have learned that God says that we are all equal and for God there are no differences of race, color, language, or anything. He says that before God we are all equal and that is what has given me the courage to say okay we are all equal. Then I will talk because I am also the same as everyone and I will ask because here I can express my opinion and my opinion is valuable. And that's why I've been involved. And a teacher, Maria Martinez, I think she realized that when she met me I was listening, I was watching, I was knowing what her lecture was about. But I think she noticed in me that I did not sit just listening. I approached and I asked how I could better help my son and I took notes, at first, right, of this, he said this, I then go to school and ask about that and that's one way I learned to communicate and relate to teachers, and I learned that teachers are not on an unattainable level there. On the contrary, we have to be on the same level because they have our children in their care and they are very important, the teachers because they are teaching our children and our house is where we educate, correct, demand and if we support enough, because i as a mom do not know the subjects, do not know, everything is different from our country, so for me is like i give myself a challenge because i say to them, how can i help you, when it does not look like what i learned?]

Eva was provided a safe space, where trust was established, and she considered the *plática* and being around other parents to be a form of engagement. Her perception was that in our culture we stand aside because of language and viewing other persons as higher than ourselves, which adds to feelings of discomfort at a meeting or teacher conference. Her faith has allowed her to believe she is an equal and there are no differences in race, color, language, or anything else. Therefore, she will be voicing her opinions because they matter. In providing a safe space, the parents were able to share their lived experiences, their *testimonios*, in comfort and with a strong voice. Again, this all occurred within moments, the difference is it was all in Spanish.

One key practice is for schools to host meetings in parents' home language to help break down language barriers and create a more familiar atmosphere where the parents will respond authentically without worrying about having to filter their thoughts. School leaders acting as change agents and breaking down the barriers that exist for parents of students in a bilingual

program will also open the door to parents to ask questions without any fears of being misunderstood. Within my research, the parents reported they felt language was one of the barriers that kept them from being engaged, and “parents may feel that no one in the school will listen to them if they cannot communicate in English” (Quezada et al., 2003, p. 32). Latino parents have been categorized as disinterested, but in reality, when all of the information is presented in English, parents feel unwelcome (Poza et al., 2014).

A second key practice has to do with time, as time serves as a barrier that hinders the efforts of parents who want to be involved. School leaders should ask the parents what time they can attend a meeting, event, or function. Parents attending school functions and events is an asset, and as leaders we also need to be willing to adapt and carve out time to meet their busy schedules. Latino parents work, and their hours of work may not allow them time to attend meetings or to participate (Poza et al., 2014). In addition, some have strenuous jobs and once they are home, they are exhausted and unable to attend school events (Quezada et al., 2003); the main priority for some is to put food on the table (Good et al., 2010). Another barrier is a lack of familiarity within the U.S. educational system. Parents who are new to the United States must also learn a new system that is different from the one in their home country (Good et al., 2010). Listening to the parents and their stories contributed to my further understanding of the research and concluding that the parents did not understand the school system.

The third key practice is to teach parents about the U.S. educational system and give their concerns and questions value by adding them to our agenda as informative points of discussion. When I served as a bilingual director in a different district, I started to offer monthly meetings for parents of students in a bilingual program. The meetings would be in Spanish, and we would discuss the U.S. educational system and other topics as they arose. My plan was to ask the

parents at the initial meeting, “what would you like to see in our district to ensure your students’ success?” I kept the parents grouped by table and gave them each a chart paper, and after introductions, I asked them to discuss and jot down ideas. I walked around checking for understanding and I noticed the parents were just sitting there, not knowing what to discuss. I asked one table group if I could help, and the parents said, “maestra, es que nunca nos han preguntado eso, no sabemos qué decir.” The parents stated they had never been asked this question, and therefore did not know how to respond or what to expect from the district.

At Faith Elementary, during our group *plática*, I asked the same question of the three parents, Margarita, Eva, and Paula. Margarita said, “a que me asegure el éxito de mi hijo o de mis hijos, eso de que lo sigan y los orienten y los apoyen para tener una carrera y seguir adelante.” She would like the district to ensure her children’s success through providing guidance, support, and encouragement to obtain a career and move forward. Paula added that sometimes parents did not ask questions and doubt remained within them, but when she was personally invited to participate, she said to herself, “I’ll go and see what it’s about, maybe it will benefit my home.”

Parents might not understand our school system, speak our language, or have free time during school hours, yet they continue to encourage their children to succeed within the home. Capitalizing on parents’ experiences and funds of knowledge will strengthen the opportunities to assist parents in developing a voice and becoming engaged. This will require reimagining the view of parent engagement and capitalizing on every interaction we have with Spanish-speaking parents. For example, when parents are visiting the campus to eat lunch with their child, school leaders can use this time to connect and communicate the importance of their presence, advocacy for their child, and valuing their collectivist culture of nurturing their child through their

education. Understanding culture and its practices is the key in increasing parent engagement, yet more often than not, school leaders and personnel misunderstood the impact of culture on education. Understanding how Latinx parents view their culture, their use of language, and their interactions with others and the community will allow us to leverage these cultural characteristics into parent and family engagement activities (Poza et al., 2014). We need to reimagine parent engagement.

Training teachers using the pedagogy of the CLE will benefit all stakeholders. The CLE is culturally relevant and it will give participants, like the three parents in my study, a safe space within a *plática* to listen, share their *testimonios*, and ask clarifying questions. Within a *plática*, the unnoticed home-based activities (Bower & Griffin, 2011) can be shared and I found in my study that the parents emphasized the importance of education, the value of respect, and the importance of becoming educated (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). All three parents, Margarita, Eva, and Paula, wanted their children to move out of poverty and experience a better life than their own (Calzada et al., 2015; Guerra & Nelson, 2013).

Why do we need to reimagine parent engagement? In one example, Eva mentioned how difficult it was to understand the teachers because of the language barrier. She went on to say that she would attend the meetings and conferences and “yo ahí estaba escuchando todo, pero no entendía nada,” meaning she was present and listening but did not understand anything. Thus, we ask, how do we implement institutional cultural change and build an inclusive environment? Some suggestions include the following:

- Fostering a culture of abundance and collective thinking in action. Establishing a culture where we do not see parents as individuals but as collective partners where they support one another in the education of their children.

- Training teachers, students, and parents on the pedagogy of CLE will benefit all stakeholders. The CLE framework affords all stakeholders an opportunity to share, assess, cultivate, and influence the learning of children in a culturally relevant atmosphere. The CLE framework therefore becomes the weaver of the human capital within the community. With time, the CLE framework is no longer a framework but a way of collaborating, communicating, and engagement—hence a way of life.
- Creating spaces of opportunity that will allow stakeholders to engage in meaningful conversations and accept failure as a model of growth. Failure is a process of refinement and acceptance. The existing research showed that if parents are not physically present, the answer is they do not care (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Quirocho & Daoud, 2006; Valdés, 1996). On the contrary, if an event fails, or in other words there is low attendance, then we as leaders need to reflect on what we ourselves considered failure. At times we look at parent engagement based on attendance as opposed to authentic interactions. If one, two, or five people attend, those are the right times to give those in attendance all of the information they need to build a partnership with the school.
- Challenging barriers of language and spaces of learning.
 - Sessions in Spanish can help break down the language barrier, as in the *plática*, and create a safe space for interaction and the sharing of *testimonios*. In the case of a presenter who is not a Spanish speaker, providing a translator for the presenter is necessary to foster and respect the value of parents' native language and eliminate the language barrier.

- Location is an area we as leaders need to revisit. Oftentimes we schedule events or functions based on our campus availability and convenience. We must reimagine changing our way of thinking by offering meetings at other district locations that provide a better location and access for our Spanish-speaking parents. Taking it one step further, as leaders and educators, we can facilitate *pláticas* at a parent's home where neighbors can join and address the needs of our students and communities. In doing this, leaders are open to accepting the collectivist culture of *familismo*, and we can visit homes to learn from parents, thus using their funds of knowledge to gain a better understanding of their needs and using this new knowledge to inform our practices with colleagues.
- Providing transparency and building trust through an invitation to a *plática* and safe space.
 - Implement learning walks, which involve being transparent and building trust by allowing parents to visit, walk the campus, and learn what happens within the classroom. This opens the door for the nurturing within the collectivist culture by giving parents the ability to view their children working and respecting their teacher and the system. It further validates their engagement within the home, helping prepare their children for their educational journey.
 - Invite parents to join you for a day of educational activities, providing a comprehensive learning experience in their native language while also showcasing your campus curriculum and philosophy. This allows for an open door into the informative sessions of the U.S. educational system and again gives value to the time the parents carved out to be engaged and this opportunity allows

the school to form partnerships with parents. Allow the parents a first-hand experience with the learning practices of the campus, giving parents an opportunity to not only learn, but also to see how they can implement such practices within the home. In addition to learning, they will grasp a better understanding of the educational experiences of their children and their journey to graduation and beyond. Thus, meeting the hope that they will have a better life than their own.

Conclusions

The importance of the study is to challenge our audience and readers to change the marginalized perception that Latinx parents are not invested in their children's education. One of the federal mandates for Title I and Title III grant funding requires increasing parent engagement. Relationships are a focal point of the CLE theory of change and allow parents to bring their experiences, *testimonios*, and questions to the *pláticas*.

Parent engagement can occur within the home through culturally aligned ways (Bower & Griffin, 2011). If we as educators are to intentionally attempt to connect culture to learning, we cannot overlook the funds of knowledge that our Latino parents bring to the table. Finding and using parents' strengths to build partnerships in learning will help bridge the gaps between culture and engagement. Moll et al. (1992) stated, "The essential cultural practices and bodies of knowledge and information that households use to survive, to get ahead, or to thrive"(p. 133) are constructed through experiences and these go untapped. These experiences become their *testimonios* and *pláticas* can be used to discover the bodies of knowledge within parents. If these funds of knowledge go unnoticed and are misunderstood, Latino parents are then blamed for not caring about their children's education (G. López, 2001).

The three parents who participated in this study were willing to take a risk and were willing to advocate for change. Leaders have to be willing to change, take risks, and accept culturally aligned methods as forms of engagement. The research clearly shows culturally aligned methods have existed, such as the following: *consejos* (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994), value of hard work (G. López, 2001), values within the home and the education of their children (Gaitan, 2004), encouraging and talking with students at home (G. López, 2001), home-based involvement like dropping off their children or visiting schools (Guerra & Nelson, 2013), vocalizing the importance of education and moving ahead in life (Gaitan, 2004), reinforcing respect and proper behavior (Guerra & Nelson, 2013), and our communities shape who we are (Militello et al., 2017).

The results within this study aligned with the purpose and demonstrated that culturally aligned methods within a home do exist and as leaders we need to start recognizing the efforts of our marginalized population.

Recommendations for Further Research

Implementing change in parent engagement, through the lens of three Latinx parents, and using their *pláticas* and *testimonios* to help make changes with schools considering culture and culturally aligned practices (González, 2001; F. López, 2016; Matthews & López, 2019).

The *plática* environment opened up dialogue in Spanish, removing the language barrier and giving value to the parents' experiences and their current understanding of the school system, whereas in the past they knew little about the educational system (A. López & Viramontez Anguiano, 2013; Pstross et al., 2016). The axioms were weaved through the ecologies of knowing: self, organization, and community.

Recommendations for further research in addressing the needs of parents with children in a bilingual program through a more culturally relevant type of engagement such as the CLE framework is crucial to begin bridging the gap between schools and Spanish-speaking parents. “The reason things stay the same is because we’ve been the same. For things to change, we must change” (Jensen, 2009, p. 46). Understanding how Latinx parents view their culture, their use of language, and their interactions with others and the community will allow us to leverage these cultural characteristics into parent and family engagement activities (Poza et al., 2014). Latinx parents, through culture and parenting at home, emphasize the importance of education, the value of respect, and the importance of becoming educated (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991).

As leaders, we have to ask ourselves, are we effectively engaging Latinx parents of students within the bilingual program in a way that helps bring awareness, ensures inclusiveness, and gives them a voice? The research showed that culturally aligned methods of parent engagement, similar to those my parents displayed in providing assistance with homework, giving us advice, encouraging us to behave for our teachers, the continuation of learning through cooking and other home-based activities, and encouraging us to finish school, all assisted in the education of their children.

In closing, referencing Figure 19, making sense of the axioms, the research showed that when implementing the ecologies of knowing and weaving in the axioms in the attempt to implement cultural changes and better serve our Latinx parents can lead to open communication and the building of a relationship between the school and the parents. I challenge all readers to use the *testimonios* of the three Latinx women to give meaning and value to their voices and use their stories to bridge the gap between schools and Latinx parents.

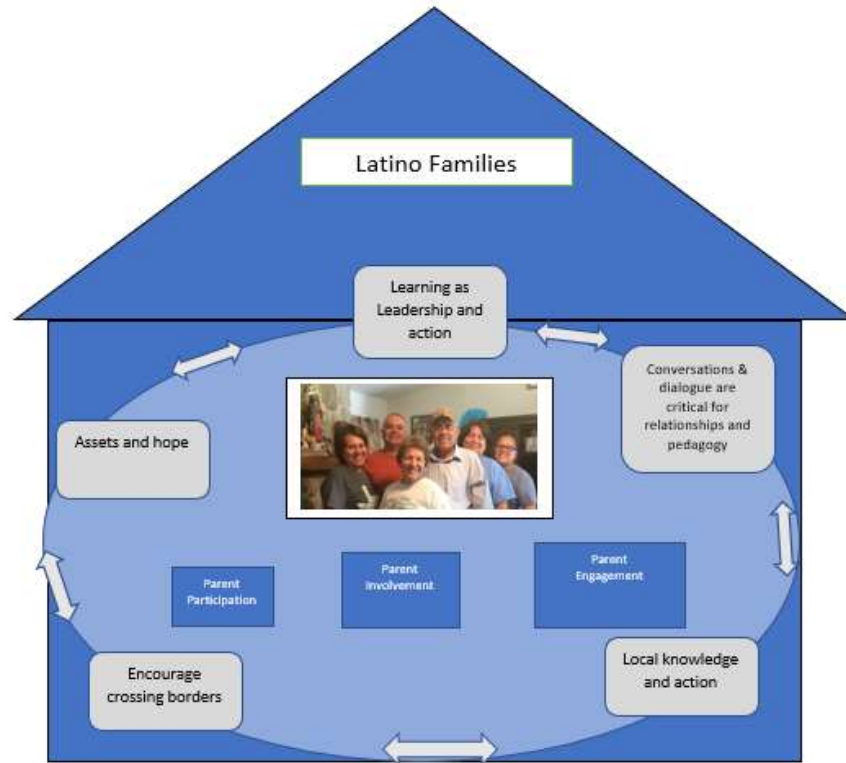


Figure 19. Making Sense of the Axioms (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016).

Final Remarks

Imagine asking your father what his dream was as a boy, only to hear the heartbreaking response of, “no sabia que sueños existian.” My father did not know that dreams existed because at the age of 5 years old, he was pulled from school in order to help his family. This research was important to me, an English learner who was raised by parents who only spoke Spanish. My parents, Jose and Eva, worked hard to instill in us a love for learning through their engagement in the home. My mother had always wanted to be a teacher but had to drop out in the fourth grade, yet she was an engaged parent within the home through culturally aligned practices.

I learned through this research that a gap still exists between schools and Spanish-speaking Latinx parents and parents of students in a bilingual program. Parents continue to navigate their way through the U.S. educational system, not fully understanding. I also learned

through this research that Latinx parents are engaged through their cultural practices, such as encouraging students to behave on campus and to respect the teacher and school space, filling their children with hope for a better future, making time during cooking or cleaning to offer assistance, and going beyond their fears to visit the campus if truly needed. My parents might not have been physically present at all times, and if they were, they did not understand the U.S. educational system. Nevertheless, through culturally aligned practices and their love and support, all four of their children graduated from college and are now contributing members of our communities.

My interest in this research topic stems from my parents' experiences. Through their continued love, support, and prayers, I landed here, advocating for a voice for Spanish-speaking parents to validate my parents' engagement in our learning. My parents may not have a degree, but they have a degree in life, and their experiences and their *testimonios* empowered my siblings and I to live with morals, integrity, and honesty and to be hard-working.

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