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Parent Engagement and Cultural Capital: Negotiating Culture in a Multilingual/Multiethnic School

Paula Andrea Echeverri-Sucerquia

Southern Illinois University Carbondale, pecheverri@idiomas.udea.edu.co

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PARENT ENGAGEMENT AND CULTURAL CAPITAL:

NEGOTIATING CULTURE IN A MULTILINGUAL/MULTIETHNIC

SCHOOL

by

Paula A. Echeverri-Sucerquia

Bachelor of Education in Foreign Language Teaching
Universidad de Antioquia, 1999

Master of Science in Education
Southern Illinoius University, 2006

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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DISSERTATION APPROVAL

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NEGOTIATING CULTURE IN A MULTILINGUAL/MULTIETHNIC SCHOOL

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Paula Andrea Echeverri-Sucerquia

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial

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for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the field of Curriculum and Instruction

Approved by:

John D. McIntyre, Chair

Kathy Hytten, Co-Chair

Dr. John Warren

Dr. Christina McIntyre

Dr. Joyce Killian

Dr. Janet Fuller

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
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AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

PAULA A. ECHEVERRI-SUCERQUIA, for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree in CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION, presented on June 15, 2010, at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale

TITLE: PARENT ENGAGEMENT AND CULTURAL CAPITAL: NEGOTIATING CULTURE IN A MULTILINGUAL/MULTIETHNIC SCHOOL

Major Professor: D. John McIntyre, Professor of Curriculum and Instruction, Ed., University of Syracuse

Co-chair: Kathryn Hytten, Professor of Educational Administration and Higher Education, PhD., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

This study explored how a multicultural/multilingual school negotiated culture with limited English proficient (LEP) students' families, particularly in the context of parent involvement activities. In order to understand how such negotiation of culture occurred, the researcher focused on the perspectives that school administrators, teachers and parents of students in an English as a Second Language (ESL) program had on the education of LEP students and their parents' involvement in school-organized activities. It also focused on the participants' understandings of cultural capital and the extent to which the school builds on immigrant /sojourner families' knowledge and culture to support their children's education.

In this ethnographical study, the researcher used a variety of data collection procedures: a questionnaire for teachers and parents, document analysis, interviews, and participant observation. While results from the questionnaires show that teachers and parents had similar views of LEP student education and parent involvement, more

detailed information gathered through interviews and observations show that school personnel and immigrant/sojourner parents held different perspectives and expectations. Moreover, the results revealed that cultural capital, social class, and parents' educational attainment level influence the way parents understand the academic and social expectations of the school's dominant culture and their interactions with school personnel. Likewise, cultural biases influence school administrators and teachers' perceptions and interactions with parents from ethnic/linguistic minority groups.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

One of the characteristics of the American culture that I find most fascinating as a sojourner in this country is its incredible diversity. When I look into the possibilities that such diversity can offer us in terms of learning, I cannot help but wonder about the great challenges such a complex society faces. As a graduate student, an educator, and a parent of an elementary school child, I have faced the complexities of being new to a culture (not just the American cultures but also the culture of American schooling) and of teaching to a diverse population. Understanding that a one-size kind of teaching does not fit all anymore is just the beginning of rethinking the role of schools in the United States in today's postmodern society that is characterized, among other traits, by the largest influx of immigrants in its history.

In 2005, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that the number of foreign-born people arriving in the United States has increased more than 10 million since 1995 (Maxwell, 2009). Many of the children of these immigrants currently attend K-12 schools (Quality Counts, 2009). According to the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, "the number of English-learners nationwide rose about 57 percent, to 5.1 million students, in the decade ending in 2005" (Zehr, 2009, p.10). These students come from more than 200 countries and most of them come from Mexico (53.7%), Asia (19.2%), and Central and South America (17.6%) (Analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, 2005-2007, in "Spanning the Globe," 2009). They speak a variety of languages, including Spanish (80% of the entire LEP population according to Batt, 2008), Vietnamese, Hmong, Cantonese, Cambodian, Korean, and Laotian, comprising 85% of the linguistic diversity in the United States (Smith-Davis, 2004, p.21-22).

Such demographic changes pose new challenges in developing instructional methods that best respond to the needs of non-American born English language learners. In his recent speech at the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, President Barack Obama referred to the challenges for American schools today. He invited American students to stay in schools during a time when so many students, mostly Latinos and African Americans, are dropping out from high school (the high school dropout rate has tripled in the past thirty years—50% now) and student achievement has seemingly lowered significantly. The president said "it is time for all of us, no matter what our backgrounds, to come together and solve this epidemic" (March 10, 2009, Washington D.C.).

Legislators, media, scholars, researchers, educators, parents, and students have pointed to many causes for the lack of educational achievement, including lazy teachers, careless students and disengaged parents, as well as poverty, violence, unemployment, and immigration. As the United States becomes more and more diverse, the issue of academic achievement becomes more difficult to tackle in schools. Many teachers and school administrators are not adequately prepared to address the needs of the ethnic and linguistic minority students in their schools, and many recent immigrant parents do not have the social, academic, and linguistic skills to interact with the school community and to effectively assist their children in their education.

Researchers have suggested various actions to improve limited English proficient (LEP) students' academic achievement, including implementing ESL or bilingual programs; developing adequate teacher development programs that prepare teachers "to understand and respond to the needs of ESL students placed in their classrooms" (Borden, 1998, p. 27); providing ways in which classroom teachers and ESL teachers

work together (Borden, 1988); and building partnerships between schools and culturally and linguistically diverse families (Colombo, 2006). In this study, I want to focus on the last of these strategies, the involvement of culturally and linguistically diverse families in schools. In my experience as a sojourner mother of an elementary school student, I see that parental involvement in a foreign culture is a very complex issue; it entails cultural differences that may constrain the communication between schools and parents and, consequently, differences in the way teachers, school administrators, and parents understand the educational experience of limited English proficient (LEP) students.

Research Problem

I have been curious about the involvement of international parents in school activities from the time I arrived in the United States as a graduate student in 2004; both my experiences as a mother and as a graduate student of education have triggered this curiosity. Motivated by this curiosity and by the isolation I experienced as a parent who was not familiar with the school culture, I became involved in school activities like volunteering and working as an intern for the principal of the school my daughter attends, which I am calling Greenwood. This K-8 school enjoys a very good reputation thanks to high student achievement on standardized tests and the wide variety of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic groups that it hosts.

As an intern, I had the opportunity to attend various teacher meetings where one "problem" was often discussed: the academic achievement of LEP students. I learned from these meetings and from my conversations with the principal and the ESL teacher, that the perceptions of parents, teachers, and school administrators were different in terms of the education of LEP students, especially in terms of their achievement. Also, as I

became more informed about the topic, I realized that cultural differences and, more specifically, differences in families' and school's cultural capital, play an important role in how those perceptions are shaped. There is little in the literature about how differences in perceptions and cultural capital impact the experience of LEP students and their families, especially in the context of multiethnic/multilingual schools; thus, there is a need for research in this area.

Research Questions

In this study, I addressed the following questions and subquestions,

1.   How do negotiations of cultural capital affect the education of limited English proficient (LEP) students?

• How do ESL program stakeholders understand the education of LEP students in this school?

• How do ESL program stakeholders perceive LEP students' parents' engagement?

2.   To what extent do school-organized parental involvement activities empower LEP students' parents to actively participate in their children's schooling?

• To what extent does the school build on the cultural capital of LEP students' parents to help them succeed academically and socially?

Theoretical Stance

There were many experiences and assumptions that drove my interest in this study. On the one hand, since my bachelor's degree is in Foreign Language teaching, I have been very interested in foreign and second language learning and how this process is affected by social forces. On the other hand, as a mother, I was concerned with becoming

more involved in the education of my daughter, especially with the knowledge I gained in my graduate studies. Moreover, taking into account that I am a non-white, non-native speaker of English as a first language, I identified with the needs and struggles of the community I wanted to study, a community of recent immigrants and sojourners at my child's school.

My interest in marginalized communities and the pursuit of emancipation resonated with the ideals and purposes of critical theory (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000), which was the main framework that illuminated the constructs and purposes of this research. Critical theory is "critical of social organization that privileges some at the expense of others" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 22). Critical theorists are driven by social justice concerns, studying, for example, how schools reproduce structures that benefit some groups and marginalize others (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The pursuit of social justice is one of the main goals of my professional life as it guides both my teaching and research. Thus, the ultimate purpose of this research was to enhance a dialogue that allows all stakeholders, including parents, to negotiate meaning and ideally, to come to a common language to dialogue about the challenges and possibilities for educating LEP students. As a researcher, I was drawn to immersing myself in a culture to get a deep and rich understanding of how LEP students and families experienced Greenwood School, hence I employed ethnography as my research approach. I intended to assess how the meanings that the predominantly-White personnel at this school construct of recent immigrant/sojourner students and families impact their relationships with these families. We are always constructing meaning in our interactions with others and it is in these interactions that we pass on meaning that we either internalize or deconstruct (Crotty,

2003). These constructions of meaning not only affect our knowledge of the world but also our actions upon the world (like school-wide decision making processes that affect the education of LEP students).

While I began with critical theory, I also acknowledged the changing nature of that theory and the ways in which the lines among theoretical positions have become blurry. Contemporary critical theories are influenced by various other theories, including feminism and postmodernism (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000; Jordan, 2003). However, there are some common assumptions that critical researchers share, as identified by Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997):

- that all thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations that are social and historically constituted;

- that facts can never be isolated from the domain of values or removed from some form of ideological inscription;

- that the relationship of concept and object and between signifier and signified is never stable or fixed and is often mediated by the social relations of capitalist production and consumption;

- that language is central to the formation of subjectivity;

- that certain groups in any society and particular societies are privileged over others and, although the reasons for this privileging may vary widely, the oppression that characterizes contemporary societies is most forcefully reproduced when subordinated groups accept their social status as natural, necessary, or inevitable;

- that oppression has many faces and that focusing on only one at the expense of others often elides the interconnections among them; and finally,

- that mainstream research practices are generally, although most often unwittingly, implicate in the reproduction systems of class, race and gender oppression (as cited in Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, p. 405)

Critical theorists attempt to understand domination and oppression, as well as how people resist these forces and can empower and emancipate themselves (Freire, 1970). For critical researchers, research needs to be an emancipatory endeavor, not only for the researcher but also for the participating community (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000; Jordan, 2003). What this means is that research should help members of a community to better understand their circumstances, to reflect on possibilities for empowerment, and to change problematic situations.

In using critical theories in my research, I also acknowledged some of the criticisms that they have received and draw on contemporary approaches to critical theory that respond to these criticisms. For example, critical theories have been criticized for using an often complicated language, for focusing too much on power relationships in terms of social class, and for being too focused on broad issues, with the danger of losing focus on the local. Critical researchers have also been criticized for maintaining a posture of superiority in their research, acting as if they know how the world functions and the researched do not (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000; Jordan, 2003). In this study, as I discuss in more detail in the Chapter 4, I employed strategies that addressed some of these concerns. For example, I used a language that was accessible to the participants since they were users of the data collected. Additionally, I avoided judgmental language as a way to respect the intended audience of my dissertation which, besides my committee members, is made up by the research participants themselves (school personnel and

parents). School personnel in particular are used to outsiders coming in and out of the building to scrutinize their job and I wanted them to feel that my role was more supportive than judgmental.

As an insider researcher, I was self-reflexive about my role and about how my theories illuminated data collection and analysis. Self-reflexivity helped me to be aware of my relationship with participants as partners in research. And finally, this study was an opportunity to make connections between broader social issues (the current marginalization of ethnic/linguistic minority groups in schools) and the particularities of power relations in the specific context of my study.

The work of Paulo Freire (2000) greatly influenced my research endeavor, as he helped me understand how power operates in society and about our responsibilities as educators, researchers and scholars in addressing power relationships. In discussing power relations, Freire refers to the oppressor and the oppressed who work together in a dialogical relationship to liberate one another from ignorance and domination. He argues that it is not the oppressors who liberate or empower the oppressed (who give the oppressor their consent to dominate), but the oppressed who become aware of domination and emancipate themselves in dialogue with the oppressor. I have found this relationaship between oppressed and oppressor commonly discussed in the discourses that relate to LEP educational experience; the oppressor and the oppressed are presented as fixed and opposed categories, the oppressor being the school and the oppressed the families of disenfranchised students. Even though I am aware that this relationship is likely to happen, I challenged this dichotomy in this study while trying to understand that school personnel often find themselves as victims of oppression as well, especially under the No

Child Left Behind mandates. My intention with this research was not to reinforce already existing discourses about power relations in schools, but rather to draw from a wide range of discourses as I analyzed how power functions in this particular context and its effects on school-families relationships and LEP students' educational experiences.

Bourdieu and Passeron's (1997) concept of cultural capital also was fundamental for this study. It helped me understand and explain why the cultural capital of immigrant families is often neglected in schools and the ways in which immigrant families are asked (implicitly and explicitly) to assimilate a new cultural capital at the expense of losing their own. In their work on cultural capital, Bourdieu and Passeron (1997) argue that schools reproduce class differences by privileging the cultural capital of the dominant group. Cultural capital includes specific knowledge, behaviors, and attitudes that constitute social assets. The closer a person's cultural capital is to that of the dominant culture within a specific context, the higher social advantage that person has. Cultural capital is passed on from parents to their children who use it in school in their socialization process; thus, differences in cultural capital may constrain the possibilities of limited English proficient students who are newly arrived into this country to succeed socially and academically since they are not familiar with the cultural capital that is dominant in schools.

I also draw on the concept of funds of knowledge. This theoretical approach privileges the voices of those who are marginalized from the school's culture. What González and her colleagues (2005) call "the funds of knowledge" refers to the knowledges that are generated within the homes and that are part of minority families and communities' daily lives. The funds of knowledge includes the cultural values, practices

and behaviors of these communities which, according to Gonzalez et al (2005) are often neglected in schools. Ignoring these funds of knowledge from the part of school actors may exacerbate biases and misconceptions of members of minority groups. Making connections between the schools and the homes is important because it may increase possibilities for students to succeed in school. Moreover, acknowledging funds of knowledge can facilitate the communication necessary to bridge the gap between American schools and immigrant homes.

In her work with Latino families, Delgado-Gaitán developed what she calls ethnography of empowerment (2005). According to her, through participation in an ethnography that had a critical agenda, Latino parents empowered themselves to organize as a group and counteract the marginalization and isolation they suffered from. They educated themselves about the English language and about the American educational system in order to better contribute to the education of their children. Delgado-Gaitán's work provided me with some visions and possibilities for this study; it influenced my original intentions to use this study as a means for supporting participating parents to empower themselves to get more actively engaged in their children's education than they traditionally do. The ethnography of empowerment approach resonates with critical theory's goal of transforming the social order by empowering marginalized communities.

Authors like Delgado-Gaitán (1990, 1991, 2001), Freire (2000) and Olivos (2006) influenced my strong leanings towards parent empowerment as a central construct in this study. In line with Freire's (2000) claim that "it is only when the oppressed find the oppressor out and become involved in the organized struggle for their liberation that they begin to believe in themselves" (p. 65), I focused on a vision of disenfranchised parent

empowerment where they organized as a result of the conscientization[1] I hoped they gained after participating in this study. My goal was that, eventually, international parents[2] would meet with the school personnel in the context of genuine dialogue to become true partners in the education of LEP students.

In order to engage, parents need to believe that their children's education is a very important cause, therefore they need to feel that they are considered subjects rather than objects within the school community. Their participation as subjects rather than objects is essential to build a genuine democratic society. Freire cautions us that participation must not recreate an illusion of access to power. Schools need to create venues for parents to organize so that school and parents educate one another to enhance the educational experience of children. The goal of organization should be conscientization, not nonsense activism, or the domestication of parents, because the key to empowerment is consciousness of options for agency (Freire, 1970; Delgado-Gaitán & Trueba, 1991; Olivos, 2006).

The concept of empowerment is similar to what Smyth et al. (2008) in their study of actively excluded communities in Australia call "critical engagement" (p.5). They define critical engagement as a "code for exploring how the tectonic plates of capitalism are impacting differentially upon society and how some excluded groups might move beyond their current diminished capacity and assertively begin to push back" (p.5). There are three aspects in the process of pursuing critical engagement:

1. Collaborative learning,

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[1] The realization of what they know as a result of a critical reflection (Freire, 1970)
[2] I use the term international, ethnic/linguistic minority, and immigrant/sojourner parents to refer to the same community of parents, the parents of limited English proficient students.

2. A critical examination of power, how things to the way they are, and what can be done to intervene, and

3. Engagement, where questions are asked in collegial interaction with the community about self-determination, responsibility, and participation.

Smyth et al. claim that these are aspects of a "critical democratic engagement" (p.6), and they define their role as researchers and the role of the participants in their study. These aspects along with Delgado-Gaitán's (1991) ethnography of empowerment informed my role as researcher and created expectations in terms of what I was looking for in terms of the parents, their participation and engagement, and in terms of the school, its role in providing spaces and opportunities for this participation to happen.

Methodological Overview

The purpose of this study was to compile data to determine the extent to which a school privileges culturally and linguistically minority families' knowledge as a way to support LEP student learning and to develop recommendations for the school. I also explored the extent to which the school took advantage of these families' cultural capital in order to inform teaching and learning practices. Teachers and administrators in this school discussed during faculty meetings that the academic success of these children was one of the most imperative issues that they needed to address at the moment.

I addressed my research questions using an ethnographic approach. I gathered narrative, descriptive data from school administrators, teachers, and parents. I used a "funnel" type of approach, that is, a broad-to-narrow study of the situations, people, and events. I studied the perceptions, expectations, and experiences of the ESL program stakeholders in general and I eventually narrowed down the focus to the experiences of

selected families and participants as they negotiated meaning about the education of LEP students.

The data for this study were LEP parents' and teachers' narratives, gathered through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews about their perspectives of the education of LEP students and their parents' involvement. I also examined school documents (the Adequate Yearly Progress—AYP report, the School Improvement committee minutes and action plan, the Parent Involvement Policy, and the School-Parent Compact) with information about LEP student academic achievement and rules and regulations about parent involvement. In addition, I performed participant observations (of ESL classroom activities, as a tutor, and of School Improvement committee meetings, as a parent representative) and non-participant observations (of parent involvement activities).

Technical Terminology

As part of studying the construction and negotiation of power relations, I learned about the crucial role of language in building and maintaining such relations. Naming groups of people in certain ways, for example, contributes to the way we perceive them and how we position ourselves in relation to the categories we create. Therefore, I recognize that the terms used in this study may be problematic and so it has been difficult for me to define how I refer to the participants or even myself. For example, terms that have been chosen, usually, by members of the dominant culture, to name and categorize groups of people are often based on deficit thinking. In other words, the terms refer to what certain groups lack of in relation to the dominant culture (e.g., Limited English Proficient). Because it has been difficult for me to come to alternative names without

falling into the trap of using very intricate language, I am using the terms that have been used elsewhere, although sometimes with alterations.

In my review of the relevant literature, researchers and educators use terms like English as a Second Language—ESL students, English Language Learners—ELLs, Limited English Proficient—LEP students, and bilingual students to refer to those students who are not sufficiently fluent in English according to school standards. In this study I used LEP students to refer to this population, acknowledging that it could be problematic and that it is the one used in many of the No Child Left Behind—NCLB documents. Usually, LEP students are either American or non-American born children of recent immigrants.

When I referred to the parents I used different terms, and in most cases, they referred to the same population of parents. I use the words ethnic and linguistic minorities, bicultural parents (as used by Olivos, 2006), immigrant/sojourner parents, and international parents, as they are commonly named in the school. Even though immigrant/sojourner on their legal status, they all correspond to the labels that have been used for this population in the literature.

When I refer to teachers, I distinguish between room or mainstream teachers (meaning the ones who spend the most time with most children in the classroom and who teach the core subjects) and ESL teachers (the teachers who work in the English as a Second Language program).

Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations of the Study

Even though the research methodology implemented in this study could be used in other contexts and that some of the results are likely to be observed in similar contexts,

I assume that the results and the procedures followed in this research are particular to this site. In fact, I assert that my purpose with this research is not generalizability. Rather, I make connections to larger bodies of literature, with other relevant discourses and assume that some recommendations that were a product of this research may be applicable to other schools as judged by the school personnel or other researchers.

From the forefront I put forth that this research is biased. I began with certain assumptions about how power operates and about emancipation and empowerment. In fact, I would argue that all research is biased in some ways, as critical researchers claim (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). However, I worked to expose and bracket my biases all the while being responsible for making informed decisions, dialoguing with participants about my findings, and maintaining a self-reflexive attitude. Concerning relationships of power, I want to make clear that I tried to stay away from the assumption that ethnic and language minority families are oppressed in this school (even as this is a common theme in the literature). I rather tried to be critical about instances where parents and teachers felt either comfortable or uncomfortable with school actions and decisions. I was aware that there are actions that could produce comfort or satisfaction and still be oppressive.

<div align="center">**Relevance**</div>

This study provides information about differences in parents, teachers, and school administrators' assumptions and expectations about LEP student education and their parents' involvement. It is original in three respects. First, I explored a greatly diverse community of students and parents coming from different countries, while most of the studies on this topic focus solely on specific cultural/ethnic/linguistic communities. Second, most of the studies on this topic have been done in the United States West and

Southwest; I have not yet found a study of this kind in the Midwest. And third, the role of the researcher was that of an insider. In most of the studies I reviewed, the researcher, while identifying with the participants in terms of ethnicity and/or language, was external to the community under study.

One of the central reasons schools need more research on parent involvement is because it is often touted as one of the ideal strategies to improve student achievement. Yet it can also have problematic, though typically unintended, consequences on the long term educational prospects for LEP students. Recent immigrant families are often fitted into a process of acculturation by the school (socializing them to the dominant cultural capital) with the intention of helping their children to succeed academically; this process of acculturation sometimes becomes a subtle form of domestication, and domestication "not only leads to a form of benign ignorance, but also absolves us from certain kinds of social responsibility" (Thomas, 1993, p. 8). According to Delgado-Gaitán (1990), parents need to participate in their own process of change instead of just being told how they should integrate into the school system so that they can internalize the process and be actual participants in the system.

I engaged in this research under the belief that parent involvement is not about domesticating parents into the "American" way; rather parent involvement should be about school administrators and teachers supporting parents' decisions and active participation in activities that enhance the educational experiences of their children. Social researchers need to do more studies about how the school views recent immigrant/sojourner families; besides, educators need to expand their role and learn more about the families and how learning occurs at home (Delgado-Gaitán, 1990). These

processes need to be done in liaison with the families, since in learning about each other they can help liberate each other (Freire, 1970). It is only through a dialogical relationship that subjects, in this case, parents and school personnel, can come together to name problems in order to transform their worlds (Freire, 1970). Thus, my purpose with this ethnography was not to just record the perceptions and experiences of the participants. Rather, my intention was to raise awareness about the importance of school and parents dialoguing across their differences in order to support LEP student education.

Outline of Chapters

This dissertation contains 7 chapters in addition to this introduction. The second chapter is the review of the relevant literature, where I used a broad-to-narrow approach to describe the findings in research related to LEP student academic achievement. Then, I referred to research done about the assumptions and expectations of school personnel and immigrant/sojourner families concerning the educational experience of LEP students and their parents' involvement. I distinguished discourses related to parent involvement and presented some successful examples of parent involvement activities and strategies.

The third chapter includes a more detailed elaboration on my theoretical stance, particularly addressing Bourdieu and Passeron's (1997) concept of cultural capital as it relates to the relationship between language/ethnic minority families and schools and to LEP student achievement. In the fourth chapter, I include a detailed description of the research procedure I used. This chapter includes information about the reasons for the study, the qualitative methodology I chose to address my research questions, the context for this study and the process followed for gaining access to this context. I also discuss in detail the procedures I followed as well as some ethical considerations I needed to make

as a researcher in terms of my role, the participation of my informants, and the representation and assessment of the veracity of the data.

In Chapters 5 through 7, I discuss the findings from this study. In Chapter 5 I discuss findings related to school personnel and parents' perspectives on LEP student education and parent involvement. It includes their opinions and expectations as well as some reasons they use to explain why some parents do not get engaged in school organized activities. In Chapter 6 I focus on two particular issues affecting LEP students' parent involvement that emerged from the data: a communication gap between school and international families and lack of parent leadership and empowerment. This chapter includes recommendations made by participants to address these issues and improve the school-families relationship. Chapter 7 presents a couple of ethnographical portraits that depict the struggles that recently arrived sojourner students and their families had to face in their first year at the school. In this chapter I refer to specific instances and experience that connect to themes discussed in chapter 6. Lastly, in chapter 8, I summarize the most significant findings in connection to my research questions along with the challenges I had to face. I end the chapter with questions this research left me with and some directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this review of the relevant literature, I explore various areas of research that relate to Limited English proficient (LEP) students' academic performance, the way their teachers and parents understand their educational experience, and parent engagement. First, I discuss immigrant students' academic achievement and the differing levels of academic attainment according to race and ethnicity, as reported in the research. This information is relevant to understand the ways in which educational research reinforces stereotypes of overachievement (e.g. Asian students) and underachievement (e.g. Latino students).

Second, I describe some of the strategies reported in the literature that are useful in helping students who are Limited English proficient to succeed academically; I delve more specifically into one of the strategies, parental involvement in schools, particularly the involvement of immigrant and sojourner parents, as this is a foci of this research. I briefly explore different types of involvement, possible causes for limited involvement, and successful programs or attempts to involve parents of ethnic and linguistic minorities.

Third, I present research about the perceptions and expectations of teachers and immigrant parents concerning parental involvement. The topic of perceptions and expectations is relevant to parent involvement as they affect the way parents and teachers assess parent involvement that simultaneously affects the communication between immigrant/sojourner families and schools. This is an important area of research because it shows how the voices of these families are often ignored in the school systems. In the final section, I explain the connections between these findings in the literature, theories of cultural capital and funds of knowledge, and my research. I have made these connections

with the purpose of understanding how the differences in meanings that cultural groups construct (their biases, emotions, beliefs, knowledge, etc) impact the relationship between the school and the families and the education of LEP students.

Limited English Proficient (LEP) students' Academic Achievement

In the literature on the subject of LEP students' educational experiences, and more specifically, their achievement (because it is the term that many researchers use these days, and especially, because of the No Child Left Behind Act's focus on achievement), I found a large and complex body of literature that is differentiated by race, ethnicity, language, and class. For example, literature about Latino student achievement is often connected to African American student and/or Native American student achievement, as these groups are generally classified as low-achievers. In comparison, literature on East Asian students often focuses on their high achievement; little is said about Asian students who are low- achievers, and the literature on Arab and Arab American students' achievement is almost non-existent (Manning & Leroy, 2009). This differentiation that I find in the literature corroborates what Gonzalez et al (2005) describe as a marginalization of many students that is legitimized by "the dominant writing of social theory" (p. 34).

Literature on LEP student achievement focuses largely on Latino students, since they make up most of the LEP population (Quality Counts, 2009). It is well known that LEP students are lagging behind their English-speaking peers in math and reading proficiency according to standardized test scores reports (DaSilva & Katz, 2007; Solórzano, 2008; Zehr, 2009). This is why much of the research on immigrant students has focused on academic achievement, especially after the enactment of the No Child

Left Behind Act. A great deal of this research on immigrant and migrant students relates

to the academic gaps between several student groups based on race, ethnicity, and socio

economic class (Lee & Bowen, 2006).

   The achievement gap and issues of race and ethnicity. For years, federal

statistics on academic achievement have shown an achievement gap that separates Latino

from White and Asian American students (Barton, 2003; Olmedo, 2003; Ramirez &

Carpenter, 2005, as cited in Pearce, 2006; Olivos, 2006; Warikoo & Carter, 2009). For

example, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (2007),

88% of Asians and Pacific Islanders completed high school compared to a 61% of

Hispanics; and, in the same year, 52% of Asian and Pacific Islanders obtained a college

or higher degree compared to a 13% among Latinos (as cited in Quality Counts, 2009).

   Researchers have explained the perceived academic advantage of Asian American

students over Latino students in terms of the "cultural attributes" that allow them (Asian

Americans) to develop an appreciation for education as a vehicle of social mobility

(Pearce, 2006). These cultural attributes often relate to stereotypes of obedience,

submission, and hard work. Because of these attributes, along with their status of high

achievers, East Asian students have been labeled as the "model minority" (Borden,

1998). I found that literature related to academic achievement and race is not only

differentiated in terms of statistics, or cultural attributes, but there are also different

discourses. Whereas in the case of East Asian students there is a discourse of merit and

hard work, in the literature related to Latino achievement there is a discourse that often

relates to socio-economic status. Olivos (2006) maintains that this difference in

discourses is an important area of study in that "it demonstrates a pattern of generational

academic and social underachievement, yet all too often the achievement gap has been studied superficially, with a focus on the obvious rather than on the structural" (p. 15).

In their review of the literature on racial and ethnic stratification in academic achievement, Warikoo and Carter (2009) explain that there is a difference in the language that is used to discuss the achievement of these groups; they say that they found a discourse of assimilation versus a discourse of oppression, and they also found differences in the theoretical framework that researchers use. These differences in the literature lead to the reinforcement of cultural stereotypes that do not contribute to understanding the cultural conflicts that minority students have to face.

Because many teachers are not equipped to understand these conflicts, they often make assumptions based on the behaviors observed in their students and believe that these correspond to personal attributes that are linked to cultural values and education at home. For example, when a new Latino comes to the classroom, some teachers assume that they are not fluent in English and that they need to be sent to the ESL program. In the case of the Asian students, some teachers assume that because they are "overachievers," they do not need as much help as other students. These assumptions often privilege some and condemn others. Assumptions about academic achievement are generally linked to the lack of English language proficiency expected at the school. Delgado-Gaitán and Trueba (1991) argue that "the very act of learning English as a second language is a cultural variation, but it does not necessarily create distress for children. A conflict ensues when children of limited English proficiency are taught all their academic curriculum in English in such a way that their native language and culture are invalidated" (p.29).

Some authors have challenged discourses of overachievement related to Asian or Asian American students; such discourses generate biases and high academic expectations that have negative effects on some Asian LEP students. Tobin & McRobbie (1996) argue that even though many Asian immigrant and refugee students with limited proficiency in English have demonstrated strong academic attainment in science and math, their success stories may disguise experiences of failure and hardship that other Asian students are going through. Using Ogbu's framework of voluntary and involuntary minorities, Tobin and McRobbie explain that, Asian students (voluntary minority) coming to US, Canada, UK, and Australia, are expected to be "committed to learning and generally prepared to make extra efforts to become acculturated" (p. 266).

According to the literature on Asian student achievement, they possess a cultural capital that enables them to partially overcome the barriers that they encounter in learning science, despite their lack of proficiency in English. This cultural capital includes ways of acting that are consistent with the Confucian tradition, for example, being hard working and task-oriented (Tobin & McRobbie, 1996; Pearce, 2006). It is important to consider though, as Pearce (2006) points out, that it would be an error to attribute this Confucian-oriented behavior to peoples from Southeast Asia or Micronesia, since those cultures were not part of the Confucian empires. In general, Asian cultures constitute a very heterogeneous group.

I include two examples of studies about Asian LEP students' academic performance in this literature review. These examples are important because they challenge stereotypical ideas about Asian immigrant and refugee students. Tobin and McRobbie (1996) studied LEP Chinese high school students in Australia. They found

that even though they were not proficient in English, they frequently selected to study

chemistry, physics and biology in grades 11 and 12. Researchers observed, interviewed,

and administered a questionnaire to these students and their chemistry teacher. They

found that these students' cultural capital and access to resources assisted them in

accomplishing their academic goals in spite of their lack of proficiency in English. This

happened with some of the Asian students whose use of Cantonese, task-oriented

behavior, access to library resources, and peer support from other Cantonese-speaking

students enabled them to succeed in chemistry class. That is, they were able to succeed in

the Chemistry class because in addition to some behaviors, there was a support system

that enabled them to make sense of the information they were being taught; perhaps they

would not have been able to learn as well if it were not because they had the chance to

use their home language in the classroom (with bilingual students).

The researchers considered that one factor that enhanced an academic-driven

attitude was that many Chinese students attribute academic success to hard work, interest,

and ability, whereas most Australian-born students attribute it to ability. Many western

students perceive school as boring and believe that the role of teachers is to engage them

in the material, which leaves them with the option of deciding whether they want to

engage or not. For the Chinese students in this research who were not as successful in this

chemistry class, having the assistance of someone who knew about the subject and also

spoke Cantonese was important.

Pearce (2006) developed a quantitative study to identify the social and cultural

factors that have helped Chinese American and White American students succeed

academically. He used two theoretical frameworks, cultural capital theory and social

structural theory, the latter of which is related to social reproduction (the reproduction of poverty across generations). He analyzed data originated by the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS, 2000), based on yearly surveys. The study suggests that there is a connection between social structure and academic achievement among White and Chinese Americans. For example, Chinese American students were better able to overcome transitions in their schooling in part as a result of the effect of parent influence; this influence is based on a strict discipline, doing more than schoolwork, and high expectations. Moreover, Pearce states that this success is not a product of the families' assimilation to the dominant White culture, but rather, a product of practices traditional within their own home culture.

Pearce (2006) challenges stereotypical views of Asian American students as passive and obedient; for him, assimilation does not explain Chinese American students' academic success because assimilation entails the abandonment of the Chinese culture when the case is of actually an interest in preserving the home culture while adjusting to the new one. His argument is that "the two cultures, in promoting education, are harmonistic but different" (p. 95). He explains that the most important finding in this study was that "parental expectations have a powerful impact on achievement" (p. 96).

In sum, the literature I reviewed shows that research on academic achievement has focused to a great extent on deficit thinking, which enhances cultural biases that affect LEP students both positively and negatively. While Arab and Arab American students remain almost invisible in the literature, East and South Asian students are expected to comply with high expectations; this leads to either a privileged position or to

having their needs neglected. Conversely, many Latino students are held to lower standards.

There are various theories that address the achievement gap from a sociocultural perspective, including the cultural-ecology theory (Ogbu, 1978, cited in Warikoo & Carter, 2009, and also in González et al, 2005), and the theory of cultural capital, as proposed by Bourdieu & Passeron (1997). According to Ogbu's cultural ecology theory, minority groups are organized into a 'caste-like' system divided into *voluntary* and *involuntary* minority groups. Voluntary minorities are those immigrants who decided to immigrate, whereas involuntary minorities are descendants of those who came to the United States via oppression (invasion, colonization, slavery, etc). Immigrant students who are voluntary minorities are descendants of those who came to the United States voluntarily, with the intention of improving their life circumstances. According to the cultural-ecology theory, voluntary minorities tend to be more optimistic about education than those who are involuntary minorities (Warikoo & Carter, 2009).

In contrast to the cultural-ecology theory, the theory of cultural capital looks at how different cultural groups are treated in society. As explained by Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), schools reproduce class differences by privileging the cultural capital of the dominant group, or in Delpit's (1988) words, the culture of power. Therefore, those who have this dominant capital have more possibilities to succeed academically and socially (Nasir & Hand, 2006). This cultural capital includes specific knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and practices that may provide certain social advantage to a person.

Addressing the achievement gap. Researchers on academic achievement suggest various actions that help to improve LEP students' academic achievement. These include

the implementation of English as a Second Language (ESL) or bilingual programs, the development of adequate teacher development programs that prepare teachers "to understand and respond to the needs of ESL students placed in their classrooms" (Borden, 1998, p. 27), the implementation of strategies that help classroom teachers and ESL teachers work closely (Borden, 1988) and cope with LEP students in the regular classroom, and the creation of partnerships between schools and culturally and linguistically diverse families (Colombo, 2006). Such partnerships are supposed to strengthen the relationship between the two parties in order to support LEP children education. These relationships can be sustained through activities like parent-teacher conferences, Parent-Teacher Organizations, and family literacy activities.

Ethnic and language minority parent participation in schools is one of the foci of this research. I would like to clarify that the term that often appears in the literature related to this topic is parental or parent involvement, although parent engagement is the term of choice for some researchers, like Pérez Carreón et al (2005). I will use both terms interchangeably in this literature review and in accordance with what the authors use. However, the term that best describes what I intend to study in my research is parent engagement; Pérez Carreón et al (2005) explain the difference, "'Involvement' has been used to describe the specific things parents do, while "'engagement' also includes parents' orientations to the world and how those orientations frame the things they do" (p. 469). They explain that parental involvement goes beyond the participation in activities proposed by the school, and that is why engagement is a more suitable term, as it refers to parent involvement "within cultural spaces," or, in other words, what parents consider parent involvement within their own cultures, which sometimes includes

activities that are not proposed by the school but that enhance the educational experience of their children.

I want to make clear that the reason I am discussing parental engagement in relation to literature on LEP student academic achievement is not that I blame parents for their children's academic failure. I believe, as the literature suggests, that there is a relationship between academic success and parent engagement, but consideration of parents' roles and responsibilities alone is only part of this issue. We also need to look at differing interpretations of education as well as structural barriers to engagement. My research is an attempt to take a critical look at immigrant/sojourner parent engagement in relation to larger social issues.

Parent Involvement as a Strategy to Address the Achievement Gap

Research shows evidence of the positive impact of parental involvement on student academic achievement (Epstein, 1986; Delgado-Gaitán, 1990; Epstein & Jansorn, 2004; Pérez Carreón et al., 2005; Lee & Bowen, 2006). Parents constitute an important link between the home and the school (Medina-Jerez et al., 2007). Wright (2001) defines parental involvement as "diverse activities occurring either at home or at school to allow parents to share in their child's education" (as cited in Kauffman et al., 2001, p. 2). Delgado-Gaitán (1991) explains that when parents do not get involved, this directly and negatively affects the educational experience of their children, and the communication between the children and their teachers.

To counteract the negative effects of the lack of parental involvement, Vandergrift and Green (1992) proposed two keys to successful parental involvement: "the first is support, which is defined as encouraging their children and being sympathetic, reassuring

and understanding […]. The second element of parent involvement is active involvement. Active involvement is doing something that is observable" (as cited in Kauffman et al., 2001, p.2). Similarly, Delgado-Gaitán (1991) argued that an important factor determining parental involvement is communication. According to her, schools should inform parents about school operations and provide them with resources to organize themselves into support or study groups, or parent advisory committees. This is important because better communication may enable parents of ethnic and linguistically minority groups to "become a strong support for academic learning, and can help smooth the transition of children from one cultural environment to another," as Delgado-Gaitán and Trueba (1991) suggest (p. 31)

Categories of parent involvement. Vandergrift and Greene (1992) defined four categories of parent involvement. The first category corresponds to the parent who participates in school activities, frequently communicates with the teacher, and engages in decision making processes in the school. The second category corresponds to the parent who cares about the child's education and finds comfort in the teacher's support, without necessarily joining school activities. The third category they defined is that of the parent who joins school activities and programs, but who, at home, neglects the child's basic needs. And the fourth category of parent is neither supportive nor actively involved in their child's education.

This four category model is an example of an idea that much of the research I reviewed focuses on, that is, a view of parent involvement that results from the assessment of the parents' engagement in the activities organized, developed, and carried out by schools. These activities, which I mentioned earlier, include, but are not limited to

Parent-Teacher Organizations or Associations, open houses, parent-teacher conferences, and volunteer activities (Pérez Carreón et al, 2005). A primarily school-centered and defined idea of parent involvement affects how parents and school actors perceive each other and how they judge the efficacy of parent engagement programs, activities, and strategies.

Given the changing demographics in the United States, many educational and social researchers are arguing that we need to question such traditional ideas. For example, Pérez Carreón et al. (2005) assert that "parental involvement is not a fixed event but a dynamic and ever-changing practice that varies depending on the context in which it occurs, the resources the parents and schools bring to their actions, and the students' particular needs" (p. 467). This implies that alternative forms of engagement need to be considered in educational research and policy making.

Parent engagement revisited. In their review of the literature on immigrant parent's school engagement, Pérez et al. (2005) found that parents enter traditional spaces for involvement being ill equipped to negotiate their roles. Consequently, those who understand and support the structures for participation already in place are seen as 'good' whereas those who dissent with those structures are perceived as 'problematic' (p. 467.). Even if they attend those school-sponsored activities and spaces, parents do not typically have the power to voice their opinions and concerns or participate in the decision-making process.

This concern is also supported by Kozol (2007), when he recommends the novice teacher not make false assumptions about the less engaged parents; generally, teachers and school administrators establish a better rapport with those parents who "tend to share

more of the social styles and the value systems of the teachers" (p. 22). He recommends

teachers reflect a little on the reasons why some parents seem disengaged. On the other

hand, Olivos (2006), in his research on Latino parent involvement found that school

personnel often expect parents to get involved in ways that are supportive, not critical, of

school practices. Parents who challenge existing practices may be seen as troublemakers.

Olivos, a former school teacher in California, invites educators to be careful and critical

of what they define as involvement.

Lee and Bowen's (2006) study of the level and impact of parent involvement on

elementary school children's academic achievement provides some keys as to what

teachers should keep in mind in terms of parent engagement. Their sample was composed

of 415 children: 51% European American, 34% African American, and 15%

Hispanic/Latino. Their survey included demographic components like race/ethnicity,

participation in free–reduced-price lunch programs, and parents' educational attainment,

along with some items related to different categories of parental involvement (parent

involvement at school, parent-child educational discussion, homework help, time

management, and parent educational expectations). They found that parents get involved

in the education of their children regardless of their level of education.

The greatest differences across different groups of parents were found in their

involvement at school; for example, "those whose culture and lifestyle were most likely

to be congruent with the school's culture [European American, not participants of the

school lunch program] and whose educational attainment was higher or more similar to

that of school staff," were more likely to get involved in school activities (Lee & Bowen,

2006, p. 210). They found that parent race/ethnicity and educational attainment were

associated more with educational success than parent involvement, but parent involvement was not associated with academic success. On the other hand, they found that parents' help with homework was negatively associated to European American student achievement (help did not necessarily determine their success) and positively associated to African American and Latino students (when parents helped they did better). In sum, parents with different demographic characteristics exhibited different types of involvement. Also, the types of involvement exhibited by parents from dominant groups (like participating in the PTO) had the strongest association with achievement (p. 193). Nonetheless, parents from dominant and nondominant groups equally benefited from their specific forms of involvement.

From the findings in this study, Lee and Bowen (2006) conclude that the reason behind academic failure among students from nondominant groups is the lack of cultural capital. Yet this is a controversial claim, other researchers argue that the issue is not about possessing more or less cultural capital, but about the resemblance between one's cultural capital and that of the culture of the dominant group. The discussion about having or not having cultural capital reinforces deficit thinking, because it leads to the idea that immigrant and sojourner families are incomplete, that they need to be supplied with cultural knowledge. Considering the idea of differences in cultural capital points to the importance of understanding other cultures and negotiating cultural values.

Pomerantz et al.'s (2007) review of the research on parent involvement supports the positive effect of parental involvement on student achievement. Like Lee and Bowen (2006), they also found that the way parents become involved determines the success of their involvement, and that not all forms of involvement are really beneficial for student

learning. They found that different forms of engagement may enhance the development of skills and motivation in the children that are necessary for achievement. Research on the effects of parental involvement at home that is directly linked to school is not very conclusive. For example, in Lee and Bowen's study (2006), Pomerantz et al. (2007) found that in some cases parents' assistance with homework has a negative effect on student achievement.

Because of what has been found in research on parent engagement in recent years, Pérez Carreón et al. (2005) claim that "practices of parental involvement must be studied in connection to the spaces in which this involvement takes place, along with the physical, material, and organizational boundaries embedded in these spaces" (p. 468). Researchers and educators need to keep in mind, for example, that the parents' level of educational attainment and social class have a great effect on student outcomes and parent level of engagement (Wiggan, 2006). I believe that a different demographic landscape in American schooling requires that we (educators, researchers, parents, policy makers) think about parent engagement in different ways.

In the process of reviewing the literature related to the topic of my study, the work of Olivos (2006) was very enlightening, as it helped me think differently about parent engagement, especially the engagement of parents from minority communities. Olivos maintains that the kind of involvement that is privileged in a school relates to the kind of knowledge we value the most, and this depends on the context. For example, in rural areas, agricultural knowledge will be more important than having a PhD. In America, he explains, "knowledge is a commodity […] it is quantifiable and measurable" (p. 67); the more of it that you have (in certificates, diplomas, degrees) the better you are. This view

of knowledge leads to the devaluing of many parents of color and/or parents from low social classes, as they feel inferior compared to the dominant population. In accordance with other authors I previously mentioned, he claims that "parental involvement must be redefined using a paradigm that will provide the space for voice, access, and the democratic participation of subordinate communities in the process of education" (p. 104).

      Alternative models of parent engagement. Recently, several authors have questioned and revisited traditional models of parent involvement, like those presented by Vandergrift and Greene (1992) and have encouraged models that better suit the current student populations in American schools. For example, Delgado-Gaitan (1991) identified three models of parental involvement in her study of Latino parents in a school in California: conventional, nonconventional, and COPLA activities, or the Committee of Latino Parents. She defines these models as follows,

    1. Conventional parent involvement: this model corresponds to traditional parent involvement activities. This model represents domination on the part of the school that makes the family conform to pre-established norms.

    2. Non-conventional parent involvement: in this model, there is an attempt on the part of the school to share the power; it includes activities for the parents where they learn how to support their children's learning; however, the agendas are still decided by the school personnel.

    3. A model of empowerment: In this model parents do have the power to make decisions; they decide their own agendas and share the decision making process (about policies and practices) with the school personnel.

In this research, I will often refer to this last model of empowerment, because I believe this is the one that most genuinely engages parents in the education of their children.

Limited English Proficient students' parent involvement. The research on LEP students' parent involvement shows that the involvement of recent immigrant parents constitutes a very complex process that poses great challenges to American educators. Not only are there significant differences between families and schools in terms of language, but also in terms of culture, including sometimes very different views of what schooling should entail. Structural and cultural factors create different expectations and practices among these parents (Olivos, 2006).

Conflicting home and school identities may have an impact on ethnic and linguistic minority families' interactions with school actors and on LEP students' academic achievement. DaSilva Iddings and Katz (2007) argued that LEP students' sense of agency "may be harshly abridged by school practices that strictly predetermine ways of using the language, ways of interacting, and ways of being that may not in any way represent them nor reflect their out-of-school experiences (…); thus imposing rigid boundaries on home school identities" (p. 312). If this home-school relationship is analyzed under Bourdieu and Passeron's theory of cultural capital (1997), it is possible to say that this gap between home and school identities is an example of how the cultural capital that is privileged in American schools does not necessarily correspond to the cultural capital of immigrant families. Typically, the role of the school becomes that of helping these families to assimilate the cultural capital of the dominant group in order to succeed. Moreover, the more similar the immigrant family's cultural capital is to that privileged in schools, the easier and faster assimilation becomes.

Cultural differences between ethnic and linguistic minority families and schools are most evident in research findings about the conflicting perceptions and expectations of LEP students' parents and teachers in terms of parent involvement. In the following section, I discuss research on teacher's perceptions and expectations of parent's involvement, and then recent immigrant parent's perceptions and expectations of their own involvement and the role of schools. A discussion about this topic is necessary to illustrate how differences in cultural capital result in different perceptions, concerns, expectations, and practices.

Different Views of LEP Students' Parents' Involvement in their Children's Educational Experience

Teachers' understandings and expectations. Basically, nearly all the literature that I found about this topic is related to Latino parents. According to Quiocho and Daoud (2006), Latino parents are commonly held responsible for low-performing schools. School personnel perceive them as uneducated, unsupportive, passive and uncaring (Delgado-Gaitán, 1990; Hyslop, 2000; González et al. 2005; Quiocho & Daoud, 2006; Olivos, 2006). In the opinion of many teachers, Latino immigrant and migrant parents do not value education and therefore they do not have high academic standards (Valdés, 2005; Quiocho & Daoud, 2006).

For example, Quiocho and Daoud (2006) interviewed and observed a group of teachers and Latino parents as they participated in a school. Their study focused on the participants' perceptions of Latino parent participation. Four themes emerged from their findings in terms of the teachers' perceptions:

- "Latino parents not only were unreliable, but they refused to volunteer in the classroom,"
- "Latino parents did not support the school's homework policy because they would not help their children with homework,"
- "Latino parents did not care about schooling," and,
- "Latino parents were unskilled and unprofessional" (p. 260-261).

Researchers found that these opinions were associated with unexamined assumptions by the teachers and common stereotypes of the Latino community.

In general, school personnel label many Latino parents, especially those from low-income classes, as undereducated and uncaring. DaSilva Iddings and Kratz (2007), who also studied differences in teachers and Latino parents' perceptions of parent involvement, presented a comment from a teacher that shows how she constructed identities of non-competence based on preconceived assumptions:

I normally don't ask for any parent support for Octavio, unless his sister is there to help him […] I don't think either of his parents can read. I think that some of the parents [of ELLs] can't help their children succeed in school because they don't really have an insider's eye with regards to school. Many of them are not literate themselves so they don't know how to help their children. (p.310)

Delgado-Gaitán (1991) also found evidence of teacher's low expectations of Latino parents in her study of Latino parent empowerment. According to her findings, teachers considered that the parents who frequently communicated with them were harder working; they believed that communication was essential for the students' academic success than other parents. Delgado-Gaitán argues that often teachers attribute students'

learning problems to the parents when indeed the parents need the assistance from the teacher or a school professional to help their children in their learning process. She also states that many teachers ignore the culture of immigrant families and that this ignorance often caused them to make inappropriate recommendations or hold unrealistic expectations which further the parents and the teachers' frustration.

School personnel's ignorance of immigrant families' home culture as a factor that reinforces the creations of false assumptions is a topic that Lahman and Park (2004) discuss in their report of a multi-case study of East Asian parents' perspectives of their children's education in a preschool program. Lahman, a White preschool teacher, describes how her preconceived assumptions of the Islamic culture informed her actions in dealing with a Pakistani family:

When I taught a child from a Muslim Pakistani family I read a book on understanding Islamic culture, talked to other teachers who had worked with Muslim families and an expert at the local university on Islamic culture. I was too nervous to ask the parents of the child any specific cultural questions. Respecting the culture of the family and causing no conflict was so important to me that I essentially shut off communication. I received a wake–up call when a Hindi family informed me, contrary to my assumptions, that they didn't follow any religious eating customs. I realized that in my effort to understand the families I was inadvertently treating them with racism at worst and at best as a stereotype. By not involving the specific family in my quest for understanding, I was lumping the family into a vast culture that may not account for or represent the whole of who they are (p. 132).

Here, Lahman acknowledges how the lack of communication between the teachers and immigrant/sojourner families reinforces stereotypes and can result in treating diverse cultures in problematically monolithic ways.

Olivos (2006), who has done research on bicultural parent participation in schools, acknowledges that his former perceptions as a school teacher concerning bicultural parents were based on deficit thinking. He believed these parents did not value education and that they were not thankful for the effort that he, the teacher, was putting forth to help their children. However, as he started to interact more actively with a group of very active Latino parents, he understood that his assumptions were misinformed. He explains that,

> School personnel attach values to the social, economic, and cultural capital that parents and children bring to the school and these affect the quality of their relationship with them […] White, affluent parents are automatically bestowed high levels of social and cultural capital, thus when they have questions or concerns they are treated as social equals, if not "betters" by school personnel. Low-income bicultural parents, on the other hand, are viewed and treated as social inferiors and they are challenged and rebuffed when they have a concern (Olivos, 2006, p. 37)

What Olivos, as well as the other authors mentioned in this section, suggests is that school personnel need to critically examine their views of immigrant parents and the consequences of such views and ideas on their pedagogical actions, since many teachers make judgments about immigrant families based on stereotypes (Manning & Leroy, 2009). The decisions made based on such stereotypes become problematic when they

negatively affect the relationships between schools and immigrant families and student learning. Many American teachers judge the behaviors and actions of immigrant families based on the values of the cultural capital of the culture of power (Delpit, 1988).

LEP students' parents' understandings and expectations. The literature I reviewed concerning immigrant/sojourner parents' perceptions about their involvement mostly concentrates on the Latino community. This focus is a result of the researchers' concern for challenging the stereotypes imposed to Latino parents. Contrary to what many teachers believe, research on low-income Latino parents' involvement shows that they care and are involved in their children's education (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991, Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991; González et al., 2005; Olivos, 2006; Worthy & Rodriguez-Galindo, 2006), even though they have very little education in terms of U.S. standards (Worthy & Rodriguez-Galindo, 2006). In an ethnographic study of a Californian school about the perceptions of newly arrived Mexican students' teachers and parents, Delgado-Gaitan (1991) found that there are discrepancies between teachers' and low- income Latino parents' expectations. For example, she explained that while "the parents expected more instruction and frequent communication from the school, […] teachers expected the parents to take more the initiative to enquire about their child's progress on a regular basis" (p. 30).

Research on immigrant families' perceptions about the education of their children has also revealed that many of these parents are interested in adjusting to the culture while at the same time preserving their home culture's values (Lahman & Park, 2004; Worthy & Rodriguez-Galindo, 2006; Whitmore & Norton-Meier, 2008). This interest is common among Latino and Asian families. Research on Latino parents' perceptions and

expectations show that they are concerned with their children's bilingual education, since it allows them to maintain their native language and simultaneously learn English. For the parents, English is the language that will enable them to have access to greater opportunities that their parents have not been able to have.

While parents from different backgrounds expect their children to learn English to succeed academically and socially, they expect that their children preserve the values of the home culture. This is supported by Worthy & Rodriguez-Galindo (2006), who interviewed 16 Latino parents about their views of the impact of learning Spanish and English. These parents were not only concerned with the preservation of their values, but also with the preservation of the language used at home. Giacchino-Baker & Piller (2006) found the same concern among the parents of children in their second year participating in a two-way immersion bilingual program (Spanish-English). The purpose of this study was to research parent motivation and support to the program using a survey and follow-up interviews of parents, teachers, and school administrators. The researchers found that parents had a strong motivation to support the program and that they really wanted their children to be biliterate.

In her experience teaching a kindergarten class with students from all over the globe, Stark (2008) found the same motivation among the parents to support biliteracy; however, in their effort to help their children to succeed, they sometimes sacrifice their home language along with the cultural inheritance that is preserved through language. She explains that "knowledge of English will be useful, but in their [the parents'] eagerness to help their children, they risk overseeing something that is irreplaceable" (p. 3).

In their ethnographic study of Latino parent involvement in a school community in Arizona, Delgado-Gaitán and Trueba (1991) found that interviewed parents viewed education as the tool that their children needed to obtain a good job in the future as well as to preserve the cultural values inculcated by their parents. In terms of their own cultural values, parents felt that teachers were too permissive in terms of controlling student behavior. Parents also believed that it was important to learn English themselves in order to help their children with schoolwork and to secure their freedom and privacy.

The Asian parents interviewed by Lahman and Park (2004) also expressed their concern about their children becoming too "Americanized". They explained that they were interested in adjusting to the new culture without losing their own. Parents (graduate students coming from Korea and China) expressed their satisfaction with the parent involvement activities that the school implemented, but they felt discouraged because of their difficulty in communicating in English with school personnel. In addition, this communication barrier, which constrains parental involvement in school activities, is recognized by Latino parents (Ramirez, 2005; Colombo, 2006; Quiocho & Daoud, 2006; Worthy & Rodriguez-Galindo, 2006).

In terms of parents' perceptions of school parent involvement activities, Delgado-Gaitán (1990) found that many Mexican parents feel that the role that school personnel expect from them differs from the one that they had with schools in their home country. She focused on literacy activities at school and at home as well as the parents' participation in parent involvement events at the school. Some examples from her findings illustrate the differing perceptions of families and school personnel. For example, parents reported that they felt that the Open House did not provide enough time

to discuss their children's progress. They disagreed with the teachers in that the 20 minutes provided for the parent-teacher conference were sufficient to discuss the student's performance. Delgado-Gaitán asserts that parents need to be instructed about the skills they need to develop in order to effectively participate in these activities.

Pérez Carreón et al.(2005) who developed a 3-year research project in central Texas with 17 immigrant parents and other non specified number of nonimmigrant parents, report the stories of 3 of the Latino parents. They investigated "how parents living in high-poverty urban centers perceive their school engagement experiences" (p. 471). The 17 parents (13 mothers and 4 fathers) were the ones who answered a call to participate in what the researchers called "conversation groups" (p. 472). Three conversation rounds were held in Spanish around a subtheme (this was a very common strategy in the research projects reviewed in this chapter). After these conversations took place, parents were invited to come back for a series of 6 meetings that were called talleres. These talleres were organized around three themes: platicamos (where parents discussed findings from conversation teams), trabajamos (where parents worked in small groups to generate personal experiences with immigration and school participation), and contamos (where parents shared their stories with the rest of the group).

I include in this section three stories that Pérez Carreón et al. (2005) refer to in this article because they constitute an example of the contradictions that are often implicit in the parent engagement process. The three participants reported here are Celia, Pablo, and Isabel. Celia was a woman from El Salvador in her forties, a mother of three children, but only one of them was living with her and her husband. Even though she actively participated in school activities, Celia reported that "many times she felt that the

school neither respected nor truly valued her presence" (p. 474). She talked about her problems communicating with school personnel. Also, she felt disrespected during the PTA meetings; she felt that the only role expected from the parents was to pay fees. The authors explain "Absent in the principal's and teachers' discourse was acknowledgement that highly engaged parents might be positioned as outsiders and might perceive a lack of respect by the present structures of the school, both interactional and discursive" (Pérez Carreón et al., 2005, p. 475). When Celia was asked if teachers had asked for her opinion concerning decisions about her child's education, she answered 'no.'

Pablo was a Mexican man in his thirties. Like Celia, he actively participated in school activities, but still, he felt like an outsider. Because of his limited proficiency in English, he feared that when communicating with the school personnel, they would see him as incompetent. He said that he did not receive enough support from his child's teacher, who did not inform him well about the child's progress. Pablo also engaged in other ways in his children's education: teaching them how to grow a vegetable garden, or how to play soccer. However, the school did not recognize this kind of engagement.

Isabel, a Mexican mother of three, discussed the challenges of being an immigrant and how she had lost confidence because she lacked the cultural knowledge to interact in this new context. She felt powerless. Through participation in this research, and through her interactions with other Spanish-speaking parents, she was able to gain the knowledge she needed.

The cases of Celia, Pablo, and Isabel show that even when parents were involved in their children's education according to the school's standards, they felt disempowered and invisible. Pérez Carreón et al. (2005) concluded that, in all three cases, parents tried

to establish a relationship with the school in ways that they deemed significant; through communication, they wanted to gain knowledge about the school in order to help their children, but this communication was not always successful.

In conclusion, research shows that immigrant parents value their children's schooling. They believe that it is important so that their children gain access to the resources that will grant them a good future. Many parents engage in their children's education in ways they have traditionally done in their home culture. However, parents and researchers find that these ways are not always valued in American schools. Even in the case of parents who engage in school planned activities, they feel they are not being empowered to participate more actively. So, while teachers perceive parents as disengaged and disinterested, parents believe that they are motivated to assist their children, but often their efforts do not coincide with the expectations of school personnel. Communication barriers are a persistent concern.

Reasons for LEP students' parents' lack of involvement in school-driven activities. Even though many LEP parents have a genuine interest in participating in their children's education, often they do not engage in the activities the school prepares and carries out in order to get them involved. A variety of interrelated factors account for why parents may not be active in school driven activities:

- Lack of time due to work obligations (Careaga, 1988; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Olivos, 2006). Researchers have found that often low income immigrant parents have to work two shifts so they can afford a decent life. Olivos (2006) argues that these parents often work under conditions in which they have neither luxury of making decisions about

their work schedules nor the luxury of missing some hours of work, because they need the money.

- Differing views about authority (Vandergrift & Greene, 1992). In other cultures, parents are more inclined to believe that they do not have any authority to interfere in school activities or decisions; doing so could be an act of disrespect.

- Lack of self-confidence (Careaga, 1988; Hyslop, 2000) due to language barriers, or differences in educational attainment among the parents. The parents' level of education as well as their position in the job market affects the way that parents see themselves in relation to the school (Delgado-Gaitán, 1990).

- A sense of powerlessness (Vandergrift & Greene, 1992; Hyslop, 2000). Delgado-Gaitan (1991) argues that many recent immigrant families living in poor economic conditions and are marginalized from the school, and this generates a communication gap between the two. As parents feel powerless, the sense of knowledge and authority that they enjoyed in their home cultures is "silenced and undermined, [and consequently, LEP students] could be left with little recourse for coping with everyday challenges" (DaSilva Iddings & Katz, 2007, p. 311). Even in the case of parents who communicated more frequently with the schools, like some of those interviewed by Delgado-Gaitán (1990), they felt frustrated because they continuously faced obstacles and did not find the support to organize their efforts.

The communication gap between parents and schools is not just a result of the differences in languages spoken (like Spanish vs. English, or Arabic vs. English). As Bourdieu and Passeron (1997) found in their research of French students from different socio-economic classes, there is a linguistic capital that is acquired in schools (the

language that is used in academe). Sometimes parents, depending on social origin (their social, economic, educational, and cultural background) are not familiar with this language. It is often the case that parents and school personnel do not possess the same linguistic capital, and when this occurs, the result is a cultural and communication conflict. If parents do not possess the cultural capital that is valued in schools, their dialogue is likely to be silenced (Delpit, 1988). In order to communicate with the parents, Delgado-Gaitán (1990) argues, the school needs to use the parents' language and teach them about the ways that the school operates, especially if parents are expected to participate in the school's decision making process. Delgado-Gaitán (1990) and Pérez Carreón et al. (2005) explain that many immigrant parents lack the linguistic knowledge to cope with very specific situations, like talking to a teacher or requesting a schedule change.

In the preface to Delgado-Gaitán, and Trueba (1991), DeVos and Suárez-Orozco argue that "poverty, linguistic limitations, and lack of knowledge of the social patterns of the majority population […] limit or prevent parents from feeling part of the system in which the school operates or is supposed to operate" (p. 6). Language is an instrument of power and social intercourse, and if parents lack proficiency in dominant languages (e.g., English, or the academic language used in the school), their relationship with the school and schooling might be negatively affected. At the same time, language is essential in the preservation of cultural values (Delgado-Gaitán & Trueba, 1991; Lee & Bowen, 2006)

Cultural differences often remain unexplored by teachers and school administrators. These cultural differences include different forms in which immigrant parents and American teachers communicate with LEP students; for example, in the case

of many Latino parents, they use a more direct style than that of U.S. American teachers (Quiocho & Daoud, 2006). Moreover, as I previously discussed, there are also differences in the meaning of parental involvement for different cultures (Valdes, 1996 as cited in Quiocho & Daoud, 2006), and differences in values that are important for each culture; for instance, interdependence and collaboration are prioritized more in Asian (Lahman & Park, 2004) and Latino cultures (Gonzalez et al, 2005) than in the U.S.

Successful strategies to involve LEP parents. In order to participate more actively in school-organized activities, parents need to be provided with information about the American school system and how it works, as well as information about their rights and responsibilities (Delgado-Gaitán, 1990; Pérez Carreón et al., 2005). Parents need to be educated, for example, about the protocol for asking questions to the school personnel, as well as the right time and place to do this (Delgado-Gaitán, 1990). Again, school personnel should communicate this using the parents' language.

In this section, I present several examples of programs and activities that were intended to engage parents to participate more actively in their children's education. I selected these examples because they are successful in going beyond what is traditionally expected from the relationship between schools and parents. Pérez Carreón et al. (2005) put forth that

> Successful engagement experiences are not related to parents' personality traits (i.e., some parents can do it and some parents cannot); instead, they are the result of a process in which parents and schools interact in particular spaces, using specific forms of capital, to create a level of engagement that truly benefits a child's school experiences (p. 471).

The successful strategies I includ here are the result of such processes; they take into consideration linguistic and cultural differences and they use these differences in a way that values the contributions of ethnic and linguistic minority families. One of the themes that is recurrent across different studies is the need for effective communication (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). Kauffman et al. (2001) explain that an important step in developing effective communication is translating the communications from the schools to the families (handouts, phone messages, etc) into their native language. Also, hiring bilingual staff, aides, parental advocates, and home visiting personnel, could be a great support. Green (2005) argues that it is very important to keep this communication as a "two-way venture" (p. 51); that is, maintaining a communication that does not only go from the school to the homes, but also from the homes to schools.

Another important component of effective parent involvement referred to in the literature is English instruction through ESL, bilingual programs, or family literacy programs (Kauffman et al., 2001; Green, 2005). Kauffman et al. (2001) state that for these programs to succeed, several conditions need to be provided, including appropriate schedules, child care, and an interpreter. Parents also need to receive instruction about "bilingual and multicultural materials" (Kauffman et al., 2001, p. 7), and resources that help parents assist their children with their education (Green, 2005).

For example, Medina-Jerez et al. (2007), in their discussion of how parents can help LEP students succeed in science, recommend implementing "[p]arent-to-parent and parent-to-teacher workshops […] to facilitate information (in various languages) on science related issues, such as health, environment, and planning for careers in science" (p. 55-56). Green (2005) also suggests organizing a "Curriculum Fair to give parents a

better understanding of the curriculum that is being taught, and how they can become involved" (p. 51).

Hyslop (2000) provides examples of projects and programs across the nation that helped Hispanic parents become more involved in an ERIC digest entry. These projects include a program that helps newly arrived students adjust to the new culture; a project to help parents to develop "a portfolio with their child's literacy development which reflected literacy behavior at home" (p. 2); and other literacy programs for both students and parents, where parents and children develop their English literacy skills together.

Green (2005) emphasized the importance of "ask[ing] parents to be involved" and "avoid[ing] making judgments about the apparent lack of interest of parents' in their child's education" (p. 58). Again, communication is a very important component of effective parental involvement because it helps dispel the myths and biases held by teachers and parents. Delgado-Gaitán (1991) tells us that once "congruency exists between home and school settings, children have a greater chance of succeeding in school" (p. 21).

There is research showing that efforts have been made to engage ethnic linguistic minority parents by simultaneously privileging their cultures and their cultural capital. The research that I reviewed focuses on Latino parent engagement. As I explained earlier, I am using the term "engagement" rather that "involvement" because it encompasses the parents' "orientations and how [these] orientations frame the things they do" (p. 467). In other words, engagement is not the involvement in a specific activity (often imposed by schools); engagement goes beyond this involvement and takes into account, for example, the parents' cultural capital that affects the decisions they make.

The cases I present next are examples of this engagement. They also correspond to Delgado-Gaitan's (1991) third model of parental involvement that I explained earlier; this model "involves an autonomous group of parents who set their own agendas and design a context in which they invite the school personnel to share decision making about programs, policies, and practices related to the education of their children" (p. 40). I focus on activities of this type since traditional or conventional parent involvement activities do not provide occasions for the parents to learn how the school operates or for them to develop the skills they need to help their children at home.

Examples of successful LEP parent involvement programs

Parent Partnership for Achieving Literacy. The Parent Partnership for Achieving Literacy (PAL) was a project funded by a federal grant that was developed in a school district in Massachusetts (Colombo, 2006) with the purpose of bridging the gap between the school and immigrant families. The program used two strategies. First, it offered teachers professional development opportunities "to enhance their cultural awareness and improve their knowledge of the strengths and needs of the children and their families" (p. 316). Second, through workshops, meetings, and written messages, PAL helped diverse families "to understand the expectations of mainstream teachers and schools" (p. 316). Parents, teachers, the PAL director and university faculty structured the program activities together. Parent coordinators, who were parents with a better understanding of the project's goals, worked as the liaisons between the school and the families and assisted other parents in helping educate their children. The program has helped to improve LEP students' academic achievement, to engage parents in school activities, and to break down teachers' misconceptions about LEP students and their parents.

Bethune-Chavez Academy. In this school, the active participation of minority parents enhanced a very active parent council, led to a better attendance rate among students, and resulted in the reclassification of LEP students "as English proficient at the beginning of their sophomore year" (Levine et al., 2008, p. 29). The principal and teachers created a system where teachers became "advisers". In their new role as advisers, teachers were expected to inquire about their students' and their families' cultures. The administration supported this work by allowing more release time for teachers to plan and to rehearse the discussions that they eventually had with parents during home visits (which included an interpreter if necessary).

Fair Oaks. In this Californian school, ethnographer Delgado-Gaitán (2005) observed and interviewed a group of working class women of color who met at the local library to join their daughters in a computer literacy class. These mothers discussed ways to support their daughters' education. They came from different countries in Central America. Although they were very enthusiastic about having their children educated in the US, they had never imagined the challenges for them as mothers in terms of language, culture, and the differences in schooling. Through their conversations, they learned about adolescent development and the school system from the program coordinator, increased their English proficiency and their self-esteem, and some became more computer-literate. As a result, their daughters became more academically and socially confident in their schools.

Parent empowerment in Carpinteria, California. Delgado-Gaitán (1990, 1991) conducted an earlier ethnographic study of two non-conventional California-state-funded parental involvement programs: the Bilingual Preschool Program and the Migrant

Program. In the Bilingual Preschool Program, the teacher instructed the parents in their

monthly meetings about the teaching methods she used to develop literacy among the

students. "In essence, Mrs. Baca (the teacher) designed a preschool curriculum that

included teaching parents how to be her coteachers" (p 28). To do this, she used the

families' native language, and incorporated these families' cultural capital "so that

children would value their language, culture, and heritage" (p. 2 9). She also included

parents in the decision-making process in the classroom, which empowered them to

participate more actively in their children's education.

The Migrant Program involved 100 participant families who met four times a

year. They discussed themes selected by the director of the program that related to the

basic needs of these families, like immigration and alcoholism. The presentations were

conducted in Spanish. The experience of empowerment of parents participating in the

Bilingual Preschool Program motivated them to actively participate in the Migrant

Program; indeed, they organized a group with Spanish-speaking parents with the purpose

of motivating other parents who did not engage in school activities. They called this

group the "Comité de Padres Latinos -COPLA." The purpose of these parents, who were

already engaged in school activities, was to engage the parents who participated less.

They got together to act on behalf of other parents who shared the same concerns.

Delgado-Gaitán (1990) explained that "[e]ach time they met the parents understood that

the task of organizing was meaningful because it meant a commitment to their children"

(p. 149). Parents not only became literate in terms of school activities and processes, but

they also learned how to conduct and participate in meetings. They expressed their

concerns and became more confident to share their responsibility to obtain the needed

information. In this study, Delgado-Gaitán (1990) also found that the parents who were more literate in terms of the school culture and expectations had the tendency to be more engaged.

Parent Empowerment

A common theme among these programs and experiences is their successful attempts to enhance parent empowerment. Through these programs and activities, parents became more literate, not only in terms of the English language, but also in terms of the structure and expectations of the American educational system. Delgado-Gaitán & Trueba (1991) defined empowerment as

> The process of acquiring power, or the process or transition from lack of control to the acquisition of control over one's life and immediate environment. Therefore, empowerment is equated with the possession of power to act or to effect something by participating in a given activity, or by acquiring social status associated with the enjoyment of human rights and privileges universally and crossculturally recognized as universally accorded to all members of the human race (p. 138)

Delgado-Gaitan (1991) argued that a central component of parent empowerment is a "critical reflection process" that engages people in a careful examination of the assumptions that lie behind self, family, and institutional norms, values, policies, and decisions that direct our lives (p. 34). Through empowerment, there is a realization that one can control her own destiny by controlling one's access to knowledge (which positively affects self-concept). As this knowledge is accessed, one becomes confident to participate. Exercising this right to participate is a democratic right.

Delgado-Gaitan (1991) found that, as a result of the critical reflection the immigrant parents engaged in, they were able to

- share their personal experience of isolation in schools in the United States

- learn from others

- identify and confront biases that constrained their participation and involvement, and

- "realize that the knowledge required to participate in their children's education was acquired in social contexts" (p. 34).

There is an excerpt that Delgado-Gaitán (1991) used in her report taken from a conversation between one of the parents and the school principal that illustrates well the empowerment gained by a parent as a result of this experience:

I see that you [principal] have your priorities for this school and as Latino parents we want to help you, but we don't want to be called just for fund-raising activities. We are organized to share with each other what we know about our children's education and we need your help and that of the teachers to talk to us about educational issues (p. 34).

According to Delgado-Gaitán (1991), programs that encourage parent empowerment like COPLA do not necessarily resolve the frictions between parents and school personnel. She also states that for parent empowerment to occur, teachers need to have release time to meet with the parents, and principals need funding to hire bilingual personnel and to provide a complete parent education program.

DeVos and Suárez-Orozco (1991) explain that empowerment is necessary to the exercise of democracy. In order to operate in a democracy, "an awareness of being a

subject, a possible initiator of action needs to be awakened" (Delgado-Gaitán & Trueba, 1991, p. 7); therefore, parents need to be provided with the knowledge they need to develop this awareness. DeVos and Suárez-Orozco (1991) also explain that when parents share their knowledge in relation to the school and their children's education, they are also building a consciousness of their rights and responsibilities; that is, they educate and empower one another by dialoguing about their experience; they challenge the social isolation that leads to a sense of passivity, helplessness, and inferiority when they organize (also in Lee & Bowen, 2006).

Olivos (2006) developed a study on a small group of Latino parents who organized separately from the school after several failed attempts to dialogue with the school administration about their concerns. He observed how the parents developed a political consciousness as they got poor responses from the school administration; he explains, "When they began to experience a personal experience dissonance between their lived experiences and what the school promoted as meaningful parent involvement, they began to realize the insincerity of the school's parent involvement policies and practices" (p. 5). Resilience and persistence got them their victory in trying to be heard—resilience because it was the treatment that they received from the school administration that motivated them to claim their rights to participate as parents. The group that Olivos refers to was initiated by four mothers, one father and one grandmother. These parents were actively involved but constantly felt that their presence was invisible to the school staff.

Peterson (2007) also found that resilience motivated parents to organize. Peterson, a former fifth grade teacher, described how in spite of the difficulties they had to face in

communicating with the administration, a group of parents and teachers organized and created a bilingual program in a school in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to respond to the needs of a mostly Latino community. They also demanded a change in the administration; parents became part of the school government. Peterson explained that many parents became involved; they made sure that there were seats in the management council for African American and Latino parents. They also redirected money from their budget (collected through fund raising activities) to hire two part-time parent organizers (one African American and one Latino); they paid parents to participate in a writing workshop (Peterson, 2007). One lesson they learned from this experience is that schools need to promote genuine opportunities for parent involvement. Peterson asked, "Do parents exert real power during their time spent in schools?" (p. 52). However, he cautions that "empowering parents at times seem to work against the principles of a democratic school because some parents' ideas are neither progressive nor democratic" (p. 52); therefore, structures need to be created that ensure possibilities for genuine dialogue and ongoing debate, "and these structures must not privilege those people with college education or more free time" (p. 53).

Conclusion

The increasing immigrant/sojourner population is posing significant challenges to American schools, including the education of limited-English proficient students, whose academic achievement is typically lower compared to that of White American students. One of the strategies suggested by researchers in order to compensate the lack of teacher preparation and bilingual personnel necessary to assist LEP students succeed academically is parent involvement. Conventional activities to involve parents include

parent-teacher conferences, Parent-Teacher Organizations—PTOs, open houses, etc.

According to Delgado-Gaitán (1991) and Olivos (2006) among others, such activities do

not empower parents to genuinely engage in their children's education, but rather, create

a greater dependence on school decisions.

I share Delgado-Gaitán's (1991) and Olivos'(2006) assertion that genuine parent

engagement strategies should truly empower parents so that they are able to not simply

support the already existing school activities and policies, but also to be part of the

decision making process, because this process is what a true democratic society entails,

genuine participation. I believe that parents become empowered as a result of

constructing shared meanings of their identities, their children's learning, and the

American culture. This empowerment, as I see it in the studies I reviewed for this

chapter, helps them develop a new sense of self-agency that is necessary to participate in

helping their children and themselves to learn.

From this review of the literature, I conclude that research on LEP student

academic achievement should challenge deficit thinking models and should put forth

models that encourage scholars and educators to revisit paradigms of culture as they

relate to the negotiations of meaning that school-families relationships entail and that

affect the educational experience of the new American youth. Research on this field

should also revisit the roles of parents and educators in the education of language and

ethnic minority students; these roles should be understood not as mere responsibilities of

individuals, but essential for school communities within the constraints and possibilities

offered by the context the United States and the challenges of the 21st century

(immigration, a global economic crisis, war, advances in technology, etc.). We –parents,

educators, researchers, legislators—need to commit to new solutions that ensure the well being of every one of us.

The challenge that my review of the literature sets up for my research is that I will need to be reflective about ways in which school driven parent involvement activities empower parents to actively participate in the education of their children. Also, I will need to be reflective about ways in which different cultural stereotypes may affect the ways in which the school personnel relate to families of different cultural backgrounds in a multilingual/multiethnic school. One aspect of this relationship that has been little explored is how the school copes with cultural differences (given the stereotypes of over and under achievement) and how these also relate to socio economic status and social capital. Most of the studies I reviewed were located in bilingual communities that were to some extent homogeneous in terms of income. By contrast, my study is located in a context where families not only come from different countries but different socio-economic backgrounds. Many of the graduate students who were parents of LEP students in the school had a graduate degree and came from middle to upper socio economic backgrounds, whereas most of the Mexican parents did not possess a high level of educational attainment and work on farms. The theories that I discuss in the following chapter, Bourdieu and Passeron's (1997) notion of cultural capital and González and collegues' (2001, 2005) funds of knowledge approach helped me understand relationships of cultural capital, family knowledge, parent empowerment, and LEP student academic achievement.

CHAPTER 3: CULTURAL CAPITAL OF LINGUISTIC AND ETHNIC MINORITY FAMILIES AND ITS EFFECTS ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Cultural Capital and the Culture of Power

One of the most researched issues in the sociology of education is the question to what extent social background influences educational achievement (Dijkstra & Peschar, 2003, p. 59). As I explained in earlier chapters, there are several theories that have been used to explain the achievement gap between White students and students of color. One of those theories or explanations is Bourdieu and Passeron's (1997) notion of cultural capital. They define cultural capital as "the cultural goods transmitted by the different family [pedagogic actions], whose value qua cultural capital varies with the distance between the cultural capital imposed by the dominant [pedagogic action] and the cultural arbitrary inculcated by the family [pedagogic action] within the different groups or classes" (p. 30).

There are several aspects of this definition that are important to explain. First, there is an idea that cultural goods are transmitted through what they call "pedagogic action", which is basically education, either formal (institutionalized) or informal (outside of institutions). Second, there is recognition of a dominant pedagogic action, which is comparable to what Delpit (2006) calls "the culture of power". The culture of power is the dominant group within a society; she explains that the rules of the culture of power are a reflection of the rules of the culture of those in power, so for example their ways of talking, writing, dressing, and interacting constitute codes or rules for participating in

power. Delpit argues that those who are members of the dominant group are frequently least aware of, or at least willing to acknowledge, its existence (p. 39).

Bourdieu and Passeron (1997) claim that the education provided by schools reproduces the dominant culture (its values), which contributes to the reproduction of the power relations embedded in that culture. For them, this process is a symbolic act of violence (p. 6) that does not necessitate the presence of obligation or punishment, because it is actually more successful if a "soft approach" (p. 17) is used (an example they provide is the use of diminutives and affectionate qualifiers by American teachers in elementary school).

In this discussion, Bourdieu and Passeron introduce the concept of "habitus," which I understand as the set of contents and practices that are valued within a specific culture and that is product of education or training. Their critique of schools is that their pedagogic work tends to inculcate a habitus that is distant from the habitus inculcated by pedagogic work within the family, which is the same argument that other researchers cited in this chapter have offered. The distance between students' families' habitus and the habitus inculcated by the school determines the student's possibilities for academic and social success. Building on what Grenfell & James (1998) and Lareu & Horvat(1999) argue, Lee and Bowen (2006) explain that "when an individual's habitus is consistent with the field in which he or she is operating, that is, when the field [a structured system of social relations at a micro and macro level] is familiar to and understood by the individual, he or she enjoys a social advantage" (p. 197). Similarly, parents' educational habitus may determine their level of involvement in schools, as it has been demonstrated by some of the research reviewed here.

Bourdieu and Passeron (1997) studied how cultural capital operated in working class students who entered higher education programs that were often selected by middle to upper class youths. They found a relationship between social-class background and academic performance; students from the working class had to prove their abilities in contrast to those from upper classes who came to higher education having a social and linguistic capital that enable them to succeed (their habitus resembled the habitus of academe; their linguistic capital was closer to the academe language than that of the students from the working class). Conversely, in order to succeed in higher education working class students had to "manifest exceptional abilities." (p. 83).

Bourdieu and Passeron claim that a traditional kind of pedagogy actually addresses only those students who have the linguistic and social capital presupposed by that educational system. They go on to say that the school betrays the public by reproducing certain cultural capital only because it is as if schools choose which students they want to educate; they are the "public which could be satisfied with the institution because it satisfied the institution's demands from the outset" (p. 100). This practice is problematic not only because it reproduces the status quo, but also because it creates the illusion among those who do not possess the 'correct' habitus that it is their fault that they lack what they need. Bourdieu and Passeron (1997) explain,

> This privileged instrument of the bourgeois sociodicy which confers on the privileged the supreme privilege of not seeing themselves as privileged manages more easily to convince the disinherited that they owe their scholastic and social destiny to their lack of gifts or merits, because in matters of culture absolute dispossession excludes awareness of being dispossessed (p. 210).

This kind of deficit thinking is the idea upon which many school-families partnership efforts have been built. They entail a belief that there is something that needs to be fixed in the families that do not possess the cultural capital that schools expect and this is why they are frequently subjected to practices that aim at reforming and educating them and this is when a paternalistic treatment often works (Olivos, 2006).

Cultural Capital and Ethnic/Linguistic Minority Families

There are several other authors who have addressed the centrality of cultural capital to the relationship between schools and ethnic and linguistic families. In the United States, these families' linguistic and social practices differ significantly from the mainstream values and behaviors that are usually expected in the schools (Delgado-Gaitán & Trueba, 1991; Pérez Carreón et al., 2005; Lee and Bowen, 2006; Olivos, 2006). The problem that many immigrant/sojourner children and their families are facing is that they have to deal with different sets of values; for example, whereas some families emphasize cooperative work at home, most American schools reinforce competitive attitudes. Therefore, students need to engage in a sort of code-switching from cooperation to competition (Delgado-Gaitán & Trueba, 1991; Nasir & Hand, 2006).

What social and cultural capital theories bring to the issue of LEP students' academic achievement and their parents' engagement is the consideration that their achievement should be explained not only in terms of English proficiency. The academic experience of these students can easily be frustrated not only because they do not speak English fluently, but also because they are not familiar with the formal language and cultural expectations of the academe. Olivos (2006) suggests that we cannot assume that bicultural families are not offering their children tools to succeed, but that "American

society places greater worth on the cultural and social capital of middle- and upper- class whites" (Olivos, 2006, p. 48).

Pérez Carreón et al (2005) maintain that the celebration and reproduction of certain cultural capital happens even though educators have the best intentions for these students. They explain that one way to challenge the disenfranchisement of bicultural/immigrant/sojourner families is to create a dialogue with them whereby their cultural capital informs schools work. They state that,

> As immigrant parents gradually adapt their identities and practices to life in the United States, they also influence life in this country, including the cultural worlds of schools. If schools continue, even with the best intentions, to implement parental participation programs without listening to parents' voice their participation needs and hopes, these programs will remain stagnant and do little to reduce the marked distance between home and school (p. 494)

I would like to describe a few studies that address the effects of cultural discrepancies in the education of LEP students, as these help to contextualize theories of cultural capital.

Delgado-Gaitán and Trueba (1991) studied eleven Hispano families in a town on the borderlands that they nicknamed Secoya over a period of three years. The Hispano population in this town is for the most part made of Mexican Americans. Researchers focused on first generation immigrants and the behaviors and socialization process of these immigrant children at school and at home. They conducted observations of home, play and classroom activities; they also conducted interviews with adults in the home and school. They found that the Hispano children enjoyed school, even though they still felt alienated because instruction was not enabling them to participate more actively in their

education. They also found that "children's interactions in their home, community and classroom enhance their ability to learn within the respective conditions in those respective settings" (p. 142).

Delgado-Gaitán and Trueba (1991) concluded that "culture became a source of conflict in the classroom when the children's cultural values and language were ignored as they attempted to participate in their own learning" (p. 160). They argue that the educators failed to address the needs of these students because they tended to view culture as right or wrong.

Patterson & Heywood's (2007) study also addresses issues of cultural capital in the education of LEP students. They studied the perceptions of teachers, principals, and minority-language parents concerning the contributions of immigrant families' linguistic, social, and cultural capital to the development of literacy among minority language children. Just as I found in my review of the relevant literature, they argue that most studies in this subject have focused on parents of one particular cultural group or country of origin. Therefore, they focused their study on parents who came to Canada from Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East. They explain that "examined together, the perspectives of parents, teachers, and principals allow for a broader and richer understanding of ways in which parents and schools can work together to support ESL students' literacy development" (p. 519), which is indispensable in academic achievement in general.

Just as other authors cited in this review have argued, Paterson and Heywood (2007) claim that students who possess the social and cultural capital of the dominant culture do better than students who do not. Immigrant children possess different forms of

social capital that are often not valued in the dominant culture in American schools. They defined social capital as "the types of interactions and support that parents provide their children" (p. 521).

In their study, Patterson and Heywood interviewed 12 teachers, 10 principals, and 23 parents of K-8 students who had immigrated to Canada and analyzed the data using the deficit model as a reference. That is, they explored the extent to which the responses of participants collected reflected deficit thinking, meaning that the academic failure of students was attributed to something families lack of. Deficit thinking is not only what may happen among school administrators or teachers, but also among parents, who may believe that they, indeed, are the ones to blame for their children's academic failure. They specify some of the assumptions of this deficit model that I believe important to understand:

1. Parents' culture and socioeconomic status determines to what extent they are able to support their children's education

2. The linguistic capital of minority language parents cannot contribute to the children's literacy development in English.

3. Minority language parents do not use any literacy development practices at home.

4. Literacy development depends on the parents as models. Sometimes, more often than not, it is children who help parents develop their literacy in English.

Patterson and Heywood (2007) found that the participants' responses in interviews supported this deficit thinking model. For example, teachers and principals believed that "parents' social capital hindered their efforts to support their children's

literacy" (p. 525). However, they also found that all participants highly valued immigrant families' linguistic capital. They all agreed on the importance of developing their native language to support their learning of English. All participants believed that the socioeconomic status, along with the level of education, time, and resources, affected the parents' support of their children's literacy development, including those parents who were highly educated and had to work multiple jobs.

Patterson and Heywood (2007) further found that the literacy strategies that many parents used at home maintained the traditions of their home countries, that is, they would use the same strategies parents use in their countries of origin, including purchasing the grade 1 textbook used in China, writing e-mails to friends in Israel, or preferring practice rather than a textbook, as it is the custom in Egypt and Serbia. Still, several parents did not feel confident to help with homework, as reported by a parent from Sri Lanka and another from Taiwan.

What these two studies show, as well as others mentioned in this chapter and the previous one, is that efforts that aim to help ethnic and linguistic minority students to succeed academically and socially should also recognize the value of their families' culture. Schools need to appreciate ethnic and linguistic minority families' culture as an asset rather than a deficit measured in terms of the American White, middle class culture. Delpit (2006) puts forward that "there is a political game that is being played" (p. 40); she argues that minority families do need to learn the additional codes of power, but not passively; "they must be able to understand the value of the code they already possess as well as to understand the power realities in this country" (p. 40).

Schools' Use of Families' Funds of Knowledge

González and her colleagues (2001, 2005) have further developed research with

Latino families using a theoretical framework that Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg (former

professors of theirs) called "funds of knowledge." This is a concept that has not only been

used in research with unprivileged populations in the United States (González et al, 2001;

Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Colombo, 2006; Whitmore & Norton-Meier, 2008),

but also in England (Thomson & Hall, 2008), and Australia (Smyth et al, 2008). Funds of

knowledge are the "cultural and behavioral practices" generated within the home

(Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005, p. 49). They are the knowledges embedded in

community and family practices (Thomson & Hall, 2008) that are often neglected in

schools.

Funds of knowledge is a concept different from that of culture because funds of

knowledge is more specific "to the social, economic, and productive activities of people

in a local region" that they seek to incorporate strategically into classrooms (Gonzalez,

Moll, & Amanti, 2005, p. 85). For Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti, the concept of culture, in

the broad anthropological sense, does not explain the knowledge constructed within the

families that is shaped by history and context.

Advocates of the funds of knowledge approach reject traditional ideas of culture,

because culture has been used in deficit theories that explain educational failure, the idea

that certain cultures do not encourage achievement. González claims that the paradigm

that maintains that the families' culture is different from the school culture uses an

integrated view of culture, where all members of a particular cultural group share the

same traits. Therefore, the funds of knowledge is a postmodern perspective of local

knowledge, because the funds of knowledge are not perceived as something fixed but rather, funds that are always evolving and changing (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005).

González and her collegues (2001, 2005) studied the complex funds of knowledge that Mexican American families and communities along the borderlands have developed in their comings back and forth the two cultures. González, an anthropologist, and Luis Moll, an educational researcher, encourage teachers to become ethnographers by learning about their student's families' funds of knowledge (González et al, 2001; Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005).

Research using a funds of knowledge approach recognizes the cultural richness that immigrant families bring into schools and encourages parents' empowerment by privileging their voices. For example, in Gonzalez et al.'s study about distributed funds of knowledge in mathematics (2001), the researchers exposed ways in which Latino parents resolved complex mathematical operations in their daily activities, for example, in the case of one mother, when making a pattern for a dress (she was a tailor). This kind of knowledge, although valuable, is not typically recognized in schools. For Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti (2005), immigrant parents are competent, they have knowledge and skills that they have acquired through their life experiences and that is essential for household or their individual functioning and well being.

González et al. (2001) and Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti (2005) have not only worked with immigrant families but also with the teachers of their children, since one of their main purposes has been to teach teachers how to become ethnographers of their students' families so that their funds of knowledge inform their pedagogic practices. Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti (2005) are critical of discourses of critical pedagogy that do

not take into consideration the structural constraints that limit the work of these teachers that not only disempower parents to engage in their children's education but that also disempower the teachers themselves. They argue that such discourses "have often become circumscribed within academic circles, peripheral to the very people they purport to affect because of a turgid literary style and an apparent lack of connection to everyday life in classrooms" (p. 3).

In their study of Mexican immigrant families' funds of knowledge, Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti (2005) with the participating teachers, learned ethnography by doing ethnography. They followed these steps:

1. Reading ethnographic literature

2. Role-playing of the field work teachers would be doing

3. Being a good observer, paying attention to detail.

They carried out home visits in order to better understand the households' funds of knowledge and create ways to use these funds in the classrooms. As they approached the homes, they looked for other cues in the surrounding areas.

Gonzalez explains that, in the households, life isn't still so they could observe, but full of events that informed the ethnographers about the family's value system and knowledge. When they were 'training' for developing observation skills, they realized how their funds of knowledge often "colored and filtered" their perception of what goes on (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005, p. 10). They tried to avoid ideas of culture and focused more on ideas of practice.

The researchers used "a combination of ethnographic observations, open-ended interviewing strategies, life histories, and case studies that, when combined analytically,

can portray accurately the complex functions of households within their sociohistorical contexts" (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005, p. 71). The interviews emerged more as a type of conversation rather than a formal protocol. They wanted to ensure that parents were convinced that there was a genuine interest in the researchers to understand the families' lives.

They did three visits using three different questionnaires. The first questionnaire was about family history and labor history (why were they there, what were their family roots, etc.). The second interview was about the family routine, including questions about the kinds of literacy involved in this routine (like mathematical literacy). The third interview was about how parents viewed their roles as parents and caretakers. They were also asked about their school experiences and how they compared to their children's school experience, and about the language they used at home, when, and why. Because the teachers conducting the interviews were of different backgrounds, the ones who did not speak Spanish had the assistance of a bilingual teacher of a bilingual paraprofessional. Most interviews were held in both English and Spanish. They audio-taped the interviews and also collected field notes.

The lead researchers and the teacher-researchers wanted to understand the families' knowledge in their own terms rather than as a reflection of group knowledge. They wanted to re-discover the families through an open dialogue between the teachers and the parents.

In referring to her visit to one of the families, Tenery, one of the teachers reported,

It is only by experiencing the same type of unease that someone from the outside

can understand the family's daily anxiety. The fact that teachers are willing to

move out their comfort zone is key to the unusual relationship that developed

between parents and teachers in this project (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005, p.

120)

Here she referred to the anxiety that she felt as she approached the unknown territory of

the families and how it was this anxiety that helped her identify with the struggles that

they face in their daily lives in a foreign culture, and she could only do this after she

stepped outside of her comfort zone.

One dimension of this research was the contact with the families, and the other

one was the study groups where teachers reflected about and discussed their work as

ethnographers. In this context they "dicuss[ed] the background readings, introduce[d]

observations and note-taking, revise[d] interview procedures, review[ed] findings from

each visit, and discuss[ed] classroom practices and implications" (p. 17). Throughout this

research, teachers became better able to approach immigrant families with the purpose of

discovering the knowledge constructed within households that could be used to support

the child's education; these teachers-researchers challenged the idea that teachers should

approach families to point at what they are doing wrong and fix them. As Gonzalez,

Moll, and Amanti (2005) argue, the "funds of knowledge become cultural resources for

teachers as they document their existence and bring them to bear on their work" (p. 19).

One of the most significant contributions of the advocates of the Funds of Knowledge

approach to my research is that they are not simply documenting the mismatches between

the schools and the household's cultures but rather, they are trying to create a genuine dialogue among the households.

Conclusion

Many educators and school administrators complain that immigrant parents, particularly Latino parents, do not seem to care about their children's education and that they are undereducated and uninterested. However, as the research reviewed in this and the previous chapter show, parents do care about their children's education and have high expectations for them. Differences in the way teachers and parents understand the educational experience of LEP students may be explained by the differences in teachers and parents' cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1997).

The purpose of many schools appears to be the reproduction of the dominant cultural capital by teaching recent immigrant families to assimilate the American culture at the expense of their native culture, which generates a cultural conflict. If school personnel and parents want to help LEP students, they need to create liaisons where teachers share their expectations with parents and where the knowledge that parents bring, their funds of knowledge (González et al, 2005), is valued at school.

Much of the literature on LEP students and their families is guided by an ideology of assimilation. That is, many schools have concentrated their efforts in involving immigrant parents in their activities as a way to help them assimilate the American culture so they can succeed academically and socially. What is problematic about some of these efforts, even though they are put forth with the best of intentions, is that parents are encouraged to risk their own culture in order to assimilate the culture of power (Delpit, 1988) that reigns in the United States. Many linguistic minority parents, for

instance, are encouraged to speak English at their homes, avoid relationships with those of their same background, and establish relationships with Americans to facilitate the assimilation process (Borden, 1998).

I hope that my research contributes to the larger bodies of literature that claim that ethnic and linguistic minorities' families' cultural capital and funds of knowledge must be valued as resources and not assessed according to the standards of the dominant culture. This view would contribute to the empowerment of parents since they would no longer be understood as passive receptacles of cultural knowledge or passive supporters of school-driven efforts, but as contributors to their children's education, and sources of knowledge themselves. When families and schools become allies, the education of LEP students becomes an easier task, or at least a communal one.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH PROCEDURES

In this study, I addressed the issue of how school personnel and linguistic minority parents' relationships, i.e., through the parent involvement activities that the school organizes, affected the education of limited English proficient students in a school. This chapter includes information about the reasons why I did this study, the qualitative methodology I chose to address my research questions, the context for this study, and the process I followed for gaining access to this context. I also discuss in detail the procedures I followed as well as some ethical considerations I needed to make as a researcher in terms of my role, the participation of my informants, and the representation and assessment of the trustworthiness of the data. I finish with some conclusions about my purposes, challenges and limitations of this study.

Being a Parent at Greenwood School

As the mother of a student at Greenwood school, I was curious about the relationship between school personnel and international families. As a sojourner parent myself, I have moved from really struggling in an unfamiliar territory, the American educational system, to becoming more engaged and knowledgeable of how education in this country works.

One day during a faculty meeting at Greenwood school, four international parents and I were invited to share anecdotes of our early experiences when our families were new to the country and the school. I told the teachers how ignorant I was of the school language, and the expectations for parents and students. I confessed that the vocabulary in the communications sent in English from the school to the families did not make any sense to me. For example, every time I saw an invitation to "Open House," I thought it

referred to a yard sale. "Family Literacy Night" meant a night where families came to the library to read together not teachers instructing parents on the methodologies they used to teach our children. The lack of the proper 'vocabulary' hindered my participation in school activities; during my first year in the school, I simply did not want to participate in an event where I did not know what to do or how to behave.

As I became more involved in school activities by volunteering in my child's classroom, doing an internship with the principal, and attending some faculty meetings, I came to understand what was actually going on in the school and why. I became more aware of my own previous feelings of isolation and helplessness, as well as my growing sense of empowerment. I also became more curious about differences in the way school personnel and international families construct meaning of one another and how the resulting conflict may affect the educational experience of recent immigrant students. These differing perspectives were the focus of this study.

Research Questions

I begin this research with two overarching research questions and several subquestions:

1. How do negotiations of meanings of cultural capital affect the educational experiences of limited English proficient—LEP students?

   - How do ESL program stakeholders understand the educational experiences of limited English proficient-LEP students in this school?

   - How do ESL program stakeholders perceive parental engagement?

2. In what ways do school-organized parental involvement activities empower LEP students' parents to participate more actively in their children's schooling?

- In what ways does the school build on the cultural capital of LEP students' parents to help them succeed academically and socially?

Theoretical Frameworks for Data Collection, Analysis, and Interpretation

Procedures

Critical theory, and more specifically, one of its research manifestations, critical ethnography, is the framework upon which I base my research. Critical ethnographers address issues of domination, marginalization, empowerment, and emancipation. Critical ethnography is a research framework that resonates with the purposes of this study because I am trying to understand a phenomenon happening within a school as part of larger social issues related to minority student academic achievement, parent involvement, and the silenced voices of those who do not possess the cultural, linguistic, and social capital that is necessary to survive and succeed in American schools.

Some background on critical ethnography. Thomas (1993) defines critical ethnography as

> … a type of reflection that examines cultural knowledge, and action. It expands our horizons for choice and widens our experiential capacity to see, hear and feel. It deepens and sharpens ethical commitments by forcing us to develop and act upon value commitments in the context of political agendas. Critical ethnographers describe, analyze, and open to scrutiny otherwise hidden agendas, power centers and assumptions that inhibit, repress, and constrain. Critical scholarship requires that commonsense assumptions be questioned (p. 3).

In other words, critical ethnography provides opportunities for us to see beyond the apparent and question that which looks "normal," commonsensical, and comfortable; to

raise questions about the nature of phenomena and how they could constrain a community's possibilities for empowerment and emancipation, that is, to actively participate in democratic processes. Critical ethnographers get an in-depth look into institutions like schools, families, and subcultures to explore how these institutions might contribute or not to hegemony or its subversion (Jordan, 2003, p. 84).

Thomas (1993) and Jordan (2003) also define critical ethnography as the combination of conventional ethnography and critical theory. Using the procedures of ethnography coupled with critical reflection, critical ethnographers study "the process of domestication and social entrapment by which we are made content with our life conditions" (Thomas, 1993, p. 7). Critical researchers seek to unveil areas that, because they make some of us content, remain unnoticed. The goal of critical ethnography is not only "to describe the lives of the oppressed, but also to uncover the structural and cultural factors causing oppression" (Adkins & Gunzenhauser, 1999, p. 62). By exposing the voices of the disenfranchised, critical ethnography strives for emancipation (Jordan, 2003, Hytten, 2004, Smyth et al, 2008).

Critical ethnography is characterized by

- An inherently political and value-laden agenda, which is the empowerment of those who have been disenfranchised from society.

- A core of values represented by critical social theory that challenges domination and pursues emancipation. Critical researchers seek to connect the meaning of a situation to broader issues of social power and control.

- A commitment to change society; a change that aims at improving the life conditions of all.

• A direct involvement of the researched in the research process; there is a construction of knowledge rather than a production of knowledge. Critical researchers seek to create a literal dialogue with the participants they are studying; they speak to an audience on behalf of their participants as a means of empowering and giving them more authority (Thomas, 1993; Adkins & Gunzenhauser, 1999, Jordan, 2003; Hytten, 2004; Creswell, 2005; Madison, 2005; Smyth et al, 2008).

In sum, critical ethnography, and critical research in general is characterized by its commitment to social justice through a process where the researcher and the participants empower themselves to improve their living conditions. However, critical ethnographers may easily find themselves reinforcing the issues that they intend to challenge; for example, the critical researcher may find herself perpetuating asymmetrical relationships of power by imposing her own ideas and research agenda on the researched. Authors like Jordan (2003) and Hytten (2004) argue that critical researchers need to be cautious about critiques that have been made to critical ethnography, like the one I just mentioned, in order to enhance the quality of the research and truly accomplish its political agenda. Some of these critiques include:

• A somewhat distanced relationship between researcher and researched, as it has been common in traditional ethnography in order to enhance an objective perspective from the researcher.

• Too theory-driven research procedures that often lead the researcher to make a priori assumptions about the data.

• A lack of genuine reflexivity about the process, product, and impact of the research.

- Researcher's values that are imposed on the research.

- A researcher's writing style that seems to appeal to academic audiences but not the interested community (Jordan, 2003; Hytten, 2004).

Hytten (2004) suggests that critical research "needs to become more dialectic and less macro theory driven…[then it would be] more fully dialogic, collaborative and pedagogical" (p. 101), implying that both researcher and researched learn in the process of research. If critical ethnography's ultimate goal is the emancipation of disenfranchised communities, critical ethnographers need to find ways to overcome these challenges implied in these critiques, and this is where postmodern and feminist concepts of reflexivity and emancipation have played an important role in critical research (Thomas 1993; Jordan, 2003; Madison, 2005).

Reflexivity in critical research does not only include issues of self-reflection, but also reflectivity about the values and theories informing the research, about the complementary nature of theory and practice, and about the role of the researcher (Adkins and Gunzenhauser, 1999; Hytten, 2004). According to Jordan (2003), "postmodernist notions of reflexivity have also opened up possibilities for experimentation with new types of ethnographic practice" (p. 90), including the possibility to study how the participants in a study become more empowered as a result of their participation in the research process (Delgado-Gaitán, 1990). Critical ethnography is not intended to impose transformation or empowerment by the researcher upon the participants/informants (this would be like replacing one form of hegemony for another, as Hytten, 2004, asserts, but rather, to enhance mutual transformation and empowerment. Therefore, the key to make critical ethnography emancipatory and

empowering is self-reflection, collaboration, negotiation, and dialogue (Hytten, 2004; Lather, 1991).

In sum, critical ethnography provides a framework that opens up possibilities to connect school phenomena to larger social issues that we, educators and parents, often fail to recognize. One of my research goals is to study how this particular school community at Greenwood either reinforces or challenges larger social issues like the disenfranchisement of minority families in the context of an ESL program.

Research Site and Population

Greenwood school is located in a rural area in the Midwest. It is one of 4 districts that feed into a high school in a town of about 40,000 inhabitants. It comprises K-8 grades in one school building. For the year of 2007-2008, it had an enrollment of about 730 students, of which 57.7% were White, 17.8% were Black, 6.7% were Hispanic, and 4.4% were Multiracial or Ethnic. About 58% of the students were considered low-income and about 9% were considered Limited English Proficient. It has a teacher-to-student ratio of 16.2 and a parent contact ratio (that includes parent-teacher conferences, parental visits to school, school visits to home, telephone conversations, and written correspondence) of 90%. The average class size is 20 pupils. In terms of state standards (all tests), the district scored about the same as the state average for the year 2006-2007 (District 72.9% , State:73.8%) (Illinois District Report Card 2007).

At the time of conducting this research, Greenwood had 49 full-time teachers (of whom 96% are White, 2% Hispanic, 2% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0% Black), two principals, one principal assistant and one superintendent (all of them White). Greenwood enjoys a very good reputation in the local community; many people say that it is perhaps

the best school in the area. There are several characteristics that distinguish this school: the quality of the teachers, the good academic standing of its students, the active role of its Parent Teacher Organization, the up-to-date resources and teaching materials, and most of all, its unique diversity. Unlike many of the schools in this area, where most students are of European or African American descent, the student population at Greenwood school is made up of students from more than 25 countries. The school hosts many of the children of faculty and students of the local university who are immigrants or sojourners. A large portion of this population is transitory, because the children stay in the school only as long as their parents study at the university.

Even though students come from a wide variety of countries, and the number of international students can drastically change from one year to the next. Most international students in the school are from Korea, Latin America (mostly Mexico), Arab countries, and China. In order to attend to the special needs of these students, the school created a transitional or pullout English as a Second Language (ESL) program about 15 years ago. The international students are assessed by the ESL teachers as soon as they come to the school to make a decision as to whether the child should be in the program and as to determine their language proficiency. There were two ESL teachers, one of them, the coordinator, was European American; the other one was Mexican American. They had three aides; one is African American, another is from China and the other is from Thailand. Most students attended the ESL program twice a day during scheduled times; they came for a minimum of 16 minutes a day, but some students stayed for as much as 4 hours a day.

With younger students (K-2), ESL teachers concentrated on literacy skills, like spelling, phonemic awareness, phonics, writing, and reading, whereas grade 3-8 students focus on content-based English. They also focused on developing what they call "survival skills," which are basic things that they need to be able to do and say through their day at school like asking, "Can I go to the bathroom?" "Can I get a pencil?" "I need help," "I don't understand," etc.

There are several activities that school administrators and teachers organize and conduct, concerning parent involvement. These activities include the Parent-Teacher Organization—PTO meetings and activities, parent-teacher conferences, a volunteer program, an open house, and family literacy night. The school also uses written communications to inform the parents about what happens in the school. These communications are in English and they include a wellness program newsletter, weekly report of the menu and activities/events taking place that week, and some teachers send a weekly newsletter announcing the topics that they will work on during the week as well as the tests that the students will have. They also send invitations about events, programs and activities in the school and in town. One of the school programs, Family Circle, offers ESL classes for adults; most of the participants in this program are recent immigrant parents (especially mothers). Family Circle also provides a Pre-K program.

Identifying knowledgeable subjects. The population of this study was the international community at Greenwood school district, which comprised approximately 25% of the school population. The group of participants was the stakeholders of the ESL program at Greenwood school district, that is, the parents of students who attended the ESL program along with their teachers and the school administrators. I chose this sample

within the international community of the school because in most cases they were recent immigrants or sojourners and had limited time to adjust to the local culture and language. According to the principal, the students in the ESL program often are those who have more difficulties in terms of literacy, behavior, and academic achievement in general.

I used purposeful sampling and, as the research progressed, I used what Creswell (2005) calls "opportunistic sampling," which is "purposeful sampling undertaken after the research begins in order to take advantage of unfolding events that will help answer research questions. In this process, the sample emerges during the inquiry" (p. 206). I did this opportunistic sampling by selectively narrowing down the number of parents that participated in my study (I explain this process in more detail later in this chapter). Key participants of this study, besides the parents, were the ESL teachers, the school principals, the superintendent, and the home room or mainstream teachers.

Gaining entry to the field. I started being part of the Greenwood school community as a parent in 2004, when my daughter started kindergarten there, but it was not until 2007 that I started to visit the school on a regular basis. In 2007-2008, I volunteered in my daughter's third grade class. I came to class every Wednesday for a couple of hours. My duties initially included helping struggling readers or spellers, and spending some time reading with small groups of children. Eventually, I started to spend some time with the children by myself, when the teacher needed to get some copies or go to the principal's office. A couple of times I prepared and delivered a lesson. The volunteering experience helped me to better understand the goals and activities at school and the teachers' expectations for students. The teacher I volunteered for has always been very kind to me and never took a paternalistic attitude with me, which is different from

some past experiences with local people who did not know me well. When I came to faculty meetings, she would introduce me to other teachers and talk on my behalf when necessary.

Simultaneously, I was doing an internship with the principal for curriculum and instruction. I selected this site for my internship in order to get better acquainted with school activities because I wanted to do my research there, although I was not sure of the topic. The curriculum and instruction principal was very supportive and assigned me tasks related to the school curriculum. For example, I had to elaborate rubrics, contact publishing houses and search for potential textbooks for the next year. She invited me to attend the curriculum committee meetings and the school improvement council meetings. Even though I did not participate very actively in these meetings, I developed a better understanding of the events occurring in this school. At every meeting, the principal would introduce me as her intern and a mother of a student at the school. During one of the meetings, she announced that I was going to do my research there and that I needed their support, because the information provided by my research was essential to the improvement of the school, and particularly, the education of ESL students. As a consequence, many teachers recognized me when they saw me and were familiar with my research.

The support of the principal, the ESL coordinator and my daughter's teacher at the time granted me a very significant opportunity to access the school and its staff. Their recognition of my work facilitated my access to information and my confidence as a researcher in the school. The ESL coordinator also facilitated my access to the ESL families.

Being a member of the international parent community and an international

student at the local university was a very significant asset as well. I shared many

experiences with other international parents because we lived in the same community.

However, there were some spaces that we did not share, because immigrant/sojourner

parents often limit their circle of friends to those who speak the same language and go to

the same social events. This is where the interpreters/translators played a very important

role. They were women who contributed with translations of a preliminary questionnaire

I administered to the parents and who eventually collaborated as interpreters in interviews

(one from Korea, one from Japan, one from China, and one from Morocco). Their role in

my study was crucial to gaining access to information about the community of

participants. These women, who also were students at the local university, shared with

me some knowledge of the international families at Greenwood that I did not have; they

usually attended the same social events or the same church, or shared the same circle of

friends. Nonetheless, I recognize that this knowledge is always partial.

Establishing rapport. Being a good listener was of utmost importance to

establishing relationships in Greenwood school. As Delgado-Gaitán and Trueba (1991)

argue, it was important to develop a relationship of trust with the families that

participated in their study as an attempt to preserve the welfare of their children.

Also, being honest about my expectations, as a researcher and as a parent,

contributed to creating trusting relationships with the school administrators and some of

the teachers. Informing the participants at key moments (during school improvement

council meetings, for example) about findings in my research was crucial to obtaining

more information. Moreover, using the parents' home language was a priority to

establishing a connection with them; questionnaires were translated by my

informants/interpreters into Spanish, Korean, Arabic, and Chinese, as well as any written

communication. I also conducted interviews with parents with the assistance of these

interpreters to ensure that the parents understood the questions and that they felt

confident to express their opinions and concerns. I let parents and other participants know

that they were free to choose to participate in this research, as well as to withdraw at

anytime. These steps granted my research human subjects approval (Appendix C).

Data Collection, Analysis, and Interpretation Procedures

Data collection. I collected narrative, descriptive data from school administrators,

teachers, and parents. I used a "funnel" type of approach, that is, a broad-to-narrow study

of the situations, people, and events. In other words, I started by studying the perceptions,

expectations, and experiences of the ESL program stakeholders in general and I

eventually narrowed down the focus to the experiences of selected families and

participants as they negotiated meaning and contributed to the education of LEP students.

The purpose of this was to get in-depth understanding of a larger issue. I illustrated this

process as Madison (2005) recommends, using a conceptual map.

Document analysis. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), more and more

qualitative researchers are turning to documents as sources of data to support other forms

of data like interviews and observations, since documents provide information about

things that cannot be observed (Patton, 2002). Official documents, in this case,

documents of internal and external circulation in the school, offer the "official

perspective" of the school on issues that relate to the population of ESL students and

families, and parent involvement activities, as well as "the ways various school personnel

communicate" (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007, p. 137). Documents that I looked at included the District Report Card, the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) report, the School Improvement Committee minutes and Action Plan, the School-Parent Compact, and the Parent Involvement Policy.

*Questionnaires***.** This data collection tool, unlike face-to-face interviews, allows the researcher to get access to large numbers of people at the same time (Fraenkel & Biklen, 2003). My purpose with a questionnaire was to obtain preliminary data from a larger sample of the population of parents and teachers in order to make decisions about the subsequent procedures in the research process (for example, about the selection of specific participants or the types of questions that I would ask during interviews).

I administered a questionnaire to the teachers and the ESL parents inquiring about their perceptions and expectations related to the academic achievement of LEP students and their parents' involvement in school activities (Appendix A and B). I distributed the teacher questionnaire at the end of a faculty meeting with the approval of the administrators. I sent the parent questionnaire to the ESL students' parents with the collaboration of the ESL teacher. The questionnaires were translated from English into Spanish, Korean, Arabic, Chinese, and Japanese. Parents whose native language was one of the previous were provided with a copy of the questionnaire in their home language and another one in English, so they could decide which one the wanted to complete. Parents who returned the questionnaires were compensated with a children's book. The questionnaires included close and open-ended questions.

As soon as I analyzed the data from these questionnaires, I started conducting interviews with the school administrators, the ESL teachers, and some international

parents in order to further explore the issues revealed by the answers to the questionnaires. These interviews were an opportunity to establish a dialogue where interviewees and I could construct meanings about cultural capital, LEP students' education, and empowerment.

   Focus group interviews. Focus groups are "interviews that are structured to foster talk among participants about particular issues" (Boglen & Biklen, 2007, p. 109). Focus groups are typically made up of homogeneous groups of people who share similar backgrounds or experiences (Patton, 2002). I chose focus groups as one of my tools for data collection because I thought they would allow me to obtain information from specific groups of parents who shared the same home language and whose children participated in the ESL program. I invited parents of ESL students from the larger language minority groups in the program (Korean, Spanish, and Arabic) to come to a focus group meeting, one for each group, for a total of four meetings (2 with Spanish speakers). I invited parents to get together in these separate groups because I believed they would feel free to share their opinions and concerns in their own language; thus, I had an interpreter with us.

   I expected the focus group meeting to be an opportunity for parents to share in a comfortable environment, with other parents who speak their language, their opinions and concerns related to the education of their children and their own engagement in the process. I sent invitations in their language as well as a couple of reminders with their children. The meetings with Korean, Arab, and Latino parents were held in the activity room of the housing complex where most international families whose parents are students at the local university live. The meeting with Mexican parents was held at the

school library, where I had the assistance of the Mexican ESL teacher. I planned on having separate meetings with Spanish speaking parents, one with those who were associated with the university and those who were not. I decided to have two separate meetings with these groups because they usually come from different backgrounds in terms of geography, educational attainment, and socio economic status. Moreover, they perform different activities in town: while the first group was made up of graduate students for the most part, the second group, constituted by Mexican parents, usually comes to this area to work in farms and local restaurants.

Few parents attended the call for the focus group meetings: only one Korean parent attended the meeting (I eventually met with another mother), 3 Arab mothers attended, one Latina mother (I eventually met with 2 other mothers) attended the meeting, and none of the Mexican parents came to our appointment at the school, in spite of the ESL teachers phone reminders. Fortunately, I could eventually meet with two Mexican mothers but in individual interviews.

I asked parents questions about their perceptions and concerns related to the education of their children (including what they think about the ESL program), their perceptions and concerns related to school parental involvement activities and their involvement in those as well as in other activities that involve their children's education that are not organized by the school. I also asked questions related to their perceived cultural capital in relation to the school's dominant cultural capital. Questions included,

- How do you feel about the education that Greenwood school district is providing to your child(ren)? Do you have any concerns?

• What do you think about the parental involvement activities that the school offers to parents?

• How do you assess your participation in these activities? Are there other activities that you use outside of school to enhance your child(ren) education? Which ones?

• To what extent do you feel the school respects or promotes knowledge and understanding of your culture?

Interviews took between 30 and 60 minutes. As I explained before, they were conducted in the parents' home languages, which provided parents with a comfortable environment to express their ideas. I also brought some children activities so that their children were distracted while we conversed. Only one father attended the meeting; all the other parents I interviewed were mothers.

Case study. Case studies examine "in depth, a 'case' within its 'real life' context" (Yin, 2005, p. 380), through direct observations in natural settings. Through case study, the researcher develops a first-hand understanding of people and events (Yin, 2005). Cases constitute units of analysis (Patton, 2002) which, in the case of this study, are defined according to the information obtained through the preceding research procedures (the questionnaires, observations, and focus group interviews).

I focused on the observation and interaction with 2 recent sojourner ESL families. Although I expected to choose families from different linguistic backgrounds, the circumstances allowed me to select 2 Latin American families (they were the families of 2 students the ESL coordinator assigned me to tutor). I studied these two cases with the belief that they would further the information provided by the procedures aforementioned to help develop a better understanding of the way immigrant/sojourner parents make

meaning of their experiences at the school. I observed the students as I tutored them twice every week, one for 2 hours per day during the entire school year and the other one for 1 hour during one semester. I interacted with their parents in different contexts inside and outside the school (school activities, social events, by e-mail, and by phone). I recorded and transcribed the interviews with the parents and the teachers and took field notes during and after my observations.

Other individual interviews. I conducted 2 interviews with the principal for curriculum and instruction, 2 interviews with the ESL coordinator, and single interviews with the other school administrators and the other ESL teacher. I asked questions related to their perceptions and concerns about the LEP student population, the ESL program, the community of international parents, including those who are recent immigrants/sojourners and those who are not. The questions were similar to those I asked in the group interviews. As the research progressed, questions to individual participants were more specific. For example, questions to school personnel related to specific situations, people or experiences where I was an observer (like a holiday celebration), and questions to the parents related to their experiences and feelings in their relation to the school and their child's education as well as their adaptation process to the new culture as it affects their engagement in their child(ren)'s education.

*Other observations***.** In addition to the observations previously mentioned, I observed and participated in the School Improvement Committee meetings and annual retreat. The principal for curriculum and instruction suggested that I participate as an international parent advocate, since they only have a parent representative from the PTO, which does not include any international parents.

Data management. I took field notes during interviews and observations in a field journal. I also recorded auto-ethnographic notes about my role in the field, the theories that inform my research, and my own engagement as a parent and advocate.

Individual and group semi-structured interviews were recorded and transcribed by me. I kept interviews to a maximum of one hour. The interviews were taped with a digital voice recorder and the voice data was saved in separate computer files. While transcribing, I identified initial recurring patterns in the data. I took field notes during and after observations of meetings and ESL class activities. I observed as an insider in most situations, like in the ESL classroom and the group interviews, and in most faculty meetings.

Data analysis and interpretation procedures

Data coding process. Right after collecting the data I performed a preliminary exploratory analysis of the data in order to get a better sense of themes in my findings and to decide whether or not I need to collect more data. I used an inductive approach to analyze the data. I adopted an adaptation of Creswell's model (2005, p. 238) and Madison's critical ethnographic approach (2005) by utilizing these steps:

1. Read through the data. I began by identifying broad categories –prevalent topics or key issues.

2. Level the segments of information with codes (produce 30-40 codes). Madison recommends coding keeping the audience in mind; in my case, my audience was not only my committee, but also the school personnel and the parents.

3. Discover overlapping topics, marked distinctions, and topics that should be moved from one cluster to another. Discover topics that should be eliminated completely.

Reduce overlap and redundancy of codes (reduce codes to about 20); here I used color codes)

4. Collapse codes into categories (reduce codes to 5-7 categories). The codes I developed related to the following categories:

- Participants' perceptions of LEP students education

- Participants' perceptions of parent engagement and empowerment

- Participants' perceptions of school personnel and linguistic minority parents' cultural capital

- School-linguistic minority parent relationship and the role of communication

6. After organizing the information into categories, I looked for quotes and comments that supported the codes.

7. Create a graphic or picture of my organizational framework.

Research analysis procedures. Once I identified the categories, I organized information corresponding to each theme into separate files, again, using critical theory and my research questions as guidelines. I read through data to identify issues of cultural capital, language and power, parent involvement/empowerment and its effects. As I did this, I reflected on how critical theory, and more specifically, theories of cultural capital, funds of knowledge, critical ethnography, and ethnography of empowerment informed my research and my own transformation as a researcher, as an advocate, and as a parent.

In analyzing the data, I tried to read them very carefully to "let the data speak to [me]" and avoid "prejudge[ing] or impos[ing] my own preferred meanings," as Thomas

(1993) suggests. In the section about the validation of the data I discuss the resources I used to do this.

Research interpretation procedures. Thomas (1993) explains that the interpretation of data in critical ethnography is a process of "defamiliarization" (p. 43) because the researcher studies the data first as it normally appears to us, or as we commonly perceive it and then "translate[s] it into something new." When the critical researcher interprets the data, she is looking for new meanings, looking for what might be underneath the surface since perhaps what seems noble to us may contribute to asymmetrical power relationships in ways that are hidden to us. To do this, I provide the following,

- A review of the findings and how the research questions were answered by the data.

- My personal reflections about the meaning of the data: This is the self-reflexivity part that critical ethnographers are often missing according to the critiques (Thomas, 1993; Hytten, 2004). Here I reflected on the data and how my theories, assumptions, and positionality affected the research process, the setting, and the participants.

- Personal views compared or contrasted with the literature: I established connections between the findings, my reflection, and the theoretical frameworks I used in the study.

The Researcher's Role

As previously argued, reflectivity about my role in this research was a crucial component of this study. My role provided me with the opportunity to look inward and

outward, as well as to examine how my assumptions and actions affected the data and vice versa.

In this ethnographical study, I did not want my role to be that of the lone ranger that is typical of traditional ethnographic research; instead, I wanted to function as a facilitator, collaborator, and learning resource in order to enhance the participation of my informants. According to Patton (2002), the researcher who acts as a facilitator "recognizes and values participants' perspectives and expertise and works to help participants recognize and value their own and each other's expertise" (p. 185). The researcher as a facilitator avoids patronizing attitudes and maintains a good rapport with the participants.

I did not expect my position to be objective during this research; there were key situations (interviews, school meetings) where I intervened by sharing information that I had found in the study and that was relevant in those situations. This intervention, as Fear et al. (2006) put it, "is a process by which we 'share knowledge and learn with those who struggle for social justice … [and] collaborate with them respectfully and responsibly for the purpose of improving life" (p. xii, in Smyth et al, 2008, p. 7). An example of this is in Delgado-Gaitán's study of Latino parents' empowerment (1990). In this study, she intervened to push and formalize the parents' effort to organize; she explains, "the idea [of mobilizing and organizing] might have been dormant had it not been for my intervention as a researcher" (p. 145). She more explicitly defines the characteristics of her role: First, she organized the parents' activities, facilitated the process by providing guidance about the logistics of organizing as a group and second, she collected data in the process of parents organizing themselves. She states that

this process of facilitating parent organization represents an expansion of the researcher's role in an educational ethnographic study in an educational setting. Her study demonstrated the possibility of conducting scientific research while utilizing the flexibility of the methodology to intervene for the purpose of empowering the participants and studying the intervention (Delgado-Gaitán, 1990, p.165).

During the preparation of my research, I never anticipated that parents would become empowered either by their participation in school planned parental involvement activities or by participating in this research. Rather, I assumed that there were some possibilities that this process could take place within this context and that I would be attentive to the factors that either hindered or enhanced this process.

As a researcher I also tried to make connections between the global and the local; between the educational needs as reported by national and state authorities, how these needs take place in the particular context and how they are addressed; between findings reported by other researchers and my findings, between commonsensical cultural stereotypes and the participants in my study, and finally, connections between theory and practice. In this process of establishing connections, I strived to be responsible for unpacking my own assumptions and to let the participant's assumption inform mine (Thomas, 1993). I tried to maintain a critical rather than judgmental attitude, although at times the line between the two was blurred when I took in the interpretations that school personnel made of my findings and contributions. In this process, my reflections written in the field journal were very useful, along with my conversations with the participants and the members of my committee.

There is another aspect of my role and that is my position as an insider. Being part of the community of international parents provided me with significant knowledge about the needs, concerns, and experiences of those families who are new to this country and its cultures. This knowledge, which comes from my own experience as a sojourner and my interactions with people in this community, enabled me to better understand the processes of adaptation and change that they have to go through and that affect their relationship with the school.

Researcher or advocate? Madison (2005) explains that critical researchers often find themselves in the dilemma of deciding whether they should focus on their role as researchers or if they should act as advocates. She recommends researchers to maintain a balance between the two. When we become aware of an issue through our research, it is easy to feel committed to the issue, even more so for me as I am a sojourner parent myself whose academic work is significantly enlightened by critical theory. On the other hand, I was directly asked by the principal and the ESL coordinator to act as a parent advocate given the knowledge I possessed as a graduate student of education and as an international parent. They were interested in having someone be a bridge between the often silent community of international parents and the school personnel. My participation in the School Improvement Committee, for example, became a great opportunity to do this.

In order to keep the balance between the researcher and the advocate, I constantly asked questions like this during this study:

- What is my evaluation of my purpose, intentions, and frames of analysis?

- What could be the potential harm of my purposes, intentions, and frames (of data collection and analysis) for the participants?

- How can I create and maintain a dialogue of collaboration between myself and Others?

- How does my/our work make the greatest contribution to equity, freedom, and justice?

- How are preliminary findings relevant to solve any current problems at school?

- When and to whom should I communicate these findings? (some of these questions are adapted from Madison, 2005)

Potential Ethical Issues and Ethical Methods

According to Madison (2005), critical ethnographers have a moral commitment to transforming the world in a way that improves the living conditions of the disenfranchised. I do not believe that such change can be measured by the impact that a researcher alone can generate by her research but rather, by the degree of conscientization (Freire, 1970) that her research may enable in the community of the researched participants that will help them to transform their own lives. If the researcher is intending to impose transformation, she is contradicting the principles of critical theory of empowerment and emancipation.

In considering my ethical endeavors, I found the role of reflectivity, or critical reflection, to be very important. For Patton (2002) to be reflexive is "to undertake an ongoing examination of *what I know* and *how I know it*" (p. 64). Gadamer (1976) defines reflection as

> The act of rigorously examining how [our] involvement affects our data gathering, analysis, and subsequent display of the data to an audience. Through reflection […] We attempt to become self-aware of the process and consequences of knowledge production by bringing the original act of knowledge back into consciousness (p. 45, as cited in Thomas, 1993, p. 46)

Thomas (1993) proposes some questions to guide this critical reflexivity in relation to ethical commitment: How do my own values influence my work? What are the social implications of my findings and how should I present them? How does my study challenge injustice? What are the implications for action? (Thomas, 1993, p. 47). Thomas (1993) also warns critical researchers that when reporting the data, we are likely to fall into several "traps." These traps are related to our use of theory and language, and our preconceived assumptions. He advises critical researchers to avoid imposing meanings on data and seeing only what we want to see. He also recommends that we avoid using complicated jargon that may thwart the participants' understandings of the findings.

Thomas (1993) claims that critical researchers need to remain true to the data by avoiding making inconsistent conclusions from the data and overgeneralizing; he recommends researchers illustrating rather that asserting (p. 65). Other suggestions include writing keeping in mind those who are convinced by our ideas, being aware of the images that we convey through the language that we use to describe our participants an their experiences, and finally, keeping in mind to discover who we are through our reflections about the research process. In sum, Thomas suggests that researchers be mindful of our assertions and actions as far as they affect our research, our participants, and our audience.

In terms of confidentiality, I always ensured participants that the information they provided would remain confidential and anonymous. I asked participants consent to share specific information with other participants; for example, I asked parents which concerns they wanted me to share with school personnel during the School Improvement Committee meetings or with other parents. I used pseudonyms or other methods that prevented participants to be identifiable by people outside of the community.

Trustworthiness

I enhanced trustworthiness of data by using self-reflective questions, member checks, and triangulation. I asked the self reflective questions I previously discussed and wrote about them in my journal. Also, as I shared information with the participants at specific moments during the research (like in my interviews to the school administrators and the ESL coordinators, faculty meetings, and focus group interviews), I strived to assess the veracity of the data.

The way I used member checks included sharing the interview transcripts with informants so that they could check for reliability, and sharing with the school personnel an executive summary and a presentation of my research findings. Another form of member check I used was a critical dialogue with my committee members and other doctoral students who were also in the process of writing their dissertations. They provided me with critical questions about my research, my role in it, and helped me to increase the clarity of the data.

I triangulated the data in two ways. One was by gathering the perspectives of different participants (parents, school teachers, school administrators, along with my own

experiences as a parent). The other was by using different forms of data collection: questionnaires, interviews and observations.

Conclusions

In this research I embarked on an interesting yet complex journey, as it constituted a process of inquiry about social, systemic issues, about others, and about myself as I interplayed roles of learner, researcher, advocate, and parent. This process posed great challenges for me in terms of positionality, ethics, and the logistics of ethnographic research, not just because I was new to ethnographic research, but also because of my relationship with the setting. As is evident in this chapter, I significantly relied on advice provided by ethnographers and qualitative researchers. I did this because I acknowledged from the beginning the complexity of this research and I believe that a systematic approach really helped me to better comprehend and represent the data.

My purpose with the data presented in the next several chapters was not to criticize a school and its community. Instead, my purpose was to inquire about a current issue and how it might take place in this particular context, but I tried to do it from a critical yet understanding standpoint. By this I mean that my inquiry aimed to uncover that which may seem normal or commonsensical, because normalcy often hides ideas that have negative effects on some groups. I did not begin a hypothesis that there was something wrong in this school community, but I wanted to interrogate how some practices and ideas may have unintended consequences. I learned from Thomas (1993) that critical researchers should only expect partial results, because partial results always leave room for rethinking, deconstructing, and reconstructing. In the next chapters I

summarize those partial results and how they relate to issues of language, power, and

difference in the context of LEP student education and parent engagement.

CHAPTER 5: ESL PROGRAM STAKEHOLDERS' CONSTRUCTIONS/UNDERSTANDINGS OF LEP STUDENT EDUCATION AND PARENT ENGAGEMENT

The purpose of this study was to explore how a school and linguistic/ethnic minority families negotiate cultural capital in the context of school-organized parent involvement activities and how this negotiation may affect the education of limited English proficient students. More specifically, I studied an ESL program's stakeholders' perspectives of LEP student education, LEP students' parent involvement and the role of culture in shaping of those perspectives.

I argue that the way parents get involved in their local school community is influenced by their cultural and social capital, which may widen the gap in the communication between school and the families. Further, school organized parent involvement activities may help them assimilate the cultural capital of the dominant culture once parents are familiar with the purposes of such activities, but they are not empowering them take part in the decision making process of the school.

For the past 2 years I collected information from school administrators, teachers, and parents. After gaining access to the community of participants, I analyzed school documents like the School-Parent compact, the School's annual report card, the School Improvement Plan, the Response-to-Intervention plan, and the Parent Involvement policy. In addition, I administered questionnaires to teachers (41) and LEP students' parents (39), interviewed school administrators (3),ESL teachers (2) and parents (11), and performed participant observations of school-organized parent involvement activities, faculty meetings, and the ESL program, where I also worked as a tutor. As previously

explained, I used a "funnel" approach to collect data, consistently narrowing down the scope of my research.

The data is presented in three different chapters. Chapter 5 includes an account of the participants' perspectives on LEP student education and parent involvement. In Chapter 6 I elaborate further on two aspects of my findings; communication and culture. Chapter 7 portrays two recent soujourner families and their experiences of adjustment and negotiation of perceptions, values, and expectations with the school. Even though these portraits are not generalizable to all linguistic/ethnic minority families, they exemplify struggles that are shared by different groups across cultures, languages, and nationality. They provide a close-up look into the lives of those families who need to adjust to the culture of a different country and a different school system.

In this chapter I capture the perspectives and perceptions that school administrators, teachers, and parents have constructed about limited English proficient students, their education at Greenwood school, and the involvement of their parents in school activities and other activities that might enhance these students' learning. Further, the description of the different perspectives leads to a discussion, from the point of view of the ESL program stakeholders, of the role of culture and cultural and social capital in the construction of such perspectives, perceptions and expectations.

Faculty's perspectives of LEP students and their families were collected during a faculty meeting using a questionnaire (Appendix A); 41 teachers returned the questionnaires at the end of the meeting. The purpose of this questionnaire was to get a broad idea of teachers' perceptions of LEP students' education, their communication with

the ESL program teachers, their preparation to cope with LEP students' needs, and LEP students' parents' involvement.

Figure 1 shows teachers' views of some aspects of LEP students' education. According to the data, all teachers believed that LEP students' presence contributes to creating a positive atmosphere in the mainstream classroom and the great majority (39/41—27 strongly agreed and 12 agreed) thought that the inclusion of LEP students in the mainstream classroom is beneficial for all students. Most teachers (32[3]/41) disagreed that LEP students should not be included in the mainstream classroom unless they have attained a minimum proficiency level in English. A similar number of teachers (36/41) considered they should accommodate their teaching according to LEP students' needs. However, there is no consensus on whether or not teachers have time to cope with LEP students' needs (19/41 teachers agree whereas 21/41 teachers disagree).
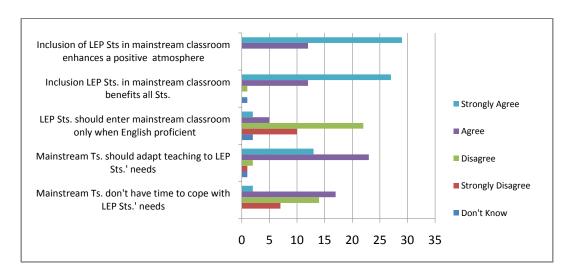
Figure 1. Teachers' views of LEP students' education

Parents of students in the ESL program were asked to complete an adapted version of the same questionnaire (Appendix B). The questionnaires were previously

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[3] I am combining the number of responses for "Strongly agree" with "Agree" as well as those for "Strongly disagree" and "Disagree", unless it is necessary to specify each.

translated into the languages of the larger linguistic minority groups within the program at the time[4]: Korean, Spanish, Arabic, Mandarin, and Japanese. Graduate students at the local university who are native speakers of those languages translated those questionnaires and I did the Spanish translation. Parents speaking those languages were sent their native language version along with an English version of the questionnaire. Many of them filled out the version in their native language, especially the Korean and Spanish speaking parents.

Parents whose native language is none of the above mentioned were sent an English version of the questionnaire. Some of them complained about not receiving a translated version of the questionnaire as other parents did; however, translating communications to international families is quite a task when there are so many different languages spoken in the building. Nonetheless, such translations greatly facilitate communication with international families. A total of 36 parents answered the questionnaire (corresponding to 45 out of 66 ESL students or 68% of the ESL population). Table 1 shows the number of respondents distributed according to their native language.

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[4] The number of speakers of certain languages in the ESL program changes continuously. At the time of writing this report, for example, there were no Japanese speakers in the ESL program and the number of Malay speakers increased.

Table 1

Number of ESL students' parents answering questionnaire

Native language	Number of respondents
Korean	13
Spanish	6
Chinese	5
Arabic	4
Farsi	1
Japanese	1
Malay	1
Indonesian	1
Shona	1
Thai	1
Lingala	1
Bahasa	1

Questionnaires were sent in two rounds; the first round was sent at the end of the Spring

2009 to all parents in the ESL program, and the second round was sent only to the

incoming parents in the Fall of the same year. Parents who answered the questionnaire

received a children's book as compensation for their participation.

Parents provided similar answers to the question on LEP student education,

although there were more recurrences of parents answering "I don't know," as Figure 2

shows. Like the teachers, most parents (31/36) considered that LEP students' presence

contributes to a positive atmosphere in the classroom (Disagree=1, Don't know=3). Most

parents too (26/36) believed that the presence of LEP students benefits all students in the

classroom (Disagree=3, Don't know=6). Also like the teachers, many parents (22/36)

disagreed that LEP students should not be included in the mainstream classroom unless

they have
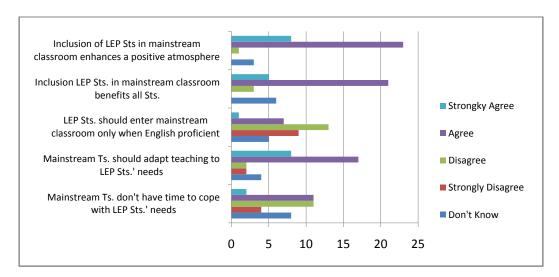
Figure 2. Parents' views of LEP students' education

attained a minimum proficiency level in English; 8 agreed with the statement and 5

checked don't know. Twenty-five of 36 parents thought that mainstream teachers should

accommodate teaching to LEP students' needs versus 4 parents who disagreed with this

statement and 4 who did not know. And just as it happened with the teachers, there is no

consensus on whether or not teachers have time to cope with LEP students' needs; while

13/36 parents agreed, 15 parents disagreed and 8 answered I don't know.

In general, according to the answers provided to these questions, teachers and

parents shared a similar view of LEP student education. They considered that LEP

students' presence is important in the mainstream classroom and that they need to be

exposed to the environment within this classroom even though they do not yet

demonstrate proficiency in English. Some additional comments by parents explained that

LEP students need intensive exposure to the language in order to learn it and that is what

they can get if they are in the mainstream classroom from the time they arrive in

Greenwood. Both parents and teachers agreed that although they believe mainstream

teachers need to adjust their teaching to LEP students' needs, they are not sure whether or

not teachers have time to cope with such a task. It is my perception that many parents and teachers perceived this task as a difficult and time-consuming one and that they see a difference between the teacher's ideal responsibilities and the realistic possibilities of fulfilling them. Four teachers complained that they did not have sufficient time to cope with those particular needs; one explained that they can only adapt their teaching to some extent.

Ways in which parents believe languages are learned shape their perceptions and expectations about LEP student education. Some parents commented that their children's age facilitated their learning of a second language as well as their immersion in an English-speaking environment and regular communication with English native speakers. One Korean parent even commented during an interview that pairing up students from the same country, a practice common in Greenwood school, is not beneficial for [Korean] students; it does not help them learn English. The way parents construct such perceptions will be further discussed in the following pages.

Perspectives on Limited English Proficient Student Education in Greenwood School

Parents' perspectives of education in Greenwood. In addition to the questionnaires, I conducted individual and group interviews with ESL students' parents. A total of 6 interviews were conducted and a total of 11 parents were interviewed in their home languages with the support of a Korean and an Arabic interpreter. Before and after the interviews, I held conversations with these interpreters who are well known members within their communities since they attend many of the same social and religious events. They played a very important role in helping me understand the parents' perceptions and expectations.

In the questionnaires and during the interviews, parents expressed some general opinions about the education their children were receiving at Greenwood school. I classified parents' comments as assets or areas for improvement.

Assets. Many parents seem to be very satisfied with the education their children are receiving in this school. Several international parents from different countries expressed their appreciation for the opportunity that Greenwood provides for international students to learn English and the American culture. The comment on the questionnaire of one of the Arab parents summarizes the perspective of several international parents: "I am very glad that my children get involved in the American culture and education, and we feel very comfortable in the American educational system, where no pressure, nor stress [is put] on the students. […] American people […]are very kind and helpful."

Many parents find that their children not only interact and learn about American culture, but also learn about a wide variety of cultures of families coming from other countries. A Latina mother explained that "[Me and my daughter] like the diversity in the school. [My daughter] speaks about her Arab friend, her African friend, her Turkish friend…it's great." Several parents are also appreciative of the support provided by school staff and the positive atmosphere that makes parents and students feel comfortable; as one Arab parent put it, "The whole staff in [Greenwood] try to understand the culture and they encourage [students] and if the student is smart or doing well or not doing well they communicate with the parents in such a way that you don't feel that you're international; they even adapt to the culture." It is also very important for parents to know that their children are treated well and that they are not discriminated

against because, as a Mexican mother commented, "If my children are treated well, I feel the school is okay […] so far, we haven't seen they've been discriminated, because for me that is the most important thing."

In terms of actual teaching, some parents commented that worksheets assigned for homework were clear, and that the school offered nice afterschool activities (for students in the upper grades) like the marching band and sports clubs. A couple of Latina mothers expressed that what they liked best about Greenwood was that they encouraged reading a lot; one of them said that now her daughter reads every night without being asked. In informal conversations with fellow international parents and during some of the interviews, they shared many positive comments about the school. They were glad to find in a public school the quality you would only find in private schools in their home countries.

Areas to improve. There were not many areas that most parents complained about. Several parents, especially those coming from Asian and Middle Eastern countries complained that the breakfast and lunch menu "is too Americanized" and less nutritional than the meals in their home countries (only one Saudi mother expressed the opposite). One Korean father complained that homeroom teachers do not speak the students' languages (no teacher in the building speaks Korean).

There were two Latino parents who were more critical about the school. They argued that the teaching and assessment methods used in Greenwood are too traditional; one of them said that "there is no inclusion of play as a teaching and learning strategy; the children spend too much time in their classrooms, just sitting, and they get loads of homework to do!" They also explained that some classrooms are very boring and some

assignments seem very repetitive (like the worksheets where students have to fill out the blanks); students can easily lose motivation. The other parent commented, "When I entered the science room I was like 'What!!' There were all these desks lined up in front of the board and a few posters on the wall, but it was the most boring science room I have ever seen! A science room has to be a room where discovery happens!"

These same Latino parents also complained about the way student behavior is controlled; they argued that extrinsic rewards[5] for behavior are useless because when students rely too much on rules, they are not able to develop self-control. One of them said "The idea is that they learn these rules at an early age so that when they become adults they follow the same rules. The problem is, since they did not develop self-control they don't have… that's why you go to a [college town] bar and see all these crazy people! Because when they don't have [external] rules, they don't know what to do!" They concluded that the educational model used in Greenwood is based on productivity and competition: "[The educational model in Greenwood] is driven towards this model of success, productivity, efficiency and efficacy that is so terrible and that is killing our humanity… it is so cultural too; we [in my home country] are going in that direction as well."

In conclusion, parents are satisfied taking into account whether or not the school provides a comfortable and respectful environment and opportunities to support LEP students' learning of English. Many parents, especially those who have a relationship with the local university either as students or faculty significantly value extra curricular activities. In fact, I noticed in my interactions with parents that for the most part, the

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[5] Students are given tickets, coins, and cards for good behavior and they can redeem them at a store within the school that was created for this purpose. Prizes include some school supplies, stickers, and last year, an I-pod.

parents' educational attainment level as well as their previous schooling experiences shaped their expectations of the school. I will discuss this further in a section on the role of culture in parents' views of LEP education.

Perspectives on LEP student academic progress in Greenwood. Teachers and parents were asked to assess the progress LEP students have made in specific areas. Results show that both groups are satisfied with the progress these students have made, as it is evident in Figures 3 and 4.
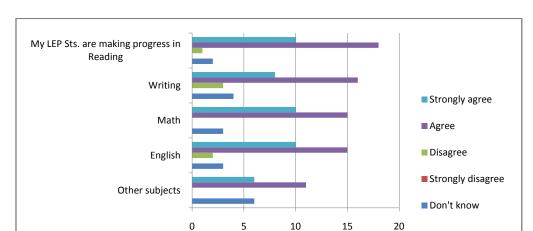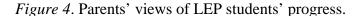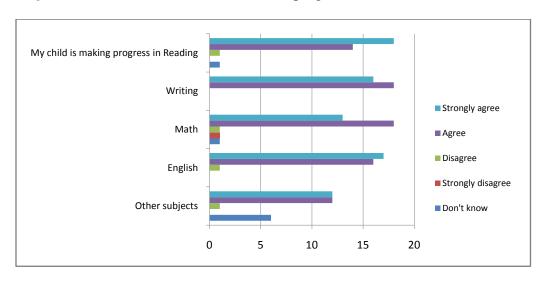
Figure 3. Teachers' views of LEP students' progress.

Figure 4. Parents' views of LEP students' progress.

Most teachers and parents agreed that LEP students have made significant progress in specific areas; in Reading 28/31 teachers[6], and 32/36 parents; Writing, 24/31 teachers and 34 parents; Math, 25/28 teachers and 31 parents; English, 25/30 teachers and 33 parents; and Other Subjects, 17/23 teachers and 24 parents. Neither parents nor teachers made specific comments about this progress, so just from questionnaire data it is impossible to know what they attribute this progress to or why teachers do not use "Strongly agree" more often—they probably refer to significant progress made by *some* of their LEP students, not all of them, whereas parents only refer to their child(ren)'s progress.

Perspectives on the ESL program and its role in fostering academic success. Teachers and parents also assessed the role of the ESL program in fostering academic progress. Figures 5 and 6 show the frequency of their responses. According to both figures, most parents and teachers believe that the ESL program is helping LEP students' make academic progress. However, there are more participants who disagree with the statement or select the "I don't know" option, at least compared to the previous questions.

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[6] Even though 41 teachers answered the questionnaire, not all of them answered this question (and some others) probably because they are aides or Prekindergarten teachers, or simply because they do not teach that subject. I am including here the total number of teachers who answered the question.

Figure 5. Teachers' perspectives on the role of the ESL program in supporting LEP students' progresss in specific areas.
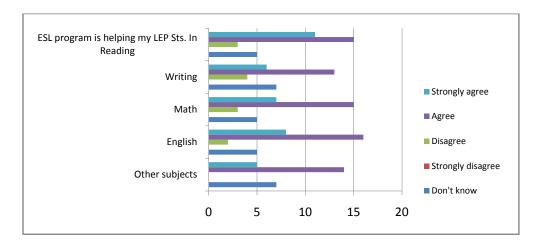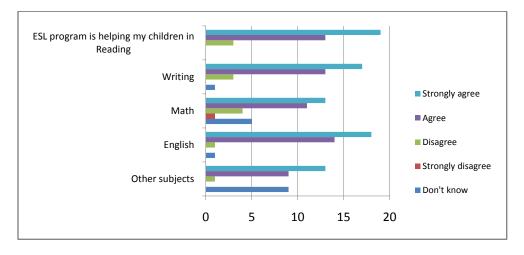
Figure 6. Parents' perspectives on the role of the ESL program in supporting LEP students' progress in specific areas.
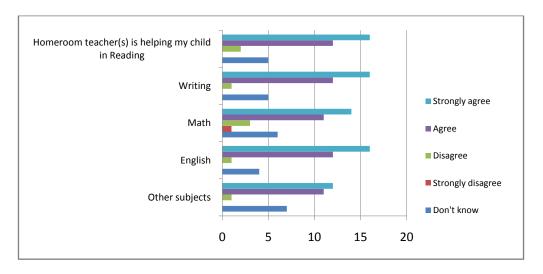
For example, in relation to the support of the ESL program to LEP student progress in Reading, 28 teachers agreed vs. 1 who selected "Disagree" and 2 "Don't know"; and 32/35 parents agreed vs. 3 who disagreed. Similar numbers were reported for Writing and English. Among the teachers, there was a higher number selecting "I don't know" in relation to "Other Subjects", while the same happened among the parents in relation to Math, where 5/35 parents selected "Disagree" and 5/35 selected "I don't know" for the

same statement. The disagreement or lack of knowledge on the part of respondents might mean that they are not completely familiar with what students do in the ESL program or that they do not communicate regularly with ESL teachers. One Latino parent in particular commented that she "had not seen yet his [son's] work from the ESL program."

During interviews with the parents, I was able to get more specific ideas about the ESL program. A couple of parents commented that besides teaching them English, ESL teachers helped their children with homework and content they do not understand from their other classes. One Korean parent complained that parents do not receive sufficient feedback about their children's progress. Suggestions parents made in interviews and the questionnaire included that more ESL teachers should be hired, considering the high number of ESL students in the building; instruction should be adapted according to the needs of different ethnic groups; and that ESL teachers and homeroom teachers need to communicate content to better support LEP student learning.

Since I wanted to find out whether parents attributed their children's academic progress to their work in the ESL program or in the mainstream classroom, I asked them to assess the homeroom teacher's support in their child's progress in specific subjects (Figure 7). Comparing the data represented in Figures 6 and 7, I found that parents are more likely to relate language learning progress with the ESL program (Reading, 32/36; Writing, 30; English, 32) than progress in other subjects (Math, 24; Other subjects, 22). This is not as evident in Figure 7, where the recurrences are more homogeneous across all subjects. However, Figure 7 shows a higher recurrence of "I don't know" responses (Reading, 5; Writing, 5; Math, 6; English, 4; Other, 7).

Figure 7. Parents' perspectives on the role of the mainstream teachers in supporting LEP students' progress in specific areas.

I do not think this means that parents attribute academic progress mostly to the ESL program but rather, that parents are uncertain as to what LEP students do or how their learning is supported in the mainstream classroom.

Communication between mainstream and ESL teachers. One factor that affects the education of LEP students is the communication between homeroom teachers and ESL teachers. As I stated before, some answers to the questionnaire suggest that the lack of knowledge by some teachers about the function and operations within the ESL program might be a consequence of a lack of communication between ESL and mainstream teachers. However, according to the data represented in Figure 8, most teachers think they keep regular communication with ESL teachers to either discuss LEP students' progress (Strongly agree=11, Agree=21, Disagree=5) or ask for assistance when teaching them (Strongly agree=11, Agree=24, Disagree=4).
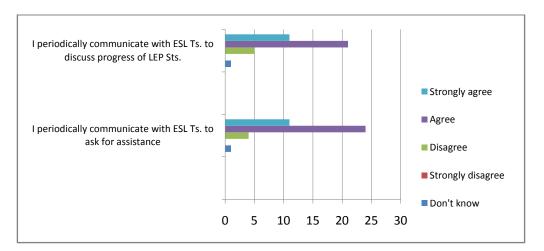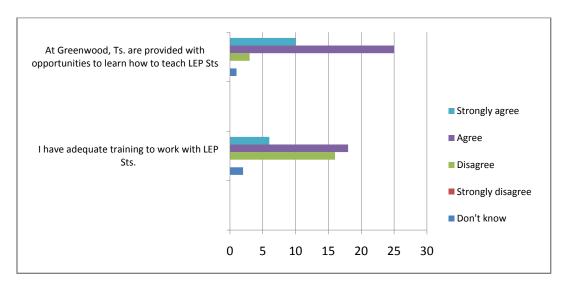
Figure 8. Teachers' views of their communication with ESL teachers

One teacher commented, though, that she "would like to have more time for this scheduled meeting to share goals." She was referring to a time that was designated for the same grade level teachers to meet and plan and share ideas. According to what one of the school administrators told me, teachers in lower grades have a better opportunity to meet since it is easier to schedule some shared time, whereas for teachers in Junior High it is not as possible to work together as often since they are always teaching at different times.
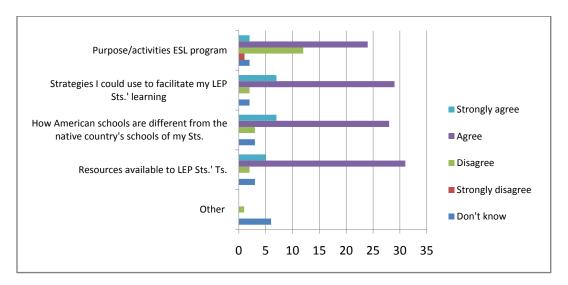
Teachers' perspectives on their preparation to teach LEP students. Teachers were asked four questions related to their professional preparation to deal with LEP students (see Figures 9 and 10). Thirty-five of 39 teachers agreed that they are provided with opportunities to learn how to teach LEP students while 3 disagreed. Yet, when they were asked to assess if they had adequate training, 16 teachers considered they do not compared to 24 who agreed they do (Strongly agree=6, Agree=18). One of the teachers commented that she would like to learn other languages and another one commented that she receives training every year. No more teachers added further comments to explain why they believed there was a discrepancy between the amount of training they received and the adequacy of such training or what areas of preparation they required the most.

Figure 9. Teachers' views of their professional development to teach LEP students.

In the next question, teachers were asked to assess whether they needed preparation in 4 specific areas (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Teachers' assessment of areas for professional development.

According to the data, most teachers agreed that they needed further preparation in all of the areas provided in the questionnaire, including effective teaching strategies, differences between American and other countries' schooling and especially teaching resources they can use to teach LEP students. Even though some teachers (26/39) agreed

they needed to learn more about the ESL program operations, perhaps the newer teachers or teachers who do not work there full time, 13 teachers disagree that they need to know more about the ESL program. Indeed, one teacher commented that she is "aware of the resources they have." Unfortunately, teachers did not provide any comments about the kind of training they needed or wanted except for a teacher who commented "I would like materials for the classroom."

In general, homeroom teachers think they maintain good communication with ESL teachers; there are a few teachers who disagreed or who complained that they do not have enough scheduled time to share with them. In interviews with the ESL coordinator, she explained that some teachers are more willing to collaborate than others, which might affect the coordination between activities in the mainstream classroom and activities in the ESL room. It seems that teachers in lower grades have more opportunities to dialogue with ESL teachers, which in turn affects the relationship between mainstream teachers and families (I will explain this in the next section).

In terms of teacher professional development, the data might appear a little confusing. Not all teachers agreed that they are sufficiently prepared to teach ESL students, even though one explained that they receive training every year. Comparing information provided in the questionnaire with information I collected during interviews with ESL teachers and administrators, I found that Title I funds are provided for in-service training in this area, but not all teachers are willing or have time to participate (however, in the last faculty meeting on ESL issues I attended, all faculty had to attend). The superintendant explained that teachers do have the training, but that many of them lack the confidence to effectively use this new knowledge. So, whether there is a problem

of a lack of training or a lack of confidence to effectively teach LEP students it is something that is not clear from these answers.

Perspectives on Limited English Proficient Students' Parents' Involvement and Empowerment

In this section I discuss data related to the participants' views and perceptions of LEP students' parents' involvement. I start by presenting some of the school policies related to parent involvement, more specifically those that relate to linguistic/ethnic minority parents. Then I move to a discussion of the perceptions expressed by participants. I refer to statements or policies within documents like the Parent Involvement policy, the Response to Intervention (RTI) plan, the School-Parent compact, the District Report Card, and the School Improvement Plan. In most cases, the same information appears in all documents. I start by discussing school personnel and parents' common perspectives and when differing, I discuss ideas that are specific to each group.

LEP students' parents' involvement according to school policies. In Greenwood's Parent Involvement policy, parent involvement is defined as,

> The participation of parents in a regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities, including,
>
> A. That parents play an integral role in assisting their child's learning;
>
> B. That parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child's education at school; and
>
> C. That parents are full partners in their child's education and are included as appropriate in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child.

This definition includes three main aspects of parent involvement: parent involvement in child's education, parents as school partners who work collaboratively with the school, and parents who participate in decision making processes in the school. One of the school administrators, who according to the Parent Involvement policy analysis is the school-parents liaison, added to this definition by explaining that an actively involved parent is one who constantly communicates with the teachers to make sure that their child gets the best education. Moreover, she added, "it's almost like, you don't have to be a demanding parent, you don't even have to be a controversial parent, but if you're a constant presence and you're having continuous conversations with the teachers, it definitely piques that teacher's awareness of that kid in the classroom and to know what that child is doing."

Parent involvement activities offered at Greenwood. According to school documents like the Parent Involvement Plan, the Parent Involvement Policy, and the School-Parent Compact, the following are activities currently done at Greenwood to involve parents:

- Parent Orientation and Open House (usually takes places around September; they are intended to communicate school programs and expectations)

- Activities where parents participate in decision making processes (e.g., committees and teams)

- Activities to facilitate parent/child interaction (holiday celebrations, family reading night, academic night)

- Annual community-school board retreat (including representatives from faculty, administration, parents, and community; it is intended to foster relationships between the school and the community)

- Provision of a parents' room

- Observation of classroom activities (this includes the volunteer program for parents)

Unfortunately, parent involvement has been identified as an issue of concern in Greenwood according to the District Report Card (2009) data and a Technology and Parent involvement survey that was conducted at the end of the 2008-2009 year by the administrators and the technology specialist. According to these data, there has been a decrease in parent involvement in the activities aforementioned. This is the reason why the School Improvement Committee identified as a prioritized challenge getting information to families, encouraging their participation in completing surveys, and facilitating a two-way communication (From summary of information gathered during School Improvement retreat).
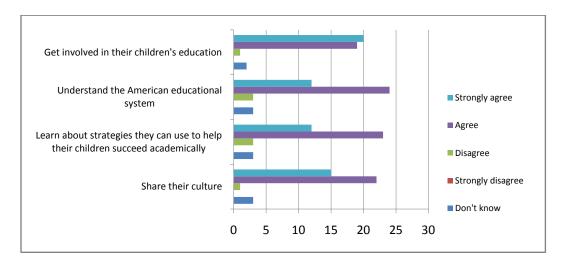
In order to address these challenges, the Parent Involvement Plan (2010) includes the following provisions, among other items that I mention here, as I find them especially pertinent to linguistic/ethnic minority parents:

- Clear communications, written in a language that parents can understand;

- Full opportunities for participation, making accommodations if necessary, including, for example, the provision of interpreters if there is a request from parents; and

- Support for activities, including funding for parent involvement initiatives and the provision of a space as needed.

The Parent Involvement Policy Analysis document I analyzed also identified activities like a review of the parent-teacher conference format and home visits to facilitate parent involvement.

In addition to the parent involvement activities teachers and school administrators identified in school documents, teachers had the opportunity to assess activities that were more specific to the international parent population in the questionnaire I administered (see Figure 11):

Figure 11. Teachers' views of the involvement opportunities Greenwood offers to ethnic/linguistic minority parents.

Almost all teachers (39/40) agreed that Greenwood provides ethnic/linguistic minority parents opportunities to get involved in their children's education; surprisingly, most of those who agreed (20) selected the option "Strongly agree," which is not common in teachers' responses. Similarly, most teachers agree that Greenwood also provides international parents opportunities to understand the American educational system (36 versus 3 who disagreed), learn how they can support their children's education (35 versus 3 who disagreed), and share their culture (37 versus 1 who disagreed). There were comments from only two teachers; one of them explained that Greenwood does provide

the opportunity to get involved in the students' education, but that the school has not communicated very well with international parents. The other teacher explained that she invites international parents to her class so that they share information about their home cultures.

In the next section, I present school personnel's perspectives of LEP students' parents' participation in all these activities.

School personnel's perspectives on LEP students' parents' involvement. According to school administrators and ESL teachers, linguistic/ethnic minority parents are highly involved and collaborative. One of the school administrators explains,

> Our international parent community is our largest population of parents who come
>
> at the end of the school year and request additional work for their students for the
>
> summer more so than any other population that I have here. So they are highly
>
> aware of any difficulties that they are dealing with within our district and are
>
> more than willing to overcoming those difficulties and taking responsibility for
>
> that on their end as well.

Besides demonstrating high expectations and a great sense of responsibility with their children's education, administrators agreed that international parents are very kind, respectful, and thankful, to the point that some parents (typically Asian) bow to them or even invite them over for dinner, which does not happen with American families. One of the principals explained that linguistic/ethnic minority parents participated in specific activities, mostly the Open House and Parent Orientation. When I asked her if there were any international parents participating in the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), she told me there were not any. About this issue, the ESL program coordinator explained that

"some of the activities, [including] the PTO might be a scary idea for some parents, not really knowing what it is, what they're supposed to do, how to get involved in it."

The rest of school faculty was also asked to assess linguistic/ethnic minority parent involvement in the questionnaire I administered. Figure 12 summarizes their answers.
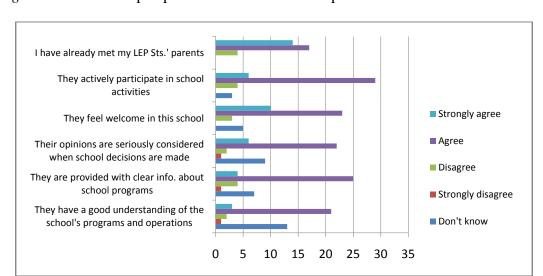
Figure 12. Teachers' perspectives of LEP students' parents' involvement

According to the data, only 4 out of 39 teachers disagreed that LEP students' parents are actively involved in school activities. Further, most teachers believed that these parents feel welcome in the school, that their opinions are taken into account in decision making processes, and that information they get from the school is clear, so it is not surprising that teachers think parents have a good understanding of school programs and operations. There was only one teacher who said that school information is indeed delivered to parents, but that he did not know if parents understood this information. Another teacher commented that Greenwood needs to do a better job at providing clear information to international parents about *their* (the school's) culture. Since the issue of communication is so recurrent in the data, I dedicate an entire forthcoming section to it.

In general, the impression school personnel have of ethnic/linguistic minority parent participation is very positive. However, when probed more deeply about this topic in interviews, they said that there are various degrees of parent involvement and that they found differences across ethnic and linguistic groups. For example, according to school administrators and ESL teachers, Korean parents are the most highly involved, followed by Islamic or Arabic parents and Mexican parents are the least involved. These differences are the topic of the next pages; I start by enunciating reasons why school personnel think some ethnic/linguistic minority parents are less involved than others.

LEP students' parents' perspectives of their involvement. Ethnic/linguistic minority parents' perspectives vary depending on the activities they are familiar with, either from their home culture or that they identify from communications from the school. In general, most participating parents did not assess other international parent involvement in school activities during interviews; they rather preferred to refer to their own participation, except for one Korean parent who argued that she would like to see international parents more involved. She mentioned, "I find the parental involvement activities well organized and useful. International parents should try harder to participate. Often I am the only international parent in those venues."

On the questionnaire, parents were only asked to assess their participation in terms of their communication with teachers, as Figure 13 shows.
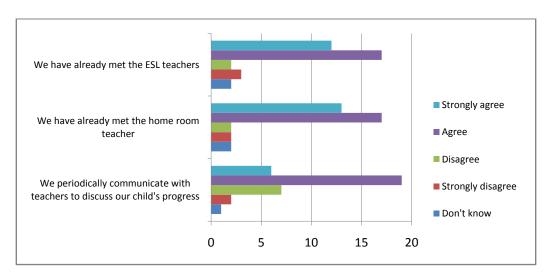
Figure 13. Parents' views of their communication with teachers.

The figure shows that parents (29/36) have met ESL and homeroom teachers (30/36) and that most of them (25) agreed that they periodically communicate with teachers, perhaps referring mostly to the fact that they come to the school when they are required to discuss their child's progress.

Parents more easily participate in activities where they feel compelled to participate (like those where they would get information about their children's performance) and do not feel in a position of power. Their participation also depends on their level of acculturation, as my Arab interpreter explained to me in relation to Arab families' involvement:
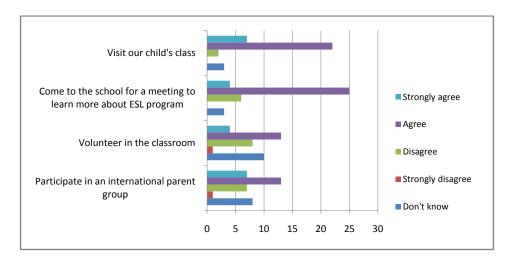
If you compare those families who recently arrived to the US to those families who have lived here for 3 or 4 months, you'll see that that they are not as involved, because they do not have to do it in their country. Sure, after 3 or 4 months you learn or you hear people saying that you have the right to talk to the principal… that's what they learn, and as they learn it, they use it.

This comment indicated that parent engagement in school activities is not necessarily cultural, but is a set of attitudes and actions that may be fostered by the environment. Perhaps in the case of Arab parents, involvement in an American school like Greenwood entails taking responsibility for a privilege they did not enjoy before.

I also asked parents in the questionnaire what activities they preferred to participate in. According to the data presented in the figure below, parents prefer to get involved in activities like classroom visits (29/34) or school meetings (29/38), activities where they can learn about the education their children are receiving at Greenwood. However, they do not seem to feel as motivated to participate in volunteering (Agree=17, Disagree=9, Don't Know=10) or participating in a parent group (Agree=20, Disagree=9, Don't Know=8). During interviews, I inquired about reasons why parents like to engage more in some activities than in others. As I explained before, they were more likely to participate in activities they feel are mandatory to the success of their children.

Figure 14. Parents' views of parent involvement: Activities they prefer to get involved in.

The following are the activities that were more commonly reported across interviews in order of popularity.

Parent-Teacher conferences. This is the activity most parents would not miss since they get an account of their children's progress and perhaps they are more used to participating in this one from their home countries. All the parents I interviewed mentioned they participated in parent teacher conferences unless they have conflicting schedules (although usually this is not the case since parents choose the time of the meeting) or if they do not have transportation. One of the Mexican mothers explained, "We have not been to the general assemblies, we have only gone to talk to the teachers." Often when there is a meeting with a Mexican parent, one of the ESL teachers or even their own child translates for them.

Holiday celebrations. This is the second most attended activity according to the parents I interviewed. Holiday celebrations include such activities such as Fall Carnival or Christmas celebration. According to what I observed during these events, ethnic/linguistic minority parents usually come with other parents from the same ethnic/cultural group because it makes them feel more comfortable. Still, many parents do not understand what goes on during these activities. I often saw parents of the same group mingling while their children played or participated in the activities with their classmates in more mixed ethnic/linguistic groups.

Open House. While many international parents participated in this activity, some do not feel motivated to come because they did not consider it important. Their perception of the value of this event stems from their lack of understanding of what the activity is about since many do not have an equivalent activity in their home countries. Some parents have come to Open House with the expectation of becoming familiar with their child's grade level curriculum, as well as knowing what the school demands from

them, as the purpose of the activity states. However, what I observed during Open House is that school personnel are around showing parents the building, while teachers are in their classrooms waiting for parents to introduce themselves and ask questions. Unfortunately, many parents do not have the confidence to ask questions.

   Supporting child's participation in extracurricular activities (arts, sports). Greenwood offers extracurricular activities mostly to students from 5th to 8th grade. Therefore, parents of students in those grades expressed that they like their children participating in those activities and parents of students in lower grades lamented that the school does not offer enough activities for their children.

   Some parents encouraged their children to participate in activities offered outside the school. For example, a Mexican mother commented, "My children only like sports; my son plays soccer and my daughter is in the school's basketball team. My son plays soccer on Thursdays and Saturdays with his neighborhood friends. Sometimes my husband and I take him to the soccer fields." It is very common to see Mexican and Arab families on the town's soccer fields, while it is common to find Korean and Chinese parents mingling while their children are in swimming practice at the university, violin practice, or in reading programs at the public library. Parents get to know about these activities through communications sent from the school or the university.

  Volunteering. This activity was only referred to by the parents in a couple of interviews; one was a Korean mother who was actively engaged in the volunteering program. She explained, "I try to participate in any way that I can help. For example, I was an official school volunteer for the year 2006-2007. I have also been helping with Trojan Store activities for two years." The Arab mothers I interviewed expressed a desire

to participate in the volunteering program, but they do not feel confident enough to do so. As the Arab interpreter explained to me, *"S*ometimes they want to volunteer; [one of the interviewees] wanted to volunteer [during recess time] for kindergarten but she couldn't basically because the kids speak better English than her. So they want to volunteer, they want to be involved more but the language is a barrier for that."

Literacy night. Parents from different ethnic/cultural groups like to participate in the Open Library event that Greenwood library has once every week. A Mexican mother said, "Sometimes we go to the library and they read books to the children… we do like it. They paint, draw, and we read with them" (p. 9). This activity is most popular among parents of students in lower grades.

Parent-Teacher Organization. Even though international parents receive many communications from the PTO, the great majority of international parents do not know what PTO stands for or what its function is. One of the Arab parents explained though that he does not participate in it because he does not have the time: "I have a lot of researches." In fact, one of the administrators mentioned that there are no international parents in the PTO; about 10 parents make up the organization, of which 2 are African American and about 8 of European descent.

In conclusion, parents participated in activities they felt more compelled to attend, especially if they are related to the academic support of their child and perhaps because they are familiar with these are activities from their home countries. In general, ethnic/linguistic minority parents and school personnel's perspectives about LEP student education and their parents' involvement in school activities were very positive. A few parents were critical about specific aspects of the education provided at Greenwood,

including traditional teaching methodologies used by some teachers and, for the most part, issues of communication. Next, I discuss some factors parents and school personnel identified during interviews that hindered international parent participation in school activities.

Reasons why linguistic/ethnic minority parents might not get involved. The barriers for participation identified by school personnel and parents coincide with barriers found in the relevant research (see Chapter 2, p.47-49). They are organized according to their recurrence in the participants' responses and comments.

Language/cultural barrier. For some parents who are not English proficient, communicating with the school is a hard task; a task that some would prefer to avoid. One of the administrators asserted that he would actually assess international parent involvement "depending on their management of the English language; the more comfortable they feel with their English, the more involved they are." Both school administrators and the ESL coordinator explained that they have dealt with parents who speak little English but are highly involved as well as parents who do not feel confident to come to the school and communicate with them or the teachers.

Generally, when parents are not proficient in English, they lose their confidence to come to the school and interact with the school community. Then parents become dependent on others like friends, spouses, or their children to communicate with the school. As one Arab mother explained, "The other problem I have is that we don't have time [to participate in school organized parent involvement activities]. My husband has been studying and working so he cannot be in there so I have to be the one going to school and then language is a barrier." This is the very same case that several Mexican

mothers experience, where they have to rely on their husbands to translate during parent teacher conferences. Even though many of these parents have been in the US for more than 10 years and have attended the adult ESL program at Greenwood, a free program that is offered at the school for incoming families and members of the community who are not fluent in English, they have not had the real need to develop fluency in English, as one of the Mexican mothers explained:

> I did not understand any English, and still I decided to start working. Because it is a Mexican restaurant, and I was usually working in the kitchen, then I rarely needed English. Then I got pregnant and now I take care of the baby, but since registration starts tomorrow, I will sign up for ESL classes so that I can understand.

The parents I interviewed who are not English proficient expressed a desire to learn English at Greenwood, but they either do not have the time or do not feel motivated to come when their peers are more fluent than they.

> *Different degrees of knowledge/understanding about American schooling.*

According to one of the school administrators, ethnic/linguistic minority families come to the school with different levels of knowledge of the American schooling system. That is, some parents know more than others what they or their children are expected to do. She added, "I don't know if that's because… most of them are associated with [the local university], if when they come to [study/work at this university, the faculty/personnel there] do a better job of explaining and acclimating these individuals to the area." According to this administrator, the education/experience that many international parents

get at the university familiarizes them with the American educational system and perhaps tells them something about their role as parents of students in an American school.

Sometimes parents are simply not interested in engaging in school activities that they do not understand. One Korean parent, for example, explained that he had not participated in any activity because he did not know which activities were for parents. A Latina mother elaborated more on this phenomenon saying "Since you do not understand [American] traditions, you participate in activities but not with the sufficient motivation. I mean, if you do not understand the purpose of activities then why would you participate?" This lack of understanding and subsequent lack of motivation decreases as parents spend more time in the US and get more exposure to the dominant culture.

Lack of transportation. As the ESL program coordinator explained, many international parents who are students themselves have only one car that is mostly used by the parent who attends school. So they rely on this single car as their means of transportation to and from the school, since there is no public transportation to the school. There used to be a university bus route that went to the school but the company eliminated it. One of the school administrators said, "We called them and we couldn't get them to bring back the […] Express; it's a budgetary thing… […] We told them it's hard for our population of volunteers."

The families who suffer the most are those who just arrived, or are in their first year of school, since it usually takes them some time to buy a car and they are precisely the ones who need the most support from the school to help them understand the school's culture. A Latina mother complained that she "couldn't go to the activities for not having a car… that's one thing we had criticized, that the school has not coordinated any

solution to help parents who don't have a car, which are generally those in their first year here."

Lack of time. Since most of the parents are students or faculty at the university, they are usually busy with school work, assistantships, and research. And very often, the other parent stays home and takes care of the house and sometimes several more children. There are other parents who are not related to the University, usually Mexican parents, who work at restaurants or in the fields, often working for two shifts in a row. As the ESL coordinator said, "sometimes a lot of the parents who aren't involved with the University have to work very hard for a living and… if time permits a lot of them will come to the school if they're able to and will try to communicate but sometimes because of work schedules they just can't." This was precisely the case of a Mexican mother, who explained

> Since my husband works all day long, and he is the only one who understands [English], we don't really participate [in school activities] because of the lack of time, and now we don't have a job [in the fields]. And if he doesn't take care of his [current] job, it'd be difficult to get a new job if he's fired, so my husband is very careful with [keeping] his job. He can only ask for permission when we have an important meeting.

So parents' participation also depends on the kind of jobs parents have; some of them have jobs where they have to stick to tight schedules or jobs where they have no position of authority where they can make decisions about their time.

Childcare. Some parents have other children they have to care for and that added to the challenges of transportation and time which limits the parents' possibilities to

participate in school activities. As the ESL coordinator explained, "the parent just has some difficulty to get in here or there's two, three, four other children at home that they need to watch and then might need someone else to watch their children."

Lack of a support network (friends). For some parents, it is important to share opportunities of participation with other friends who have children at Greenwood, especially if they lack English proficiency. The company of more experienced friends provides parents with the confidence they need to come to the school. Some ethnic/linguistic groups seem to value the support of friends more than others; for example in the questionnaire, when asked what would facilitate their participation, several Korean parents (6/13) expressed that they would like the support of a neighbor or friend.

Feeling uninvited/not needed. When asked about the lack of participation by some Korean parents, a Korean mother explained they do not get involved because "they believe that the school is doing a great job anyway, and therefore their help is not crucial," which resonates with the comments from other parents from other ethnic/cultural groups. She added,

> [Some Korean parents] find it hard to mingle with other parents and feel
> somewhat uninvited. This is what I sometimes feel, too. American parents often
> talk with other American parents only, treating international parents as sort of
> invisible. I feel pretty awkward in a situation like that. Not that I blame them: I
> understand that American parents also find it hard to blend with international
> parents who seem to be shy and whose English is not fluent.

In conclusion, I found that although there are some external factors that hinder parent participation, there is one central obstacle that significantly impacts their involvement and that is the communication between the school and ethnic/linguistic minority families. Their communication can be negatively affected by a language difference, not only in terms of the parents' home language and English but also by a school jargon that parents do not understand. Communication can also be affected by a cultural difference or as some authors call it, a cultural incongruence that leads to conflicting values and expectations. This is the topic that I expand upon in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6: ETHNIC/LINGUISTIC PARENT ENGAGEMENT AND THE CHALLENGES OF COMMUNICATING ACROSS LINES OF DIFFERENCE

In this chapter I discuss the two issues that represent the most significant findings of this research for they have a significant effect on the engagement of ethnic/linguistic parents in their children's education: communication gaps between the school and families and lack of parent leadership. I focus on these two issues since I found that many international parents do not get involved for their fear of communicating with the school due to a language barrier. Even though parents and school personnel described opportunities to interact, authentic dialogue often does not occur. This problem is similar to what Delpit (1988) calls "the silenced dialogue," an attempt for dialoguing where school personnel appears to listen, but does not always hear, the voices of parents of color.

In the case of parents and school personnel at Greenwood, there is a silenced dialogue not simply because the teachers may unintentionally not hear parents, but because they use different codes to communicate, either during face-to-face interactions or in written messages. The result of this is that in many occasions where there is a difference in language (either because parents are not English fluent or because they do not possess the linguistic capital that is valued in the school), no meaning is actually conveyed. Therefore, some linguistic minority parents do not really understand what the school expects from them and their children, nor does the school understand international families' needs and expectations.

Parent leadership and empowerment is the second issue I address in this chapter. I find a relationship between parent leadership and communication because it is language

(possessing the linguistic capital to participate in schools) that empowers parents to genuinely and proactively engage in their children's education without being an object but rather a subject (Pérez Carreón et al., 2005) in the process. I find parent leadership and empowerment relevant because, as several authors (i.e. Delgado-Gaitán, 1991; Pérez Carreón et al., 2005; and Olivos, 2006) suggest, new parent involvement models focus on empowerment and emancipation from school organized activities that domesticate parents to engage in specific ways and do not provide them with skills and opportunities to engage in decision making processes that affect their children's education.

Even though shared leadership has not been given much importance in the school by either parents or school personnel (parents are afraid of being in positions of leadership and school personnel fear that parents will spoil the progress they have already made), it is a recurrent theme and requirement in school official documents. In this research I insist on the importance of parent leadership and empowerment because I find it necessary to bridge the communication gap between school and the families: parent leaders can become mediators between the two and by facilitating communication, they can help incoming parents understand school expectations and become more involved members of the school community.

I start this chapter by describing school personnel and international parents' perspectives on communication and parent leadership and empowerment. Then I present school personnel's perspectives concerning differences in parent engagement across different ethnic/linguistic groups and elaborate on how school and families negotiate educational expectations taking into account their cultural, socio economic, and educational background.

Communication between the School and Ethnic/Linguistic Minority Families

Communication with families has been identified by school personnel as one of the most important challenges the school needs to address in order to support parent involvement. Concerning the communication with linguistic/ethnic minority parents, these are two related NCLB provisions/requirements (in the Parent Involvement Policy evaluation): communication should be sent in accessible language and the report card should give a clear account of students' progress.

Even though school documents emphasize that they need to improve these two areas, most teachers (29 vs. 5 who disagreed and 7 who answered "Don't Know") and most parents (23 vs. 5 who disagreed and 7 who answered "Don't Know") agreed that the school provides them with clear information about the school's programs. Furthermore, many teachers (24 vs. 3 who disagreed and 13 who "Don't Know") and most parents (19 vs. 6 who disagreed and 9 who "Don't Know") agreed that they have a clear understanding of the school's programs and operations. Looking at these data alone, there appears to be no communication issues between the school and the families. However, during interviews I had the opportunity to find out that this communication is being hindered by a number of factors.

Perspectives about communication.

Parents get clear communications from the school. In the questionnaires, most parents and teachers expressed that they maintain good communication about LEP students' progress. During interviews, some parents added that school staff is patient when communicating with LEP parents. One Latina mother praised the phone communications from the school, referring to the fact that the school secretaries call

parents when a student absence occurs and to the automated phone emergency system that the school uses to warn parents when an emergency occurs, like changes in the schedule due to inclement weather. However, when asked further, the ESL program stakeholders identified some areas where communication is somewhat strained, including the teachers' fear to communicate with parents, parents who are not interested in communications from the school, a language barrier, written communication that do not state clear expectations for parents, unclear communication with teachers of upper grades, lack of communication of school curriculum, and lack of importance given to students' family lives.

      Teachers are hesitant when communicating with parents. One of the school administrators expressed that even though she does not get many teachers complaining that they cannot communicate with international parents, they are still hesitant to interact with linguistic/ethnic minority parents and students due to either a language or a cultural barrier. She explained that, "There is still that… misunderstanding maybe … that hesitancy to understand their world and how we're asking them to fit in our world." She believed that her faculty is prepared to communicate with these families, but she thinks they do not have "the confidence to deliver that preparedness." She added "I have teachers that when dealing with our international population they don't deal with it; they come straight to here and say 'you're gonna have to deal with this.'"

      Something that can be frustrating for both school personnel and parents is the fact that their communication will often require an interpreter or a mediator, and in that exchange, according to this administrator, the message might get lost. Another administrator commented that they were aware that they need to do some language

accommodations, but that they could not make them: "There are some things that we have to put up to parents by law, and it has to be worded in a certain way; the government doesn't give us a choice in that unfortunately."

Some parents may not be concerned about receiving communications from the school*.* The administrator who is also the school-family liaison, explained that many parents do not really care about language accommodations because they are not interested in "technical stuff" from the school. She said that "Most parents, when you try to have a meeting, or when you try to have explanations [they say] 'I trust you; you're educating my kid, you do what you do; I do what I do in my job, I do what I need to do as a parent, that's your job, you do it,' and that's really the mentality of most parents in our school, international or non international."

There is a language barrier*.* While school administrators think that the school cannot make all the necessary accommodations for its international population, the ESL coordinator believes that the school is doing these families a disservice in terms of communication; she explained, "A lot of families maybe do something if they understand [communication sent from school], but they're bombarded with so many papers that come home! It's hard for them to do something if they don't speak very well English." According to her, the ESL program sends communication in the families' home languages if they have them available, but that they do not do it as a school that often.

School language is difficult to understand, even for American parents as far as I heard during the School Improvement meeting; there are codes they use that are understood by only some parents (e.g. Box Tops, Open House, school supplies list, etc.). For example, one parent said during a faculty meeting,

I really appreciate the messages that we parents receive every week saying what

the children are gonna eat, or the topics they're gonna study every week, but at

the beginning I did not understand so many things; like ISAT, and I felt that I was

supposed to know all those things… I didn't know what Open House was; [I

thought it meant] they were having a yard sale! So I didn't know how to behave,

what to do, how to approach teachers… so I think there is a language barrier in

terms of me not being as fluent as you [teachers] in English but also what we are

expected to know in terms of schooling and all those terms that we don't

understand.

There is also a language barrier when parents are not proficient in English; they

completely depend on an interpreter (ESL teachers, spouse, or their own children). One

of the ESL teachers replied when asked about Mexican parents involvement that "[They]

do not get very involved because of] the language barrier. And it's usually the mom that

will come with the children and the father is still the one who speaks more English than

the mother, but then if the father doesn't come, the mother is hesitant to come because

her English skills are very low."

Communication does not state clear expectations for parents. The ESL

coordinator also explained that ethnic/linguistic minority families do not participate in

activities like the PTO because the information they receive about the organization and

its activities is not clear or not delivered with enough clarity: "I don't think there's a lot

of explanation at the beginning [about PTO], […] they just don't know, there's a lot just

put out there; there's also a lot of notes coming home from PTO, those notes are a little

bit long and for the parents that's a lot to take in if they don't know English that well."

So, these communication do not clearly explain what parents should do or what their role is. As my Arab interpreter explained to me, "Whenever they get the document for the PTO they think okay, this is not for us, this does not concern us." But they also said that if they received clear invitations to participate in the PTO, they might send their husbands to participate, since they speak better English.

Communication with teachers of lower grades is better than communication with teachers of upper grades. Some Arab mothers who have children in Junior High school complained that communication with teachers got worse as their children moved to upper grades. According to them, "Until the sixth grade there is a communication because they know what the student is doing; they know the homework, they know the activities, but after that they don't… it's because in the teacher-student relationship the parents don't get involved."

My Arab interpreter explained to me that there is also a bigger language barrier as children move to upper grades; for these mothers, it is more difficult to understand the content their children study in those grades and to guess what they need to do since they receive less input from teachers on the content they are studying. The ESL coordinator agreed that this happens and provided an explanation to the problem:

> Communication [in lower grades] is such a big part of what you do with your students, with your parents, because your primary goal is to teach them to read and to write; there's very little focus on the academic content and it's on the actual nature of the language so [teachers] are very used to sitting with parents […] As you progress upward to the grade levels every year, the focus is more on the academic content and students are expected to be more responsible and

therefore the teachers don't communicate as much with the parents because the

students are expected to go home and share things with them and take more

responsibility for themselves.

She added that she is not necessarily sure why this happens; if it depends on the teachers'

age, or experience, professional development, or simply willingness to communicate with

parents. It seems though that there is an assumption that LEP students in upper grades can

develop autonomy at the same rate as their American peers.

The curriculum is not communicated to parents. Several parents I talked to

would like the school to share the syllabi with them so that they knew how to better

support their children's education at home. One of the Latina mothers said, "We don't

know what a student [at Greenwood] should know. So there is no way of knowing what

the child missed to learn or when we're going back to [our home country], we'd like to

know what's missing [from the contents they're expected to know in their home country].

This way we can prepare them for the standardized tests there." This was also the

expectation of many Korean parents who are concerned with catching up with the content

in Korean schools.

Students' family lives matter. Some parents expressed that they would like to

know more about their children's lives in the classroom and at the same time they would

like teachers to ask about their children's lives at home so that they get to know more

about their students' needs and strengths. One Latina mother stated,

There is no integration between the school and the homes which I consider so

important for our children's education; it's just like one thing happens at home

and a very different one happens at school, so you never get to know what

happens in the school and [the teachers] never get to know what happens at home!

So there totally is a disconnect between life at home and life at school.

This integration between school and home lives is also very important to the development of the students' hybrid identities; the presence or lack of such integration is crucial for the healthy growth of their personalities.

Improving communication. Several parents came up with ideas about what the school can do to improve communication with ethnic/linguistic minority families.

Educate about expectations and school operations at the beginning of the year. They believe that activities conducted at the beginning of the school year, like Open House, could provide parents with more information about the role expected from them. During a school faculty meeting, one parent commented,

> I think that in general there is a great communication gap, especially when we just arrive in the country and I think that teachers need to have this very important conversation with recent immigrant parents because there are so many things we don't understand, we need someone who comes and say 'This is what you are expected to do in this society and this is what your child is expected' […]I think that teachers cannot expect recent immigrant parents to come and say things, but I think that teachers need to approach parents, because we need a lot of support."

Planning and developing a second Open House or a specific Parent Orientation meeting for new coming international parents could be a solution, not only for some parents, but also for the ESL coordinator who explained that she has tried to do something like this at the Open House but that she needs people at the school to work together on the same effort. The problem is, she said, that "if you're not in control of the situations I think it's

harder to get." By this she implies that she needs the support of the administration to put this idea into action.

But educating families cannot only be done exclusively during school meetings. Many parents agree that they would be happy with having home visits with the teachers, especially for the new coming families; this is actually a procedure that many parents are used to from their home countries. Several parents explained how home visits could be beneficial, like a Korean father who said "In Korea, teachers are encouraged to visit their […] students; I believe that sometimes students might have many problems but you don't know what is the real problem, the reality behind him or her. If we can visit the home we can figure out what is the real problem, it's very beneficial for students and for teachers." Similarly, a Japanese parent explained "In Japan, usually at the beginning of the year the teacher visits all the students' house […] I think that actually shows that teachers care about their students so Japanese students and families would appreciate actually if you would do that."

Utilize user-friendly codes or teach parents school codes. Parents need to be familiarized to the school language to facilitate their understanding of their role and therefore their involvement in school activities. The school can also use clearer language in communication to families. For example, the communications may include definitions of acronyms or descriptions of specific events of which international parents may not be familiar.

Create support networks. Pairing up families or electing and supporting parent leaders/advocates would compensate for the lack of personnel in the school to help parents from different ethnic linguistic groups. Sojourner/immigrant parents who have

lived in the US for a longer time may accompany incoming parents and help them in the process of adjustment to the host culture.

    Create comfortable spaces of communication. According to the ESL coordinator, Parent-Teacher conferences sometimes are not comfortable spaces for parents to interact with teachers. She suggested that the school could sponsor "more activities with the parents so they could sit down with their teachers and just talk and not in a formalized parent-teacher conference but just getting in a big group together, … maybe the parents feel more comfortable in situations like that." Maybe parent groups could provide them with the confidence they need to freely discuss student progress.

    Change/accommodate policies according to linguistic/ethnic minority families' needs. It would be very beneficial if school administrators and teachers assessed the extent to which some school policy reform could be done to provide more involvement opportunities for ethnic/linguistic minority families. According to the ESL coordinator, it takes the administration supporting parent involvement efforts by making them a priority. Parent involvement is important for school administrators, she said, but they already have too many activities and operations to be busy and comply to.

    However, the ESL coordinator believes that if *someone* took the initiative to propose that school administrators make certain changes that fostered international parent participation, it would not take a lot of work to make things happen. Since she said that she has proposed chances herself, I assume that the "someone" she refers to is probably a parent, but what parent would commit to do this? And how does the school encourage and support parents who want to speak on behalf of other parents or influence decision-making processes? In the next section, I discuss school personnel and parents'

perceptions and feelings about parent leadership in Greenwood as well as the importance

of promoting shared leadership as a strategy that facilitates communication between the

school and international families and authentic opportunities of parent engagement.

Shared Leadership and Parent Empowerment

The School-Parent Compact (a book that schools are required to provide parents

at the beginning of the school year that communicates rights and responsibilities of

parents and school personnel) refers to the following activities related to parent

leadership:

- Recruit parents to participate on committees

- Participate in decision making

- Serve on committees

- Prepare and develop leadership training

- Ask for parents' assistance concerning better ways to communicate and

work with international parents

- Analyze barriers for international parent participation

- Organize an annual meeting with parents

- Prepare parents about state's academic standards

According to the Parent Involvement Policy Analysis report, all mandated teams

and committees except for the School Improvement committee do not have parent

representatives and there is no parent council. In general, the types of parent involvement

that are most valued by school administrators and teachers include activities that support

child learning and school events (like holiday celebrations); parent leadership is number 6

and in their ranking of parent involvement activities and fundraising appears to be the last

one, number 7, in spite of being one of the most visible ones during the school year.

Perspectives on parent empowerment/leadership.

Different perspectives of authority. Parents come from cultures where different

perspectives of authority exist, which in turn may affect parents' desire to be leaders; in

most cases, they avoid being in positions of authority. One of the ESL teachers, when

referring to Mexican parent involvement, explained that they are hesitant to participate

because they feel it is not their job to tell the teacher what she needs to do because she

already knows and they would never argue with the teacher because she knows best. She

added, "I've only had a few [Mexican] parents that have volunteered to help; the other

parents just want to come and be here; they'll come but they'll just be; they don't want to

be put in a position of any authority at all." The ESL coordinator also commented that

"A lot of parents are very hesitant to speak out about something that they don't like or

don't agree with maybe because you know, they're being polite or they don't want to

offend… or maybe they don't feel like it's their place."

Parents lack confidence. As I have already discussed throughout this dissertation,

soujourner/immigrant parents often lack confidence to participate in school activities due

to several factors, including differences in language and culture, and lack of familiarity

with American schooling. For both school personnel and parents, time of immersion in

the American culture in addition to progress in language proficiency and exposure to

academic life in the university help parents gain more confidence. One of the ESL

teachers even said that the school has already done a lot to engage parents and that is up

to them to gain confidence and act now.

Needing to be "pushed" to participate. When inviting parents to participate in this research and in analyzing parents responses to the questionnaire, I found out that parents often need to feel compelled to go to school activities in order to participate, often precisely because of their views of authority. During one of the focus groups with Spanish speaking parents, for example, the ESL teacher attended because she is an important liaison with this community—she is Mexican. None of the parents showed up for the group meeting even though I had sent three invitations and the ESL teacher had called them personally on the phone. When it is not school administrators who tell parents that they have to go to school events, many parents just think it is not important to attend.

Some parents do not feel attracted to the idea of engaging in activities that encourage their empowerment since they are not used to this concept from their home cultures, at least in the context of schooling. One Korean parent, for example, commented that parents are not supposed to organize in his culture and therefore, he sees little possibility that it will occur in this school. At the same time, according to parents' responses to the questionnaire, most of them (a high number of Spanish speaking and Korean parents) do not know if their opinions are taken seriously when school decisions are made. Still, there were some parents who during interviews expressed their desire to share their ideas with the school, so there seems to be a contradiction between some parents' motivation to share their ideas and their fear about speaking up. They might discuss their concerns among those of their ethnic/cultural group but not necessarily take this information to the school administration.

Having to adjust to the host culture. Part of the reluctance to share their ideas with the school or to participate in the decision making process is because many international parents believe that it would not be proper to complain since they are the ones who need to adapt to the school's culture because "it is their country, not ours" as one Mexican parent put it. Another Latina parent, however, was critical of this position and struggled with "that idea, that I have to adapt to the school, not only because the school is very good but because this culture is very good, this country is very good! And we came here to learn and so did our children… and we need to adjust to that… and there isn't a process of cultural negotiation." I will further discuss parents' perspectives on acculturation in the section on cultural incongruence.

A parent mediator/advocate is needed. The school administrators considered it important for them to hear what parents need to say, and since many of them do not have the confidence to speak up, parent representatives could be mediators in the process of communication. One of them explained,

> It's definitely gonna take individuals within the international community who can say and get the word out that it is okay to go out and have those conversations. There's got to be some leadership within those communities as well to create that level of confidence and security […] That's a greater impact than me telling them hey, I've got an open door, come on in; they need to hear it from somebody who's been in here who can go in and have that conversation and that they're gonna be heard and there's gonna be some follow up. So as we have international parents or whomever attend things like retreats we are hoping that they live those experiences and go out and share those experiences openly within that community as well.

According to this administrator, I assume that there is an expectation for parents to take initiative and become spokespeople of the parent community themselves and not as a result of a communal effort between the school and the families.

During interviews, several parents showed interest in having parent representatives or advocates who take their opinions to the school since they do not feel confident doing it themselves. For example, a group of Arab mothers expressed, they "want their voices to be heard." The school could work with these parents and obtain rich information about parents' understandings, expectations, and concerns related to their children's education. By the same token, the school could use a liaison as an opportunity to encourage parent leadership.

But promoting parent leaders is not the only way to promote parent leadership. One Latina parent commented that parents also can get involved in decision making processes at the classroom level. She has done so by sharing with her son's teacher ideas about teaching a specific lesson, sharing teaching materials with her and even translating a story from Spanish to English for the children to read in class. She explained that it was the teacher who encouraged parents to contribute with their ideas.

Other ideas that parents shared with me concerned activities they used in schools in their home countries including the creation of a parent support group where parents share their ideas and concerns related to their children's learning and experience in the school and making a policy whereby parents are mandated to come for a whole day to the school so that they get to know their child's school routine. The mother who proposed this said that "you really get to know what your child does during the day, what her daily

life is about! So it was a wonderful activity that really involved parents, because you get involved when you really *know* [what goes on in the school]."

Parents also said that the school needed to make sure that parents could express their ideas, even in their home languages if it otherwise was not possible, and that they have access to transportation; if there is no possibility of a bus, the school could help coordinating car pooling among the parents. In sum, ethnic/linguistic minority parents need the administrators and teachers' support to take their initiatives to the school either by themselves or through parent leaders. Several parents have expressed interest in undertaking a more proactive role whereas other parents are still reluctant to since the idea of empowerment and/or leadership is foreign to them.

Parent leadership is an aspect of parent involvement that needs to be further discussed and analyzed at Greenwood. Perhaps school personnel believe that parent empowerment and leadership is up to the parents or perhaps there is already the assumption that parents trust the school is doing a good job so they are not interested in developing their self-agency and leadership. Still, what I observed is that many potential valuable efforts to work with international parents are not conducted unless they are mandated or required from the state government.

In the next section I discuss the role that cultural capital, educational attainment, and knowledge of school's predominant culture have on understanding and creating perceptions and expectations of parent leadership and communication between schools and families. Understanding the effect of culture better helps in creating more realistic expectations about LEP education and their parents' engagement.

Cultural Capital and Limited English Proficient Students' Parents' Involvement

In previous sections I have presented school personnel and ethnic/linguistic minority parents' views on LEP student education and parent involvement. After discussing general opinions and concerns, I focused on two significant issues that came out in my analysis as related to the relationship between school and families in the context of parent involvement activities: one was communication and the other one parent leadership/empowerment. In the specific context of a multiethnic/ multilingual school like Greenwood, cultural and social capital play a very particular role in shaping the school community members' constructions of schooling and involvement. In this section I discuss those different constructions and understandings and how these affect school personnel and families' negotiation of their roles and their expectations.

Culture, LEP student education, and parent involvement. In schools that are increasingly becoming more diverse, school administrators and teachers may feel the urge to treat all students equally in spite of the linguistic, ethnic, and cultural differences. Greenwood has more experience than many local schools in dealing with wide-ranging forms of diversity due to the great influx of international parents coming to study at the local university, and many of these families live on campus and thus attend this school. Because it has had a longer history in this effort, one of the administrators argued that diversity is simply one more trait that they do not need to address separately: "I don't feel it as an administrator within this building [that linguistic and ethnic minority families are] an issue that needs to be singled out and addressed. I think it is something that when we do see it we deal with it and […] it's just such a part of our uniqueness…" However, the

ESL coordinator related a comment made by a Colombian parent during a meeting that made her more aware of how *difference* needs to be addressed in the school:

> I think he made the best statement in the world, he said "you know, you treat your students well, but you don't know our children, you don't know us. You see us, you're polite, you say hello but you don't know if I have a good sense of humor, my likes of dislikes, or you don't know that my child does dance class on Saturdays; you don't get involved in our children's lives, partly because of the language and as a whole;" I think that teachers are afraid because they don't speak English, it's difficult, so you just don't get connected to them sometimes as much as you do with your other students and for me that's a shame; it really hit home for a lot of teachers.

Parents are aware of such differences, differences that seldom are discussed by parents with the school (they think they are not in position to impose their values) or by teachers (they do not want to inquire about families' intimate lives). Therefore, perspectives that are shaped by school personnel and ethnic/linguistic minority families' cultural capital may collide and perhaps never come to be openly negotiated. The Arab mothers I interviewed called this a "clash between two cultures." One of them provided an example of a situation during play where accidently there was physical contact between a boy and a girl, which in their culture is not considered appropriate. The mother complained to the administrator who explained that this was normal; he didn't do anything for her. She further commented that they "cannot say anything about it just because the majority [of students] is from that culture [American] and they [the Arab community] are minority. So they respect the culture, the majority's, but they want their culture to be respected as

well." At a different time her daughter, a 6th grader, had just started wearing a head scarf. During recess, her classmates told her that she was probably wearing the scarf because she was bald. The young girl finally refused to wear it to avoid feeling insulted.

School personnel's perspective on parent involvement and culture: Ethnic/Linguistic minority groups engage differently. As I explained previously, initial responses from school personnel led to the conclusion that the majority of international parents are quite collaborative and supportive of the school's efforts. However, interviews revealed that school personnel believe that parents from different ethnic/linguistic groups hold different educational/academic expectations and attitudes. Put simply, the reason why parents engage differently is culture, as one of the administrators explained, "that is a cultural thing in terms of the way possibly education is viewed in their countries and how they pursue supporting their students within the educational environment." Another administrator gave the example of how views of authority differ:

> The way they interact with me I think that's cultural. I think that the Middle
> Easterner families I don't think… I think it has to do that I'm a woman in
> authority and that maybe influences their interactions with me [which she had
> already described as contentious]. To the Asian population I am the principal,
> period. I think it's the figure, it's the position, and that's what they respect and so
> I think that part is cultural.

As this example shows, certain behaviors are associated with specific ethnic groups, even though the groups are large and diverse themselves.

Culture and educational attainment: Parents' schooling experience might influence involvement. When asked about the role of the educational attainment level in the way parents engage in school activities, one of the administrators explained that involvement in schools is higher in some countries/cultures than others:

> Asians tend to work at SIU, I don't know whether that is within their own educational systems in their countries where maybe the Asian populations have more access to higher ed, you know, so their goal is get my higher ed degree then get some experience in the US because that elevates their status when they go back whereas the Middle Easterner families maybe their access, especially for the females to education isn't like… so they actually have to come here to get their education before they go back.

According to this comment, there is an association between ethnicity (and even nationality) and educational attainment. One thing this administrator might not be taking into account is that most of the sojourner parents who come to the local university, and often their spouses, have a high educational level and that they come from a wide variety of countries, including those in Africa and South America, only their numbers are lesser compared to those coming from Asia. Perhaps the number of Asian parents is compared in this sense to the number of parents who are not related to the local university, who are mostly Mexican and possess a lower educational attainment level. Consequently, parents who come from other Spanish speaking countries and are highly educated become invisible in this classification.

Parents who come to the US as students prioritize education, so do their children. In an interview with one of the administrators, he commented that if education

is a priority for parents (meaning, if they invest in pursuing higher degrees), it becomes a

priority for their children as well. He claimed that he actually experienced this since his

parents came to the US as immigrants from the Soviet Union.

> I was born here but my mother is Ukrainian and my father is Russian and
>
> education was a top priority for them; they were unable to help me, that's the
>
> difference. They spoke four languages at the time, they didn't speak English so
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> they weren't able to help me with my work so I was kind of more or less on my
>
> own and you know I did well enough to grow up since they sent me to school,
>
> learning English from the kids around us.

In his story, he is not only referring to immigrant/sojourner parents who are highly

educated, because his parents were not, at least according to US standards, but also to

working parents. It is not clear, though, if for him only those parents who come to the

local university to pursue graduate studies are the ones who prioritize education.

> ***Parent engagement among the three largest ethnic/linguistic minority groups in***
>
> ***Greenwood.*** The examples presented here are by no means representative of all the

cultural/ethnic/linguistic groups of families that come to Greenwood. I focused on the

larger groups because this facilitated data collection and analysis.

For the school personnel I interviewed, there are differences in the way parents

from ethnic/linguistic minority groups engage in school activities; those who are highly

involved attend most events, ask questions about school operations and programs, and

basically support the school's efforts in educating their children. The least involved

parents, according to the data, are those who seldom or never attend school events, do not

help their children with homework, and rarely or never communicate with school personnel.

School administrators and the ESL teacher identified the Asian and Arab populations as the most highly engaged of the international population. One of the administrators explained,

It is my Asian population and the Islamic population who is in here the most looking for more challenges and more rigorous approaches to the curriculum; that is the group of parents who stand a lot of time talking to me about what kind of gifted education do we provide, what kind of partnerships can we have with the high school so that their son or daughter can go ahead and take a course at the high school level.

During interviews, school administrators and ESL teachers described the engagement of parents from the three largest linguistic minority groups in the ESL program. They also provided some reasons why they believed some groups are more involved than others.

East Asian parents, especially Korean parents, are highly involved. For school administrators, the Asian population (mostly referring to the Korean families, as they are the largest Asian group in the school) are perceived to be more highly educated than parents in other groups; they usually work at the local university as faculty. They maintain respectful and grateful interactions with school personnel; they frequently communicate with teachers but avoid questioning the school personnel's actions. They hold high academic expectations for their children. In the case of Korean parents, they actually even get tutors to help their children stay on top and prepare for standardized tests in Korea. One of the administrators said that, unlike other groups, they speak

English in school events. Yet the ESL coordinator commented that, even though they actively attend school events, they avoid participating in activities where they feel "on the spot."

Middle Eastern families are highly involved. According to school administrators, Middle Easterner families, particularly the mothers, like to volunteer. Arab parents (often referred to by the participants as Islamic or Middle Easterner) regularly participate in school events, where they usually speak English. Most if not all are affiliated with the local university, usually as students rather than faculty. They are more assertive and demanding than other groups of parents, so often their interactions with school personnel are more contentious.

Mexican families are the least involved. In reference to parent participation, only Mexican families were mentioned by school personnel during interviews—they were often referred to as Hispanic and differentiated from families coming from South America and the Caribbean. One of the administrators actually made clear that for her, Mexican and Latino are two separate groups.

One of the ESL teachers, who happens to be Mexican, explained that the families from her country attending Greenwood are very hesitant to participate; "they would call me at home, they would call me on my cell phone, they're still hesitant to go through the school system". One of the school administrators explained that this might happen because they are aware that their level of education is not as high as other parents,' because many of them may be illiterate in their own language: "I don't want to say [they feel] embarrassed by it, but they don't want people to know that they aren't as educated

as other people. And I also think that they automatically feel that they're judged; I think

the Mexican families feel that way, so I think there's automatically a barrier."

The interviewees agreed that Mexican families are the least involved of all groups

of international parents; they do not come to events, unless they're mandatory (like a

Parent-Teacher conference), and they do not volunteer like other parents do. They are

less likely to be affiliated with the local university; only 2 of about 10 Mexican families

in the school have parents who are students there. In most cases, they work with other

Spanish speakers in restaurants or in the fields; therefore, they do not have the

opportunity to learn the language as it happens with other groups of parents.

One of the administrators assumed that education is not the priority for Mexican

parents as much as family is; she commented,

> I think with the Mexican families, and again, this is just general, I don't wanna
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> say I'm stereotyping them because I don't want to do that, […] but in general
>
> culturally with the Mexican families I think that what I see with them… education
>
> is not their priority; I think they put family definitely in a very high regard […]it's
>
> more of a familial thing I think with the Mexican families.

This assumption implies that not prioritizing education is a Mexican cultural trait, and

then it is not clear whether this view also applies to those parents who are graduate

students. She also commented that the fathers do not get involved but mothers do and she

did not know if it was part of the culture that mothers' role was to take care of the

children's education and not the fathers.'

One of the things that this school administrator also highlighted concerning Mexican families was that communication with them is usually about a problem; they do not come to meetings or do not follow rules:

I can tell you that most of my conversations with Mexican families are over a problem; they feel like their child is mistreated, they don't want to follow the pickup/drop off rule because they feel they want to do it their way and they think my rules are stupid, uhm, they're not going to do it and I had one of the Mexican parents run over my foot one year because I refused to move because he was in the wrong spot and I said 'I'm not doing this with you every day, I need for you to follow the rules.' He says 'I'm not' […] I said if you want to run over my foot, you run over my foot. So that's the kind of conversations I have."

Experiences like this may shape perceptions of cultural/ethnic/linguistic groups and contribute to the construction of cultural identities that shape future interactions.

Negotiating educational expectations. Schools that increasingly become diverse are undeniably places where cultural incongruence and negotiation takes place. As I have argued, school personnel and parents' perceptions, ideas, concerns, and expectations are shaped by the values that define their home cultures and by previous schooling experiences and educational attainment level. In this section I present ways in which Greenwood's ESL program's stakeholders try to negotiate educational expectations.

For the school administrators, it is sometimes very difficult to negotiate American values with other cultures/countries' educational/academic expectations. Administrators understand parents, but they can't always please them; it is not possible to provide equal

education and provide accommodations for international parents at the same time. One of them put it best in this comment:

> One of the things that is frustrating especially for those [Asian and Middle Easterner] populations is the parameters that are placed on public education within the US and why we can and cannot do certain things… […] It's … kind of a fine line, you need to understand where they're coming from […]But equally frustrating for us as well because what happens when you make those concessions is that I'm now asking teachers to create the situation very differently [for LEP students] and that is hard because when you're trying to create an environment that welcomes all students; we know we wanna be equal across the board and if I'm asking the faculty to do something different maybe because of a cultural difference … that's a sticky situation sometimes and it doesn't set well with your faculty and the last thing I wanna have happen is the perception that an international family comes in, you're gonna make all kinds of concessions so that when they go back to their country or whatever they're gonna slide right in; they made the decision to come to a school within the United States and there are certain parameters that we have to work with. So it's very much a compromise, now I'm the one who gets stuck in the middle of that compromise.

Basically, school administrators try to reconcile differences in the school population and parents' expectations with providing equal education to all, but sometimes it is as if they feel that when they adjust instructions or programs according to ethnic/linguistic minority students, they are being unfair to those students who are American born. They try to reconcile differences, for example, when some international parents ask for specific

accommodations (concerning assignments, or the menu) due to religious beliefs: **"**we have one particular religion who they don't do any music so they don't want their children to participate in an activity with music or instruments, they ask for accommodations and we do alternative assignments for when they're going to music or if they're doing an assignment in class that has to do with music."

Concerning the immigrant/sojourner parents' perspective, they come to this country with ideas about good education based on their own or their children's experiences in schools in their home countries. Unfortunately, they do not often share these ideas with school faculty because, as I discussed in the section on parent empowerment, they feel they are not in a position to be demanding. Next I discuss some areas where parents found conflicting expectations.

Teaching methodology and behavior expectations. In my conversations with some parents throughout my experience in Greenwood, I found out that some of them are critical of the teaching methodologies used at Greenwood; they make judgments and create expectations about them based on their previous schooling experiences. Some consider the teaching methodologies used in the school to be very flexible, others feel they are demanding, and others feel they are too traditional and teacher centered. The two following stories told by a Latina mother and an Arab mother illustrate how their social and cultural capital affect the way they understand and assess their children's experience in Greenwood.

> All those rules, like "Don't touch your partner," or that of "Keep your hands to yourself," my children are not used to that. My son, he's calmer now and I haven't heard any complaint about him from the teachers, but I did with my

daughter. When I had a conference with her teacher she said that my daughter

didn't pay attention in class, that she did not do what she was supposed to and the

teacher recommended that my daughter needed medication!! Haha… I didn't

want to say anything about that. Learning all these rules is difficult for them; you

can't even ask an adult to be writing for 7 straight hours, doing the same thing!

For this Latina mom, she and her children are used to a different code of conduct and she

thinks that the behavior expected at this school is too rigid for children. In her story we

can see how her daughter's behavior is interpreted differently by her (as a behavior that is

supposed to be typical among children) and the teacher (as a condition that needs to be

treated). In previous conversations with this mother, she explained that her children were

used to learning through play in their school back home and that children are allowed to

converse among themselves while on task in the classroom. For her and for another

Latina mother I interviewed, schooling in Latin America values student interactions. She

gave the example of being silent as a behavior that is highly prized in this country and

"that famous detention that is not part of our culture!" Because of this cultural

incongruence, these mothers believed that the discipline management system used at

Greenwood is not allowing students to develop self-control.

The next story illustrates a case where a parent is actually glad that her child

adjusts to the school's dominant culture.

When we were back home my son was in third grade, every day I wake him, he

didn't like to go to school because school is boring, those classes from 7 to 1 pm,

no break time, just 10 minutes for lunch; sometimes they can't eat lunch because

they need ten minutes to buy food; we didn't have free foods… No activity, just

soccer… it's so boring. So when we came here the first two months the hard thing

was language; they told me every day Mom, I can't speak with my friend, my

friend didn't like me, but I can't understand the teacher; but after that everything

really changed, now he wakes up 10 minutes before the hour, they say 'Wake me

up early, I want to go to school.'

In this story told by a Saudi mother, her children experience more freedom and

motivating activities in Greenwood compared to what they were used to in their Saudi

school. I wondered if what they experienced in the past was particular to that school or if

it was common to other Arab schools and countries, so I asked my Arab

interpreter/liaison about this and she explained that the difference between education in

Arab countries and the US is that over there schooling is boring because there is no play,

no interactive activities; students have to take too many subjects and there is a lot of

lecturing, even in elementary school. She added,

When I talk to [Arab] families here, [they say] that they give more importance to

children here than there, and that is a characteristic of the society, not the schools.

[…] If something happens to the child in the school, like an accident, it isn't like

here; if a teacher beats a student, it is a terrible thing here, but not so much there.

[In the US] if a child is 'gifted,' the school supports him. And those praising

comments like 'You're so good,' 'You're doing good,' they don't receive that

there; only within the family […] That's why they like it here. And this is

generalizable to most Arab countries.

Perhaps this perception is not generalizable to all Arab schools, but it is reflected in comments I gathered from other Arab parents. This example shows how parents and LEP students' previous schooling experiences influence how they value American schooling.

Academic expectations. All participating parents seem to have high academic expectations for their children and the school. However, parents with a higher educational attainment level have more specific expectations and demands. For example, sojourner parents from different countries base some of their expectations on their home country's national school tests; they hope to know in advance to what extent the school covers the contents their children need to know to pass those tests so that they cover the rest at home. This is why they demand more information about students' progress from the teachers (e.g., that is available in the report card). A Mexican mother, for example, explained that when the school year is over here, they only get a piece of paper with grades, whereas in the school in Mexico they prepare a bigger event and acknowledge the best students. She said: "I feel it is better [in Mexico] because I feel that parents are informed; here a student graduates from elementary school without you realizing it. I know that we're not in our country, but… there is so much difference!"

In other cases, many international parents expect teachers to assign more homework to their children so that they keep up with their classmates' progress, even though some parents whose children are in their first year think the amount of homework is excessive (this is due to the students' lack of language proficiency that takes them more time to complete assignments). Still, all participating parents mentioned that the amount of homework that students are given in their home countries is greater compared to Greenwood. According to a Korean father, for example, additional school work is a

big issue in his country because "[academic] competition is very tough […] competition is very hard so [students] need to study some more."

Family life is important to school life. In most of the parents' cultures, more importance is given in schools to students' family lives compared to American schools. Some parents feel this does not necessarily happen at Greenwood, where they feel there is a barrier, not a connection, between family and school life. According to a Latina mother, they do not have this problem in her country because parents and students are usually very open to the teacher. Students spend the first minutes of the school day talking about their lives, so the teacher has the opportunity to listen to her students and they have the opportunity to express what they feel. I suppose this is why several parents from different nationalities suggested that teachers visit incoming families so that they get to know them better and become more aware of students' needs.

Face-to-face interactions with school personnel. Expectations concerning face-to-face interactions and attitudes towards authority vary from culture to culture (physical contact, eye contact) and parents make judgments and act accordingly when interacting with school personnel. Parents expect teachers to learn and understand these expectations and adjust if possible, although they rarely express it.

A Korean father, for example, explained how students in his country should avoid eye contact with their teacher, "it is believed that he is very impolite or rude but in America I think it's opposite." Although this behavior can easily be interpreted by Greenwood teachers as shyness, at least some are aware that this is a sign of respect, and appreciate it. On the other hand, Latino parents complained about personal interactions with school personnel saying they are "so cold and distant to the children," while in Latin

American cultures physical contact is so important, even between teacher and students, since teachers are considered "like a second mom." This behavior, however, is less likely to be acceptable among school personnel, as it could be a practice that goes against the respect for individual space, so praised in American culture.

In sum, the negotiation of educational expectations can become a tough issue in a multicultural/multiethnic school, when expectations that often differ so much come into place. As I have argued, many parents do not share these expectations with school personnel either because they do not feel they are in a position to impose their ideas, or because they do not feel confident, or because they feel their voices will not be heard, or because they are the ones who need to adjust to the school's dominant culture, not the opposite.

Educational expectations are shaped by cultural and social capital, and it seems that some expectations can be negotiated with the school more so than others. That is, those expectations that will not substantially change the expectations in the dominant culture will be more likely negotiated (like an emphasis on competition or more distant/respectful interactions) whereas others will be less likely negotiable (like ways of interacting that require more physical contact). Whatever the case is, cultural incongruence affects the negotiation surrounding educational expectations and the more that school personnel and parents postpone dialoguing about their differences, the more this leads to cultural misunderstandings.

The Dominant Culture

In the last section of this chapter, I want to discuss how the school's dominant culture plays a role in the way parents understand and construct their own culture and

how ethnic/linguistic minority parents perceive the school is fostering respect and understanding of other cultures. I believe this discussion is important in order to understand the effect of culture on the relationship between the school and families of ethnic/linguistic minority backgrounds.

Initially, through the questionnaire to parents, they expressed their belief that Greenwood provided opportunities for them to share their culture (Agree=29, Disagree=3, Don't Know=2). When asked further, some parents agreed that school personnel respect their cultures, but other parents commented that, while American culture is not imposed, other cultures' values are not shared or studied. The Arab mothers explained that "[Arab children] integrate completely [to American culture] but the parents at home try to control that to at least preserve some of the Arab identity. […][Teachers] don't pull them to the American culture but they don't help them preserve the Arab culture." The example they provided was that when there is an Arab holiday, teachers do not explain to the rest of the class the meaning of it, while the opposite happens with celebrations like Thanksgiving or Christmas. One of them said that there is respect in the sense that when you go to classrooms, on the door, there is an alphabet and expressions in other languages. In other words, there is recognition that there are other cultures in the building. They believe that the preservation of their home cultures is the role of parents.

So parents acknowledge that there is a dominant culture to which students need to adjust and comply. Many parents believe that their home cultures are respected when they see material in their home languages around the building or when parents are asked to share information about their country in their children's classrooms. However, parents

feel that there is an emphasis on the school personnel's part to acculturate international families by teaching them about what parents call the American culture, what I name a White, Eurocentric, Middle class culture. As my Korean interpreter translated from a father, **"**He doesn't feel they respect our cultures. […] Children bring a lot of materials from school… he can experience okay, this is American culture in the materials, but he thinks the school just shows them 'This is our American culture'."

Many parents see how children, in their process of assimilation, end up replacing some of their home culture values for the values learned from the dominant culture, and they struggle with this. A Mexican mother, for example, explained how her children "want [to live] the way it is here, they want their food as it is here; pizza, hamburgers, stuff like that. And we don't prepare that kind of food at home, but they eat [it] at school. They want to go to the mall by themselves, go shopping, go to the movies, and this is something that would probably happen once a month [in Mexico]."

Conversely, some parents seem to be excited about the fact that their children assimilate the dominant culture and change their personalities. One Arab mother commented: "I see my kids [have] a different personality when we came here; they get more skills, like in computer, music, and basketball. They can speak better than in Saudi Arabia because they were shy but now they try to change this; they have all the different countries so it's a good experience for them." My Arab interpreter explained that when Arab children come here they become motivated, assertive, and outgoing. She added that this can be good and bad; good because this helps them survive in this culture, but bad because they often have to return to their home countries (in the case of sojourner families) and these traits that they develop are not appreciated in their cultures, so they

may easily get into trouble. Often, when they change, they feel their teachers no longer have authority over them. She told me she also feels Arab children become arrogant after living in the US, something that is completely unacceptable in Arab cultures.

But Arab families are not the only ones who perceive that their children become arrogant or disrespectful after interacting with the dominant American culture; parents from other cultures complained about the same thing, like a Latina mother who said that here, "Students do not respect [teachers]." This is partly due to the differing views of authority parents hold. For parents, this is also due to the 'American way' of disciplining children. For example, parents who come from countries where spanking children is acceptable complain that they can no longer do this in this country so their children take advantage of this and become rebellious. A Mexican mother commented, "It is very different here because they want children to do whatever they want and we're used to something different, right?"

What I see in the data is that ethnic/linguistic minority parents need support in understanding how their children's identities evolve. Moreover, they need to be instructed directly about how they are expected to perform in the school's dominant culture (Delpit, 1988), as a Latina mother said, "Especially when you first arrive to the US, it'd be great if they [school personnel] explain how to get used to the culture, how it is here." Still several parents believe that international families should adapt. For example, A Mexican mother said, "Like my husband says, we are the ones who came here, we should adapt, not them to us!" A Korean mother also commented, "Of course the dominant culture is imposed but what else would you expect? International people should also respect American culture especially when we are living in their country!"

In sum, communication greatly affects parent engagement in LEP student education. Communication becomes a complex issue when interacting with ethnic/linguistic minority families since there is a language barrier. I do not think that a communication gap such as the one between the school and these families will ever be completely bridged, but I suggest that the school can share leadership with parents as a strategy to create liaisons that foster authentic dialogue between the two parties.

In the next chapter I present portraits of two ESL students and their families. I use these portraits to represent the struggles that recent immigrant/sojourner families have to face when they enter an American school without being familiar with the school's dominant culture and expectations. They illustrate how communication is a central issue in parent involvement.

CHAPTER 7: CULTURAL INCONGRUENCE AND LEP STUDENT EDUCATION: ETHNOGRAPHICAL PORTRAITS OF TWO SOJOURNER LATINO FAMILIES

In chapter 5 I reported the findings from questionnaires, interviews, and observations related to the ESL program's stakeholders' perceptions of LEP student education and their parents' involvement. Data from the questionnaires, in particular, seem to reveal that both teachers and parents are satisfied with LEP students' academic progress and with parent involvement in school activities. However, observations, informal conversations, and interviews have revealed some actual incongruence in the perceptions of both groups. Therefore, it appears that parents have some different ideas and expectations for the school and their children's education as compared to the perceptions of the school's personnel. I argue that such dissonance occurs because of three factors: communication gaps, lack of support for parent leadership and empowerment, and cultural incongruence, which I discussed in chapter 6.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a glimpse into the lives of two recently arrived sojourner families to serve as examples of many other families who struggle in their process of adaptation to a new country, a new culture, and a new educational system. The two cases were purposefully chosen since they are the families of two students the ESL program coordinator assigned me to tutor, Antonia and Jasmin[7]. I decided to observe them more carefully because of the closer interaction I had with them and their families; this interaction was facilitated by a common language, a similar background, and our relationship as student-instructor/facilitator.

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[7] I use pseudonyms and do not reveal their countries of origin to protect the students, their families, and their teachers' identities.

The structure of this chapter is different from that of previous chapters. In this one, I integrate my field notes and participants' quotes into two stories, one for each student, including my commentaries. I finish the chapter with some conclusions and connections to the themes described in chapter 5 and 6.

Tutoring in the ESL Program

Towards the end of the spring of 2009 I talked to Mrs. Donovan, the ESL coordinator, about the possibility of tutoring and observing in the ESL program during the next school year as part of my research and also of my desire to contribute as a parent volunteer. She said that help was always needed in the program, so I was welcome to participate. It was not until the third week of August that I came to the ESL classroom and decided with Mrs. Donovan to tutor twice a week, Tuesdays and Thursdays, from 9 to 11. On the first day, I sat at one of the tables and observed what was going on in a classroom that was familiar to me due to many visits during the previous year as a researcher.

The ESL program has two classrooms; they are located in a section of the building where other alternative programs operate, such as the reading program or other special education programs. The ESL classrooms have several small tables where students from different grades usually work in small groups with a teacher. There are shelves filled with textbooks, dictionaries, and children's story books in different languages. There are also math, science, and other vocabulary posters on the walls. In the classroom where the ESL coordinator has a desk, there is a smart board that only she uses. In the same classroom, another ESL teacher from Mexico has a desk as well.

Children from different ages, nationalities, and races come and go during the whole day; less proficient students come more often than others who are more proficient but need assistance with class assignments. While younger students are usually working on language skills, students in upper grades come to get help with work from other subjects from the ESL teachers and aides. The first day I came to observe this year, the ESL coordinator showed me a colorful schedule with the times every student comes during the day, what they work on, and with which teacher.

New students are coming throughout the academic year; many come during the summer, many come during the first weeks of school, and some come in January. Since many of the students are children of the local university's students, the time they come depends on when their parents start classes at the university. My first story starts in the first week of the fall of 2009, when I was assigned to help a scared little girl from Latin America.

Helping Antonia Make Sense of a New World

Getting to know Antonia. The first time I came to the ESL classroom as a tutor, I went looking for the coordinator to tell me what to do. I found her sitting at one of the tables talking in Spanish with a little girl who was crying inconsolably. Mrs. Donovan told me that her name was Antonia, she was 7, and asked me if I could talk to her in Spanish to comfort her. This was her first week of school in the US and she did not speak any English. Having someone speak in Spanish to her made her feel better or at least made her stop crying.

After spending a few minutes with Antonia, I thought that she seemed to be a very intelligent girl; she used a vocabulary in Spanish pretty mature for her age. She seemed to

have a social capital from home that I was positive was going to help her build the skills she needed in school. For example, she was able to assess her teacher's methodology and her interactions with her. She was also able to name and clearly talk about her feelings. From our conversation I could tell that she was feeling overwhelmed in her classroom, although Mrs. Donovan had told me that she had observed her during recess and saw Antonia playing with other girls. This did not surprise me, since I saw the same thing happening when my daughter was 4 and she did not speak any English. Mrs. Donovan commented that Antonia was upset especially because she had very high expectations for herself and she was feeling completely lost.

One of the things that Antonia complained about was the great amount of worksheets she had received everyday and that she was not able to make any sense of them. She said that she liked her teacher because she was kind to her, but it seemed to me that the teacher did not know how to communicate with her, so Antonia felt frustrated. Mrs. Donovan explained that indeed Antonia's teacher was very kind, but that she used a somewhat traditional teaching methodology; she based most of her teaching on fill-in-the-blank exercises.

After Antonia left, Mrs. Donovan and I discussed the situation and decided that I would tutor her from the following week on, since she needed more individualized assistance (the other second graders came to ESL for less time and worked within a small group). So the next time I came, Mrs. Donovan took me to Antonia's classroom to introduce me to her homeroom teacher, Mrs. Hooks. She was very kind and remembered me from the faculty meetings I had attended before. She asked Antonia to join us and told us that she was being very strong; then she talked to her, to which Antonia nodded. I later

asked her if she had understood what her teacher had said and she answered no. Antonia came with us to the ESL room, and I noticed she had a note in her hand. I asked her what it was and she said "*mas tarde lo vas a saber,*" which means, You'll see later.

In our short way to the ESL classroom, I was thinking how complex communication between American teachers and students who do not speak any English can be. As in Mrs. Hooks' case, she was trying to compensate the communication barrier with kindness, which was something that Antonia realized and responded to positively. The problem was that in Mrs. Hooks' attempts to communicate with Antonia she seemed to take for granted that every time Antonia nodded, it meant she understood the message, which actually was not the case. This reaction is very common in communications between parents and teachers where both parties assume that a message was delivered and clearly understood. Such 'miscommunication' shapes perceptions, ideas, expectations, and feelings and affect decisions made by parents, students, and teachers.

Once we arrived in the classroom, Antonia gave me a small note that said "Te quiero mucho!" which means, "I love you very much;" I guess it was her way of saying thanks. For me this was very important, because I felt as she was entrusting me with her well-being. This also made me think that many mainstream teachers may find it very difficult to comfort and support a non-English speaking student, when the truth is that it does not actually require so much. Language, though, even a few words in the student's language can make a difference: it carries the teacher's intention to get closer to her student.

Then she told me that she had a friend, Colombian like me; her name was Claudia. I had met Claudia and her mom a few weeks ago along with some other

Colombian people who just moved in town. Claudia is about 12 and is in 6th grade.

Unlike Antonia, Claudia learned some English before coming to the US with a tutor her

mother hired. Her mother, a professor at a Colombian university, had told me that was the

best thing she could do for her daughter considering she was so advanced in school. I

realized that Antonia and Claudia's mothers had become friends and I was glad for it;

there is nothing like having the support of someone who speaks your language and is

going through the same struggles as you when you are a new-comer.

Antonia had brought a folder full of worksheets, around 30, mostly about Math

and some on spelling. As I helped her understand the instructions in the sheets, I realized

that Math was easier for Antonia, but spelling was difficult because she did not know

many English words. She needed to complete sentences that she did not understand with

words she recognized only because she had previously worked on those words at home

with her mom. So I classified the worksheets according to subject so that her mom could

make sense of what they were and thus help her with homework. I did not know much

about Antonia's mother; she had only told me that she was always busy with her studies

but that she tried to help her with some assignments. I wondered how overwhelming it

had been for her mother to see such a large amount of worksheets; she probably

understood the content, but ignored their purpose or priority. Students usually do these

worksheets in the classroom, but Antonia lacked the language proficiency to work on

them at her classmates' rate and she had gotten far behind.

To go or not to go to school events...why should parents participate? On

Wednesday, September 9, the school had Open House in the evening. I came with my

family to a building full of families buzzing around. I was hoping to see Antonia and

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family to a building full of families buzzing around. I was hoping to see Antonia and

finally meet her parents, but I did not. I saw her the following day and when going through her take-home folder, I found the Behavior Contract that parents and students are supposed to sign and return during Open House. If the teacher was sending the contract through this folder, it meant Antonia's parents' had not come to Open House and I wondered why; I asked her but she did not seem to have a clue. I later discovered from her mother that they did not come because they did not have transportation and because they had no idea what an Open House was.

As it happens with many other immigrant/sojourner parents in their first year in an American school, Antonia's parents were not familiar with the rules of this culture, and a name like Open House did not mean anything—it did not mean anything to me the first time I heard it. Like them, I did not have transportation that first year and basically paying $40 for a round trip taxi cab fare could be too much for a parent, especially if you do not know what the event is about. 'Open House' is a very American term; it defines a kind of event that probably exists in other school contexts, but the name is not easily identifiable even for someone who is fluent in English but comes from another country. It requires some cultural knowledge that a parent gains through exposure to the culture.

The same thing happened in October, when the Parent Teacher Organization carried out their annual Fall Carnival. Undoubtedly, many more parents came to this event this year, including international parents than in previous years. The Fall Carnival is an event that the PTO organizes to integrate families and collect funds for the school. Considering what happened the previous time with Open House, I told Antonia what the event was about; I told her that she could wear her Halloween costume and play games with her friends. She looked pleased, but hesitant. To my dismay, I realized that they did

not come to the event. Antonia told me that they now had a car, but that they did not come because they needed to buy winter clothes. This time I did not know what to think; they had transportation, I had provided some information about the event (although I was not sure about how Antonia had delivered it to the parents), so what kept them from coming? Were the parents uninterested? Did they have little time to share as a family and they preferred to spend their limited free time doing something else? This time I placed myself in the position of a teacher who does not know what the reasons behind parents' actions are so the only thing they do is to conjecture, often deciding that parents simply do not care.

Making progress…one worksheet at a time. One cool October morning, after having waited for Antonia for half an hour, I finally saw her arriving with her usual pack of worksheets; she sat by me and started a worksheet on fire safety tips by herself. She needed to find a hidden message using the clues provided. I often disliked not knowing what time Antonia was coming; once I waited for almost an hour… but I always guessed it was not her fault. One of the ESL teachers explained to me that Antonia's homeroom teacher often sent her students late because she forgot about ESL time. I did not see that happening with other students, although I realized ESL teachers usually pick up kindergarten or first grade students from their classroom; they still need help moving around the building and their room teacher cannot leave the rest of the class by themselves.

In the time I observed at the ESL program in Greenwood, I realized that communication between ESL and homeroom teachers varied a lot; some homeroom teachers seemed to communicate or coordinate activities with the ESL coordinator more

often than others. This usually happened with teachers in lower grades. Some teachers more than others informed ESL teachers of the contents they are studying in other subjects; some of them seemed to assume that sending the students with their folders would suffice for the ESL teachers to know what they needed to practice.

The next time I came to work with Antonia, I had to wait again for several minutes. But this time I decided to pick her up at her classroom. I knocked on the door and when the teacher saw me, she did not smile or say anything, so I guessed she did not recognize me. I said I had come to pick up Antonia, and the teacher just said "Okay." Antonia came out a minute later. We walked to the ESL room, while I commented on her hair –it was crazy hair day today. I was glad that she engaged in the activity; I had not expected her to do so. She told me her mom read the flyer the school sent explaining why they were doing or wearing weird things as part of their celebration of Red Ribbon week, which encourages children to stay out of drugs. By doing this, I perceived Antonia was feeling she was "part of the crowd" not an alien, as a student in her situation must feel. Because the activity organizers explained to parents what they were expected to do instead of simply saying "Tomorrow is Crazy Hair day" (which does not mean much for many parents), Antonia was able to engage in the activity.

On Crazy Hair Day, Antonia did not bring her usual pile of papers; she just brought whatever they were working on when I picked her up; an exercise on reading and understanding diagrams and an activity related to Red Ribbon Week. She spent almost an hour doing this. Since we still had 30 minutes left, I asked her to go back to her classroom and bring her folder with all the other assignments she had pending from before. There were just too many; I thought they would take us several hours to complete.

As far as I could see, she was not taking that much work to finish at home and I did not really know how much her mom was expecting her to complete at home. So, as in the past, I took a look at all the worksheets and classified them according to subject. All the math ones I filed in her take-home folder with a note to her mom saying she needed to work on as many as possible at home, and during our sessions, we would work on those related to language.

I believed Antonia was making progress with her English after only two months in the school; she was becoming better able to keep up with school work. I thought she only needed to complete all the work she had gotten behind and was concerned if she could do this at home. I strongly wished for her to learn English and stop feeling she was not smart and I was overwhelmed by the amount of work I saw every time I came. I felt a little caught up between what I felt I needed to do as a tutor (helping Antonia complete all those sheets) and simply supporting her to learn one thing at a time, at her own pace.

As the days went by my role as Antonia's tutor did not change much. I almost always needed to pick her up because otherwise she would be late or not come at all, and we still had to fill in the blanks; the volume of pages was decreasing, though very slowly. In November, during the week before Thanksgiving break, Antonia brought about 20 pages of activities related to Thanksgiving—coloring pages, crossword puzzles, and readings. Wondering how much she knew about Thanksgiving, I asked her what people celebrated and she said "*No sé; creo que es un día donde se come mucho pavo*" (I don't know; I think it's a day when people eat a lot of turkey). Sure it was, as she could tell from the 4 or 5 coloring pages with turkeys.

Worksheets are one of the ways that LEP students are directly taught about American culture, although some students are left to their own to infer about the holiday from the materials, they may have problems trying to understand the materials, like Antonia did. I told her a little about the story they tell in the school (I knew from my experience with my daughter). In my view, teaching about traditions and holidays is a little decontextualized for children who come from other cultures if relationships of comparison and contrast are not established with traditions from other cultures. It is through our own culture that we genuinely find value in others.

I asked Antonia to start coloring one of the turkey sheets while I looked in her folder for the stack of handouts she had not yet completed, which were many. I decided we would do a few pages on possessive nouns; it was enough for the time we had and not too difficult for her, I thought. She needed to complete a list of sentences with "'s" in the plural and singular forms, which she did very well. I explained examples in Spanish and then in English. When she finished, I said it was okay for her to color another turkey sheet; I had seen she got tired if we only worked on grammar exercises for the hour and a half that we spent together so I divided our time between filling in the sheets and coloring, which was more fun for her.

After 3 months of working with Antonia, I could see how much progress she had made in spite of her disappointment, and sometimes boredom, for never being able to catch up with her classmates. She seemed more confident and required a little less assistance because she knew more words. She was no longer afraid of me speaking in English to her either. When she did not know what certain words meant, I gave her examples in English, or acted out their meaning. By the end of one of our sessions in

mid-November, Antonia was very happy and proud because she finished the weekly spelling assignment before her ESL classmates who were on the other side of the room; she was used to being the last one to finish.

This sense of progress really made a difference in how Antonia felt. According to what I saw in her, more than the language barrier it was the never ending amount of worksheets that made her feel set apart from her classmates. Mrs. Hooks, her teacher, never ceased being kind and demonstrating positive feelings about Antonia's progress, but there were gaps in the way Antonia and her teacher understood her schooling experience. Surely, Antonia needed and was thankful for her teacher's support in the form of comments like "Good job!"; that was Mrs. Hooks' way of showing concern. But for Antonia, and as I later realized for her mother as well, there was a distance between what she felt she needed (more communication about school expectations and more one-to-one time) and what her teacher was providing.

One day in late November, I was waiting for Antonia outside her classroom while looking at her drawing of a turkey, which was posted on the hallway. We were chatting a little about the picture when Mrs. Hooks came out and asked me, "What do you think about Antonia? Do you think she's made progress?" I replied that sure, she knew a lot more words and that she felt confident when I spoke to her in English and demanded her to do the same. She said that indeed Antonia had made progress, that she spoke to her in English and understood most instructions; she added that her own classmates had said that they were surprised at how much English Antonia was speaking now. Antonia understood much of what the teacher said and felt proud. I also thought that the fact that on that day she did not bring the large stack of worksheets but only the ones she was

working on that morning encouraged Antonia to do more and better; this time she was not doing old work in combination with new work. In fact, she finished her work before the other 4th graders coming to the ESL classroom at 10:30; that made her really proud, she was beaming.

This instance shows that LEP student perception of their own work and performance shapes their self-concept and self-esteem, which often becomes so deteriorated in an experience like immigrant/sojourner students have to go through in their process of adjustment. Given the fact that many students in Greenwood come from families where great educational expectations are created and that frequently children of highly educated parents are used to succeeding in school, feeling ignorant or unskilled can have a very negative impact on their relationship with schooling. At the same time, children's schooling experience may shape parents' perceptions of not only a school, but also a society. For the first months of my experience tutoring Antonia, I wondered what her parents thought about her experience; I wanted to know what their concerns and expectations were. Fortunately, I did not have to wait long to know.

Opening up to a different perspective: communicating with Antonia's parents. I did not know much about Antonia's parents. I knew from Antonia that she lived with her mother and her mother's husband. Antonia's dad lived in back home, but she frequently communicated with him. They had come to the US because Antonia's mother was a Fulbright scholar pursuing graduate studies at the local university.

I met Antonia's parents one afternoon at a bookstore. I heard a child's voice saying "Hola!" and turned around to see it was my little student. Her parents and my husband and I introduced ourselves and talked a little about the town, what we do, and

about books. They seemed to be very kind and we agreed to get together soon. Indeed, we got together soon after at my house and we ate delicious traditional food.

Antonia's mother and I spent a good deal of time talking about her new life, her experience with the university and with Greenwood. She told me about how hard these first months had been for her as a graduate student and trying to cope with Antonia's needs at school. She confessed that at the beginning of the school year she was so upset to see her daughter crying and so overwhelmed that she was considering taking Antonia out of school. She explained that Antonia was not used to following all this very systematic approach to learning, to filling out so many worksheets every day, and to having to sit still all the time. In her home country, Antonia used to go to a Montessori school, so she was habituated to a more individualized kind of instruction. Compared to what she called a more progressive approach to instruction, her mother thought that the teaching methodology at Greenwood was very traditional. She said, for example, "[Antonia's] assignments are so boring […] even now that she speaks the language better, I think those worksheets are so boring, the same kind of problem-solving exercises that are repeated over and over again!"

As our conversation evolved, I realized that Antonia's mother was aware and critical about the education her daughter was receiving at the school. She had certain expectations based on Antonia's previous schooling experiences and she was constructing her idea of Greenwood's curriculum based on what she perceived from Antonia's teacher. After a little hesitation, I explained to her that it was not like that really, that this particular teacher was a little traditional in the sense of using worksheets for instruction. I asked her if she knew more about the school, if she had attended any

school events and she said that she did not have time and in the past she did not have transportation, that there was not any bus going in that direction. She added that she did not have time to help Antonia either, with all those worksheets that she brought home every day. I said I understood, although I was thinking her daughter needed a lot of support from her, especially at this stage. She told me the teacher said that Antonia had improved a lot in her speaking and that she had just started grading her work (this was towards the end of the fall).

In general, I got the impression that she did not know a lot about the school, about what Antonia was supposed to do at school, and overall the protocol for parent participation, but I understood that this is common to immigrant/sojourner families in their first year. She was already overwhelmed by the amount of school work she had to do as a graduate student and that did not leave her time to help Antonia—she was trying to adjust herself and that alone takes a lot. I was not completely sure about Antonia's stepfather's role and to what extent he was helping her with school work.

This conversation opened up a new perspective for me. Given the fact that I had had a similar experience during the first couple of years in the US, I understood this family's struggles and the way they were trying to understand this new world, a world with different rules, values, and expectations. But this time, being Antonia's tutor, I also placed myself in the teacher's position, trying to understand for example, why parents do not get involved in school activities if through their participation they might to get to understand the school's culture better. But the kind of conversation I had with Antonia's mother can critically make a difference in the teacher's and the parents' perspective and can better inform judgments and decisions related to a student's education. Fortunately in

the case of Antonia, her parents are fluent in English and have had experience as educators, which facilitates this kind of conversation.

Over the course of the spring I had the opportunity to witness Antonia's extraordinary progress in her English proficiency and I also had the chance to interact with her parents on several occasions. Since January, Antonia only wanted to speak English at home. She also did her assignments rather quickly during our tutoring time, but she was rarely motivated to do them. It was difficult for me to get her attention and help her keep focused; she was often looking at what other students in the ESL classroom were doing. One day, for example, she brought a folder full of worksheets with activities related to Martin Luther King Jr.'s holiday. She was not interested in them at all, I supposed because she did not know who he was. So with the help of the bilingual teacher, I found a picture book with his biography and we read it together. I told her a little bit about racism and the civil rights movement because she was not familiar with the concept of racism. Then she was ready, though not very happy, to fill in the worksheets.

So basically my work with Antonia became helping her with her worksheets and trying to help her stay focused. In February, I briefly talked to her homeroom teacher and she said that she was doing very well and that for the first time she gave her grades in her progress report. Antonia told me she had gotten good grades. Mrs. Hooks said that since Antonia does not have major difficulties, she would not call her parents for a parent teacher conference that week.

Antonia's parents and her teacher had had a couple of conferences in the past; the first one did not really take place; Antonia's mother explained to me that at the time they did not have the car so they called a taxi cab that arrived an hour late, so they were late to

the meeting. When they arrived the teacher said she was sorry, but that their time for the meeting was almost over. For the second conference they were able to arrive on time, the teacher explained to them that Antonia was doing very well, and told them some anecdotes. Antonia's mother told me she had written some questions to ask Mrs. Hook and Mrs. Donovan, the ESL teacher, but that her time ran out and she could not ask them. She said that she expected to have a more "personal" meeting with the teacher, to learn more about Antonia's life in the classroom, but she could not. She expected the teacher to ask about Antonia's family; if they had come by themselves, if the father had come as well, but as the school's superintendant once told me, these are the kind of questions that teachers do not ask parents as a way of respecting their privacy.

Antonia's mother complained several times that because her interactions with the teacher were so impersonal, she had not been able to get the most out of those communications. And for her, the same had happened with Antonia; she got the impression that the teacher did not really deal with Antonia's needs, but rather, expected the ESL program to address those needs. Antonia's mother commented about this, "At the beginning, Antonia was so sad because she did not have any idea and she didn't speak any [English], and the teacher always said to her "Go to ESL" or "Go with someone who can help you because I can't," I mean, she never took any steps to get closer to her; she let her go to solve it somewhere else." She also argued that the teacher never used strategies to make her feel comfortable in the classroom, or make other students feel that even though Antonia came from a different culture, she had a lot to contribute to the class. For her, the consequence of this was that Antonia was going to feel that she was slow and incapable.

Antonia's mother had realized that her daughter did not have any friends and in her opinion, this was not addressed by her teacher. Antonia's only friend had been Shona, a Japanese student who was of great support during the fall, but had now left for her home country. Antonia felt isolated from the rest of her classmates because she did not have any friends. She told me she had some friends from another class and they were mostly international students; this happened even though she had greatly overcome the language barrier. Antonia's mother became very good friends with a another Latina mother who had 2 children—a 5 and a 10 year old- also attending Greenwood. They were Antonia's closest friends. Curiously enough, in spite of speaking the same home language, they always communicated in English at least during the spring semester.

But Antonia's family did not only have problems with personal interactions with the school; her mother also commented that they had difficulties trying to understand the flyers and other written communications that were sent from school. She explained, "For example, all that information that comes every week in the menu… there are a lot of activities that I don't [know], for who they are, or for what purpose…. [looking at the menu] Look, I read this here [the menu and the most important events of the week/month, like early dismissal dates] and I don't understand most of it." She argued that there are words that she understands in English, but that since she does not have an equivalent in Spanish, she cannot make sense of it, even if she looks them up in the dictionary. For her there is also a problem when she tries to make sense of report cards. She finds them to be very strict because for her, Antonia has made a lot of progress, but she felt that her progress was being assessed in comparison to the rest of students who are more English proficient and more used to American schooling.

In conclusion, Antonia's mother did not feel a great desire to participate in school activities, at least in the ones that she knew of. On the one hand, she perceived her daughter had a lack of motivation to do school activities, although her motivation for learning in general and for improving her English proficiency improved. On the other hand, she did not like the venues for communication that the school used as she felt interactions were impersonal and written communications were unclear. She said that she rather valued activities where dialogue is encouraged. Still, she recognized that she had not organized her very busy time to come to the building and learn more about the school.

Towards the end of her first academic year in an American school, Antonia felt more at ease as her language skills evolved; they provided her the autonomy to do school assignments on her own, understand the teacher's instructions, and take the initiative to get closer to other students. She still had not made many friends, but did establish a few consistent playmates. Her mother gained more knowledge about the school and its expectations through her interactions with other Latina mothers, through our conversations, and through her daughter's experience; however, she was still critical of American schooling and kept her expectations high.

Smiling at the Unknown: Dealing with new Rules and Expectations

Meeting Jasmin, the new student. School was back in session on the 4th of January. When I arrived at the school on the following Tuesday to tutor Antonia, the ESL teacher informed me that there was a new Latina student in 8th grade who didn't speak English at all and asked if I was willing to tutor her as well. She had arrived in town a month before

with her mother, sister and twin brothers to join her father who was a graduate student at the university and had arrived in town several months earlier. Jasmin and her twin brothers would study at Greenwood while their sister would spend the time learning English since she had already graduated from high school. Because she was so advanced in her studies, Jasmin needed a lot of individualized instruction, while her brothers were in kindergarten and could join the group of other kindergarteners attending the program. We then scheduled a tutoring session with her, right before my session with Antonia, on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

After this, Mrs. Donovan walked me to Jasmin's classroom. At this hour, she was in Language Arts class. We first talked with her teacher, Mr. Gordon, who told us he had asked her to write in Spanish as much as she could, because his goal was for his students to develop writing skills. I asked him if there was a specific way I could help Jasmin, but he just said that it was important for her to write, even in her home language, and that he could read some Spanish. Then he called Jasmin, who came out of the classroom and I introduced myself. She seemed to be very glad to meet another Spanish speaker who was going to help her. From then on, Mrs. Donovan and I tutored her, both using Spanish to communicate with her.

On Tuesday, January 12th I arrived in the ESL classroom at 8:20 to tutor Jasmin. Mrs. Donovan lent me the spelling book they were using in 8th grade to help Jasmin learn the words on the lists assigned by the teacher. She also gave me a form with basic personal information that is used with all non-English proficient students to teach them how to provide this information in English. It required some skills like spelling out names, giving out numbers, naming shapes, etc. Going through the list I realized that

Jasmin barely knew the alphabet, the numbers, and some shapes. So we worked on this information for a little time and then did some spelling exercises. The words on the spelling list were difficult, especially for someone who was not used to reading English. I noticed, though, that we had an advantage: all the words contained Latin prefixes and suffixes that English shared with Spanish.

During our second session together I realized that Jasmin was very talkative; I felt that I had to help her focus on the language that she needed to learn, but I also enjoyed listening to her because it helped me understand how she felt. She was very willing to learn and in spite of her lack of English proficiency she seemed comfortable in the school and kept smiling all the time. She told me her father was teaching her, her sister, and her mother English during the nights; still in January they had time to do this since her father did not have as much school work so he was able to devote his free time to them. Additionally, Jasmin's teachers did not really assign class work to her; it actually seemed that she was only taking English in ESL and being given some worksheets to complete from other subjects. So initially my work consisted of helping her understand instructions in the worksheets, practicing providing personal information, which included some vocabulary, and learning her spelling words.

Jasmin and her family. During our first sessions together, I asked Jasmin about her family. She told me she lived with her parents, her 19-year-old sister and her 5-year old brothers. Her father is a professor in the state's public university; he came in town in the fall of 2009 with a Fulbright scholarship to pursue a master's program in Teaching English as a Second or Other Language--TESOL. He was the only one in the family who spoke English. I was really surprised that, given his area of expertise, he did not

previously have his children in English classes, at least the 2 daughters, given the difficulty of learning another language as people get older. Jasmin also told me that her sister had already graduated from high school and did not seem to have plans at the moment, except for checking the possibility of entering the local high school. Jasmin's mom did not speak English either; therefore, all of them relied heavily on the father to communicate with English speakers.

One weekend Jasmin's mother called me. I had let her know through Jasmin that my family and I were leaving to return home soon and that they could take a look at the stuff we needed to get rid of, since I knew they needed some furniture. We set up an appointment at my house; I thought it was a great opportunity to meet Jasmin's parents. After talking about business, we talked about their experience in a different country. They knew barely anything about the town or the school, so as I did with other parents during interviews, I shared with them what I considered important information for a sojourner family, including resources they could use, places around town, and English programs for Jasmin's mother and sister.

I noticed in our conversation that Jasmin's parents were especially concerned about the twins because they do not speak English, they are younger than their sisters, and they have less experience in schooling. I told them that they should actually worry about Jasmin, because it was probably going to take her longer to learn English and the language she was exposed to in school was more complex than the one the twins heard or were expected to use. Jasmin's parents seemed overwhelmed with the many things they needed to pay attention to, like getting to know the town, understanding school expectations; specifically for the father, who had to face challenges like dealing with

school work and supporting his family at the same time, as being the head of the household and an interpreter. The mother's challenge was learning how to navigate in the American culture while supporting her children without much knowledge of the language.

During our initial sessions together, Jasmin and I went back and forth with her providing personal information and talking about time; days, weeks, dates. She knew very few English words; she did not even have the vocabulary that a regular 8th grader in her home country is expected to know in English. When I asked her about her schooling back home, she told me that there had been a curricular reform in her state, so schools were going through a transition process, and that was why she knew so little. I started to be concerned about her, about her future when she graduated from Greenwood and went to high school, where LEP students do not receive as much support as they do in this school.

Expectations here and there. I had much freedom on whatever I decided to do with my students in the ESL program. With Antonia, I mostly helped her with homework; she had to do assignments that were basically helping her learn English; for example, she had to spell very basic words, read simple texts for the most part, and learn words using picture cues. That did not happen with Jasmin: She needed to do Algebra, Physics exercises, read complex stories with complex vocabulary, and learn how to spell and use words whose equivalent in Spanish she did not even know. Often, she memorized the words on the spelling lists, but she was not able to make sentences with them. Teachers valued that progress, but I wondered to what extent that really was progress; she

had memorized the words, but she did not know them because they were not significant to her.

As a tutor, I did not know whether it was best to help Jasmin understand homework assignments or to teach her survival English. Every time I did one of the two she needed support in the other. I finally decided to help Jasmin learn the English she needed to interact with people daily. Basically, we started by naming the world around her, like objects, places, and people at school and home. Because I tutored her during the Language Arts class, I decided to focus on writing and connect it to speaking. I gave her a notebook and told her that would be her journal or diary where she could express what she felt and thought using the words she was learning; she would do this at home and we would talk about her entries during our time together. She seemed to love the idea. Since I had previously noticed that parents were not able to support their children efficiently at home because they did not know what they were doing or expected to do at school, I e-mailed her mother telling her about my plan. She appreciated it and told me that she would remind Jasmin of doing her assignments.

My experience as a sojourner student who went through a similar experience, as the mother of a student who came to the US speaking no English, as an educator, and as a researcher, helped me develop great expectations about what could be done with Jasmin. I believed that with my teaching her English, the ESL coordinator assisting her with school work, and the support of her parents at home we could all help Jasmin do well pretty soon. Nonetheless, my expectations were affected by the fact that sometimes Jasmin forgot to write about the entries I gave her and was not reviewing and practicing the language I was teaching her. I interpreted this as if she was not interested or did not

feel the need to learn English. The situation was disappointing, but I wanted to understand why it was happening.

As I reflected about this issue, I understood that I was making assumptions about Jasmin's expectations, her parents,' and her teachers' without having a conversation with them. What I perceived was that Jasmin was already content with the fact that she did not have to do any homework or that her teachers did not call on her often and were patient with her; her parents were pleased because their daughter was happy in school and the Language Arts teacher was happy that she was at least writing in Spanish. This was a case in which all of us had a piece of information and were acting only on what we knew.

I was concerned about a couple of issues. First, Jasmin had not developed certain important skills and background knowledge she needed to understand the content of subjects in class. For example, when doing mathematical operations in some geometry exercises, I realized that she did not completely know the multiplication tables. And in terms of language, she had problems identifying word categories (nouns, adjectives, adverbs, etc) and spelling even simple words in Spanish. Not knowing this information in addition to lacking proficiency in English made it even more difficult for her to understand the content she was being taught in class. I asked her about her schooling in her home country and she told me that she used to go to a public school, in a class of 45 students. This is common in public schools in her home town, where in many cases students cannot get individualized and differentiated instruction due to lack of resources, teacher/student ratio, etc.

My second concern was that I did not see Jasmin doing any homework assignments. It seemed as if she was just passing by her classes, without really

developing a sense of accomplishment. Perhaps with the best of intentions, teachers were simply giving her time to adjust so they did not demand much from her. In the meantime, she was feeling good about it, but she was losing a lot. She told me she sometimes understood and a couple of classmates helped her, but she had not given teachers much evidence that she had indeed understood. At times I thought that teachers did not have great expectations for her.

Communication plays a big role in how expectations from all stakeholders are shaped. In Jasmin's story there are a couple of instances that illustrate this. One was her relationship with the Language Arts teacher. Even though he is not fluent in Spanish—he mostly reads it, he uses the few words he speaks to communicate what he wants her to do but especially to praise her progress. His effort to bridge the communication gap between the two of them has given Jasmin confidence. I encouraged her to show him what she was able to write in her journal and he was very glad she was making the effort. So communication, although not very effective, served the purpose of making Jasmin feel she had the teacher's support.

The second instance relates to a situation during Math class. The ESL coordinator told me one day that she was a little disappointed with Jasmin after a conversation she had with her Math teacher. She told Mrs. Donovan that she did not have any grades from Jasmin because she had not turned in any assignments. To make it worse, during class, the Math teacher found that instead of doing the exercise students were suppose to solve, Jasmin was simply drawing something not related to Math at all. When the teacher asked her why she was doing that, she replied that she did not understand what the teacher was explaining so she decided to do something different. When Jasmin and I discussed the

situation, she told me that she was indeed drawing and she thought it was okay. About her homework assignments, she had just assumed that she was not required to turn them in, as it had happened with other classes.

These two examples illustrate the importance of communicating academic expectations to students and parents in a way that they understand. As I explained in chapter 6, this communication might be complicated by the fact that students in junior high are expected to be autonomous and manage their own learning; thus, expectations are directly communicated to students, not parents. Both teachers and parents might be expecting Jasmin to do so even when, due to a language and cultural barrier, she has not develop independence in this context.

In the case of Jasmin's parents, they seemed to be content with her positive attitude and were not really expecting her to fulfill specific expectations. I was unsure, for example, if they were checking for homework, until her mother told me, "About the topics [Jasmin] studies, we haven't really followed them up as carefully as we have with the twins. What we've done is to ask her if she has homework or not, to which she often replies that she does most of her homework in school." I think this phenomenon might be related to, first, the parents' assumption that Jasmin can already take care of her own learning, and second, the complexity of topics that Jasmin is supposed to study in class; her dad does not have time to explain to her and her mom does not understand English. Jasmin's mother actually told me one day that she used to be the one in charge of the kids' school work and of being involved in school activities, but the lack of language proficiency was her constraint and her husband said he did not have time to help.

Communicating clear expectations. After having concluded that there were conflicting expectations in relation to Jasmin's education, I came to the realization that part of my role was to help her understand school expectations and also communicate them to her parents. One way in which I did this was to help her understand the flyers and communications she got from school. One day, for example, we read the weekly updates and menu together and we went through a list of documents she needs to bring to school, including her vaccine record. We also talked, about the school's dress code. She told me for example, how some of her classmates stared at her when she took off her jacket and displayed her tight spaghetti-strap-tank top. She said it was normal for her to wear this in her former school, on those days when she did not have to wear her school uniform. She thought T-shirts were of poor taste (like those worn by her classmates), but I told her those are the ones she was supposed to wear in school. She told me nobody had informed her there was a dress code.

I also exchanged e-mails with Jasmin's mother about her family's experience during their first months of school and we talked from time to time when she came to the adult ESL classes at school—they are held within the same building. She and her husband believed the twins had a lot of support from the ESL teachers, but they did not think they were getting the same support from the room teacher. They had not talked to the homeroom teacher for the first two months. They had, however, talked to the Mexican ESL teacher, whom they said had been very supportive. In our communications, she let me know that it was not until I e-mailed some questions about their perceptions of the school that they realized some of the aspects they needed to take into account concerning their children's education.

In terms of their understanding of school communications, Jasmin's mother explained that they understood most of the messages sent so that they could "comply with school requirements, for example, information about medical exams, academic and social events, etc." She felt a little discouraged, though, by the fact that she had to rely on her husband to understand them (but she signed up for the adult ESL program at Greenwood). Concerning school requirements, we had the opportunity to talk about and clarify her doubts about insurance for her children, but in terms of their participation in school "academic and social events," I found out that they had not come to their first parent-teacher conference or other events yet. They related more to the Mexican ESL teacher because she was the liaison between the school and them; thus, when there were disciplinary problems, the homeroom teacher communicated these to the Mexican teacher and she would contact the parents.

One instance when this occurred was when during the twins' class, where the teaching methodology is based on learning centers (different sections within the classroom where students do different activities in small groups) they were taking the materials they used in one center to another. The teacher tried to explain to them that they were not supposed to do this; they were supposed to leave materials used in their place. They could not understand why they were doing something wrong. So the homeroom teacher called the ESL teacher who also contacted the mother so that she explained what the children were supposed to do or not do. Some children from other countries and even other schools are not used to this methodology; however, they seem to be expected to know how to follow the procedures from the very beginning.

In general, Jasmin's parents were happy with the support they received in school, especially from the ESL teachers; Jasmin's mother said, "They are always attentive to their progress in the English language, they always have instructional materials and we can notice the progress in the second language." But she complained about the support from the other teachers; she explained, "We have the feeling that there is less support from the other teachers and communication is null, to the extent that some homework assignments or in-class activities [completed by our children] contain mistakes or are not corrected in class, which we understand given that the teacher doesn't speak Spanish."

In spite of the communication gap, Jasmin's parents are grateful their children go to Greenwood school; the mother called their experience "motivating" because as soon as they came in the school they got admitted and that "gave the family stability." They noticed the teachers' and administrators' concern and desire to support their children. For Jasmin's mother, their attitude greatly helped them to adjust to the new culture. Further, realizing their children's motivation to go to school where they have access to up-to-date resources and books and have the opportunity to learn English made Jasmin's parents very happy that their children studied at Greenwood.

Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter was not only to look at a couple of family cases whose experiences portray some of the issues presented in chapters 5 and 6 related to ESL program stakeholders' views of LEP student education and their parents' involvement. My intention was also to provide cases that show connections between parents, teachers, and administrators' perspectives and expectations and LEP student

educational experience. I want to reiterate, however, that these cases are not representative of all immigrant/sojourner experiences, since they are shaped by differences in terms of cultural and social capital, parents and students' educational background, and even socio economic status.

Even though the experiences of Antonia and Jasmin differ greatly especially because they are at different stages in their schooling experience, there are some common features that define their experience:

Cultural expectations and former educational experiences influence educational expectations. Parents and students assess their current experience in the school based on comparisons they make against their educational experiences in their home countries. For instance, if they were used to having a more personal relationship with teachers because it is part of the school culture in their countries, this is what they expect from their current teacher. If expectations in the home culture and the current school's culture are similar or if, according to the parents' and student's judgment, the current school provides more than the previous one, their assessments are very positive. Expectations evolve as immigrant/sojourner families get more exposure to the host culture.

Gaps in school-families communication may exacerbate conflicting educational expectations and nfluence LEP student educational experience. It seems that communication gaps will persist as long as parents and teachers do not have a genuine dialogue about what each of them expect concerning the education of a child. Unclear expectations may generate confusion in a student who finds herself between two cultures, lessening the student's confidence and therefore affecting her self-esteem. At the same

time, a student's perception of his or her other own progress affects the parent's understanding of his or her child's schooling.

Did informing parents and students of expectations make a difference? In these two cases, informing parents and students about the school's expectations made a difference in their understanding of school's culture and facilitated the process of adjustment. Even if expectations are not discussed, parents will get to know them sooner or later, but the sooner those expectations are known, the more beneficial for LEP student performance. But school personnel should also become familiarized with parents' expectations in order to understand why parents make certain decisions, as I argued in chapter 6.

Limited English Proficient students may still survive American schools if parents and teachers do not communicate their opinions, feelings, and expectations. However, differences that are never discussed may not only lead to biased judgments but also to a slower process of adjustment. It can also deny the possibility that local cultures become enriched by the presence of other cultures and the transformation that American schools require in times of increasing diversification.

CHAPTER 8: AN EXPERIENCE OF EMPOWERMENT: CONCLUSIONS FROM

AN INSIDER-RESEARCHER PERSPECTIVE

I started this study two years ago inspired by my experiences as an international student and parent. From the literature review to my interactions with the participants, I realized that many students and parents from non-dominant cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds shared the same struggles I faced during my first years in the United States: the effects of being "the Other" that are sometimes mitigated with time, learning, and the enactment of the behaviors expected by the host culture.

I began my study with the belief that with such a growing diversification of the student population in schools in the United States there is an increasing need to address Limited English Proficient (LEP) students' needs. Many researchers and educators have found out that a one-size-fits-all kind of instruction is not effective when dealing with students who do not possess the values, attitudes, and knowledge of the dominant culture.

While the increasing number of LEP students in American schools is a phenomenon present nationwide now, even in states that were not traditionally targeted by migrants and immigrants, many teachers are not sufficiently prepared to deal with the different needs of a diverse population. Likewise, many immigrant/sojourner parents do not have the social, linguistic, or academic capital to interact with the school community and assist their children in their education.

In this study I focused on the engagement of cultural and linguistic minority parents in schools and how they negotiated perspectives and expectations with school personnel, taking into account that they may understand LEP student experience differently than schools. The ultimate goal of this research was to support a dialogue that

allowed school administrators, teachers, and parents to negotiate meaning and ideally, arrive to a common language to discuss the challenges and possibilities of educating LEP students. By doing this, I intended to contribute to the improvement of LEP student education while privileging culturally and linguistically diverse families' knowledge.

In the next section I summarize and discuss the findings of this study by addressing my initial research questions related to the ESL program's stakeholders' perspectives on LEP student education and parent involvement, parent empowerment, and the school use of ethnic/linguistic minority families' cultural capital in schools. Then, I present my reflection about the research method and procedures I used in this study. I further discuss the possibilities of empowerment that this research provided me as well as the possibilities offered by my positionality as a researcher-insider. I address some of the strengths, weaknesses, and limitations of this study and I conclude with some questions I was left with after completing this research and new directions for research on the topic.

Summary of Findings

How do negotiations of meanings of cultural capital affect the educational experiences of limited English proficient students? The meanings we construct of cultural capital affect the ways in which schools interact with students and their families. Every day we construct meanings about our experiences and we assign a specific value to them. The meanings we construct and the values we attribute to our experiences affect our knowledge and actions upon the world, and this research provides good examples of how this happens.

Ethnic/linguistic minority families and school personnel understand and construct in their minds the school's dominant culture and other cultures in ways that often remain

hidden to each other. They create perceptions, ideas, expectations, and biases based upon the value that members of the school community socially and individually attribute to cultural groups. Even though families and school personnel are not aware of this when they interact, they always negotiate meanings about what they believe about the other's cultural capital. What is problematic about this is that the values that school community members attribute to various forms of cultural capital privilege some ethnic/linguistic minority groups and marginalize others. I provided examples of this in chapter 6 when I addressed how involvement by ethnic minority group parents, namely Arab parents in comparison to Mexican parents, is assessed in terms of the behaviors that are most praised in the school's dominant culture. Using culture as a reference, some school personnel classified them as highly or non involved parents

Before addressing the issue of how negotiations of cultural capital affect the education of LEP students, I want start by discussing my sub-research questions. These more specific questions relate in particular to the school personnel and parents' views of LEP student education in Greenwood and parent involvement.

How do ESL program stakeholders understand the educational experiences of limited English proficient-LEP students in this school? Both school personnel and parents thought that LEP students' presence in the mainstream classroom was positive and beneficial, even if these students were not sufficiently proficient in English. Teachers appreciated the cultural contribution from these students, although it was not clear if all teachers provided a space in class for them to share their culture or if they made it part of the curriculum.

Parents typically expected teachers to accommodate their teaching according to LEP students' needs, but teachers were not sure that they had the time to do so. LEP student education can be a time and effort consuming endeavor. Many teachers found themselves doing a lot of additional work in order to respond to the needs of this student population, which made them feel overwhelmed and helpless considering all the paperwork they already had to do in order to comply with national and state requirements.

Concerning parents' beliefs and ideas about their children's English language development, I found that in general parents did not have clear ideas about language learning or that they had not had the opportunity to discuss the subject. When asked about the topics they would like to learn more about in the school, many parents assessed that they needed to learn more about the ESL program and its operations. Knowing more about this program could help them support their children's language learning at home.

In general, parents were satisfied with the education that Greenwood provided to their children; they agreed that it offered a good, comfortable environment, and that school personnel were respectful of other cultures. A few parents complained that some teachers used very traditional learning activities, particularly teacher-centered activities and a great amount of fill-in-the-blank assignments. Other parents lamented that school-family interactions were "impersonal," that they wanted to know more about students' lives in the school, or that some teachers lacked sufficient knowledge of their students' family lives.

Parents and teachers agreed that LEP students had made progress thanks to the mainstream and the ESL teachers' support. Teachers agreed that they had good

communication with ESL teachers and LEP students' parents; however, the ESL

coordinator argued that not all teachers were willing or had the time to team work with

ESL teachers. Also, some parents discussed how communication with teachers is more

limited as their children moved to upper grades. School administrators and the ESL

coordinator explained that this happens because teachers in lower grades usually are more

caring teachers and communicate better with their students and, consequently, with their

parents. Meanwhile, teachers in upper grades focus more on the content and expect more

autonomy from the part of the student, therefore communication with parents is not as

needed.

There was no consensus among mainstream teachers about their professional

development to educate LEP students. They agreed that the school provided them with

many professional development opportunities, but some of them were not sure whether

they possessed all the preparation they needed. The school administrators and the ESL

coordinator explained that teachers did not lack preparation but they lacked confidence to

put that preparation into action, especially at the moment of interacting with immigrant

and sojourner parents.

In my six years of experience as a parent of a student at Greenwood, I perceived a

high level of satisfaction among international parents. Even though there were some

parents who were very critical of the sometimes overly traditional and test driven

education provided by the school (especially parents who are professionals in the social

sciences), many parents were very pleased that their children were attending a school that

has such a good reputation in the area. It is well known among the locals that other

schools look up to Greenwood as a role model because of its personnel, its resources, its

achievements in terms of standardized tests scores, and the projects they carry out with the support of the local university. As a parent, I sometimes questioned some of the teaching activities and projects (particularly the behaviorist forms of managing student discipline), but I think Greenwood is in general a school that provides many of the benefits that a private school typically offers.

How do ESL program stakeholders perceive parental engagement? Overall, teachers and school administrators believed that ethnic/linguistic minority parents were highly involved in school organized activities; for the school personnel, international parents were very thankful, respectful, and supportive of school efforts. Parents, on the other hand, did not make general assessments of international parent participation; some of the interviewed parents explained that they engaged in activities that they felt were mandatory, e.g. academic activities or parent-teacher conferences.

When I inquired further, school administrators and ESL teachers agreed that parents from various ethnic/linguistic groups engage differently. For example, they thought that Asian parents, particularly Korean parents, were the most engaged; they were respectful, thankful, supportive of school efforts, and had high expectations for their children. They were followed by Arab parents, who also were very thankful, supportive, and demanding; they were the ones who asked for accommodations for their children when they could not participate in certain activities (like those involving music) due to religious beliefs or practices.

Mexican parents were described as the least involved group of parents; they did not participate in school events, they did not volunteer, and some even refused to follow school rules. One of the school administrators said that communications with them were

usually about a problem (this is a finding that is similar to existing research reports from the US South and Southwest on Mexican parent involvement as discussed in chapter 2). Curiously enough, the same administrator did not associate this group of parents with the Latino group; for her the Mexican group constituted a group apart from a more monolithic Latino group of parents. For many people in this area of the country, being Hispanic means being Mexican, and being Mexican is often stereotyped as being poor and lower class. The fact is that the great majority of the Mexican families at Greenwood come from rural areas and work on local farms or in restaurants. This is not the case with parents coming from other Latin American countries in this town, who usually come from a middle class status in their home countries for the purpose of getting a graduate degree at the local university.

In other words, there is not simply a difference in cultural values among these groups but a difference in terms of socio economic status that has not been sufficiently discussed in the school. The majority of international families in Greenwood come from privileged classes within their countries and possesses a high educational attainment level; they possess a cultural capital that is valued in American schools. Many of these parents share expectations that are typical of the US middle class and have themselves succeeded academically and socially. Because parents from lower classes do not share the same specific expectations, they are perceived as lacking knowledge or skills when they simply possess knowledge that is not valued in a school where middle class values predominate (Olivos, 2006).

An example that illustrates how parents from different social classes may engage in their children's education is useful here. Highly educated parents tend to provide their

children with opportunities like participating in after school activities (like a sports club, a music school, etc.), having a tutor to catch up with school contents (in the US and their home countries), or accessing technology and resources that will enhance their learning. Alternatively, parents who do not have the same middle class aspirations may demonstrate concern about their children's education by giving them advice like "Make sure you do your homework on time," "Be responsible," and "Study hard so that you can get a good job." In many cases, these parents cannot help their children do homework since they do not have the skills that the school and an information-based society value.

Not understanding the ways in which parents' habitus is influenced by different histories, geographies, beliefs, educational levels, and socio-economic backgrounds usually leads school personnel to assess parent participation and LEP student behavior in terms of personal attributes. Unfortunately, school personnel are sometimes ill equipped to understand cultural conflicts that immigrant/sojourner parents have to face; at the same time, this creates unrealistic expectations, cultural biases and misrepresentations. It also leads to deficit thinking, that is, the belief that families are incomplete and need to be supplied with cultural knowledge.

I agree with Pérez Carreón et al. (2003) when they argue that immigrant parents enter traditional engagement activities insufficiently prepared to fully participate and negotiate their roles in the school; too often, school personnel problematically separate them into those who support school efforts and those who dissent. Olivos (2006) also stated that schools expect parents to engage in ways that are supportive, not critical of school practices. In the end, teachers relate better with those parents who share their

social styles and value systems (Kozol, 2007) and they fear and misunderstand those who behave and believe differently.

In this study I found out that the great majority of parents, if not all, are very concerned about their children's education, no matter their background. International parents have high expectations for their children and try to support them in ways that are familiar to them. The problem is that a definition of parent involvement and what an engaged parent does has not been seriously discussed in the school, at least with the parents. Some expectations are explained by the school in the School-Parent Compact, but many parents do not read it carefully in part because they do not recognize its importance and the jargon used there.

The ESL coordinator and most of the parents I interviewed expressed that parents need to be informed about school's expectations from the very beginning of the school year in a way that is accessible to parents. Delgado-Gaitán (1991) argues that a factor determining parent involvement is communication: schools should inform parents about school operations and provide them with resources to organize themselves. When parents know and understand what they are expected to do, they become better able to participate in ways that not only are supportive of school efforts but that also are creative and provocative of new ideas.

Lack of genuine communication reinforces stereotypes of parents and school personnel. But for true communication to occur, parents need to be educated about the protocol used to communicate with the school. Delgado-Gaitán (1990) argues that by developing their linguistic capital, parents may develop awareness about their role in

their children's education and be able to speak the same language when communicating with the school.

In this study, I realized that communication between teachers and families was most effective in K-5 grades. This was due to various reasons; first, most of the LEP student population was concentrated in lower grades; second, according to school administrators and ESL teachers, lower grade teachers were more caring, maternal, and developed a closer relationship with their students and parents while upper grade teachers focused more on the content they teach. And third, upper grade teachers expected their students to be autonomous and to harness their own learning process without much intervention from the parents. Parents agreed that this expectation for autonomy greatly affected their communication with the school and the kind of support they could provide their children with their education at home, first because parents were ill equipped to help with more sophisticated content, and second because their children lost some of their autonomy and confidence when they were not proficient in the language used at school.

In spite of the difficulties expressed by parents and teachers concerning expectations, perspectives, and communication (not being able to understand school/sojourner and immigrant families' language), most parents seemed content with the education provided by Greenwood. Even though some parents recognized that school organized parent involvement activities did not enable them to participate as actively as they might like, they felt also felt some security because they were not pulled out from their comfort zone. This phenomenon was not particular to ethnic/linguistic minority groups, but it happened to other parents as well. The notion of enacting a more proactive role as a parent is probably something new to many parents and it is possible that parents

whose cultural capital is similar to that valued in the school find it easier to assume more active and assertive roles.

There is an issue I want to emphasize in this section and that is that at a multilingual/multiethnic school like Greenwood, it is easy to attribute school personnel and international families' attitudes and practices to *culture*. But what is it that is being defined at Greenwood as culture? In this study, I have come to realize that culture often has been understood and constructed as a monolithic set of beliefs, ideas, and practices that are geographically bound without taking into consideration other factors influencing cultural groups, like socio-economic status, educational attainment, and parents' knowledge of the school's cultural capital. Parents' expectations greatly affect their engagement in school activities, particularly their perspectives and interactions, and the same thing occurs with teachers.

In what ways do school-organized parental involvement activities empower LEP students' parents to participate actively in their children's schooling? At Greenwood, school-centered and defined parent involvement activities predominate, for example, activities organized by school personnel where they teach parents about the best ways to educate their children, or help them interact with other families and members of the school community. School personnel assess the quality of parents' engagement in their children's education according to their participation in these activities.

According to what I observed and gathered through interviews, many parents were satisfied with the kind and amount of school organized activities. This was because first, parents were not expected to be in positions of leadership, and second, these activities tended to be more extensive than what they would regularly expect in their

home countries. In some countries, parents were only expected to participate in parent-teacher conferences and in helping their children with homework. In my case, for example, my parents were expected to participate in parent-teacher conferences, some cultural activities, and with homework, but we did not have something like Open House. However, there were other parents who came from schools where they engaged in school activities where they could participate in decision making processes or where they discussed with other parents about ways of educating their children.

Many international parents come to American schools expecting to participate in the same ways they were expected at schools in their home countries. In the particular case of international students, where they often lack English proficiency, school linguistic capital, and confidence, many parents expect not to be required to be highly compromised. If their role is expected to be that of a follower, or as Freire (1970) put it that of an object, many parents felt comfortable with that and avoided roles of leadership where they become subjects rather than objects.

Greenwood's parent involvement activities primarily involved teaching them how to support student learning at home and interact with other families and this seemed adequate for most parents. I can conclude that the school accomplished its goals as far as educating parents concerning ways to support their children's learning and bringing in families together. Nonetheless, school parent involvement activities did not involve parent leadership, except for the Parent Teacher Organization, of which immigrant/sojourner families know almost nothing. Indeed, there were no international parents involved in the PTO. In my interactions with school personnel and international parents, I realized that many of them did not feel that parent leadership beyond fund

raising and family recreation was necessary, or that it was not necessary to promote more parent leaders. I observed that there was a certain resistance from both parts to support parent leadership that engages in school decision making or at least in more proactive activities.

Many parents assumed the school was already doing a very good job and there was nothing they could really contribute, and some school personnel jumped to the conclusion that if parent leaders were supported, they were going to take over and spoil the good job they had already been doing and they had been praised for. Both parties need to recognize through authentic dialogue that parent organization is not detrimental to school efforts and that it should lead to conscientization, not parent domestication or nonsense activism, as Freire (2000) described.

One of the purposes of my research was parent empowerment through two routes: the first one, as a result of the parents' participation in this research; the second one, as a result of informing school administrators about the need to enhance shared leadership; part of this second route was the creation of a parent group. Concerning the first route, I think that some parents became at least more conscious of the role the school expects them to enact, particularly those I interviewed. Through our conversations, I was able to explain to them some of the school jargon that they had not understood in the school communications and we could also talk about the school expectations for parents. There was a way in which in spite of our cultural differences, other international parents and I connected through a common language that emerged through our common experiences.

With respect to the second route, my research contributed to parent leadership to a certain extent; even though the idea of creating a parent group or a parent advisory

council was not totally supported, school administrators agreed that it is important to recognize and support some parent leaders among the international community so that they become mediators between the communities and the school.

In this research I found that emancipation and empowerment are two difficult goals to attain for various reasons. One is that empowerment is not a notion embraced among some cultural groups where submission to authority is praised. Another reason is some parents hold a deficit view of their own culture in comparison to American culture—a culture that is praised for economic progress, organization, political power, and civil freedom. And the last reason would be systemic; both parents and teachers are part of a system where individual needs are not central; NCLB requires a lot from schools without taking into account particular contextual needs or without providing the resources for such provisions to occur.

I want to emphasize in this study the importance of a school-families partnership whereby parents participate as leaders with teachers supporting each others' work. It is only through collaborative work that they can develop conscientization that leads to their empowerment, that is, a facilitation of their possibilities of educating their own and other people's children.

One of my unresolved questions is to what extent empowerment can be an imposed notion, or a concept that is valued in some cultures as a result of a history of oppression and not something that is valued universally. A father who had recently emigrated from Korea explained that he did not find it important or valuable for parents to organize, simply because it was something that parents did not do in his culture. For him, the school personnel knew how to do their job while parents support it by having

their children involved in various extracurricular activities and making sure they work hard to attain their academic goals. Other parents like a Mexican mother I interviewed who comes from a community that has historically been segregated in this country, explained that she and her husband considered they were not in a position of criticizing or asking for accommodations of the school: they were in a country that was already providing them with better living conditions than their home country.

In what ways does the school build on the cultural capital of LEP students' parents to help them succeed academically and socially? In this study, I found that school personnel perceived differences in parent involvement across ethnic/linguistic minority groups. As I explained earlier in this chapter, the schools perceive some groups as more supportive than others. They explained these differences in terms of culture, for example, by saying that some cultures (like the "Asian" culture) highly value education while for others (like the "Mexican" Culture) education is not a priority. This supports what authors like Olivos (2006) and González and colleagues (2001, 2007) have argued, that cultural biases in schools privilege some cultural groups while they marginalize others, even with the best intentions from the teachers' part. There is little discussion in the schools about how engrained ideas about cultural groups, social class or social capital, or at least a relationship between these factors, impacts children's educational experiences.

In my presentation of these findings to all the school faculty and administrators, I emphasized the urgency of being critical about the use of the word "culture." In Greenwood, this term was usually associated to "the Other," this individual incarnated in the person of those who do not value the same beliefs, attitudes, and actions that are

valued by the dominant culture in the school, which is basically a White, Eurocentric, middle class culture. In the analysis of how the concept of culture is being understood and used in this school district, it is important to understand the interaction between cultural beliefs, socio-economic class, race, ethnicity, language, and parent educational attainment.

In trying to understand the communication gap between the school and the multiethnic/multilingual community of families, the easiest explanation is cultural incongruence. Several authors I cited in my literature review chapter who used Ogbu's framework of voluntary and involuntary minorities (for instance Tobin & McRobbie, 1996) explain that the more similar the cultural capital of non-mainstream families is to that of the dominant cultural group, the easier it is for members of the non-mainstream group to effectively navigate within the dominant cultural group. Indeed, in this study I found that parents and students who were members of groups that had traditionally been perceived as closer in terms of values to the American dominant culture (like those who have been defined as praising a hard work ethic and respect of authority, especially Asian families) seem more likely to succeed academically and socially. Conversely, parents and students belonging to groups whose values were not shared with the dominant culture (those described by school members as not following the rules, being unpunctual, and uninterested in education, especially Mexican families) had a greater tendency to take more time to succeed academically and socially. However, families from non-dominant ethnic and linguistic groups shared similar struggles when trying to communicate with the school due to the language barrier.

School personnel's assessment of parent involvement that they differentiated according to ethnicity/language/nationality lacked a consideration of the intersections between these categories and socio-economic status and parent educational attainment level. For instance, lack of engagement from Mexican parents was attributed to "culture" while disregarding the fact that many of these parents came from rural areas, had a lower educational attainment level, and were not usually raised in middle class environments. Their supposed lack of skills and/or willingness to participate was not explained as a systemic problem but rather in terms of personal traits.

In contrast, I found that those parents who had a connection with the local university, either as faculty or students, were able to overcome much of the cultural incongruence more easily than other parents whose cultural capital, or to be more specific, whose "habitus" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1997, p. 67) was not that of the dominant culture in the school. The majority of families, if not all, who came from other countries to pursue studies at the local university came from privileged classes and/or were highly educated. To me, this explains why school administrators differentiated between Mexican parents and other Latino parents—it is not really a difference of "culture" as it is a difference of class. Non-Mexican Latino parents still had communication issues with the school, but they shared the same middle class values, expectations, and aspirations that were valued by the school's dominant culture.

In my experience of engagement in my own child's education, I found many of the international parents accompanying their children to sports practice, music school, or literacy events outside the school: they had very specific expectations for their children. In sum and in accordance to Bourdieu and Passeron (1997), when parents and students'

habitus (set of contents and practices that are valued within a specific group) is similar to that of the field (the school's), they earn an advantage. Middle class values and aspirations are of great help when their engagement is constrained by a lack of English proficiency and linguistic capital. Eventually, the more ethnic/linguistic minority families adopt school's dominant language and cultural capital, the more visible they become to school personnel.

Going back to the question about the extent to which the school builds on families' cultural capital, I conclude that the school prioritizes the respect of other cultures over using such cultural capital to support student learning. As I explained in previous paragraphs, school personnel certainly value other "cultures" in different ways, ways that could unintentionally be detrimental for some ethnic and linguistic groups. Surely cultural diversity is a trait that defines the school, and the way it is addressed is through respect—the acceptance that there are other ways to see and live in the world. International parents recognize this in their interactions with school personnel; as one parent said, "they treat us as if we were equal, as if we weren't international." As a parent, I have seen that even though teachers can be either reluctant or afraid of interacting with international parents, they always try to show respect in the form of kindness or simply avoiding judgment in spite of popular cultural biases.

Other ways of showing respect and appreciation for diverse cultures include some of the accommodations (menu, class activities) due to cultural/religious beliefs, and cultural celebrations like the International Food Fair or International Night. There are also posters in other languages decorating the school. However, I find that an emphasis on respect (not judging) and appreciation is covering an undiscussed lack of

understanding. Some more experienced teachers have a greater understanding about how students from other cultural backgrounds learn or how their parents interact with the school; also, teachers have tried to make sure that textbooks they select are inclusive of other cultures, especially reading textbooks and the library contains a significant amount of books in languages other than English.

Nevertheless, many students and parents from the mainstream culture do not understand why certain traditions, practices, and attitudes occur among members of ethnic/linguistic minority groups. As a couple of Arab mothers commented, they were thankful that their culture was respected in the school, but they did not feel that other students understood why their children engaged in some practices, like fasting during Ramadan, wearing a scarf, or assuming specific gender roles. So I disagreed with the school superintendent when she argued that international parents are not seen as different because they are just "part of the school's fabric;" I believe that cultural diversity is certainly recognized as a school trait, but it is not typically an explicit part of the curriculum and members of ethnic/linguistic minority groups are still often 'otherized.'

There will always be chances for cultural difference and cultural incongruence to occur, even among American-born families since there still are cultural differences in terms of their historical, geographical, racial, and socio economic background. But traditional notions of culture cannot masquerade notions of difference and the need for an authentic dialogue about the meaning of culture within a school context along with ways to better address the negative effects of cultural incongruence on student education. For example, parents need to discuss with the school their fear of losing their culture as their children completely assimilate the American dominant culture. Teachers and school

administrators need to find new ways to address cultural differences as they also relate to social class and educational attainment and to consider cultural differences as an asset and not as a limitation for student learning and parent involvement. Moreover, I believe that in order for members of the non-mainstream cultural groups (including the African American community and the low-income White American community) to fully participate in the education of their children in spite of cultural differences, they need to learn what Delpit (2006) calls the "additional codes of power," but not passively; as she explains, they must first understand the value of the code they already possess, and this is partly the responsibility of schools.

A Reflection on the Method: Critical Ethnography and Parent Empowerment

I chose to conduct this study as a critical ethnography because this approach best supported my research goals, namely to privilege voices that often go unheard, and to critically analyze commonsensical notions of culture and immigrant/sojourner families' involvement in school activities. Critical ethnography suits my ideas about research and helped me to make connections between a local phenomenon to larger issues of power and difference.

However, while using critical theory to conceptualize and analyze the data collected and the school as a site of cultural reproduction, I realized that it is easy to blame schools for issues of inequality without understanding the complexities of the teachers and other school personnel who work there. As Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti (2005) explained, some critical theory discourses do not take into consideration the structural constraints that limit the work of educators. Such discourses not only disempower parents to engage in their children's education but disempower teachers

themselves, or, as they put it, they are discourses that are "peripheral to the very people they purport to affect." (p. 3)

Some of the parents I interviewed complained about the lack of authentic dialogue between the teachers and the families, in particular, that 15 minutes for a parent-teacher conference simply was not enough. I could blame the school for not getting closer to the families, but when I heard teachers complaining about the great amount of work they had to be accountable for and the lack of time to do it all, I understand that they also work within a system that constrains their actions.

A Reflection on positionality: The insider-researcher perspective. This critical ethnography represented for me a process whereby I could constantly reflect about my positionality as a researcher and as a parent. By the same token, my positionality as an insider researcher enabled me to have access to a wide range of information and afforded me a unique angle to view differing perspectives on the phenomenon I studied.

Being a parent and a mentor at the school facilitated my getting access to insider information at the school and among the parents. As an ESL mentor, I had the opportunity to observe the ESL program activities first hand and understand the struggles of ESL teachers and students when trying to communicate with someone who did not speak a shared language or when trying to cope with so many teachers and so many students at the same time with limited personnel.

Initially, I did not feel empowered to interact with the school teachers. I felt I was probably seen as an outsider who had intentions to scrutinize their work. During my first visits as a parent researcher, I realized that I, a young parent, non-native English speaker, graduate student, and a woman of color, would not gain any recognition or support unless

I got someone's backup; in this sense, the support and advocacy from the principal proved to be essential for my research. She always referred to me during faculty meetings as her former intern, or the parent who was doing the kind of research the school needed. That, along with the support and kindness from some of the ESL teachers and former teachers of my daughter, made me feel confident about my work. Still, when informing about the findings of this research, some of which were received with resistance, I felt that my work needed to be validated by someone else with a higher status, as if my contributions did not have value by themselves. While I had gained very useful access to insider information in the school, I would always be the Other because of my positionality.

Concerning my relationship with the parents, I felt that common struggles and concerns united us. Although our experiences had brought us together, I would not have gotten the information I was able to get with parents whose background was similar to mine if it were not for my interpreters. They not only "decoded" information in a language that I could not understand but also helped me understand the perspectives that shaped the parents' answers. I would have not understood certain cultural values and assumptions if it were not by their knowledge as members of those particular communities. I have to recognize, nonetheless, that my interviews with Spanish speaking parents were richer, since I did not depend on someone else to negotiate meaning. Mexican parents, though, were shyer than other Spanish speaking parents, probably because they felt I was more on the side of the school than on their side. Because I was aware of this, I often shared personal anecdotes with them or brought my daughter with

me to minimize the "outsider" effect, and this actually worked well towards the middle of the interviews as these parents became increasingly open and warm.

A funnel research methodology. Given the complexity of the issue I wanted to study, a funnel methodology—starting by exploring broad perspectives and then narrowing down to particular ideas and experiences—was very useful in progressively gaining access to participants, conceptualizing the data, and getting in-depth information. While the questionnaires provided me with a very general outlook of teachers and immigrant/sojourner parents' perspectives, the observations and interviews allowed me to address more specific questions and develop a closer relationship with participants.

As I narrowed down to more specific participants and experiences, I focused more directly on the issue of empowerment. I initially thought, for example, that focus group interviews would facilitate the eventual creation of a parent group, which did not occur. I was not aware at the time of writing the proposal for this research that I would need to face parents' fears to speak up and "be visible" or that the notion of empowerment was not valued in other cultures. Even though I think the funnel approach I used greatly facilitated access to the field and data management, I would require even more time than I had visiting the school biweekly for 2 years to actually reach a higher number of participants.

The fact that a higher degree of parent emancipation and empowerment did not occur as I expected as a result of this research (in other words, that parents did not decide to organize as a result of participating in this study) made me aware that I needed to be careful about my own biases and expectations as a researcher and as a parent who wanted to be proactive. I did provide parents information about the school so that they

participated in activities they do not traditionally participate in. I did provide the school

administrators with information about parents' perspectives so that they can better

understand their needs and expectations, but I did so while acknowledging that I could

not impose my expectations on them for how they should interact with each other. This

was challenging; fortunately, continuous reflection about my ideas based on readings on

the subject, writing in my journal, and constant conversations about my study with

friends and professors helped me to avoid imposing my views and improve my listening

skills instead.

Challenges and Limitations of the Study

I faced several challenges in the process of this research. Some of them included

my own biases and opinions not only as a researcher as I explained earlier, but as a parent

in Greenwood. Reading about the subject I was studying created certain expectations

about the result I expected for this research. Moreover, as a parent researcher, I

interpreted some teachers' indifference when I encountered them in the hallways or their

avoidance during faculty meetings as something personal, so it was easy to blame them

for the issues I observed in the school. As I explained before, self-reflection and

continuous dialogue about my ideas on what I was finding helped to reduce the effect of

those biases; so too did communicating about those findings to the interested community.

Something I initially understood as a challenge to my research was the parents'

lack of desire to participate through the questionnaires or in focus group meetings. It was

disappointing for me that after many efforts to facilitate their participation (giving them

children's books, having meetings in their neighborhoods, providing snacks and children

activities, and having an interpreter) many parents did not get involved. After those

missed attempts, it was easy to jump to the conclusion, as usually many teachers do, that parents simply do not care. Yet I understood that parents' reluctance to participate was part of the phenomenon I was studying in the school and gave me more reasons to find alternative explanations to their lack of participation. One of my realizations in this process was that parents will not simply organize as a response to a call, especially when they are not used to participating in meetings such as the ones I proposed. I understood that they need a "push" and some mentorship from the school in order to organize—parent advocates cannot simply expect that parents will deconstruct traditional forms of involvement in such a short time.

Another challenge in this research was the great amount of data I collected. Because my doctoral committee made me aware of this when I presented my proposal, I decided to be extremely organized with data. I started by developing a strict schedule and some short term goals. Systemically reducing the amounts of data I had to manage was essential for staying on track. In addition, my experience as a parent often corroborated what I was finding in the data, which at the same time coincided with what I had found in the literature I had reviewed for this study.

I think the most significant limitation of this study is the amount of participants in the interviews. Even though I was able to gather multiple perspectives, I still was not able to bring together more parents within the focus groups. I would have also liked to gather more of the mainstream teachers' perspectives through individual interviews, but my time constraints did not allow me to do so. Even though critical research is not the kind of research that ends at one point in time, I think this one ends here, since I will return to my home country and there is no one here to follow up on this study. Still, I think the study

had some lasting effects on my own way of understanding and enacting parent engagement and on school educational policies.

An Experience of Parent Empowerment: Lessons Learned from this Research Experience

This study not only represented a great opportunity for me to develop my research skills but also to enact a more proactive role as a parent. The complexity of the study allowed me to explore different research tools, interact with a wide range of participants, and conceptualize an issue using various theoretical frameworks. Research that I hoped to be empowering for the participants resulted in a process perhaps even more empowering for me. I became a more involved parent thanks to this research. The study became the excuse to know more about other parents' perceptions, about teachers' ideas, and about processes taking place in the school. I became more knowledgeable about the linguistic capital that predominates in the school among teachers and school administrators, so I was able to understand school communications and even most of the faculty meetings I attended. Most importantly, I was able to contribute ideas during some school meetings, at least at those where a topic I was familiar with was discussed. I always took advantage of these opportunities to speak on behalf of those international parents who were not there, at times using information I was finding in my research to support my arguments and proposals.

Nonetheless, I cannot say I always felt I was heard by school personnel or other native born parents during those meetings. Sometimes I felt that whatever I said did not make any sense to them, either because of language or because my suggestions were unconventional. Some of my findings were not welcome by the administration, and it was

very disappointing for me to face their resistance. At other times I actually did feel that my suggestions spurred other people's ideas and I felt very glad about it, since one of my ultimate goals with this study was to inform school policies.

Some of the changes that will be implemented at the school as a result of this research are the publication of school curriculum on the website to inform interested parents, and the use of alternative forms of communication with all parents, like simplifying the language used in communications sent home or changing the dynamics of the Parent Orientation and Open House at the beginning of the school year by having parents assigned to small groups where other more experienced parents familiarize them with school programs and operations. The study also ignited a dialogue about issues of culture and how parent educational attainment and socio-economic status shape families' cultural values. School administrators recognized the importance of dialoguing about the effects of social class on student performance and parent involvement, since families from lower social classes of different races and ethnicities, including Whites of European descent, are also reluctant to actively participate in school activities. These strategies will be included in the new School Improvement action plan.

Another important thing that I accomplished with this research was to raise awareness among parents about what they need to consider in terms of their children's education. The interviews constituted an excellent space to help parents understand the school jargon and school expectations that they did not understand before, probably for several years. I was also able to inform them of their rights as parents to ask for accommodations, including the use of an interpreter during meetings. After my

interactions with parents, I felt that we had all come out from the interviews with knowledge we needed to understand our experience at the school.

When informing school personnel about the findings of this research, I emphasized the importance of supporting parent leadership efforts, but as I explained earlier in this chapter, I was not quite successful at accomplishing this. One the one hand, school administrators did not show too much enthusiasm about the idea, perhaps because they fear parents will want to take over and demand accommodations that are not possible under the given circumstances. On the other hand, parents needed more time to really embrace the idea; they have ideas that they want to contribute, but they are still afraid to speak up. In my opinion, the idea of a parent group could have been possible if only I had more time to interact with the participants.

In general, the significance of this study lies in its contribution to the trend initiated by several scholars of color that is reframing parent engagement focusing on the involvement of minority families. It is also significant as it shows the intersections between cultural values, socio-economic class, educational attainment, and parent knowledge of school culture and how these factors shape parents and school personnel's perspectives on education and parent involvement. This research also calls attention to common struggles among different ethnic/cultural groups, those that unite them more than those circumstances that separate them. Lastly, this study focuses on the evolving and ever changing nature of culture as applied to a school context and how restrictive and marginalizing traditional notions of culture can be for particular groups.

New Questions and Future Directions

Several questions remained unanswered for me after conducting this research. Concerning parent empowerment, my question is to what extent is empowerment a cultural value as opposed to a notion that is praised universally. As a distinct cultural value, is expecting leadership from all parents an act of imposition? If so, then expecting it from certain groups becomes an imposed practice or result. Additionally, how can parent leaders and teachers ignite other parents' desire to participate if empowerment is not part of their common sense or their cultural values? For instance, how is it possible to encourage parents who traditionally are not used to participating in focus groups or parent groups without imposing a set of values? And finally, what kinds of programs can be created to mentor parents to become school leaders?

In relation to school personnel and parents' conflicting perspectives, I wonder what other effects such conflicts have on LEP student education and how immigrant/sojourner parents and students' evolving perspectives interact. I also wonder to what extent LEP student experience in the classroom is influenced by the interaction of those perspectives.

In the future, I do not see myself doing research in a multicultural/multiethnic community like the one I chose as a context for this study, essentially because as I return to my home country I will do research in a completely different environment. However, I see myself studying how issues of socio-economic class and educational attainment affect parent understanding and engagement in their children's learning. My home city is going through drastic changes in many ways (education, technology, architecture, etc) thanks to conditions imposed by the globalization era. These changes include an agenda for my

home state to become bilingual in the near future while parents, teachers, and students are not prepared as they lack the linguistic capital and the skills to participate in such enterprise.

In conclusion, I think that more research needs to be done on parent empowerment among communities that have not traditionally been oppressed, about the effects of school and parents' conflicting perceptions and expectations on LEP student education, and about mentorship opportunities schools can provide for parents to become leaders and advocates. Lastly, I think it would also be interesting to study the influence of class within similar cultural/ethnic groups—for example, a Latino group of participants as a way to dispel myths related to cultural biases.

I hope my research has contributed to a better understanding of the centrality of communication that is based on authentic dialogue between the school and the families in order to avoid misinterpretations and cultural biases. Schools need to support families who do not possess the linguistic capital that predominates in the school if authentic communication is desired. Clear communication, that is, communication in a language that does not marginalize parents, facilitates parent understanding of school culture and its expectations. By the same token, clear expectations may increase parents' desire to participate more actively and critically in their children's education.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

<table>
<tr><td colspan="6">

GREENWOOD SCHOOL
LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT STUDENTS AND PARENTS: TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear teacher:
Please fill out the following survey and return it to me by -----------. Your feedback will be used for research and school improvement purposes. I appreciate your participation!
</td></tr>
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<tr>
<td colspan="2">Grade level and/or subject area:</td>
<td>Years of experience:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country of origin:</td>
<td>Ethnicity:</td>
<td>Languages spoken:</td>
</tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td>How long have you worked in Greenwood?</td></tr>
<tr><td>What level of education have you completed?</td></tr>
<tr><td>How many ESL students do you have this semester?</td></tr>
<tr><td>What is the average number of ESL students that you have had since you started working in Greenwood?</td></tr>
</table>

Please read each statement and place a check in the box that best describes your opinion. Feel free to add comments that you consider necessary.

	QUALITY RATING					
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Comments
The inclusion of Limited English Proficient--LEP students in subject-area classes creates a positive educational atmosphere*						
The inclusion of LEP students in subject-area classes benefits all students*						
LEP students should not be included in general education classes until they attain a minimum level of English proficiency*						
Mainstream teachers should accommodate their teaching (content, activities, language, time) to meet the needs of LEP students.						
Mainstream teachers do not have enough time to cope with the needs of LEP students						
My LEP students this year are making significant progress in the following areas: • Reading						

• Writing						
• Math						
• English						
• Other subjects						
The ESL program is helping my LEP students in: • Reading						
• Writing						
• Math						
• English						
• Other subjects						
I periodically communicate with the ESL teachers to discuss the progress of my LEP students.						
I periodically communicate with the ESL teachers to ask for assistance.						
At Greenwood, teachers are provided with opportunities to learn how to teach LEP students						
I have adequate training to work with LEP students						
I would like to learn more about • The purpose/activities of the ESL program						
• Strategies I could use to facilitate my LEP students' learning						
• How the American schools are different from the native country's schools of my students						
• Resources available for LEP students' teachers						
• Other						
I have already met my LEP students' parents						
Greenwood provides opportunities for international parents to: • Get involved in their child's education						
• Understand the American educational system						
• Learn about strategies they can use to help their child(ren) succeed academically						
• Share their culture						
International parents actively participate in school activities						
I believe international parents feel welcome in this school						

The views of international parents are seriously considered when school decisions are made						
International parents are provided with clear information they need about the school's programs						
International parents have a good understanding of the school's programs and operations						

THANK YOU!

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

For further information about this project, you may contact Paula Echeverri at paulae@siu.edu

APPENDIX B

GREENWOOD SCHOOL INTERNATIONAL PARENT SURVEY

Dear parent or guardian:
Please fill out the following survey and return it to me by mail in the envelop I enclosed with this survey. Your feedback will be used for research and school improvement purposes. Your participation is greatly appreciated!

Parents' or guardians' names:		Date:

Contact information (please provide at least one of the following):

Address	Phone	E-mail
Your child(ren)s name(s):	Your child(ren)'s grade level and teacher:	

What is your country of origin? _____How long have you lived in the United States? _____

What language do you generally speak at home with your children? With your spouse?
_____

What level of education have you completed?
_____

What time is the most convenient for you to visit school or come to a meeting?
_____

If you wanted to participate in school activities, what times would be preferable for you?
_____

To participate in parent activities, which would you require? (Check all that apply)
- o Babysitting
- o Transportation
- o A neighbor to accompany you
- o An interpreter

Please read each statement and place a check in the box that best describes your opinion. Feel free to add comments that you consider necessary.

	QUALITY RATING					
	Strongly agree	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly disagree**	**Don't know**	**Comments**
The inclusion of Limited English Proficient--LEP students in subject-area (regular) classes creates a positive educational atmosphere						
The inclusion of LEP students in subject-area (regular) classes benefits all students						
LEP students should not be included in regular education classes until they attain a minimum level of English proficiency						

Regular classroom teachers should accommodate their teaching (content, activities, language, time) to meet the needs of LEP students.					
Regular classroom teachers do not have enough time to cope with the needs of LEP students					
We believe our child(ren) are making significant progress in the following areas: • Reading					
• Writing					
• Math					
• English					
• Other subjects					
We believe the ESL program is helping our child(ren) in: • Reading					
• Writing					
• Math					
• English					
• Other subjects					
We have already met the ESL teachers					
We believe that our child's regular classroom teacher is helping our child(ren) in: • Reading					
• Writing					
• Math					
• English					
• Other subjects					
We have already met our child(ren)'s regular classroom teacher(s)					
We periodically communicate with the ESL and the regular classroom teacher to discuss the progress of our child(ren)					
Unity Point provides opportunities for international parents to: • Get involved in our child's education					
• Understand the American educational system					
• Learn about strategies we can use to help our child(ren) succeed academically					
• Share our culture					
We would like to • Visit our child's classes					
• Come to the school for a meeting to learn more about the ESL program					
• Volunteer in the classroom					
• Participate in an international-parent group to talk with other parents about our					

questions/concerns/experiences related to our child's education						
We would like to learn more about						
• The purpose/activities of the ESL program						
• How to help our child with schoolwork						
• Volunteering to help in the classroom						
• How the American schools are different from our native country's schools						
• Community resources and services available						
We feel welcome in this school						
The views of international parents are seriously considered when school decisions are made						
International parents have a good understanding of the school's programs and operations						
International parents are provided with clear information about the school's programs						

THANK YOU!

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS?

_____

_____

_____

_____

For further information about this project, contact Paula Echeverri at paulae@siu.edu

VITA

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University

Paula A. Echeverri-Sucerquia   Date of Birth: December 22, 1976

Carrera 52 #68-59
Bello, Antioquia COLOMBIA

pecheverri@idiomas.udea.edu.co

Universidad de Antioquia
Bachelor of Education, Foreign Language Teaching, October 1999

Southern Illinois University Carbondale
Master of Science in Education, Curriculum and Instruction, August 2006

Special Honors and Awards:
Dissertation Research Assistantship Award. 2009-2010.

Elmer J. Clark doctoral award. 2008-2009.

Fulbright Scholarship. Awarded August 2004 to August 2006

Dissertation Title:
          Parent Engagement and Cultural Capital:Negotiating Culture in a
Multilingual/Multiethnic School

Major Professor: Dr. John D. McIntyre