

LANGUAGE CLASSES FOR PARENTS AT A TWO-WAY IMMERSION SCHOOL IN  
NORTH CAROLINA: LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR THIRD SPACES

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctorate of Philosophy in the  
School of Education (Culture, Curriculum, and Change).

Chapel Hill  
2014

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## **ABSTRACT**

Alison M. Turner: Language Classes for Parents at a Two-Way Immersion School in North Carolina: Laying the Groundwork for Third Spaces  
(Under the direction of Claudia Cervantes-Soon)

This qualitative case study took place at a Spanish/ English Two-Way Immersion (TWI) elementary school in North Carolina and examined the experiences of parents and their language teachers, including myself, who participated in the school-sponsored English and Spanish parent language classes during the 2013-2014 academic school year. The primary purpose of this study was to explore if connections were made between parents and between the home and school during the parent language classes with the goal of understanding to what degree, if at all, *third spaces* (Bhabha, 1994; Gutiérrez, 2008) opened as parents worked with one another to learn another language. The secondary purpose of the study was to unpack contextual issues of the school that positively or negatively affected the parent language classes.

According to the continuum of third spaces presented in this dissertation, it was found that while some preliminary groundwork was laid for the *initial level* of third space openings, more work was needed before third spaces might fully open in this context. Subtractive school factors, including over-reliance on top-down transmission and instruction and prevalence of deficit hypothesis about Latino families in particular, ultimately undercut the goals of the language classes to promote authentic connections among parents and with the school.

Implications for this work include re-conceptualizing the traditional model of parental involvement, evident in most schools' work with parents today. An alternative model of parental involvement, Collaborative Integration Model of Family-School Connections, is presented. The Collaborative Integration Model reorients how culturally and linguistically diverse schools think about and plan for parents' work at the school. That is, under this new model, parents work in collaboration with one another on tasks that are central to the classroom and school, build relationships based upon *confianza*, mutual trust, (Dyrness, 2007) and work to create more equitable and humanizing third spaces in schools for all children and families.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, to “Veronica Ramos,” the language teacher at PES, gracias por todo, amiga. Gracias por confiar en mí y por compartir el año conmigo. Aprendí mucho trazando tus pasos. A los padres Latinos de las clases de idiomas, gracias por asistir y participar en las clases aún durante la lluvia y el hielo. Su dedicación a la escuela y a sus hijos me inspiró. No lo hubiera haber hecho este proyecto sin Ustedes. To the English dominant parents of the classes, thank you also for attending and participating in the classes. I’m grateful for your openness to work with me and your sincere desire to connect with other parents at the school. Especially to “Amy” and “Rachel”-- thank you for all your time and your dedication to the language classes and to your children. You both touched me with your honesty and the fierceness with which you advocated for your children.

I would also like to thank all of my family and friends for all your support and love over this most stressful and arduous "marathon" of the dissertation study. Your support meant so much to me. Especially to Mom and Dad, I couldn't have done it without you. Thank you for all your help with the kids on long weeks and weekends as I wrote and revised and wrote some more. Your moral support, though, was the most important thing to keep me going. Thank you for always staying positive, pushing me on, and helping me to see the light at the end. To my husband, Brian, we made it! Thanks for surviving this process with me, for talking things through with me, for letting me escape to my “offices” on weekends to write, and most importantly for helping me to laugh. Thank you for everything. To my sister,

Meghan, and my brother, Dan, for all your support and love always and especially during graduate school. Thanks for always being there and thanks for leading the way. To my little ones, Erynn and James, you both are perfect and beautiful. I hope that you will always see things with wonder and live each moment to the fullest as you do today. I hope that you will continue to find school and learning meaningful and exciting. And to the teachers at my children's preschool—Sras. Claudia, Vicky, Laura, Donnina, Berthalina, Debbie, and Carmen—Thank you for loving my kids while I was away working. Siempre guardaré un lugar especial para Ustedes en mi corazón. And in deepest gratitude to the many professors at UNC-Chapel Hill for supporting me in this process. To Stuart Day who spent countless hours working with me as an undergraduate when I was still learning Spanish and prior to my becoming a Spanish teacher. I have never forgotten your attention and dedication to your students. Thank you for believing in me. To Claudia Cervantes-Soon for leading me into this field of TWI and bilingual education and helping me to develop as a critical researcher and scholar. Our work together around your kitchen table helped to shape my thinking. Thank you for taking the time to work with me. To Xue Lan Rong who accepted me as her graduate student and supported me throughout my time at school with opportunities to supervise student teachers and be a part of research studies. Thank you for all your advice and guidance. To Jennifer Wooten for all the time you took with me talking through ideas, describing your own dissertation experience, and helping me through the dissertation study. Thank you for pushing me to think more critically and become a stronger researcher. To my committee members Jocelyn Glazier and Dana Griffin, thank you for reading the dissertation and for offering your insightful suggestions. Each of you have inspired me to be a better teacher, researcher, and writer. Thank you.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

AIG Academic and Intellectual Gifted

CLD Culturally and Linguistically Diverse

ESL English as a Second Language

PES Polk Elementary School

TWI Two-Way Immersion

## **INTRODUCTION**

Given the growing popularity of two-way immersion (TWI) programs throughout the United States and increasingly in the Southeast as a way to adjust instruction for the rapidly expanding number of immigrant and English language learners (Shannon, 2011), it is important to explore the efficacy of these new educational spaces. TWI programs are an educational model in which students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds share the same classroom space and learn content in both home languages that they bring with them to the classroom (Lindholm-Leary, 2001). One emerging issue is the extent to which TWI schools are able to bring together children and parents from differing socio-economic, cultural, and racial groups while meeting the needs and interests of multiple communities, such as in this case of English dominant, or Anglo, and Spanish dominant, or Latino, communities (Fitts, 2006; Palmer, 2009; Valdés, 1997; Varghese & Park, 2010).

In addition, it is widely accepted that parental involvement at school and in children's learning is one factor that is central to the success of students (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Epstein, 1990, 1995; Henderson & Mapp, 2002), and therefore TWI schools like any culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) school must ensure that both communities are involved in the schooling of their children. Part of schools' efforts to involve parents at school typically includes efforts to help parents feel more connected to the school (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, &

Davies, 2007; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Peña, 2000) and, less frequently, to other parents from the school (Henderson et al., 2007).

This dissertation study took place at a Spanish/English TWI elementary school in North Carolina. It is a qualitative case study of English and Spanish parent language classes that were offered by the school after the principal received multiple requests from both English dominant and Spanish dominant parents at the school. The goal of the study was to explore these classes as an opportunity in which *third spaces* (Bhabha, 1994; Guitérrez, 2008), new “in-between” or hybrid spaces, could open between English dominant and Spanish dominant parents and also between the parents and the school as parents worked together on a shared goal of learning another language. It was hoped that third spaces would open as parents worked with one another and gained a new understanding and respect for each other’s perspectives and experiences and subsequently pushed out against the standard and official boundaries that existed previously between the two groups (Bhabha, 1994). Therefore, this dissertation examines to what extent the Spanish and English parent language classes provided the opportunity for parents to strengthen relationships with one another and build connections between the school and home. It also unpacks the context of the school and its factors of subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999) towards children and their parents that negatively affected parents feeling connected to school and classroom teachers as well as the possibilities of opening third spaces during the parent language classes. The possibility to open productive third spaces after strengthening relationships across parents and across school and parents is explored.

I will provide a brief introduction to my work with the parent language classes. The Spanish and English parent language classes originated out of parent requests and were

intended by the principal to address issues of separation and equity among Latino/a Spanish dominant parents and English dominant parents at the school. The goal of these classes was to provide a space in which parents could gain some proficiency in their non-dominant language, whether English or Spanish, and begin to build cross-cultural relationships in the school community. I volunteered to be one of the language instructors of the parent classes and worked with Verónica Ramos (this and all subsequent names in the dissertation are pseudonyms), the kindergarten and first grade literacy specialist at the school and also the other main language instructor, to subsequently design, plan, and run the classes during the 2013-2014 academic year.

The findings of the study indicated that in order to better promote third spaces, schools must re-conceptualize the traditional notion of “parental involvement” to widen the possibilities in which parents can engage together in impacting the school. Relationships need to be forged first among Latino/a parents by creating safe spaces where they can share and discuss their perspectives and their experiences with the school and in doing so, develop *confianza*, or trust and confidence, with one another (Dyrness, 2007). White English dominant parents, likewise, need safe spaces in which they can interrogate notions of discrimination and white privilege before coming to work as competent allies of the Latino/a parents. In addition, the school context in which the language classes were embedded is described in this study in hope of identifying places where feelings of connectivity, trust, and relationships can be fostered instead of discouraged. The parent language classes and the larger school context, while both flawed, still provided the space in which significant progress toward third space opening were made. Therefore, this study contributes to the understanding of the important potential for parent-school connections in TWI schools as

well as a reconceptualization of what parental involvement might look like in CLD schools. It also explores a new perspective about the complex process and negotiation of opening third spaces in TWI schools in which levels of development toward fully open third spaces are imagined.

In this introductory chapter I will first provide an overview of the purpose and significance of the research study. Next, I will briefly define third space theory and explain how it was used as the primary lens of the study and provide a summary of the research methodology. Then, I will give necessary background for the study including the nation-wide trends about immigrants and CLD students and the particular context of North Carolina where the study took place. I will define common terms used in the literature and explain the choices of terminology that I have made for this dissertation. Finally, I will conclude with a short description of the dissertation chapters.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The main purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore parental experiences at a TWI elementary school, Polk Elementary School (PES) in North Carolina, as parents participated in adult Spanish and English language classes offered by the school. The goal of the study was to identify to what extent connections were made between parents and between home and school during the parent language classes and whether these connections were able to tap into third spaces, new alternative and equitable spaces, in the school. Furthermore, the study examined school-wide factors that contributed to or mitigated the success of parent language classes and the possibility of opening third spaces between parents and between home and school. Finally, the research study suggests implications for future efforts by the



school to more fully open third spaces and for future research. The research questions were the following:

- 1) To what extent were connections and therefore understanding and knowledge made between parents (within language groups and across language groups) and between parents and school during the parent language classes? To what extent did connections between parents and with the school open third spaces, new alternative and equitable spaces, in the school?
- 2) What school-wide factors supported or did not support the parent language classes?
- 3) What are the implications for furthering schools' efforts to build connections between parents (within language groups and across language groups) and from parents to school in an effort to further open third spaces?

### **Justification of the Study**

The research literature on TWI education has grown significantly in recent years (Cervantes-Soon, 2014; Christian, 1994, 1996; Collier & Thomas, 2004; Howard, Sugarman, & Christian, 2003; Lindholm-Leary, 2001; Palmer, 2009; Valdés, 1997; Varghese & Park, 2010; Wiley & Wright, 2004) as well as literature on issues of parental involvement in TWI schools (Casas, Ryan, Kelly-Vance, Ryalls, Ferguson, & Nero, 2005; Cassidy, Garcia, Tejeda-Delgado, Garrett, Martínez-Garcia, & Hinojosa, 2004; Peña, 1998; Rubio, 1995; Shannon, 2011). Although many texts on parental involvement refer to parent education classes (Berger, 2000; Decker & Decker, 2003; DiCamillo, 2001), there are a limited number of research studies that include the mention of parent English language classes (Henderson, 1987; Henderson et al., 2007; Lasky & Karge, 2011; Moles, 1993; Rivera & Lavan, 2012; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Waterman, 2009) and only one of these studies

described the effects seen in increased “parental participation” after Spanish dominant parents participated in district-wide English language classes that focused on language learning and increasing parents’ involvement at school (Waterman, 2009). There are no studies that discuss offering non-English, target language classes as well as English language classes for parents although Bower and Griffin (2011) suggested the potential benefits of such classes in building relationships across parents in CLD schools. There is also a lack of studies on efforts to connect and build relationships between members of Spanish dominant and English dominant families in traditional or TWI programs and in parent language classes. In general, there is little evidence of the effectiveness of TWI schools in promoting collaboration and inclusion of all members of the school community in the research literature. This is a significant gap given that it is a goal of TWI schools to draw these two groups together in effort to improve the education of all the students involved. The purpose of this study, then, was to begin to address this gap in the literature by providing a case study of one TWI school’s parent language classes and to consider improvements for the subsequent years to make these spaces more fruitful for building connectivity among parents and with the school.

In addition, there are no research studies that explore school-sponsored activities to build relationships between parents and between the school and home through the third space lens. The work of Kris Gutiérrez (2008) and other scholars have applied third space theory to classroom environments and relationships between students and the school, often represented by one classroom teacher. Gutiérrez (2008) called on researchers and educators to expand academic settings to include the third space and thus better reflect the “increasingly complex, transnational, and hybrid world” (p. 148) that all people navigate. Therefore, this study

provides insights for thinking about providing opportunities in which third spaces may open fully between parents and the school and between parents across cultural and linguistic borders.

Through the findings of this case study it was confirmed that with more authentic trusting relationships among parents both within language groups and across cultural and linguistic groups and with the school, TWI programs can better fulfill their potential as a resource for empowering Latino/a children and their families. TWI education is worthy of investment as it “offer[s] a chance for (Latino/a) children to maintain and develop pride in their heritage language and culture while still learning English, which is critical to their survival in the United States” (Palmer, 2009, p. 179). Therefore, this study contributes to the goal to make schools more just and equitable places by calling attention to the complications and tensions that abound when working with parents of differing socio-economic, cultural, and racial backgrounds and who have different relationships with the school in terms of their expectations and desires.

### **Third Space Theory**

Third space theory emerged out of several traditions including post-colonialism and the work of Homi Bhabha (1994) in which Bhabha presented the third space as a conceptual space marked by hybridity and continual evolution as people and cultures come into contact with one another and people negotiate cultural changes.

Following the work of Bhabha as well as other scholars, including Kris Gutiérrez and colleagues (1995, 1997, 1999), and Elizabeth Moje and colleagues (2004), I extended third space theory to conceptualize the potential negotiation and hybridization of the two parent cultures, Anglo and Latino, and school and home in which elements of each are

acknowledged and utilized in a new theoretical space. For example, the “first space” belongs to one group of people, say, the Latino/a Spanish dominant parents and represents their group culture and community, and the “second space” belongs to the other group of people, say, the white English dominant parents and represents their group culture and community. The “third space,” therefore, would represent a hybrid space that opens up as parents meet and work together during the language classes over the course of the year. I imagined that this hybrid space would combine home knowledge, discourse, experiences and values for both of the separate groups. To open third spaces, power differentials between parent groups must be neutralized. Parents must enter into covenant with one another through the shared belief that all parents are equally worthy of having a say in their children’s schooling experience and furthermore, that it is the diversity of parental experiences and knowledge that can enrich the schooling of CLD students. In addition, I imagined similar third spaces opening between the school and home as the traditional school space was transformed and became a more humanizing and equitable space that blended home and school.

## **Background of the Research Problem**

### **The Latinization of North Carolina**

Sprouting up throughout North Carolina are *taquerías* and *tiendas latinas* while Spanish masses are being added as quickly as bilingual priests are found or recruited throughout the catholic dioceses in North Carolina (G. L. Lewis, personal communication, August 14, 2014). It is rare today not to hear Spanish spoken at local malls, parks, amusement parks, movie theaters, and car dealerships in North Carolina. Newcomers are starting small businesses selling empanadas out of their home and Spanish preschools. The Latinization (Mohl, 2003) of North Carolina and the Southeast is a process that had already

begun in the 1980s but went largely unnoticed until the surge of the 1990s (Mohl, 2003). Between 1990 and 2010, North Carolina had a 944 percent rise in the Latino population (Perreira, 2011). Latinos currently make up 8.4 percent of North Carolina's population (US Census 2010) having more than doubled in size from 2000 to 2010 (Passel, Cohn, & Hugo Lopez, 2011) reflecting the larger nationwide trend in which Latinos are now the largest minority group having surpassed African Americans (Brown & Lopez, 2013). The majority of Latinos (2/3rds) in North Carolina are from Mexico or have Mexican ancestry; other Latinos in North Carolina are made up of immigrants from El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, and Costa Rica (Gill, 2012, citing 2010 American Community Survey). And still another group of Latinos in North Carolina have moved from other areas in the United States, typically traditional gateway states, in search of new professional and personal opportunities and pointing towards the diversity among people traditionally characterized with the term "Latino" (Hamann & Harklau, 2010).

**Changing demographics of the North Carolina classroom.** The factors described above have resulted in a dramatic change in the student body population throughout the United States, in which as of 2011, 24 percent of children in public schools were of Latino origin; it is projected that 30 percent will be Latino by 2023 (National Center of Educational Statistics, 2011). This population change has especially been seen in North Carolina schools. In fact, North Carolina had the largest increase in the number of Latino school-aged children between the years of 1990 to 2000 compared to other states (Valencia & Johnson, 2006). The numbers continue to rise-- as of 2011-2012 Latinos made up 13.5 percent of the North Carolina public school student body, up from a mere four percent in 2000-2001 (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2012). For example, in Charlotte Mecklenburg

County Schools, the county with the highest Latino enrollment, there were 26,020 Latino/a boys and girls enrolled in public schools in 2011-2012 with 205,427 Latino/a students state-wide (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2012).

The change in student body to include Latino/a students is significant in North Carolina where in the majority of its communities, race had been largely defined as white/black dichotomy. Furthermore, prior to the 1980s with the influx of Latino/a workers into the state, language diversity had been almost non-existent. Now, however, schools face new challenges as they scramble to add programs and change practices to meet the linguistic needs of its changing student body. The demographic changes to the state, in effect, have disrupted the way people conceive of diversity in schools to include cultural and linguistic differences.

**The historical reasons behind the new Latino Diaspora.** The reasons behind the *new Latino Diaspora*, that is, the rapid rise in immigration of Latinos and their settling in North Carolina and other non-traditional gateway states, are multiple and complex relating to the supply and demand of good and services across the porous U.S.-Mexico border (Hamann & Harklau, 2010). Historian Raymond Mohl (2003) explained the intersection of a number of factors including shifts in the global economy as the South lost a significant amount of its industry including textiles and furniture and a surge of economic investment as “American and foreign capital sought cheap labor, new markets, and government incentives” (p. 33). This new influx of companies expanded, for example, industries as diverse as biomedical research facilities in North Carolina’s Research Triangle Park to food processing plants for poultry, hogs, and seafood. Corporations advertised the jobs and tranquil life of the South, recruiting many workers from traditional gateway states like California, Texas, Arizona, and

Chicago to places as far flung as Statesville, North Carolina and Russellville, Alabama (Mohl, 2003). Billboards in Tijuana, Mexico as late as 2002 advertised, “Mucho Trabajo en Russellville, Alabama” (*Much work in Russellville, Alabama*) (Mohl, 2003, p. 35).

Jeff Popke (2011) pointed to neoliberalism as a leading factor in reshaping the Latino transnationalism in the United States as well as the current backlash against immigrants which he described as “...a deep sense of disquiet over the increasing presence of ‘others’ within the community” (p. 243). Krista Perreira (2011) agreed that the anti-immigrant hostility in traditional gateway states has also factored into the relocation of immigrant families to North Carolina and other states in the South that offer more rural and suburban areas where “immigrants hoped to escape gang violence, expensive and crowded housing arrangements, and poor schools” (p. 269).

At the same time, transnational labor migration patterns also changed in response to new immigration laws. The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) added funds to secure the border and gave amnesty to Mexican workers that had been working in the United States for at least five years. This changed patterns for workers who because of fears about re-crossing the border and increasing costs of the trip, began to put down roots in American communities and sent for their family members who joined them. Whereas immigrant workers that came to the United States as part of the “Bracero Program<sup>1</sup>” of the 1950s and 1960s, were characterized primarily as single men who came as laborers and sent their earnings back to their family at home; today immigrant families are increasingly likely

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<sup>1</sup> The Bracero Program was a series of laws and agreements that allowed the importation of temporary laborers from Mexico to the United States from 1942 to 1964. “Bracero” refers to manual laborer or “one that works with his arms.”

to reunite and settle together, send their children to local schools, and put down roots in the community (Perreira, 2011).

Finally, historians also point to the changes in Mexico in which the *ejido* system<sup>2</sup> was eliminated in many parts of Mexico in 1991, and farm laborers were forced to find new options to support their families when the land was sold to large corporations that could more efficiently make money off of the land (Perreira, 2011). Therefore, increasingly the immigrants to the United States in the 1990s and 2000s were from agricultural regions of the South and Southeastern Mexico. Perreira (2011) provided a profile of these new immigrants: “Most (58 percent) had an 8<sup>th</sup> grade education or less, and before moving to North Carolina, they had worked in low-wage jobs in agricultural (21 percent), manufacturing (18 percent), or hospitality and leisure (20 percent) sectors of Mexico” (p. 266, citing the North Carolina Latino Adolescent, Migration, Health, and Adaptation Study). Therefore, immigrants arriving in the 1990s and 2000s were increasingly from a rural agricultural background and lacked significant formal education.

In many ways, North Carolina leads the way in determining the U.S.’s response to the many challenges and opportunities that arise with the arrival of a new population. It is up to our elected officials and voting members of the community to support policies and practices that give new Latino North Carolinians a chance for “survival, fairness, and dignity” that they deserve (Gill, 2012, p. 7).

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<sup>2</sup> The *ejido* system, carried over from the traditions of the Aztecs and reestablished after the Mexican revolution, is a system of land control found in Mexico in which an area of communal land is divided among community members who farm and gain a percentage of profits from a specific parcel of that land but do not own the parcel of land.



**The social construction of Latinos in North Carolina.** Initially Latinos were extended a (*luke*)warm reception into communities of North Carolina as a potential answer to the state's declining economy, due to the movement of manufacturing jobs overseas and an increased reliance on service jobs, and the need to fill jobs harvesting crops and working on the processing lines in the growing poultry, hog, and seafood processing plants. However, with the "Great Recession"<sup>3</sup> that began in 2007 and whose effects continue to be felt today in 2014, many North Carolinians snatched away the "welcome mat" that they had tentatively placed in their communities. Latinos were increasingly socially constructed as "problems" (Murillo, 2002, p. 217), suitable for only the most dangerous and difficult of manual labor, associated with violence, gangs, and drugs, and considered "'foreign aliens,' unentitled to public services, and as disorganized, dirty, and chaotic" (Murillo, 2002, p. 222).

Communities and corporations were eager to use Mexican laborers but not so far in that they were welcoming of their families that began to settle with them and that needed a range of services including access to health care and education (Perreira, 2011) especially as the economy began to turn downward. Yet, they expected Latino/a workers to risk disease, injury, and exhausting working conditions for minimum pay. In short, companies had developed a "highly perfected racialized form of economic exploitation and violence" (Murillo, 2002, p. 229).

The new Latino Diaspora has brought Latinos to North Carolina and other places in which people are largely unaccustomed to being around Spanish speaking people. Hamann, Wortham, and Murillo (2002) pointed to the confusion, challenges, and sense of loneliness

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<sup>3</sup> The Great Recession is used to describe the worldwide economic decline that has been called the worst economic decline since World War II. It is said to have begun with the subprime mortgage crisis and resulting financial crisis in the United States in 2007-2008.

that Latino newcomers face: “In the [n]ew Diaspora, than, Latinos face more insistent questions about who they are, who they seek to be, and what accommodations they merit- questions that are asked both by themselves and by others” (p. 1). Latinos in North Carolina are often regarded by the general public as one large conglomeration of “Mexicans” and typically labeled with the census term of “Hispanic.” However, this label has served to “obscur[e] the diverse ancestries and range of countries of origin, and has also cloaked profound differences within national origin groups (e.g., differences between Mexican nationals from urban versus rural backgrounds)” (Murillo, 2002, p. 223).

In addition, the threat of deportation is a real fear for many Latino families that affects a family’s sense of stability, their desire to put down roots, and their well-being. Many families in North Carolina live under constant threat of deportation because of the state’s anti-immigrant laws including those that prevent undocumented North Carolina residents from obtaining a driver’s license, and local 287(g) agreements between local sheriff’s offices and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to enforce immigration law. Currently Alamance, Cumberland, Cabarrus, Gaston, Mecklenburg, and Wake Counties along with Durham Police Department have implemented 287(g) agreements in North Carolina (Gill, 2012, p. 5). Other laws including the Senate Bill 229 of 2007 have been passed that allow local police to check immigration status of someone charged for driving under the influence or any felony (Gill, 2012, p. 5). These pressures on Latino families are a reality that is carried by parents and their children into classrooms and affects how they see themselves and their place in North Carolina.

## **Definitions of Terms**

Before proceeding further, a note about terms employed in this dissertation is warranted. Many terms related to immigrants and Latinos, such as illegal, alien, undocumented worker, problem, and criminal, can take on political and emotional charge and can be used to negatively manipulate the debate on immigration. Therefore it is important to utilize terms that uphold the humanity of the new North Carolinians described in this study.

Latino/a is the term utilized in this dissertation to describe a wide range of people that includes immigrant and U.S.-born men and women from or with strong familial connections to one of twenty-two different countries in which Spanish, Portuguese, and other languages are spoken in the Caribbean, Central America, and South America. In some cases people described in this case study would not self-identify as “Latino/a.” They may prefer the term “Hispanic” or “hispano/a” to describe themselves. Hispanic is a term widely used after the government adopted it in the 1970s, and some claim that it comes from Spain which was once called “Hispanola.” However, increasingly people prefer the term Latino as some say that it better includes all the people from Latin America (“Latino Immigration,” LEARN North Carolina, 2003) and because “Hispanic” overemphasizes a Spaniard identity. Conversely, if Spanish dominant people are newly arrived to the United States, they may prefer to identify with their nation origin such as Mexican, Argentinian, Chilean etc. (Hamann & Harklau, 2010). I have chosen to use the term “Latino/a” to include all the diversity among this population. I include both the feminine (a) and masculine endings (o) to reflect that there are important female members that make up a part of the group such as in the case of Latino/a parents that include both mothers and fathers and because it is a word from Spanish which specifies gender with the ending of the word (“o” or “a”). However, for

ease of reading I will employ the masculine singular form of “Latino” to describe the Latino family, culture, population, and community and likewise, I will only use the masculine form when plural (“Latinos”).

It is important to note that the growing Latino population in North Carolina, as in the rest of the country, is not one monolithic group in terms of its cultural and linguistic background or its characteristics. There is diversity among Latinos in terms of their class background and professional trajectories: “While the census reports that Latinos in North Carolina are mostly young, unmarried foreign-born men who have limited English skills and education, some migrants have had better opportunities and arrive with doctoral degrees and higher education” (Gill, 2012, p. 4).

Other differences between Latinos in North Carolina, beyond country of origin and class, include the number of years in the United States, education level, and varying degrees of proficiency in speaking and reading English and Spanish. The Pew Hispanic Center (Martinez & Velasco, 2012) summarized the results of the “2011 National Survey of Latinos” that showed that while first generation immigrants had much greater proficiency in Spanish than in English, the second and third generation immigrants tended to have equal or greater proficiency in English than in Spanish. For example, the report highlighted that among U.S.-born Latinos, more than half (51%) are English dominant. However, in North Carolina there is a higher percentage of Latinos that do not speak English very well (49.9%) compared to the national rate of 36.3 percent that report not speaking very well (“Latino Immigration,” LEARN North Carolina, 2003).

Therefore, it must be noted that Latino families may be “Spanish dominant,” “English dominant,” or “bilingual,” depending upon their comfort in each language.

Language dominance, or primary language, refers to the self-assessed level of proficiency that someone has in Spanish and English. For the purposes of this study, I will refer to families that are more proficient in Spanish than English, that is, that can read and write better in Spanish, as “Spanish dominant,” and those that rate their English proficiency higher than their Spanish proficiency as “English dominant.” Yet, I acknowledge that there is great possibility that many of the families, or members of the family, are bilingual in English and Spanish and possibly in additional languages as well including indigenous languages learned in their home countries or from family members.

We should pause to consider the term “immigrant” when we use it to describe Latinos of North Carolina because the majority (51 percent) of Latinos living in the North Carolina are U.S.-born citizens (Gill, 2012, citing the 2010 American Community Survey). Furthermore, Latinos living in North Carolina often represent the third generation in the state and as Hannah Gill asserted have “much to contribute to regional identities and histories” (Gill, 2012, p. 7). However, the mothers and teachers included in this study were all born outside of the United States. Therefore, in cases in which I describe these parents that have come to live, work, and study in the United States, whether temporarily or permanently, and were born outside of the United States, I use the term “immigrant” as it is a term widely used in the research community. On the other hand, I reject terms such as alien, undocumented worker and illegal for the automatic criminalization and intrusion that it projects onto the person. For example, Jeff Popke (2011) wrote,

Whereas the globalization of the economy has been normalized as something natural, then, the presence of the migrant body from the other side of the border is decidedly unnatural, something illegal, even *alien*. Thus, the transnational migrant is figured not as a subject of responsibility or hospitality, but instead as an intruder into ‘our’ circumscribed public sphere. (p. 250)

In this dissertation I will also employ the term “Anglo” to describe people from an English dominant heritage. They may be white or African American in race. They are typically monolingual English speakers. Since all of my English dominant participants were also white, I interchange the terms white and Anglo.

“Target language” is the term used to describe the additional language that children and parents are trying to learn. However, target language is typically in relation to the majority white English speaking population of the United States. Therefore, the term can be misleading if the children or parents are dominant speakers of a language other than English. In that case, their target language would be English. This exposes the bias in North Carolina in which the programs that include language immersion experiences “in the target language” are intended for dominant English speakers only (Cervantes-Soon, 2014).

“English language learners” (ELLs) is a term employed by many educators and researchers to describe children that are working towards greater proficiency in speaking and reading in English. They may be dominant speakers of any other language besides English, and it is important to emphasize that they are emerging bilinguals given that they are gaining proficiencies in more than one language simultaneously. ELL is generally preferred over the term “limited English proficiency” (LEP) students which emphasizes the deficit of English proficiency. However, I will use the term “culturally and linguistically diverse” (CLD) to describe children and parents that differ from the white monolingual dominant English speaker. I prefer this term over ELLs which over-emphasizes their learning English as a key characteristic of their identity.

Two way immersion programs are often considered ideal educational programs in which students, English dominant and students from a different language group, are

combined in the same classroom with the goal of becoming bilingual and biliterate and developing positive cross-cultural attitudes for working with people different than themselves (Lindholm-Leary, 2001). A portion of the day is generally taught in English and a portion of the day is taught in the target (non-English) language, and they must combine English dominant speakers and speakers of the target language (Lindholm-Leary, 2001). Without this component of combining both groups of students in the same classroom for instruction, they would not be considered “two way” immersion programs.

In North Carolina there are four different models of dual language programs that contribute to some confusion over what each program entails. I provide these descriptions so that the reader can better identify how TWI programs differ from other similar programs also offered in the state. Programs differ by how much instruction is offered in the target language and English and for which population(s) the school is intended (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI), 2013). These programs in North Carolina add considerable richness to the offerings of K-12 schools by teaching curriculum in a variety of languages including: Spanish, French, German, Mandarin Chinese, Japanese, Greek, and Cherokee (NCDPI, 2013). On the other hand, some of the programs offered are intended to be enrichment or elitist programs and are limited to children raised in an English-speaking homes (Lindholm-Leary, 2001) significantly reducing its potential positive impact on North Carolinian communities.

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction website provides definitions for each of the four varieties of dual language programs offered in the state as well as the schools and their location that offer these programs for the 2013-2014 school year:

*Developmental bilingual programs* are intended for non-English dominant children. Content is taught in English and in the target language. In North Carolina only two schools, an independent preschool and an elementary school, operated a developmental bilingual program during 2013-2014. The elementary school is located in Duplin County and the preschool is in Charlotte; they both include instruction in Spanish.

*Full immersion programs* are designed for dominant English speakers only. Prior English fluency is *required* for participation in these programs. Content is taught entirely in the target language until second grade when English literacy is introduced. Thirty schools (34 different programs) offer a full immersion program currently in North Carolina. For example, Kituwah Academy has a full immersion program for student interested in learning in Cherokee. In addition, there are five programs listed on the NCDPI website that offered full immersion programs in Mandarin Chinese; two for French; one for German; one for Japanese; and 24 for Spanish in North Carolina during the 2013-2014 school year.

*Partial immersion programs* are also designed for dominant English speakers only. However, only part of the day is taught in the target language. In North Carolina these schools are predominately middle and high schools that are fed by a full immersion or two-way immersion programs so that students can continue to learn some content in the target language. There were 15 partial immersion programs. Seven of the programs offered partial immersion programs in Spanish. Two high schools in the Charlotte/Mecklenburg City Schools had partial immersion programs in French, German, Japanese, and Spanish according to the data from 2013-2014.

*Two-way programs or two-way immersion (TWI) programs* include both dominant English speakers and dominant speakers of the target language in the classroom. Another



common term used in other states to describe these programs is *two way dual language education*. Programs and grades differ by the percentage of time in which content is taught in English and time in which content is taught in the target language. Some possible scenarios include the 90:10 model in which 90 percent of the instructional day is taught in the target language and 10 percent is taught in English during kindergarten and first grade. By second and third grades the percentage of time in the target language is reduced to 80%. By fourth, fifth, and sixth grades instructional time consists of 50% in the target language and 50% in English. Other variations in the early grades include 80:20; 70:30; and 50:50 depending upon parent preferences and schools' access to personnel (Lindholm-Leary, 2001). During the 2013-2014 school year 26 schools throughout North Carolina had a TWI program with all but one of the programs offering Spanish as the non-English target language.

### **Plan of Chapters in Dissertation**

Following this introduction, Chapter One will provide a review of the literature that will set-up the research study. Chapter Two will describe the research procedures and methodologies and share my research positionality. In Chapter Three, I will explore the findings of the first research question by describing the extent to which parents built connections with the school and with each other both within their language groups and across language and cultural groups during the parent language classes and consider to what extent third spaces were able to open. Chapter Four addresses the second research question concerning the school-wide context in which the language classes were embedded that both contributed to and mitigated the success of the language classes for parents. In Chapter Five, I will provide greater depth about the experiences and provide “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) of two mother participants in the language classes to demonstrate the connections

between these mothers' experiences at the school with their feeling of connectivity to the school and to other parents which impacted the possibility of third space openings in the language classes. Finally, Chapter Six answers the third research question describing the implications and future work to further open third spaces more fully by deliberately addressing the contextual and language class factors that were detrimental to the opening of third spaces during the language classes and by proposing an alternative framework for conceptualizing parental involvement in TWI schools.

## **CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW**

To further situate the research study, this chapter provides a review of the research literature on four main areas. First, I will begin with a review of the large body of literature on parent involvement (or family-school connections) and its benefits for student achievement. While parent involvement in these studies is largely defined in the traditional sense, in which parents are expected to be “involved” by helping with homework at home, attending parent-teacher conferences, and supporting the school’s PTA, this literature provides insights about the stance of most schools regarding parents’ engagement, the barriers that parents encounter to fulfilling the expectations of the school, and how this is slowly evolving as scholars and practitioners move to create alternatives. New alternatives of parental involvement that have emerged include transformative parental involvement models and the inclusion of Community Based Organizations (CBOs) to connect parents to schools, with which I will conclude the first section. However, the discussion on new models of parental involvement and the subsequent discussion of findings from this study will later lead (and discussed in Chapter 6) to the recommendation to adopt an alternative to these models, what I term the “Collaborative Integration Model” of family-school connections.

In the next section, I will highlight research related to parental involvement that describes efforts by schools to connect parents to schools and to each other and the benefits of creating the “caring school community.” I will review literature about including parent language classes as part of efforts to connect the school with families. While there are a few studies that include teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) to parents, there is no study that focuses on teaching the non-English target language to parents thus exposing a gap in the literature. In addition, although several research studies mention efforts taken by the school to make parents feel more connected to the school, only a few of the studies examine efforts to connect parents or families from the school with one another.

In the subsequent section, I will review the efforts to meet the needs of CLD students historically and today, including traditional ESL programs and TWI programs; these programs are increasing in popularity and make up the educational setting of this dissertation study. TWI programs, while gaining proponents, are also the subject of a growing critique. It is important to understand the appeal as well as the critique of TWI programs before progressing further into the study since the parent language classes are embedded in a TWI school-wide program.

Finally, I will provide a review of the literature about the theoretical framework, third space theory, and how it has been utilized in educational settings in the past. This provides a justification for the current study in which third space theory is applied to a new educational setting, that is, to the interactions among parents and between the parents and the school.

## Literature on Family-School Connections

### The Importance of Family-School Connections

Parents are children's first teachers (Berger, 2000). And it has long been believed that unifying the efforts of families and schools will strengthen the individual efforts of each to help children learn and succeed in school. I will use the term family-school connections to emphasize the fact that these relationships should be reciprocal in nature and include the entire family (not just parents) in the school. However, other terms used in the literature include *parental involvement*, *parent engagement*, *home-school collaboration*, *home-school connections*, and *parent-school partnerships* (Henderson & Mapp, 2002), and more recently, *home-school collaboration* (Waterman, 2009) which are seemingly interchangeable.

Both educators and policymakers alike have proposed connecting families and schools as a potential remedy to improve schools. Since the 1983 release of *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* in which the National Commission on Excellence in Education told parents to "...be an active participant in the work of the schools" (Berger, 2000, p. 23), the push for parental involvement in all students' education has had a strong emphasis in educational reform. Even today many current school reforms call for greater parental involvement as a key component to improve schools. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 stipulates in section 1118 that all school districts in the U.S. receiving Title I funds must provide equal involvement opportunities for all parents, including those who speak "limited English," are disabled, or are parents of migrant children; to plan and carry out programs, activities, and events that enable parents to get involved in school; and, to make a strong effort to communicate with and get feedback from parents who want to be involved in the programs, activities, and events of the school (NCLB, 2001).

More recent initiatives, including President Obama’s “Race to the Top” grants, totaling \$4.35 billion in federal money that began in 2009, also require evidence of support from all stakeholders of the school – teachers, *parents*, students, and *community members* – on applications to receive federal moneys to support school programs (“Race to the Top,” 2009). These reforms are driving changes in school and district-level policies as more schools look for ways to encourage community and family involvement, and meet the requirements of government stipulations in order to access much needed funds.

The insistence in greater family-school connections is a reflection of the growing body of literature that extols the benefits of family and community involvement in schools. Research has shown that family-school connections positively impact student achievement and school effectiveness (Ballen & Moles, 1994; Eccles & Harold, 1993; Epstein, 1990, 1995; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Fan & Chen, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hoover-Demsey & Sandler, 1995). “Without this overlap of school and family, many students do not respond to school programs, fail courses, become truant, and drop out of school” (Epstein, 1990, p. 101). Henderson and Mapp (2002) in their synthesis of research studies, *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, provided clear data that for families of all economic, racial/ethnic, and educational backgrounds and for students at all ages, when schools, families, and their community support children’s learning, children “tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more” (p. 7).

Parental involvement, as traditionally defined and while not the only factor at play, does potentially impact students’ development and academic success by modeling school-related behaviors and attitudes, such as valuing investments of time and work made at the

school; reinforcing positive child behaviors such as encouraging and rewarding children for studying for a test or asking questions of a teacher when needed; and providing active help and direct instruction of facts and how to engage in complex thinking and problem solving (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Olivos & Mendoza, 2010).

### **The Importance of Family-School Connections for CLD students**

Furthermore, many argue that the benefits of family-school connections are imperative to promote the success of children of lower socio-economic class and CLD students because students tend to do better when they and their parents feel that they are valued members of the school community and feel a sense of commitment and connectedness (Cummins, 1994; Delgado-Gaitán & Trueba, 1991; Genesee, 1994; Hong, 2011; Marschall, 2006; Nieto, 2010; Rodríguez-Brown, 2010; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Explicit connections between the school and family positively affect CLD students' achievement when they recognize, value, and incorporate students' home knowledge into the school curriculum. For example by drawing upon the children's "funds of knowledge," (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992) or collective bodies of knowledge and skills passed down through the family, teachers can capitalize on knowledge and ontologies that Latino/a students bring into the classroom and can enrich the classroom dialogue by offering differing perspectives and experiences than that of the language majority students (González et al., 2005; Moll et al., 1992; Olmedo, 1997; Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 2005).

Luis Urrieta and Sergio Martínez (2011) brought to life the funds of knowledge research by showing how parents educate their children at home in ways that are not acknowledged by schools. They used "diasporic community knowledge" (Urrieta &

Martínez, 2011) to name the knowledge that transnational Latino/a students and their families possess. Diasporic community knowledge is acquired, or passed down to their children, through their role as immigrants and border crossers, either as physically crossing national borders for periodic visits or figuratively crossing borders in their daily lives. This is the knowledge formed by the community, as its name implies, from their negotiation of bicultural, bilingual, and hybrid spaces as they move between multiple identities and positionalities and struggle to survive amidst anti-immigrant sentiment and discrimination. For example, parents' and grandparents' decision to take children out of school to travel back to Mexico to celebrate the patron saint's *fiesta* (party) were not actually antagonistic to the U.S. schooling as they were perceived initially by school officials. In actuality they provided families the opportunity for "presenting their children with different and ancestral ways of knowing and ways of being in the world" (Urrieta & Martínez, 2011, p. 273) that supplement children's learning. Uncovering these alternative sources of knowledge and experience in the classroom helps students relate their knowledge of the world to school topics at hand and helps teachers to better relate to and understand the contributions of their students.

### **Barriers to Parent Involvement**

Despite the many research studies that extol the benefits of parents' involvement on the children's academic performance and acknowledging the previous discussion about families' funds of knowledge and diasporic community knowledge, the disconnect between CLD parents and schools continues to be a significant problem. Researchers argue that "parental involvement," in the traditional sense, from these parents has declined in recent years while white English dominant parents' involvement has continued to increase (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Moles, 1993; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). For example, Ruiz



de Velasco and Fix (2000) found in their study that teachers were disappointed by the lack of participation by Latino/a parents: “They described parents who did not appear to supervise their children's homework, did not attend parent conferences, and did not participate in the PTA or other less formal school events” (p. 71). The differences between parent contact with the school also varied according to income level; typically parents of higher income households had significantly more contact with the school and teachers than other parents (Moles, 1993). However, these scholars failed to consider that their limited definition of parental involvement, according to white middle-class expectations, denies other ways in which parents are involved in the schooling of their children.

It is not only the CLD parents that experience disconnect with their children's schools. Economic class differences also play an important role. Annette Lareau (2002) documented child-rearing patterns among families of different economic classes and their subsequent interactions with institutions. She found that among poor and working class families, children often develop an emerging sense of constraint compared to middle class children who develop an emerging sense of entitlement through their interactions with their parents and caregivers. Parents, too, interact differently with institutions. In Lareau's (2002) study middle class families tended to be more confident in questioning and criticizing institutions while lower class families were dependent upon institutions and expressed feelings of powerlessness and frustration about their interactions with institutions. Middle class families often were more successful in obtaining needed resources and information when compared to lower class families.

It is important to consider what the barriers are to CLD and low and working class parents' “involvement” in school in the traditional and still widely used meaning (ie: helping

with homework, attending conferences, Open Houses, school events, and supporting the PTA). Many scholars (including Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008; Moles, 1993; Tinkler, 2002) have outlined the main barriers that parents encounter and reduce the likelihood that they are involved in the schooling of their children as traditionally expected. These include: 1) negative school environment; 2) disjunctures between school culture and home culture; and 3) logistical issues.

**Negative school environment.** School-based barriers to participation of CLD and low and working class parents include a negative school environment. Parents may feel uncomfortable entering the school building for a number of reasons including the feeling that teachers and administrators do not want parent involvement and frequently make themselves un-available to parents (Lewis & Forman, 2002; Tinkler, 2002). Locked doors and signs to report to the main office to check in, put in place for safety of its students and teachers, may also be off-putting to parents (Moles, 1993). Schools have to counteract these messages sent to parents if they want to encourage parents to enter the school by creating a welcoming school climate in which there is ample space to accommodate parents and families at the school; an awareness of the strengths and contributions of the CLD families to the school and their children's education; and attention to details that would facilitate the participation of parents including scheduling and access to bilingual members of the school community (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008).

**Disjunctures between school culture and home culture.** Apparent in the definition in which schools measure parents' "involvement" are significant cultural disjunctures between the school and the homes of CLD parents about the ways in which children's schooling should be supported. These disjunctures between the school culture and home

culture add to the reluctance of parents to engage in schools (Valdés, 1996) that, to them, seem like “a completely foreign environment—one that they choose to avoid” (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008, p. 9). For example, CLD parents may have had very different access to schooling in their home country. In Mexico, a *secundaria* education, equivalent to middle school in the United States, is compulsory in most places. However, in many rural places, this is ignored or impossible due to a lack of access to schools or financial state of the family (Jesness, 2004). In addition, it is uncommon in other countries to seek parents’ opinion and input on school decisions. Therefore, Latino/a parents think that they are being respectful by maintaining distance from the school and letting teachers do their job (Moles, 1993). Parents’ understanding of the role of school and the role of parents in education is often related to their own experience as children and therefore may differ from those of the school (Delgado-Gaitán, 2004).

**Logistical issues.** Finally, logistical issues especially related to scheduling of events and meetings, reliable transportation, and language skills can present a practical barrier for parents’ traditionally defined “involvement” at school. Often parents have to work long hours limiting their availability to attend school events, which are typically held in the afternoon and according to the teachers’ school schedule. A lack of stable employment or changing hours may also contribute to parents’ inability to be “involved” since they are unable to confirm attendance with any certitude. It also reflects the job situation that many Latino/a parents have in which they work in the service sector as maids or babysitters because their jobs are determined by demand from clients. Furthermore, a lack of reliable transportation can also limit the ability of parents to make plans to meet a teacher or help with an event since they are unsure if they will be able to get there (Floyd, 1998). Finally, a common

barrier to parents' "involvement" in school is parents' lack of English language proficiency, which complicates any transaction that parents want to do at schools when the school does not have sufficient bilingual faculty (Casas, et al., 2005; Delgado Gaitán, 2004). For example, immigrant parents in Ruiz de Velasco and Fix's (2000) study cited language as the "most crucial barrier to participation" (p. 72), more so than time and logistical issues. Latino/a parents felt that their children's language skills in English were far better than their own and that they were not competent to talk with monolingual teachers and administrators about their children's academic progress.

The lack of CLD and low and working class parents "involved" in schools may be most attributable to the fact that most schools follow the "traditional model" of family involvement, designed by the majority of white female educators (Snyder & Dillow, 2012) with other white middle-class female mothers in mind (Floyd, 1998) and in which "involvement" is defined very narrowly.

### **Historical Origins of Family-School Connections**

The desire to connect schools and families can be traced back to Dewey's work on curriculum. Dewey (1902) in *The Child and the Curriculum* provided an early articulation of the need to connect the experiences of the child at home with those at school:

The source of whatever is dead, mechanical, and formal in schools is found precisely in the subordination of the life and experience of the child to the curriculum. It is because of this that "study" has become a synonym for what is irksome, and a lesson identical with a task. (p. 10)

Dewey argued that the child's experience must form the basis of the curriculum and that "no false dichotomy" should be placed between the child's education at home and the school curriculum.

However, a contemporary of Dewey, a psychologist named Thorndike developed the standardized achievement test in 1904 and with that “the American obsession with testing and measurement began” (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995, p. 90). The standardized test movement and education for social efficiency reified the notion that the school and teachers were the experts and the children and their families came to them as deficient and lacking. Thorndike (1923) wrote, “it is a first principle of education—to utilize any individual’s original nature as a means of changing him for the better—to produce in him the information, habits, powers, interests, and ideals which are desirable” (p. 200). Thus, schools were clearly defined as knowing what was best for students, and achievement tests would be used to measure their impact. “The curriculum became the assembly line by which economically and socially useful citizens would be produced” (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 95). This line of thinking continued throughout the 1900s and by the end of the 1950s, the home and experiences of the child were not the primary concern of the curriculum and the practice of parent involvement in schools was solidified into narrowly defined parameters in which parents played a supportive role of schools by taking parent education classes, fund-raising, participating as a room-mother, joining the PTA, or supporting students at home especially with help on homework (Lewis & Forman, 2002).

The 1960s, marked by the civil rights movement, was characterized by minority parents’ voicing their disappointment with schools for their unequal treatment of their children. The 1960s also ushered in the era of federally funded parent involvement programs including “Head Start” and “Follow Through” that included parent education components to make parents better “teachers” at home (Moles, 1993).

Crowson & Boyd (2001) reviewed the historical transformation of community connections in schools comparing today's focus on school-home connections to the general opposition and hostility towards community involvement in schools during the 1970s:

In short, constraints were abundant in the 1970s around efforts to engage in a more community-friendly style of school administration. Both principals and the larger organization were extremely wary of opening the "four walls" of the school to a larger arena of involvement (let alone politics), even when the four walls were within yards of the pupils' homes. At that time, it was just not done. (p. 10)

The 1970s through the 1990s continued to see this growing trend toward parental involvement programs that included parent education in effort to address "national concern with the family and family life spurred by increased divorce rates, teen parenthood, mothers working outside the home, and yearning for the traditional nuclear family" (Moles, 1993, p. 25).

### **Features of Traditional Perspective on Family Involvement**

Since the 1970s, many schools have designed parental out-reach programs with the goal of involving more parents at school and in effort to "fix" the problems that they see in the community. These programs typically include parent education, programs to encourage helping children at home, information about navigating the school system, and efforts to increase feelings of connections to the school.

**Educate parents.** Instructional programs for parents, or "parent education," is offered by schools in hopes of changing the home environment by addressing how to improve child rearing, discipline, and creating home conditions ideal to support child's learning at school (including solving problems in the home and providing a structured time and place to do homework, a good night sleep, and breakfast before school) (Auerbach,

1989; Cassidy et al., 2004; Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Shanahan, Mulhern, & Rodríguez-Brown, 1995).

**Encourage helping at home.** In addition, schools encourage parents to play the role of teacher at home by helping children with their homework and by encouraging math and literacy development. Therefore, outreach programs often include family literacy programs that teach literacy to parents and steps to incorporate literacy at home (including how to read aloud with expression, how to teach children the ABCs, how to encourage reading with children in multiple languages) (Cassidy et al., 2004; DaSilva Iddings & Katz, 2007; Shanahan et al., 1995). They typically also include instruction in math for parents and discussion of how to incorporate math in daily activities (Civil, Bratton, & Quintos, 2005).

**Navigate school system.** Additional efforts by schools are designed to help parents better navigate schools in the U.S., identify resources that are available, and better understand the expectations that the school and classroom teachers have for families (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Billiant, 2001).

**Build connections to school.** A final concern of schools in terms of increasing parental involvement at school is to build feelings of connection to the school. It typically is argued that the more comfortable and connected parents feel at the school, the more likely they are to fulfill their end of the bargain by supporting schools in traditionally desired ways. For example, Henderson, Mapp, Johnson and Davies (2007) established at the outset of their guide for family-school partnerships that the more parents feel connected with a school through caring and trusting relationships with the school staff, the more likely they will be involved at school.

## **Results of Traditional Family Involvement Model**

Given its key features discussed above, the traditional perspective of family involvement results in schools operating with a top-down transmission model from schools to homes based upon a deficit hypothesis of families and children.

**Top-down transmission.** The top-down transmission of family instruction is one in which the school identifies or assumes the needs of students and families and subsequently, designs workshops, classes, or programs to give instruction in these areas to improve parenting skills, quality of child rearing, and conditions of homes with the ultimate goal of higher academic achievement of their children (Auerbach, 1989). Under this model, “parents are responsible for helping teachers do their jobs, and schools are responsible for showing parents how to do so” (Auerbach, 1989, p. 168). The school continues to be positioned as expert and responsible for the “training” of its students’ parents. Joyce Epstein’s oft-cited typology of parental involvement in 1990 showed that parents’ involvement under this perspective is limited to supportive roles of the school including communicating with teachers, attending meetings, volunteering in the classroom, supporting student performances and sport competitions, helping at home with homework, and becoming involved with the PTA (Epstein, 1990, 1995). Furthermore, parents were more often the ones asked to adjust their own practices to align with those of the school:

Optimally, the school and parent would work to fit each other’s expectations; that is, each family-school pair would negotiate a common set of expectations, appropriate for the child, parents and school. In less optimal and more frequently encountered situations, however, the family is usually assumed (by the school and the culture in general) to be in the best position to accommodate “the other.” (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, p. 325)

Therefore it was expected that parents adjust their values, beliefs, and practices to match those of the school and to support the schools’ desires and needs, whereas schools



remained relatively static and fixed in their perspectives and practices. In this way, the traditional perspective of parent engagement tends to be unidirectional by sending a steady flow of requests and information from the school to the home and failing to consider ways in which the school and families could be mutually supportive of one another (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008).

**Deficit hypothesis.** Secondly, the traditional perspective of family/school connections results in the reification of the “deficit hypothesis,” or the belief that it is the child or the child’s family that is ultimately responsible for a student’s failure in school and that many homes are not supportive of a child’s education (Crawford, 1995; Nieto, 2010; Valdés, 1996; Valencia, 1997). It typically is assumed that white, middle-class and highly educated parents are already greatly “involved” in their children’s schooling (Epstein, 1990; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Olivos, 2006) and therefore, efforts for family-school connections are done to remediate the families of low socio-economic status who are assumed to be deficient in their ability to raise children to be successful at school and not involved in their schooling (Cassidy et al., 2004; Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Shanahan et al., 1995; Valdés, 1996). Valdés (1996) explained the common tendency of schools to try to “fix” parents:

For many school administrators, for many policymakers and teachers, the problem is simple, and the solutions are simple, too: Mexican parents must be helped to become “involved” in their children’s education; they must be taught how to help their youngsters to succeed in American schools. In short, Mexican parents, like other “disadvantaged” and minority people, must be taught how to become “good” parents. (p. 192)

Olmedo (1997) echoed this sentiment describing the common perspective about CLD families:

[T]he operative thinking of many teachers is nevertheless based on the assumption that families in homes where English is not the primary language, and where few

books or reading materials are present, have little to offer that is relevant to teaching the curriculum in the school. (p. 569)

Therefore, the traditional perspective of family-school connections continues to emphasize efforts to “mold” and “train” parents to extend school practices and values into home life.

In addition, the deficit perspective that underlies the traditional notion of parent involvement is based not only upon the belief in the cultural inferiority of the family of minority children, but also upon a belief in the *biological* inferiority of certain racial and ethnic groups. Dunn’s (1987) essentially racist report entitled, *Bilingual Hispanic Children on the U.S. Mainland: A Review of Research on their Cognitive, Linguistic, and Scholastic Development* argued that Hispanic Americans are unlikely to ever amount to anything in the U.S. because their race is not as intelligent as others based upon scores on intelligence tests and because they do not care about their children’s education. Dunn reported:

In contrast to Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans do not appear to place as high a value on education, and do not instill in their children as intensive a work ethic. How to get Hispanic parents to change their attitudes and practices toward the value of education and scholarly study is beyond the scope of this review, but its importance cannot be overemphasized. Until Hispanics *see* the benefits of a good education, and are prepared to sacrifice and work hard to attain it, there is little likelihood they will advance on the ladder of success in this country, and nothing the school does is likely to change that prediction. It is time for the Hispanic people to stop blaming teachers for their own lack of school success and other troubles, and set about working harder to obtain a quality education for their children. (1987, p. 90)

Dunn released schools and teachers of responsibility to tailor policies and practices to promote the success of minority children, and ignored the socioeconomic and cultural differences among children, relying upon an argument of genetic determination of intelligence that has long been discredited (Trueba, 1988). Nevertheless, his argument is

representative of myths still propagated today that Latino/a children and their families are genetically inferior and less inclined toward education.

Both the top-down transmission of values and practices from the school to families and the deficit hypothesis that forms the base for this practice is part of the larger “whitestreaming” (Urrieta, 2010) that is prevalent in the nation’s schools and other institutions. Whitestreaming is “a coercive force that imposes white history, mores, morals, language, customs, individualism, cultural capital and other forces as the norm or standard in U.S. society” (Urrieta, 2010, p. 47). Whitestreaming can be done by all members of the community including people whose best interests it does not serve. Yet their practices serve to reify the hegemony of the dominant class and status quo in schools and society.

### **Examples of the Traditional Model of Family Involvement**

To better understand the traditional model of family involvement in schools, three research studies are highlighted here as representative of the traditional model of practices of schools to connect families and schools in the 1990s and early 2000s. One of the studies took place at a TWI school, and all of the studies addressed schools’ outreach efforts with Latinos. The weaknesses in the school practices are highlighted for the reader. These programs are designed with the goal of teaching Latino/a parents school-sanctioned skills and behaviors; follow the top-down transmission model; and are based upon the deficit hypothesis of poor and CLD families.

The family literacy program, described by Shanahan et al. (1995), put into practice the traditional perspective on family/school connections. The authors’ intervention program, “Parents as Teachers,” operated on the erroneous idea that Latino parents were *not* acting as teachers in the home and therefore “school appropriate” behaviors and activities needed to be

taught and practiced with the parents. Common to these traditional parent education programs, topics covered in family literacy classes included creating home literacy centers; sharing books; teaching the ABCs; playing math games; and helping children with homework. Because of their efforts, Shanahan et al. (1995) claimed success in reforming Latino/a parents and enabling their children to succeed:

We have operated a successful family literacy program in Chicago's Latino neighborhoods for five years. Our program has provided services to more than 300 families. In our program, parents, mothers primarily, have learned to speak and read English, and to take active involvement in their children's school learning. Their children have developed reading and language skills that enable them to succeed in school. (p. 586)

Implicit in these statements is the accusation that the Latino/a parents were not active in their children's schooling prior to attendance in the family literacy program. The authors also claimed with little evidence that now the children of these parents will be able to "succeed in school." Unfortunately, improvement in English does not always translate to success for children in school (Macedo, 2006; McKenon, 1994) since social messages about a child's worth are often more influential on a child's long-term engagement in school than their linguistic proficiency. Therefore, many of these children are still at risk for dropping out. The authors did not prove that their efforts made students more successful in school; rather, their efforts reified the notion that certain parents are less capable of providing a home that facilitates school success. Furthermore, they ignored that many children are successful in school even when their parents are not involved in their education (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995).

Researchers Cassidy et al. (2004) conducted a study on the campus of Texas A&M at Corpus Christi to evaluate a 15-week parental education course called, "Making Reading Fun," intended to prepare parents at a TWI school to become more involved in students'

education and, specifically, in their literacy development. While the course was open to all parents, all 42 participants were dominant Spanish-speakers and the majority of the children qualified for free and reduced lunches. Class sessions covered topics including how to read aloud with expression; ways to tell a story in English and Spanish; how to apply simple techniques to make reading more enjoyable; why reading is important; and how to use computers. The graduate students teaching the course sought limited parental input about the topics to be covered by asking them to fill out a brief interest inventory. However, efforts to assess the skills and strengths that parents already brought with them were not taken. Parents had been identified by the children's teachers as in need of parent outreach, and therefore, it was assumed that they lacked the necessary skills for supporting their children's academic growth. In efforts to make the workshops "culturally relevant," the parents' home language (typically Spanish) was used for instruction and the parents' favorite food dishes were prepared at the end of the semester for a banquet. While language and food are important parts of culture, they are largely superficial gestures to include the parents' culture and did not mask the fact that these workshops stuck to the top-down transmission model of skills that flows from the school or educators to the parents and on to the children. Although the authors acknowledged that "numerous researchers have opposed family literacy programs that operate on a deficit model and seek to introduce foreign or academic literacy practices to the home" (Cassidy et al., 2004, p. 481), that is, in effect, precisely what these researchers did by ignoring the culturally relevant ways that parents do support their children's learning.

Finally, Chrispeels and Rivero (2001) also used parent education classes as a way to "involve" parents in their children's education continuing the traditional notion that parent "involvement" must be aligned with the beliefs of the school and that the school knows what

is best for children and their families. In this study, the researchers studied the effects of the school-sponsored “Parent Institute for Quality Education” that offered eight weekly parent education classes on a number of topics, including the role of teacher/parent partnerships on the child’s future; motivation and self-esteem; discipline and communication in the home and school; academic standards; navigating the school system; and gaining college admission. At the end of the eight weeks, the researchers claimed that parents made progress toward adopting the necessary practices and dispositions valued by the American school.

Researchers deemed the classes to be a success because traditional parental roles brought from Mexico were found not to be permanent and could be “altered” by the school outreach program (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001, p. 165).

Each of these examples of the traditional perspective of family involvement followed the traditional model of parental involvement and pointed to the lasting effect of the deficit perspective. The deficit perspective claims that Latino families are biologically and culturally inferior with respect to ideals, values, and family organization and that they are generally unconcerned about education (Dunn, 1987; Sowell, 1982) and therefore, are in need of remediation programs to replace or supplement current practices.

### **Critique of the “Traditional Model” of Parent Engagement**

The “traditional model” of school-family connections is failing schools and its families by not tapping into the many strengths of Latino community. It fails to recognize the alternative ways in which Latino/a parents support their children’s schooling; the tendency to not encourage connections among parents as a key component; the barriers that CLD parents encounter at school; Latino parents’ high valuation of education; and the narrowness of its definition of “acceptable” parent involvement.

**Denies alternative ways of supporting learning.** The traditional model of parent engagement in schools denies the alternative ways Latino/a parents support their children's learning. There is a growing body of literature in which scholars, including Huerta and Brittain (2010), López (2001), and Souto-Manning and Swick (2006), call for a redefinition of what counts as "parental involvement" in children's education to include the many ways that families are involved. Valdés (1996) discussed the differences in expectations and beliefs about the role of the family in the schooling of children. She pointed to the noticeable difference between the meaning of the Spanish word "educación," which includes the moral upbringing of children, and its English cognate "education," which refers more to the book learning of school subjects. Therefore the ways in which parents nurture their children at home by talking to them, sharing their family history and even making sure that they are well-rested and clean when they go to school contribute to their academic development (Valdés, 1996). Latino parents and communities help educate the young people especially in their morals and values through the use of *consejos* or advice (Delgado-Gaitán, 1994; Valdés, 1996); *dichos* or proverbs (Espinoza-Herold, 2007); and *cuentos* or stories especially about hard work and familial sacrifice (López, 2001). These ways of teaching children, while not acknowledged by the school, are effective in teaching children about the importance of responsibility, respect, and sacrifice in their lives.

**Ignores connections between parents.** In the traditional model of parental involvement, schools' emphasis on facilitating and encouraging connections between parents and families is largely ignored. For example, Bower and Griffin (2011) described an episode at a school in which parents met to plan a school bazaar. The interactions among parents at this meeting is symbolic of the exchanges in many CLD schools. While there were

participants from multiple different cultural groups from the school and a school liaison who translated for the Latina parent during the meeting, there was a clear lack of relationships and real communication among parents. The parents “spoke” to one another through the translator but never looked at each other despite the fact that they had been meeting together throughout the school year. The tension among parents is likely to have contributed to further attendance of school events.

Likewise, Griffin (2011) has argued for a reconceptualization of parental involvement to one that includes fostering relationships among families. She argued that parental relationships is often a forgotten element in traditional parental involvement efforts and yet, is a key component for increasing parental involvement especially with African American families whose involvement is often overlooked since it does not always conform to the “[w]hite middle class standards” (p. 17) that form the basis of the current parental involvement strategies. As parents’ develop relationships with one another, they also become empowered to pursue issues of concern and build reciprocal connections from school to home.

Ignoring the need to build relationships among families may be attributed to findings like Sophia Catsambis (1998), who analyzed data collected from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 to determine the impact of different parent involvement on high school seniors’ academic achievement. She found the last type of parental involvement from Epstein’s Theory of Parental Involvement (Epstein, 1990, 1995), “Community,” measured by instances in which parents communicated with each other about their children's learning opportunities at school and about future plans, had a very small positive effect on student achievement. In contrast, enhancing learning opportunities at home had a strong positive



effect on student achievement. However, it has to be noted that the connections made between parents in Catsambis' (1998) analysis were in terms of learning how to get their child ahead in graduating to a post-secondary education, not creating a community of parents that support one another.

At best, traditional model of parental involvement includes surface level efforts to connect parents such as the ones described by Henderson and colleagues (2007) in their guide for building school connections to families. For example, they recommended having traditions in place that connect new families with other parents at the school including a new-parent breakfast, establishing a family center where families can meet and talk, assigning "buddies" for new students and their families, and organizing a community walk with the help of community organizations. However, there was no discussion of the effectiveness of these activities in building connections between families or the impact of these activities on a CLD family's sense of well-being and incorporation into the school community.

**Barriers encountered by CLD parents.** Educators incorrectly interpret a lack of "involvement" in the schools as a lack of caring and fail to consider the barriers that CLD parents perceive when they come to the schools. The barriers, addressed above, include factors like language barriers, cultural differences and expectations, and other structural barriers such as lack or reluctance for translation by school personnel, scheduling conflicts for working parents, and negative experiences at schools where parents have felt unwelcomed or a nuisance to the monolingual English-speaking staff (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006; Zimmerman-Orozco, 2011) that discourage parents' further participation and ultimately, hinder their children's success. In addition the typical unidirectional approach to parental involvement must be altered so that the flow

between school and home is mutual. The school should inform the home as the home should also inform the school (Delgado-Gaitán, 2004). Along the same vein, an unfriendly school environment and lack of clear communication can contribute to a low response of parental involvement (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008). If parents do not feel welcome at the school, they will simply stay away (Tinkler, 2002). Delgado-Gaitán (2004) argued that “more than parental level of education, family size, or family’s socio-economic level, the extent to which *schools reach out* to establish parent involvement in ethnically diverse schools is the strongest determinant of Latinos getting involved in their children’s education” (p. 15).

**Dismiss Latino parents’ high valuation of education.** Traditional approaches to family-school connections also tend to dismiss the fact that Latinos highly value education and consider themselves involved in their children’s education (Auerbach, 1989; Casas et al., 2005; Delgado-Gaitán, 1992; Rodríguez-Brown, 2010; The Pew Hispanic Center and the Kaiser Family Foundation, 2004). Furthermore, many immigrant families make serious sacrifices to come to the United States precisely for the educational opportunities that will be afforded to their children (Auerbach, 1989; Delgado-Gaitán, 1992, 1994; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Auerbach (1989) argued that immigrant families are often more motivated than other families because of the great lengths to which they have gone to secure access to quality schooling. Multiple studies have refuted the notion that poor, minority, and immigrant families don’t value or support literacy development. In fact, often, quite the opposite seems to be the case for immigrants: those families most marginalized frequently, see literacy and schooling as the key to mobility, to changing their status, and preventing their children from suffering as they did (Auerbach, 1989, p. 170).

**The narrowness of definition of “acceptable” parent involvement.** Finally, the traditional model of parental involvement narrowly defines “parental involvement” to the detriment of acknowledging alternative ways in which CLD families are already participating in their children’s schooling (Griffin, 2011). For example, traditional parental involvement strategies ignore forms of collaboration and advocacy demonstrated by African American families especially through their involvement at church (Griffin, 2011). Other scholars, including Olivos (2006) and Lareau and Horvat (1999), have questioned what forms of parent involvement in school are truly accepted by the school’s administration and faculty and what treatment CLD parents receive when they are involved at school especially when they question the practices and policies that affect their children. While most educators proclaim that they welcome parent involvement, in reality they “select from a narrow band of acceptable behaviors” (Lareau & Horvat, 1999, p. 42) for parents, and therefore the school system “implicitly (and explicitly) works to discourage the active, authentic, and meaningful involvement of low-income, bicultural parents and their communities” (Olivos, 2006, p. 3).

Schools desire parental involvement only so far that is accepting and non-judgmental of school practices and policies, and prefer parents to become involved by fundraising or donating money to the school to support practices already in place (Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Lewis & Foreman, 2002; Olivos, 2006). Lewis and Forman (2002) discovered, for example, the tensions present in a school where the parents questioned school and class practices and the teachers’ subsequent (and creative) strategies to silence parental “interference.” The veteran teachers, for example, encouraged the newer teachers to hide in the teacher’s lounge prior to the school day to avoid contact with parents.

When parents do question school practices and policies, their concerns are met with silencing techniques such as avoiding contact, indifference, or denial. Moves are made to prevent further criticisms from parents not by remedying the problem, but by silencing the parents further (Olivos, 2006). Olivos (2006) described the difference between “involved parent” and “troublemaker”:

A parent who helps their child at home with homework is considered an “involved parent,” a parent who attends school-sponsored events is considered an “involved parent,” a parent who volunteers in their child’s classroom is considered an “involved parent.” Yet, a parent who is critical of the school and of the underlying detrimental school climate is considered an “obtrusive parent” or worse yet a “troublemaker.” (p. 19)

Furthermore, when parents do become involved at school they are kept busy with meaningless tasks, such as making copies, cutting out manipulatives, or cleaning tables (Hong, 2011). While these mundane tasks may seem useful to the classroom teacher, they represent a failure to capitalize on the expertise that the parents hold and that have been described in earlier research (see for example, González et al., 2005). It also precludes the development of meaningful and authentic relationships based upon mutual respect between teachers and parents (Hong, 2011). Therefore, traditional models of parent involvement rarely include “opportunities to connect meaningfully with school staff or fellow parents, reinforcing the distinct boundaries between schools and families” (Hong, 2011, p. 19) and preventing authentic and mutually caring connections from the school to families.

### **Changing the Direction of Family-School Connections**

Despite the progress in scholarship that has been made in terms of acknowledging the unique experiences, knowledge, and skills that Latino families and children bring with them to school, practices have remained largely unchanged (Lewis & Forman, 2002). School

personnel and policy makers continue to reinforce the hegemony of English, the whitestreaming of schools, and maintain the system of power in place that disadvantages CLD children and their families (Boethel, 2003; Olivos, 2006; Olivos, Ochoa, & Jiménez-Castellanos, 2011). The effects on children are widely known. Latino/a children continue to achieve at much lower rates and have almost double the dropout rate as their white Anglo classmates (Rong & Preissle, 2009). As of 2000, the dropout rate for Latino first-generation males was almost 20%; the rate for all Latinos was 10.6%, which is significantly greater than the national dropout rate of 5.6% for all children (Rong & Preissle, 2009). As the student body population continues to diversify in the coming years and decades, it is important that schools are able to respond and adjust to their changing needs and strengths, no short order given the role of high stakes assessments and dwindling federal and state funds for education (Resmovits, 2012).

This is one reason that the parent language classes described in this qualitative case study were chosen as the site through which relationships between parents and with the school were studied. Unlike traditionally offered ESL classes for parents in which Latino/a parents are framed as deficient or in need of remedial language work (Henderson, 1987; Rivera & Lavan, 2012), the parent language classes studied here included both English instruction and Spanish instruction as well as a joint conversation period in which parents worked together with one another to develop language fluency. The classes were designed with the intention to build connections between Latino/a parents who are often silenced and marginalized in U.S. schools and English dominant parents who exercise greater privilege and power in schools. In these classes Latino/a parents could occupy positions of expertise as they worked with English dominant speakers who were learning Spanish. It was also hoped

that parents would also build connections to the school as they learned more about the school and spent time there.

**Transformative parental involvement.** Some scholars are now calling for a move toward “transformative parental involvement” proposed by Edward Olivos (2006) whose goal is to create real and lasting change in practices and policies that are initiated by linguistic minority parents with the goal to disrupt the status quo in the schooling of their children. It is high time, Olivos argued, that parents and schools alike reject the “laundry list of activities that the ‘experts’ feel good parents ‘do’ to blindly support the schools’ agendas” (2006, p. 13). Based upon the ideas from Freire’s (2010) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, transformative parental involvement requires that *parents* engage in their own “problem-posing education” that fosters critical consciousness, *conscientizcao*, of the injustices faced by their children in schools. Just as children should not be subjected to the “banking-concept of education” (Freire, 2010, p.72) in which the teachers fill the students with “knowledge,” parents also must break free from policies that position them as passive recipients of what they should think about and do in schools. Freire (2010) described the power of problem-posing education: “Whereas banking education anesthetizes and inhibits creative power, problem-posing education involves a constant unveiling of reality. The former attempts to maintain the *submersion* of consciousness; the latter strives for the *emergence* of consciousness and *critical intervention* in reality” (p. 81). As parents begin to reflect collectively and discuss conditions and practices that seem unfair to them, they develop confidence to approach administrators with their concerns, flexing their own political agency and raising their voice against instances of injustice. Parents would come to the understanding that student success at school is dependent on a number of factors and “parents

would no longer accept blame for being ‘uninvolved,’ ‘uninformed,’ or ‘uneducated’ parents (Valdés, 1996, p. 194). Parent involvement under this alternative model is seen as “a process of transformation in which social literacy and critical consciousness is achieved by all the participants for the benefit of student literacy, academic achievement, and school and social transformation” (Olivos, 2006, p. 111). The reciprocal process of reflection, dialogue, and action continues until parents begin to break down the current systems in place that maintain the hegemony at school favoring white middle-class students and their families. Freire (2010) explained how true knowledge emerges through this process: “Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (p. 72).

Olivos (2006) worked in collaboration with the Latino parents of his school where he was a bilingual education teacher in inner-city San Diego and described the evolution of this process over time both personally and for the parents as they developed their “political consciousness” (p. 5) by critically considering how their lived experiences at the school were in contradiction with claims made by the school administrators and district. Eventually the Latino parent group was able to exert considerable influence over their children’s school--removing administrators who had been unwilling to work with them and fighting to have policies changed to ensure that Latino children’s Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) were followed as dictated by the state.

**Partnering with “Community Based Organizations.”** In addition to the transformative parental involvement model, other scholars are turning toward partnerships with Community Based Organizations (CBOs) to enact real change in the schools and in the treatment of CLD students. Warren, Hong, Rubin, and Uy (2009) and Hong (2011) examined

cases in which CBOs fostered authentic connections between the home and schools in low-income urban communities and were able to radically transform both school practices and parents' sense of their roles in school. CBOs have traditionally worked to support families in low-income areas by providing access to much needed medical services and affordable housing (Warren et al., 2009). Just recently, CBOs have begun to partner with public schools with the goal of revitalizing local schools in order to revitalize the entire community. CBOs have the advantage of being well-established in communities with "deep roots in the lives of families" (Warren et al., 2009, p. 2210); in fact, some have a historical presence of more than 100 years, often predating the school itself (Warren et al., 2009). They are also made up of a variety of community members including parents, professionals, and religious leaders, and tend to be seen as less threatening than a parent based group. Therefore, they are more likely to gain acceptance by school personnel and ultimately, are able to exert greater influence over schools (Hong, 2011).

Both Hong (2011) and Warren et al. (2009) described the success of the Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA), a CBO in Chicago, in local public schools with its creation and implementation of its "Parent Mentor Program." With a paid stipend, Latina mothers committed to spending two hours each morning in a classroom for a semester at their children's school to support a teacher and to attend weekly workshops that focused specifically on the mothers' development of leadership skills and progress towards meeting personal goals. The close relationships formed among mothers through their participation in the Parent Mentor Program were found to sustain parents' involvement in the program. "In a school environment that may feel foreign, unfamiliar, or intimidating to the largely immigrant group of Latino parents, relationships with other parents become a critical source



of support that encourages involvement in the school” (Warren et al., 2009, p. 2231). No longer is parental involvement based upon an idea of individual participation in which parents work in isolation from one another. Rather, a central goal of these programs is that parent engagement “promotes a sense of collective community and shared participation” (Warren et al., 2009, p. 2232). As parents get to know one another, they realize that they share many of the same concerns and challenges in their lives and may begin to see opportunities for collective actions.

Another key component of utilizing CBOs to facilitate parents’ participation in classrooms, is the opportunity for authentic partnerships between parents and teachers and the ability to tap into parental experiences and knowledge that are largely ignored in most classrooms. For example, the parents placed in teachers’ classrooms by LSNA had opportunities to work individually with children in Spanish (even when the language of the classroom was English), facilitated meetings between the classroom teacher and parents during home visits by serving as translators and cultural liaisons, and provided familiar faces to children at school who knew them from the neighborhood (Hong, 2011). One parent mentor commented that students feel connected to her “because they have a person, a parent in their school who feels very much like someone in their own family, and they have a special relationship with that person” (Hong, 2011, p. 100). Parents, therefore, become seen as “assets,” not deficits, because of the many things they can do in the classroom—connect to students on a personal level, provide the ability to communicate with children and parents in Spanish when needed, and tap into established social networks in the community.

A final characteristic of these schools as highlighted by Hong (2011) and Warren et al. (2009) is their explicit efforts to develop parents as leaders and change agents both in the

schools and in the community. The LSNA in Chicago paid parents' to attend weekly workshops that focused not only on building classroom pedagogical skills for working with children, but also to support them in setting personal goals. Meeting these goals led to an enlarged sense of their agency and helped them to claim their voice in school and in the education of their children. "Through a model of community organizing, LSNA encourages parents to become leaders, to challenge school policies when necessary, and to become an assertive force within the school" (Warren et al., 2009, p. 2237). For example, parents of Monroe Elementary School in Chicago protested an attempt to bus the school's seventh and eighth graders to another school to alleviate overcrowding (Warren et al., 2009). Parents organized a campaign to stop the district's decision by calling parents and encouraging attendance at a community meeting. Their efforts were ultimately successful and the district backed down from their plans to uproot students from their school. Therefore, the political power of the CBO, pooled from the collaboration of its many members, can be persuasive in determining the course of the school and district.

### **Language Classes for Parents and Fostering Connections**

#### **School-Sponsored ESL Classes for Parents**

Given that language barriers are cited as the leading source of parents' decision to maintain distance from the school (Delgado-Gaitán, 1990; Ruiz de Velasco & Fix, 2000), many schools now include parent English as a Second Language (ESL) classes as part of their school outreach efforts (Henderson et al., 2007; Henderson, 1987; Lasky & Karge, 2011; Moles, 1993; Rivera & Lavan, 2012; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Waterman, 2009). Typically, the ESL classes offered to parents are part of a larger set of parent education classes that focus on improving the quality of the home environment in

order to better support children's academic endeavors (Henderson, 1987; Rivera & Lavan, 2012). For example, Henderson (1987) described the experience of ESL classes for parents offered in New York public schools between 1983 and 1986 and asserted, "Not only have these classes helped parents improve their English language skills, but they have also stimulated parents to become more involved in their children's education, in school, at home, and in the community at large" (p. 10). The class activities included reading articles and discussing parenting topics like limiting television viewing of children and structuring children's time after school. However, there was no data (anecdotal or otherwise) of the impact of these classes on parents.

Both Waterman (2009) and Moles (1993) described parent ESL classes that also included a focus on building parents' awareness about the importance of home-school collaboration and their expected involvement in their children's schooling.

Yet, there are few empirical studies that have examined the impacts of participation in ESL classes on parents. Robin Waterman (2009) was the first to conduct a mixed-methods study of the impacts of a parent ESL classes on parents' subsequent involvement in the school. She found that parent ESL classes that intentionally focused on parent involvement did increase significantly both the parents' English skills and their involvement in schools (according to the traditional model) as measured by pre- and post-intervention surveys that inquired into frequency of parents' participation helping with homework, home literacy efforts, communication with teachers and the principal, and awareness of school-based programs and resources (Waterman, 2009). While she focused on the connections made from parents to school, her study did not share findings related to relationship building among parents during the language classes.

Currently, there are no studies that describe the implementation of school-sponsored minority language classes for parents (for example, classes in Mandarin, French, German, or Spanish that are being taught to their children at school) and their impacts on parent perceptions and experiences at school. As mentioned earlier, Bower and Griffin (2011) recommended that courses in English and Spanish be offered to parents by schools based upon their findings about the difficulty of increasing parental involvement in high minority and high poverty schools despite efforts to move beyond the traditional notion of involvement. Given the large increase in CLD families and children in school and with the increase in popularity of TWI schools, this lack of scholarship points to an area that warrants further attention and that is addressed in part by the current dissertation study.

### **The Importance of Connecting Parents with One Another and with the School**

It is important to connect parents with one another and with the school in order to support and contribute to the school's goal of developing positive cross-cultural attitudes and behaviors among students along with bilingualism and biliteracy (Howard, Sugarman, Perdomo, & Adger, 2005). In addition, many institutions list projected goals including graduating "cross-culturally competent students" or "global citizens" yet do not fully explain what these phrases mean (Deardorff, 2004). Overall, there is a lack of consensus about a definition of intercultural competency (Deardorff, 2004; Hunter, White, & Godbey, 2006), yet it is widely accepted that it is a positive and highly sought characteristic to develop in young people and "a resource for successful and effective communication and exchange" (Krajewski, 2011, p. 138). Therefore, students, educators, and parents alike should be encouraged to develop intercultural competency in order to enjoy the benefits described below for successful interactions in our globally connected world. Parents, as well, can support their

children's development of intercultural competency by modeling and reinforcing what is practiced at school.

Intercultural competency definitions focus on awareness of self and others, an open-minded attitude, intercultural knowledge and skills (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006). There are many important benefits for individuals with strong intercultural competency.

Deardorff's (2006) model of intercultural competence explained the internal and external outcomes for an individual. Internal outcomes include "informed frame of reference" meaning that a person is adaptable and flexible to adjusting to new cultural environments and interactions as well as developing empathy for others' perspectives. The desired external outcome is effective and appropriate communication and behavior in an intercultural situation. Intercultural competence evolves over an extended period of time as individuals move along the continuum of cultural competence developing and refining attitudes, skills, and knowledge (Krajewski, 2011).

In addition and as mentioned previously as a critique of the traditional model of parental involvement, parent outreach programs under the traditional model almost always lack a discussion of the importance of building connections between parents. Often there is limited discussion about the general positive impact of creating a warm and inviting school environment (Henderson et al., 2007), but it is less common to find mention of deliberate actions by the school to foster connections between parents and the school.

Yet, there is an increasing call for caring environments at school (Doyle & Doyle, 2003; Epstein, 1995; Lewis, Schaps & Watson, 1995, 1996; Noddings, 1988; Schaps, Battistich, & Solomon, 1996). Given that schools increasingly are large, impersonal institutions, students are demanding a more caring and personal school environment (Raywid

& Oshiyama, 2000). The caring environment is one in which all its members “feel valued, personally connected to one another, and committed to everyone’s growth and learning” (Lewis et al., 1996, p. 16). Respectful, supportive relationships and connections among all students, teachers, and parents creates a caring community of learners (Schaps et al., 1996). Research demonstrates that a caring school context produces not only greater academic gains for students, but also teaches children about being a respectful, responsible, collaborative, tolerant, just, and courageous human beings (Lewis et al., 1996). This is aligned with the goal of education, according to Nel Noddings (1998), “to produce acceptable persons— persons who will support worthy institutions, live compassionately, work productively but not obsessively, care for older and younger generations, be admired, trusted and respected” (1988, p. 221). Children cannot be taught this moral grounding like any other school subject. It must be lived in the classroom and school community by involving the community in the school and bringing the students out into the community. Children are going to make mistakes as they navigate through social situations and encounter problems. They need the opportunity to discuss these occasions with others, children and adults alike, and have multiple opportunities in which to practice interacting with others (Lewis et al., 1995). Furthermore, adults, like children at the school, have a need for belonging and “forming trusting and mutually satisfying relationships with others” (Lewis et al., 1995, p. 551). These are created through multiple opportunities to work together toward a shared goal. Therefore, some schools use service learning projects such as school or community beautification projects as a way to connect members of the community and make valued contributions (Noddings, 1988). Epstein (1995) also argued that caring must be at “the core” of all successful partnership programs involving schools, families, and the community. She defined

“caring” as “trusting and respecting” (1995, p. 711) and argued that caring formed the basis of each of the six types of parental involvement that she identified in her Parental Involvement Model. She encouraged researchers and policy makers to continue to look for ways to strengthen these partnerships among members of the school community by building caring into the school environment.

While there has been some scholarship identifying the need to build relationships among CLD parents (Bower & Griffin, 2011), more studies are needed to explore these efforts in TWI settings (Shannon, 2011). Therefore, it is an area which warrants further research to determine whether all members of the school community, including teachers, students, parents, and community members, develop strong intercultural competency and positive bonds with one another, and whether the school is seen as an important and valued place by all of its members (Lewis et al., 1995) in traditional and TWI schools alike.

### **Models that Encourage Cross-Cultural Relationships among Parents**

Although Collier and Thomas (2004) have claimed that in TWI schools “the respect and nurturing of the multiple cultural heritages and the two main languages present in the school lead to friendships that cross social class and language boundaries” (p. 11), there is doubt about the validity of this statement. Collier and Thomas (2004) shared only self-reported claims of parents feeling “more connected” in the school, yet offered little data that showed in what ways parents felt more connected. Also, it is not clear how universal this is in TWI programs or if this applies equally to English dominant and Spanish dominant parents.

Shannon’s (2011) research in a TWI program confirmed a lack of connections and even interest in making connections across Latino/a and white parents. Shannon (2011)

argued little effort was made by white parents in a TWI program to connect with Latino/a parents inside or outside the school. Rather, their behaviors suggested that while they approved of their children learning Spanish while continuing to excel in English, they were not interested in engaging with the Latino population at the school. In fact, their behaviors reinforced their relative positions of power in the school and continued patterns of segregation among families at the school:

[White parents] modeled behavior for their children that reinforced the segregation and asymmetry of their places in society. They expressed fear and misunderstandings about the Latino families and their homes. It seemed as if the White parents wanted their children to be in a DLP but one that perhaps did not include Latinos. (Shannon, 2011, p. 97-98)

While Shannon (2011) acknowledged that there was also a lack of effort on the part of the Latino/a parents to connect with the white parents, that behavior can be expected given their social marginalization in the United States. Therefore, more investigation is needed to understand the efforts of TWI schools to connect parents across cultural and linguistic groups especially in cases when these efforts are successful in fostering connections so that they may be replicated at other schools.

Furthermore, there is no study that explores the experiences of parents during school-based adult English and Spanish (or other language) classes that were offered as a way to build needed linguistic skills and with the goal to create stronger connections between schools and parents as well as building cross-cultural relationships across parent groups. This gap in the research, addressed in this dissertation, is especially important given the growing popularity of TWI programs in which Spanish and English dominant children and families are grouped together strategically in order to foster bilingualism, biculturalism, and cultural competence. The very nature of TWI schools demands that not only the school, its faculty,



and personnel, but also the families are able to connect with people from different backgrounds (Shannon, 2011). While there is often misinformation or incomplete understanding about Latino families' involvement in schooling, it is argued that these communities hold different beliefs, needs, and expectations about schools and about the parents' role in schools. Sharing the same learning space may help people understand each other's perceptions and learn about others' experiences. Ultimately, the hope is that when both communities feel integrated and appreciated by the school and other families, there will be greater participation by all members and thus, greater achievement by its students. However, equally important, there will also be more opportunities for developing cross-cultural sensitivity and understandings, cultivation of children's openness and appreciation and respect for different values, life styles, and knowledge, and the creation of a more socially just school environment and community for all its members.

### **Meeting the Needs of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students**

#### **English as a Second Language (ESL) Classes**

The growing population of students that are proficient in at least one additional language but may lack academic proficiency in English have been most commonly placed into English as a Second Language (ESL) programs or a variety of transitional approaches designed to increase knowledge of English often at the expense of the home language(s) (Izquierdo, 2011; Jesness, 2004; Rong & Preissle, 2009). While these programs aim to help students develop the needed proficiency in English to be successful in U.S. schools, data has shown that rarely are they able to bridge the achievement gap between language majority and language minority students (Thomas & Collier, 2002). Furthermore, with their emphasis on English language learning, these programs tend to be subtractive rather than additive (Valdés,

2001; Valencia, 2011; Valenzuela, 1999). In effect, these classes represent a continuation of the historical racial segregation of Latino students into substandard schooling that can be traced back to the 1850s where their treatment “as non-peers allow[ed] Whites to maintain their system of privilege and domination” (Valencia, 2011, p. 42).

### **Two-Way Immersion (TWI) Programs**

To meet the challenges and opportunities inherent in educating an increasingly CLD student body and to fight against entrenched structures of oppression, many school districts are adopting a potentially more additive model, Two-Way Immersion (TWI), in which students from two different cultures and languages are purposively grouped together to learn and work together in both languages (Lindholm-Leary, 2001).

Currently all the TWI programs in North Carolina but one (which offers Mandarin Chinese) have instruction in English-Spanish, reflecting the cultural make-up of the state’s population (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2013). The amount of instruction in each language increasingly shifts toward English as the students get older and as the requirement of standardized testing in English grows more imminent (Wiley & Wright, 2004). Most programs at schools in North Carolina begin with a 90:10 ratio of instruction (with 90% of the instruction in Spanish and 10% in English), moving to 70:30, and then 50:50 by the fifth grade. The preferred ratio of speakers is 50:50 with half English dominant children and half Spanish dominant children in the classroom. However, there is a great deal of variation in the make-up of the student body and the actual practice and execution of TWI programs (Lindholm-Leary, 2001).

Extensive longitudinal research has shown the effectiveness of TWI in raising the achievement levels of CLD students and all learners in general (Collier, 1992; Collier &

Thomas, 2004, 2009; Dolson & Mayer, 1992; Howard, Sugarman, & Christian, 2003; Lindholm-Leary, 2001; Lindholm-Leary & Borsato, 2006; Thomas & Collier, 2012; Thomas, Collier, & Collier, 2011). English-Spanish TWI programs provide Latino/a children with the opportunity to not only learn initial academic content and skills in their home language, but also, with high quality instruction, gain a sense of confidence and self-worth (Palmer, 2009). TWI programs also provide much desired instruction in Spanish for English-dominant children and an attractive alternative to traditional world language programs that have been criticized for producing modest returns in second language acquisition and today have largely been de-funded by school districts (Lindholm-Leary, 2001). The TWI model is designed with the intention that both groups of learners interact and learn with speakers of the other language group, and therefore, the number of TWI programs has been gaining attention and popularity nationwide (Christian, 1994; Christian, Montone, Lindholm, & Carranza, 1997; Izquierdo, 2011; Varghese & Park, 2010) and in other regions without a previous long presence of bilingual education, such as North Carolina (Cervantes-Soon, 2014).

It is the stated goal of TWI programs to build not only bilingual and biliterate students but also students with *cross-cultural competence* (Bearse & de Jong, 2008; Freeman, 2000; Izquierdo, 2011; Wesely, 2012). Cross-cultural competence refers to the ability and experience of children who demonstrate that they have high regard for other cultures and are able to negotiate relationships with children from multiple cultural backgrounds. Self-reported data from studies in TWI programs have demonstrated high levels of cross-cultural competence among children. For example, students reported enjoying the opportunity to make both Spanish and English speaking friends in TWI schools reflecting their cultural “openness” (Bearse & de Jong, 2008).

## **Critique of TWI Programs**

It is important to consider the growing critique about TWI programs to better situate the current study that focused on the experiences of Latino/a and Anglo parents whose children attended a TWI school. While many researchers are optimistic about the potential of TWI programs as a way to surpass the gap in achievement between English-dominant and non-English-dominant students (Collier & Thomas, 2004, 2009; Howard et al., 2003; Lindholm-Leary, 2001; Thomas, Collier, & Collier, 2011), build culturally sensitive children (Bearse & de Jong, 2008) while eliminating segregation of students at school (Izquierdo, 2011; Valencia, 2011), other voices are sounding an alarm for caution and urging restraint in calling TWI a panacea and questioning the true beneficiaries of TWI programs (Cervantes-Soon, 2014; Palmer, 2009; Valdés, 1997; Varghese & Park, 2010). Increasingly, researchers question the ability of TWI programs to work for the equity of *all* its children (Valdés, 1997) and its impact on cultural competence of its students (Palmer, 2009). Palmer (2009) aptly questioned if TWI classrooms promote the biliteracy and biculturalism of all its children, or does it “inevitably end up serving the needs of dominant English speaking children first?” (p. 177).

**Equity of all students.** In some cases, primarily outside of North Carolina, TWI schools have replaced former bilingual programs that housed only Spanish dominant students with the goal of helping them develop as biliterate and bicultural people. As funding and support dwindled, many of these programs were altered to include English dominant speakers who wanted to learn Spanish. This has had serious implications for the experience and education of Spanish dominant children (Valdés, 1997) and the equity of schooling for all children (Palmer, 2009). As English dominant children are included in bilingual education

programs, the subsequent TWI programs attempt to address two very different language problems simultaneously: first, a concern of world language educators, the disease of monolingualism of Anglophone students in the United States; and secondly, a concern of bilingual education proponents, the debate over which language is best to teach Spanish dominant students. When trying to meet the needs of two very different groups, problems of unequal treatment and preference are bound to occur.

In addition, inequity in treatment also results from the larger socio-cultural context in which schools are embedded. While TWI programs strive to provide students with bicultural and bilingual competencies, schools, teachers, children, and parents cannot escape the socio-cultural context in which they exist where “the hegemony of English is an everyday lived experience for Spanish speakers, in which racism against Spanish speakers is a reality, and in which Anglo students dominate most academic spaces” (Fitts, 2006, p. 340). Therefore, messages which originate outside the school about the dominance of English and preference for English-speakers “leak” through the school walls into the school spaces, diminishing even the best efforts to create a truly equitable situation among all students (Palmer, 2009). Schools are not free from societal influences and in fact often serve to reify the status quo in the greater society (Apple & King, 1977). “Even when there is a conscious effort by school personnel to construct an alternative discourse and practices, it is difficult to counter the impact of the larger society on both teachers and students” (Valdés, 1997, p. 417). The messages sent by English dominant children to Spanish dominant children, for example, are stronger than the effects of teaching in students’ home language. Children quickly sense exclusion and learn their “place” in the classroom and society through interactions with other children (Valdés, 1997). Fitts (2006) warned, “no program can be a panacea and any

bilingual program that attempts to address linguistic issues without also addressing issues of status and power will not fully succeed in its mission” (p. 340).

**Quality and quantity of minority language.** An additional criticism lobbied against TWI programs is the quality and quantity of the minority language in the classroom. First, teachers often “water-down” Spanish by speaking more slowly or reducing variety and length of discourse so that English dominant students with little or no knowledge of Spanish can understand the content being taught (Palmer, 2009; Valdés, 1997). The simplification of Spanish has potential implications for Latino/a children in their ability to develop an academic proficiency in their first language like they would more likely develop in a bilingual education program without the influence of English dominant students (Valdés, 1997). Valdés (1997) pointed out that “were the situation reversed, [English-dominant] mainstream parents would vigorously protest having their children in classrooms in which the instructional needs of language-minority children required that English be used in ways that did not provide their children with the fullest possible exposure to school language” (p. 416).

Secondly, research studies show that teachers are more apt to codeswitch to English than Spanish during instruction time (Freeman, 2000; McCollum, 1999; Potowski, 2004). For example, in a study done by Freeman (2000), codeswitching to English was a strategy employed by bilingual teachers to meet the needs of African American students who, teachers reported, had been placed in their classes and in their opinion, “had no proficiency in Spanish and no interest in learning through Spanish” (p. 215). Other teachers reported codeswitching into English during Spanish instruction time when the students were facing standardized assessments in English (Fitts, 2006; McCollum, 1999; Potowski, 2004, 2007).

In addition, many schools lack teachers who are bilingual in English and Spanish and therefore, “specials” including art, music, and physical education are often taught in English (Fitts, 2006; Palmer, 2009; Potowski, 2004). Subsequently, English often becomes the dominant language of instruction even in cases when the school claims that the ratio of languages in the classroom is equal (Fitts, 2006; Potowski, 2004).

Finally, McCollum (1999) reported on a teacher’s insistence in focusing exclusively on the “high” variety of Spanish as the language of her classroom in a TWI school, devaluing the forms of Spanish that her students brought with them to the classroom from their working class homes. This resulted in the Mexican-background students being put in “regrettable double bind in which both their Spanish and their English were devalued” (McCollum, 1999, p. 123) and students did not feel comfortable speaking either language for fear of being corrected.

In addition to the teachers, students also influence the languages spoken during the school day. Researchers argue that white children manipulate the language of the classroom to favor English by pressuring classmates to speak in English even when they are instructed to speak Spanish (Palmer, 2009). Palmer (2009) reported that children were much more likely to codeswitch to English during Spanish instruction time than they were to switch to Spanish during English instruction time. Children also spoke English with all of their classmates including those who were dominant in Spanish. In contrast, Spanish dominant children used Spanish covertly and only with other Spanish dominant speakers during English instruction periods whereas “English speaking children seemed to assume universal comprehension of their language, and did not concern themselves with the few children who might not understand them completely...” (Palmer, 2009, p. 190). Finally, Potowski’s (2007)

study questioned the role of collaborative work in the classroom because it was found to result in high levels of English use in the classroom. Overall, Potowski (2007) warned that “both L1 [first language] and L2 [second language] students may not be using as much Spanish as educators believe” (p. 5).

**Loss of power with language.** Given that language is used to promote unity among community members and represents part of cultural capital, a final critique of TWI programs is that TWI education threatens one of the few unique advantages that Spanish-speakers have with potential for economic capital conversion by giving it away to White English-speakers (Valdés, 1997). Valdés (1997) quoted a bilingual education teacher who argued publicly against TWI programs saying that “*Si se aprovechan de nosotros en inglés, van a aprovechar de nosotros también en español*” (“If they take advantage of us in English, they will take advantage of us in Spanish as well”) (p. 393). For this teacher and for many other bilingual education proponents, language is considered an important tool that can be used to gain or maintain power by both the powerful and the powerless. While for white middle-class English speakers learning Spanish represents even greater potential of job advantages, given the anti-immigrant sentiment, it could also rob Spanish dominant speakers of their ability to gain entrance into the workforce since they no longer are unique as bilingual speakers (Valdés, 1997). Furthermore, appealing to the white middle class, many communities are emphasizing the capital potential of learning a second language as the rationale for supporting TWI programs rather than emphasizing the moral imperative to provide equitable schooling for all children including those who are speakers of other languages (Valdés, 1997).



Finally, it is important to note that data present conflicting pictures about language learning in TWI programs. Notably Collier and Thomas (2004) claimed that TWI programs over an extended period of time help Spanish dominant students gain needed proficiency in English and can eventually close the achievement gap for ELLs with their English-dominant classmates. However, Valdés (1997) summarized a research study done by Walsh (1995) in which “white, native English-speakers in two-way or Spanish immersion programs often outperform native Spanish speakers on *Spanish-language achievement tests*” (p. 419, my emphasis). That is, white students outperformed Spanish dominant speakers in language tests in Spanish after receiving instruction in a TWI or Spanish immersion program. This evidence validates the concerns about who stands to gain the most from TWI programs.

It was against this backdrop of a TWI school in North Carolina in which the study took place. It is clear that despite the best intentions of educators, this space is ripe with tensions and contradictions as its goals do not always meet the reality of the situation in which English dominant and Spanish dominant students come together in the classrooms. Children’s experiences in the TWI classrooms will also affect their parents and the relationships that parents form with the school and with the other members of the school community which will ultimately impact their potential to tap into third spaces at the school.

### **Third Space Theory**

If we’re so bright,  
Why didn’t we notice?  
The side by side translations  
were the easy ones.  
Our tongues tasted *luna*  
chanting, chanting to the words  
it touched; our lips circled  
*moon* sighing its longing.  
We knew: similar but different. (Pat Mora, “Borders”)

In this last section of the literature review, I return to the theoretical framework for the study, third space theory, with its emphasis on borders as a space of negotiation, hybridity, and as a conduit towards the future. I begin with a review of third space theory origins and then provide examples in which it has been applied to educational settings. In doing so, a gap in the research literature is exposed as there is no study that uses third space theory to conceptualize school-sponsored activities that foster relationships between parents and with the school that this dissertation begins to address.

### **Third Space Theory Origins**

Third space theory can be traced back to post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha's (1994) *The Location of Culture* in which he explored the existence of ephemeral culture and one's cultural identity along the margins, in *ambivalence*, and marked by *hybridity* and constant evolution. That is, culture is neither static nor fixed across people or across time. During his exploration of culture in the post-modern era, Bhabha (1994) introduced the term *third spaces* to describe the space in which minorities, people with a history of disenfranchisement in society, seek to negotiate new identities within the accepted space. No longer are they confined to one identity determined by their class or gender. Bhabha (1994) explained:

The move away from singularities of 'class' or 'gender' as primary conceptual and organizational categories, has resulted in an awareness of the subject positions—of race, gender, generation, institutional location, geopolitical locale, sexual orientation—that inhabit any claim to identity in the modern world. (p. 2)

The identity of a person cannot be determined by a quick glance at a person's color of skin, a snippet of conversation in which they speak their home language, or a sign of their religious beliefs or practices.

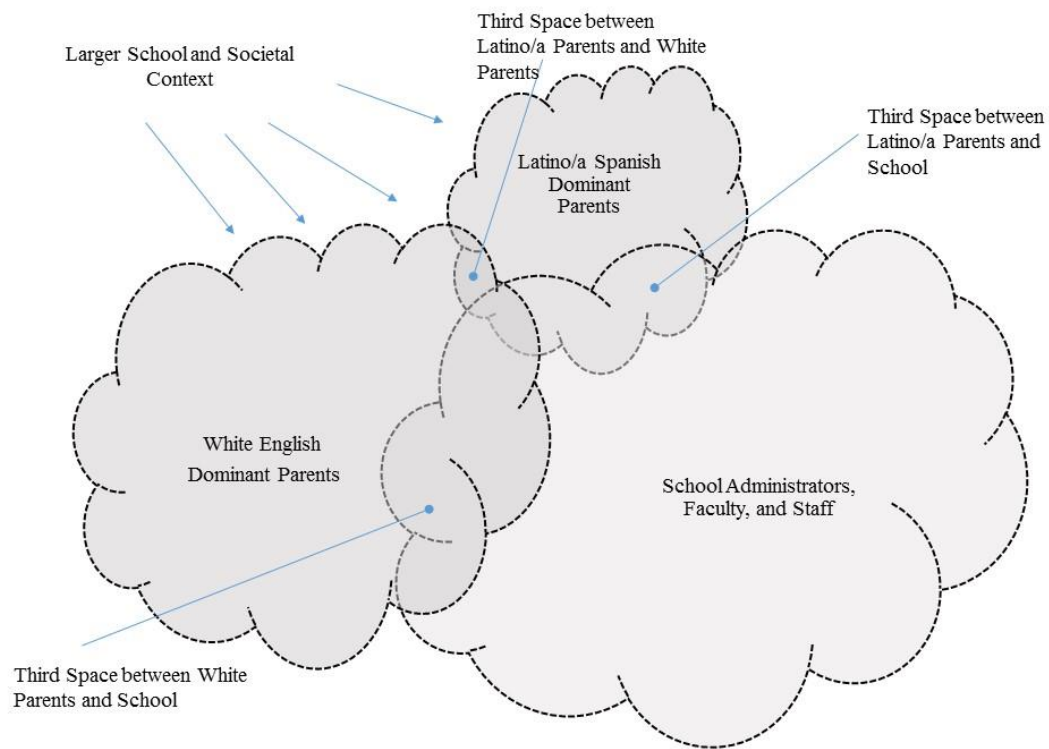
Bhabha exhorted people to reject narratives that one's origin determined a person's identity. Rather, people are to look for "moments or processes" in which cultures come together and people negotiate making cultural changes. These are what Bhabha (1994) termed, "in between spaces" that "provide the terrain for elaboration strategies of selfhood...that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself" (p. 2). It is at the border, at points of negotiation between one's original culture, which is itself fluid and constantly changing, and the cultures that one comes into contact with, that are also evolving simultaneously, that create opportunities for movement toward creating a new identity.

These "in between spaces" are also called third spaces, or spaces "emerging in the cultural interstices" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 12), created by those oppressed in their current state as they claim new space and push out on the boundaries of the official space. Bhabha (1994) has called the resulting spaces "haunt[ing]," (p. 209) and "unhomely" (p. 13). These words convey the fact that these are not peaceful, passive, or static spaces. They are marked by ruptures with the historical past and conflict. He compared third spaces to stairwells that connect first and second floors or spaces, destroying the typical binary positions on either end, and in which you can move up and down along the stairs, a continuum along being on either floor. At any one moment you could be closer to the first or the second space.

In this study, I imagine third spaces as the irregular spaces that result where two or more shapes overlap. As seen in Figure 1, I represented the parent and school groups with an abstract shape drawn with dotted lines. I hoped to convey that these groups are constantly shifting and evolving; they are not constant nor static. People may sift through them, adding

to them as they join in the space and then taking away as they move out of the space. These separate groups, as well as the third spaces, may evaporate and disappear if whole groups leave the contextual space. The points of contact as well between the two groups and the amount of overlap, or size of the third space, is also in negotiation and constantly changing to reflect the complexity and fluidity that accompanies the interactions among humans.

Figure 1: Third Spaces in the Larger School and Societal Context



I have labeled the bubble-like shapes as the white English dominant parents, the Latino/a Spanish dominant parents, and the school administrators, faculty, and staff. The shapes are grouped into the confines of the larger school and societal context which exerts its influence on each of the individual groups as well as their third spaces. The white English

dominant parents occupy a shape that is slightly larger, more centered in the diagram, and more closely connected to the school administration, faculty, and staff than that of the Latino/a Spanish dominant parents. This represents the tendency for English dominant parents to occupy a position of power and influence in schools. Currently, Latino/a and white parents do not share the same positions of power in the United States or in its communities (Feagin, 2014). The white parents participating in the parent language classes, despite claims to be part of a socially justice motivated subsector of the school community, still represent the historically dominant group of the school and larger society. They are technically considered to be members of the oppressor group, the ones that benefit from the continuation of discrimination and a structure of inequity at the school in which their children largely excel while the Latino/a parents' children's needs and special talents go unnoticed or underserved. Even while claiming to be concerned with issues of equity, history has shown that "we implement educational norms and policies unwisely or contrary to our best interests as a nation" (Portes & Salas, 2014, p. 4). At school and in society Latinos and whites are certainly not treated as equals and do not enjoy the same privileges. Therefore, in the diagram the Latino/a Spanish dominant parents occupy a slightly smaller shape and are positioned more to the outer margin and less connected to the school based upon their current social positioning in schools.

Despite the current power differential between parent groups, it was hoped that when the English dominant parents and the Spanish dominant parents came together, gaining understanding of one another and mutual respect and trust, the middle space, third space, indicated by the arrow, would open. In the third space each group would draw upon their community knowledge and experiences to create new learning and the possibility to re-

envision their future selves. There are also potential third spaces indicated by the arrows in Figure 1 showing the third spaces that may emerge between English dominant parents and the school and between Spanish dominant parents and the school. Finally, the diagram represents the possibility of an additional third space. The intersection between the three shapes represents the potential third spaces among the three groups with one central third space in which Latino/a parents, white parents, and school members work in collaboration and push back against status quo practices in favor of more equitable and just school spaces.

Third spaces are complex and hybrid spaces, connecting, negotiating, and weaving together the first and second traditionally delineated spaces. However, third space opening is always against the backdrop of the larger school and societal context which exerts pressure to continue the current system in place. However, it is precisely in this third space where the richness of community and mixing cultures can bear out. According to Bhabha's perspective, when people or things straddle two cultures, the result is a more enlightened experience and knowledge. Therefore, as Marjorie Perloff (1990) argued:

Rather than emphasizing the opposition between First World and Third World nations, between colonizer and colonized, men and women, black and white, straight and gay, Bhabha would have it, we might more profitably focus on the faultlines themselves, on border situations and thresholds as the sites where identities are performed and contested. (n.p.)

The border situations are where third spaces can open and with them possibilities for future identities and new imagined ways of being.

However, opening third spaces is not quick, easy, or straight-forward. Rather, Bhabha (1994) wrote that "...from the minority perspective, [it] is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical

transformation” (p. 3). It is, then, a complex and difficult trajectory to move into third space opening and to acknowledge and respect the resulting cultural hybrids that emerge. Third space opening is a process ripe with conflict, negotiation, and circling back. It is not a linear, clean progression from segregation and discrimination to collaboration and co-creation of new spaces.

Yet, it is the reality of our interconnected global world in which borders are crossed both geographically and internally within a person as people cross over cultural dividers in their daily lives often marked by the necessity to code-switch<sup>4</sup> or alter their behavior to better fit the culture. It is as, Bhabha (1994) wrote, a time marked by movement and fluidity of people as transcontinental migrants cross borders, moved by war, economic strife and poverty, disease, and political repression:

For the demography of the new internationalism is the history of the postcolonial migration, the narratives of cultural and political diaspora, the major social displacements of peasant and aboriginal communities, the poetics of exile, the grim prose of political and economic refugees. It is in this sense that the boundary becomes the place from which *something begins its presencing....* (p. 7)

The border, then, is not the end point, and it is not the place at which one loses their home culture and gives into the dominant culture and language. Rather, it is the point from which things begin anew and transformation is possible.

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<sup>4</sup> Code-switching occurs when a speaker includes words from two or more languages in a single conversation. For example: “I’m going to visit *mis tíos y primos* tomorrow.”

### Third Space Use in Educational Settings

Many educational scholars have taken up third space theory and have applied it to the classroom spaces (Benson, 2010; Fitts, 2009; Gutiérrez, 2008; Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Tejeda, 1999; Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Turner, 1997; Gutiérrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995; Moje, 2000; Moje, Ciechanowski, Kramer, Ellis, Carrillo, & Collazo, 2004). In these cases third space represented an alternative space created within the official academic space, formed as students and teachers created authentic relationships and in which CLD students were able to draw on their prior experiences and cultural knowledge with the aim of co-constructing new knowledge in communion with teachers and classmates. This is particularly important for Latino/a students that bring life experiences and perspectives that may vary from those of the dominant English student body population and that are often ignored in the classroom (Anzaldúa, 2007; Delgado-Gaitán, 1994; Nieto, 2010; Moll et al., 1992; Rodríguez-Brown, 2010; Urrieta & Martínez, 2011). Elizabeth Moje and colleagues (2004) pointed to the lack of cases in which teacher-designed curricula drew upon marginalized students' discourses. While third spaces can open organically, it is important to design a communal space in which third spaces are more readily tapped. For example, Moje et al. (2004) argued that allowing the unofficial or nondominant classroom discourses through *counterscripts* to enter within the official, academic spaces of the classroom gives voice to those students who are traditionally silenced in a school environment because it allows other perspectives and experiences to be acknowledged and shared. It also pushes out and expands the borders of what counts as "official" and "sanctioned" at school.



Likewise, Shanan Fitts (2009), the only scholar to explore third space opening in a TWI classroom, described third spaces in a TWI fifth grade classroom opened between teachers and children when “children’s experiences, funds of knowledge, and cultural and linguistic practices were taken up in productive ways and used to inform, enrich, or transform the academic tasks or curricula” (p. 89). Her research explored how third spaces open between home and school by emphasizing connections between *school*-based knowledges and discourses and *home*-based knowledges and discourses to make classroom interactions and school assignments richer and more meaningful for all students. She shared an example in which the classroom teacher incorporated a discussion about code-switching into a lesson. Students were asked to practice code-switching in their writing and in this assignment. In this case, the Latino students were able to draw from their home experience where code-switching was commonly used. Therefore, in the classroom, the status quo was de-centered, temporarily, as Latino/a students became the models and white students, the imitators. However, the dismissal of crucial linguistic and cultural resources that students brought to the classroom with a preference instead for the official school sanctioned discourses and ways of knowing resulted in the abandonment of the opening of third spaces in the classroom.

Teachers often fail to plan for third spaces in their classroom (Moje et al., 2004). Yet, students may initiate the opening of third spaces through *counterscripts*, or ways of resisting or talking back against the dominant discourse, the highly controlled environment, and constant student surveillance at school. A student counterscript could be a publicly voiced question of the teacher’s declarations, refusal to complete an assignment as intended, or side conversations that push back against the classroom discourse (Benson, 2010; Gutiérrez, et al.,

1995; Moje, 2000). For example, Gutiérrez et al. (1995) documented student-initiated attempts to open a third space in a high school social studies classroom. The researchers used discourse analysis of the teacher script and the student counterscripts that centered on a weekly current events activity, to examine the attempts by students to open third spaces and their eventual failure. While the student counterscript, in the eyes of the teacher, represented a rejection of the discussion and content of the classroom, it could alternatively have been considered an attempt to tap into authentic learning in which both teacher and students would work to create new knowledge about their world. However, in this example, the teacher script dominated and silenced all talk that pushed against it.

Benson (2010) described a similar student-initiated attempt and subsequent failure to push-out on the official classroom space in which a high school student in a remedial reading class used counterscripts, including elaborate ways of getting out of class, distracting others, or changing assignments, in an attempt to reclaim some expertise in a class where he had routinely been judged as a failure. Although the class was described as having multimodal focus, the student's areas of expertise, drawing and music, were routinely pushed aside in the classroom in order to focus on traditional reading and writing assignments, and accordingly he used resistance strategies to attempt to "create a third space in which he could hold expertise and counteract the school's identification of him solely in terms of skills he lacked" (Benson, 2010, p. 558). For this student, the third space represented a theoretical space outside the traditional boundaries set by school where he had potential for success. However, his attempts were undermined and ultimately ignored by the teacher and his classmates.

There were no examples in the research literature in which students in a traditional classroom were successful in opening third spaces between students and teacher, or students and school, given that student attempts were regarded as a threat to classroom control and therefore, shut-down and silenced by the teacher (Benson, 2010; Gutiérrez et al., 1995).

However, Gutiérrez (2008) explored an alternative educational space at a four week summer institute that was deliberately designed so that third spaces would open among students and their instructors. She presented an analysis of students' experiences during the Migrant Student Leadership Institute (MSLI), hosted at the University of California at Los Angeles, to provide evidence of the powerful effect of opening collective third spaces with minority students. The instructors of the MSLI aimed to develop students' socio-critical literacy by encouraging students to think critically about and examine contradictions between what was taught in school and what they had learned through personal experience. The philosophy of the MSLI was that there are multiple notions of what counts as knowledge, and students' prior experiences and funds of knowledge (González et al., 2005; Moll et al., 1992) must be used to push out the boundaries of official spaces of learning to include the informal and unofficial discourses of the students. For example, students shared their autobiographical stories about life as migrants, and teachers directed them to consider their family's past contributions to society and their opportunities for the future. One teacher instructed the students to consider "the chapters yet to come... because you still have a lot of chapters" (Gutiérrez, 2008, p. 155). In effect students were able to think beyond who they have been and what they or their family have experienced, and to consider what they could accomplish in the future.

Comparatively, Claire Kramsch's (2009) work has focused on third spaces, or "third culture," of "foreign language" learners. Third culture pushes back against the notions in language learning that there is a strict duality between concepts including "us" and "them"; first and second languages; and first and second cultures that students are attempting to approximate. Third culture, in common with the conceptualization of third space above, is not a stable or homogeneous space. Rather, the focus is on the heteroglossia contained within each of the poles and coming to understand the relationship between each extreme. Third culture in language teaching and learning then encourages incorporating multiple and varied methods, making connections to everyday life, and developing space along the margins of the official spaces.

All empirical educational studies utilizing third space study have focused on the relationships between students and their teachers in the classroom or students and their subject content. It is important to note that there was no study found in which the third space was employed as a theoretical framework with parents from the school. Furthermore, there was no study that examined parent-school relationships and parent connections with one another as they came together in the shared space of the school-sponsored parent language classes through the third space lens.

Before turning to the current study's employment of third space theory as a theoretical lens, it is important to note some recent criticism lodged against educational researchers that have employed the third space theory. Katherine Richardson Bruna (2009) urged for caution when utilizing third space theory, something that she termed, "the third space fetish in education" (p. 225). Richardson Bruna (2009) argued that people use third

space to equate hybridity to a commodity. Rather, she claimed, “[hybridity] is foundational to the human condition, and, most significantly, essential to human liberation” (p. 225). She critiqued Guitérrez’s work saying that she equated third space with hybridity and as something that teachers must “achieve, rather than something, already in existence, to simply affirm and employ, as part of their pedagogical praxis” (2009, p. 225). For this reason, in my dissertation I speak of “*opening* third spaces” not *creating* a third space to embody the fact that the third space is already present but must be tapped into, allowed room, and given support to unfurl. I also use the term “third *spaces*” to acknowledge that this is not one single isolated third space that exists, but multiple, overlapping, and concurrent spaces that blend with one another and can open simultaneously. I imagine third spaces like a wadded up pieces of foam that have been pushed down into the cracks and hidden behind walls, remaining out of sight until they are slowly pulled out, given more space, and begin to open up after begin confined for so long. For example, throughout the data collection period there were moments in which suddenly a piece of the foam of third space opening pushed through and was observed. These were often isolated, private moments among participants in the classes but they were significant in confirming that potential for third space openings existed just below the surface.

One such moment in which the third space foam peeked out was on May 15, 2014. It was the last night of our classes and a stormy unsettled evening. There were flash floods and possibility of tornados in the area. The parents had gathered in the cafeteria and were helping themselves to food and drinks. An English dominant mother asked for bottled water and Verónica explained that there was only water from the water fountain. “How about *vino tinto*?” Frieda, an English dominant mother, called out. Verónica responded jokingly “Si lo

pones en un contenedor y lo llamas jugo...” (*If you put it in a container and call it juice...*). As everyone laughed, Frieda said that she did not get what Verónica had said in Spanish. María Carmen, a Spanish dominant mother, standing close to Frieda, put her arm around Frieda and said “Así me siento yo cuando hablan totalmente en inglés” (*That’s how I feel when they speak totally in English.*) In that moment, María Carmen connected to Frieda through a shared experience of not understanding everything said in the other language. This brief moment of connection through shared experience could have potentially led to greater empathy and understanding of the other person’s lived experience and thus begin to broaden the possibility of third space openings between parent groups.

Beyond these isolated moments of seeing a glimpse of third space potential, I examined the data for evidence that collaborative, mutual third spaces were emerging. In this case, despite the valid critique by Richardson Bruna (2009), Gutiérrez’s (2008) work did provide a template for identifying characteristics and conditions involved in the opening and tapping into third spaces. These characteristics of opening third spaces include 1) valuing and adopting members’ funds of knowledge (González et al., 2005; Moll et al., 1992), epistemologies, and ontologies; 2) collaboration and co-creation of knowledge; 3) push-back on official spaces through *counterscripts*; and 4) re-imagining one’s future self. I used these characteristics as a priori codes to filter the data collected from the case study of parents’ language classes and to draw my attention to areas in which third spaces were potentially opening or starting to open, or were left ignored on the periphery. In the study, I conceptualized third space as the in-between space created among Spanish dominant and English dominant parents in the parent language classes where the first space was represented by the English dominant parents and the second space was from the Spanish

dominant community. In addition, I looked for potential third spaces that represented the space created anew between the school and the parents communally. It was precisely during “those moments or processes” that Bhabha (1994) wrote about that I set out to observe and describe as parents came together from very different positionalities to work toward the common goal of language learning. Along the way, I hoped parents would find those “innovative sites of collaboration and contestation” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 2) in which they would begin to work together in solidarity, questioning school practices and experiences that they or their children have had at the school and in doing so move toward transforming their communal identity.

In this chapter, I reviewed the body of literature related to family-school connections and the school-sponsored language classes for parents. Next, I reviewed the literature related to historically teaching CLD students and the TWI programs growing in popularity, especially in North Carolina and throughout the United States. Finally, I reviewed the literature on third space theory including its origins and its applications in the field of education.

This dissertation, therefore, sets out to address the gaps in the literature. Namely, 1) there are no studies that explore the use of parent language classes as a strategy to build connections both between parents, in separate language groups and across language and cultural groups, and between the school and parents and that likewise, 2) there is a lack of studies using third space theory as a lens to understand the connections built between parents at a TWI school.

To build upon the knowledge reviewed from the literature, I now turn to the specifics about how I investigated the parent language classes offered at the school to explore how connections, through understanding and knowledge, were created during the classes both among parents and with the school in effort to identify the opening of third spaces. In the remaining text, I will detail the research methodology I followed, the school context and the language classes themselves, and the experiences of parents, teachers, and other faculty members of the school that related to the language classes. It is, after all, their story – the one that parents and teachers lived every day of the week and every week of the school year. I will share with you the parents that I came to know who were full of hopes and dreams for the very best for their children, and the teachers, trained to lead the transformation of these children into bilingual and bicultural beings, but also normal people trying to do their best despite encountering frustrations and set-backs. Through all of it emerged a story of best intentions but unfinished work; work that these teachers and parents, surely, still strive to continue today.



## **CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This qualitative study took place from July 2013 to July 2014 at PES, a two way immersion (TWI) school in North Carolina. It is an intrinsic case study of the parent language classes offered by the school to Spanish and English dominant parents with the goal of exploring the experiences of parents and the connections made between parents and with the school. In this chapter, I will describe the research methodology employed in this study. I begin with a discussion of qualitative inquiry and my choice of following case study methodology. Next, I provide a brief overview of the study before describing the research design in detail, including the participant selection and general characteristics of the parents. I also include in this chapter substantial information about the parents' motivations to enroll their children in the TWI school. This helped to describe the nature of parents' participation and approach to the parent language classes and the school in general, which impacted the dynamics of the classes and parents' cross-cultural interactions. The chapter continues with a description of the research sites, data sources, and data collection, and potential benefits of participation in the study. Following explanation of the data analysis, I share efforts made to ensure accuracy and credibility, choices that I made during writing, and limitations of the study. Since I was a critical piece of this research study as the researcher and also a main participant as English language instructor of the classes, I conclude by sharing my epistemological stance as a critical researcher and my positionality in the field.

## **Qualitative Inquiry**

I chose to follow qualitative research methodology for this study to offer a personal, nuanced understanding of the on-going and complex work building relationships among parents and with the school. The study aimed not only to describe from my vantage point but also offer an analysis of the observed world. As Denzin & Lincoln (2005) wrote, "...qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 3). Qualitative research in general, unlike quantitative research, does not attempt to minimize the role of the researcher in selecting and interpreting data. Rather, it acknowledges the important role of the researcher in the entire research process. In fact, Stake (1995) explained that "the persons most responsible for interpretations [must] be in the field, making observations, exercising subjective judgment, analysis and synthesizing, all the while realizing their own consciousness" (p. 41).

There was an evolution in the research questions for the study. When the study began, the primary research question was: "How does participation in a parent language course impact parents' involvement in the school and/or sense of connection and community among parents at the school? How is this manifested across ethnic/linguistic groups?" However, as the study developed and as conversations with parents and teachers began to take place, I realized that "parents' involvement" in the school was an unreliable factor in determining to what extent parents felt connected to or excluded from the school. It was also based upon traditional notions of "parental involvement" in schools that I did not want to further propagate. Likewise, it was difficult to ascertain how "involved" parents were prior to the language classes and after the language classes. It was also unclear how "connected" parents

really felt to other parents at the school. As I began meeting with parents outside of the language classes beginning in late November 2013, most parents reported that they did not feel very much connected to other parents at the school unless they had known parents from previous schools or through other connections unrelated to the schooling of their children. Therefore, efforts to measure whether parents' involvement and feelings of connectedness went up or down, or stayed the same following parents' participation in the language classes was of interest once the study began.

A more relevant research question emerged, which was to determine to what extent were connections and therefore understanding and knowledge made between parents and between home and school during the language classes. This research question directed my attention to exploring and describing ways in which parents were gaining new understanding and new knowledge about each other and about the school through their participation in the language classes.

Therefore the final three research questions that directed this study were:

- 1) To what extent were connections and therefore understanding and knowledge made between parents and between parents and school during the parent language classes?  
To what extent did connections between parents and with the school open third spaces, new alternative spaces, in the school?
- 2) What school-wide factors supported or did not support the parent language classes?
- 3) What are the implications for furthering schools' efforts to build connections between parents and from parents to school in an effort to further open third spaces?

## Case Study Research

Case studies have long held a place in social science research as an effective way to better understand a “specific, complex, functioning thing” (Stake, 1995, p. 2). Case study methodology allows the researcher to develop a deep understanding of the case, its actors, and their interrelationships by relying upon multiple sources of data “ensuring that the issue is not explored through one lens, but rather a variety of lenses which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 544). Therefore, this qualitative case study aimed toward understanding the complex interrelationships between the parents, the school, and its community. By providing thick description (Geertz, 1973), I hope the reader will have enough information to vicariously experience the case and come to their own understanding. “Qualitative research tries to establish an empathetic understanding for the reader, through description, sometimes *thick description*, conveying to the reader what experience itself would convey” (Stake, 1995, p. 39).

This study is an *intrinsic case study*—a study undergone not to make generalizations to all other cases but to learn from this particular case at hand (Stake, 1995). Therefore, I investigated the activities and experience of actors in and around the parent classes at the school. I present the findings of this case in effort to elucidate as clearly as possible this particular set of events, experiences, and people. In all its particularity and all its ordinariness, the case is of interest to us as parents, activists, scholars, members of the community, and educators to learn from the varied experiences of the people that come together at various meeting points during this study. The goal of the study is, therefore, to understand both the intricate parts and the whole of the case. And although this study does

not aim to generalize findings to all TWI schools or all parent language classes, it does attempt to offer new insights through an in-depth analysis of this particular case and to illuminate some potential issues or possibilities in attempting to connect parents from diverse families to each other and to schools, particularly in TWI education.

While the parent education classes was my primary focus, I triangulated my findings with data from the larger school context in which the parent classes were embedded and included data from observations from classrooms and events sponsored by the school including Open House, Carnival, Hispanic Awareness Week, PTA meetings, Read-a-thon, and student award ceremonies (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2005). This is aligned with the definition of a case study provided by Yin (2005) as a study that “investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). Therefore, while my focus was the language classes for the parents, the underlying context of the TWI school and its community were important parts of this investigation. One influences the other, and together they ultimately affect the experience of students, their parents, and teachers at the school. As Valdés (2001) urged, “What happens in the schoolyard, in attendance offices, in PTA meetings, and at school board meetings directly reflects the beliefs and values of the community and its residents” (p. 31). I would add that the context must be included in the study because it also affects the learning environment and experiences for both the children and their parents at the school, and thus impacts parents’ connections to the school and connections to other parents which they bring with them to the parent language classes.

Still, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of my observations and perceptions about the school and language classes for parents. My viewpoint represents a

very personalized experience at the school and while I attempted to strengthen the reliability of my observations by relying upon a diverse group of “insiders” with much more experience and varied points of contact with the school and school members, my unique perspective is largely shaped by my positionality and my personal interactions at the school. For that reason, I attempt to provide vivid and detailed descriptions of the interactions and original quotations from participants so that the reader can come to his/her own conclusions based upon the data collected (Merriam, 2009).

### **Overview of the Study**

Data was collected over the course of the 2013-2014 school year simultaneously with my active involvement at the school. My entry into the school and parent language classes was facilitated by entering the school as a part of a research team including a professor and another graduate student. After a brief meeting in July with the principal prior to the start of the school year, in which I affirmed my interest in contributing to the parent language classes, a new initiative for the school that year, and my desire to also work with classroom teachers, the principal cleared the way for my presence in the school telling me that I had “full access” to visit any classroom in the school (July 26, 2013). As the school year began, my participation at the school can be better understood by describing the two avenues of my participation: 1) time spent in the kindergarten and fifth grade classrooms at PES; and 2) time spent in and planning for the parent language classes.

I begin by describing my participation in the classrooms at PES because it preceded the beginning of the language classes. The school year began in mid-August whereas the language classes did not begin until October. I also spent more time overall during the course of the school year in the classrooms because there were more opportunities to spend time in

this part of the research site. I also found the activities of the classroom informative for understanding the overall school environment and classroom experiences, the school's perspectives about parents and families and their role in children's education, and the pressures faced by the teachers. Therefore, each week I spent time once or twice a week during the school day in the classrooms of a kindergarten and a fifth grade teacher. Typically I spent 1 ½ hours to 2 hours at a time in one classroom before moving to the other classroom. I alternated which classroom I visited first in order to observe different portions of the school day. At times I worked actively as a participant observer, interacting with the students, teaching a small group of students, or assisting the teacher in whatever way she needed. On a few occasions I accompanied the children to the cafeteria for lunch. Other times I sat and observed from the back of the room. On some days my visit corresponded with a grade level or whole school assembly or special event which I observed instead.

I built relationships with the two main focal teachers, Alma Morales, the kindergarten teacher, and Isabel García, the fifth grade teacher, by first volunteering in their classrooms. When I emailed several teachers from the school to approach them about my involvement in their classroom over the next year, both Señora (Sra.) Morales and Sra. García immediately responded affirmatively. I already had the opportunity to have worked with Sra. Morales over the past two years. And lacking an assistant for the better part of the school year, Sra. García was especially open to my participation in her classroom. While initially teachers did not seem to understand why I was in the school despite the fact that I explained that I was there to gain understanding about the experience of teachers, children, and parents when possible with the school, they utilized my availability to help by putting me to work running photocopies and creating materials for the classroom. As the school year progressed, there

were opportunities for informal conversations as I helped out in the classroom that informed my understanding of the school and classroom context.

The second part of my participation at the school was during the Thursday evening parent language classes that lasted from 6:00-7:30 pm and the weekly meetings in which I met with the other language teacher and literacy coach at PES, Verónica Ramos, to make plans and materials for the classes.

After meeting with Verónica in September, it was decided that I would teach the English language classes, and she would teach the Spanish language classes. In retrospect this was an interesting decision given that the majority of her experience had been teaching English both to children and adults, whereas my experience had been teaching Spanish to high school and undergraduate college students. Verónica reasoned that this arrangement made the most sense since I was born in an English dominant family in the United States, and she was from a Spanish dominant family in Argentina. Therefore, my teaching the English classes and her teaching the Spanish classes followed the structure of the TWI classrooms at PES in which teachers from Spanish-speaking countries taught in Spanish and those from the United States typically taught in English (May 28, 2014).

The classes were held over three sessions: October 10-November 21; February 20-March 20; and April 17-May 15 with breaks between each session. The classes originated from requests from the school's parents and were designed with the intention to teach conversational English and Spanish and to provide time in which parents in the two classes could build relationships during time each week to practice with speakers of the other language during a joint conversation period. First, basic phrases and chunks of language were taught in the separate language classes with interactive pair and group activities to practice



the phrases in a realistic context. Then, the joint conversation period culminated the activities by asking the parents from both classes to practice everything that they had learned earlier in the class with another parent or group of parents. A list of questions or potential script was provided to the parents to support their conversation.

Verónica and I typically met on Wednesdays each week during the fall semester and then on Thursdays during the spring semester to make plans for the language classes. During the first session of classes, we met and planned together in her office. Then, during the second and third sessions we brought our plans for our separate classes that we had written at home to share with each other. We offered suggestions on the lesson plans and tried to find ways in which the curriculum of each class could connect across language groups. We also discussed activities for the joint conversation time. Together, we prepared materials and organized for the next class. This was helpful because it also provided time to informally discuss developments in the classroom, insights, as well as, concerns. A frequent topic of conversation for us during this time was the dwindling number of parent participants in the classes and therefore, we also spent this time calling parents and preparing flyers and reminders to send home with their children.

## **Research Design**

### **Data Collection**

Data was collected from July of 2013 through July 2014. An extended time for data collection over the course of the year was necessary to foster relationships with parents and teachers and to gain needed understanding of the school climate and general experience of students and families that attended the school. Baxter and Jack (2008) recommended “a

prolonged or intense exposure to the phenomenon under study within its context so that rapport with participants can be established and so that multiple perspectives can be collected and understood...” (p. 556).

It was important for me to spend the year in the research field site for many reasons including that the language class commitment to the parents was for the entire academic school year, and therefore I wanted to equally make the commitment to teaching the English language classes for the year. My teaching the language class was a way in which I could give back substantially to the school, its teachers, and its parents for allowing me entrance into their world. Another reason for my desire to spend an extended period of time in the field was to follow the advice of Stake (1995) to enter the field slowly, quietly acquainting myself with the many actors, contexts, and issues. Stake recommended a “quiet entry” (1995, p. 59) into the research site and to be as “unobtrusive as wallpaper” (1995, p. 59). I attempted to do this by entering the research site as a volunteer in various teachers’ classrooms and not making requests for an interview with teachers or parents until I knew them more personally. On one hand I felt more comfortable making this request after having “given” them something first (my time, work in the classroom, teaching the language class). I also felt better situated to ask questions after developing familiarity with the school and its players. Most of the parents were very willing to do an interview when the time came. However, putting off interviews may have cost me the opportunity to learn about some of the parents that I found very interesting, because they ended up not returning to the later language classes, and I was unable to reconnect with several of them again.

## **Data Sources**

The data sources for this case study included: 1) language class observations of both the Spanish and English instruction time and the joint conversation period; 2) twenty-four parent semi-structured interviews with both Spanish-dominant and English-dominant parents who participated in the classes; 3) twenty-five total parent paper and pencil surveys; 4) document collection from the language classes; and 5) four semi-structured interviews with Verónica, the Spanish language teacher of the parent classes.

I also collected data to inform the understanding of the school site and context of the parent language classes through 1) weekly classroom observations; 2) a beginning of the year and an end of the year semi-structured interview with two classroom teachers; 3) informal conversations with other teachers and faculty (including the school counselor and principal) at the school; and 4) participant observations of extracurricular activities in which families interacted with one another after school hours (PTA meetings, Carnival, Open House, Hispanic Heritage events, Book Fair, Read-a-thon events, and an award ceremony for children).

**Language class observations.** Fieldnotes from the language classes were written up immediately following the Thursday evening meetings. First, on my way home from the classes, I recorded my initial reactions to the classes using a voice recorder. Once at home, I used these initial reactions to begin the written description of the class, focusing on my own experience as the language teacher in the English classes. Then, over the course of the next few days, I used the video recordings that I had collected to fill-in notes and make a detailed description of the joint conversation period and the Spanish language classes. The fieldnotes on language classes included names of parents in attendance at the session; the general

atmosphere of the class; the activities that were planned for the meeting and which activities were completed and any significant events that occurred; and how the joint conversation time was structured by the teachers and/or parents. During the joint conversation period, I tried to note how parents greeted each other and initiated conversation; how parents negotiated communicating with one another; what conversations occurred outside the official activities; if there were moments of silence; and how parents generally related to one another. I attempted whenever possible to make these observations during interactions among members of the same language group and between members of different language backgrounds (See Appendix A for the observation protocol for parents' language classes).

During the first session of language classes, I videotaped only the English classes and the joint conversation time. After realizing the need to also videotape the Spanish language classes, I revised my methodology to also video record the Spanish language classes. Since the parents had already consented to being recorded during the language classes, there was no need to re-consent them or to adjust the Institutional Review Board (IRB) application that oversees research that involves people. However, I did explain to parents in the Spanish language classes why I was adding cameras into their section of the classes so that I could learn more about their interactions with one another and with Verónica, their teacher. By using both a tripod and a flip camera in each class, I was able to capture both the whole class and small group or pair interactions. The multiple video recordings from each class provided a record that I referred to retrospectively. This was important given that I was teaching simultaneously and therefore unable to attend closely to the interactions among all the parents.

**Semi-structured interviews with parents.** Stake (1995) argued that the interview is an important component of gaining understanding of the case because “[m]uch of what we cannot observe for ourselves has been or is being observed by others...The interview is the main road to multiple realities” (p. 64). Therefore, in addition to the many informal conversations with parents while teaching the language classes, I conducted 24 total semi-structured interviews with parents over the course of the year (10 total interviews with Spanish dominant parents; 14 total interviews with English dominant parents). The goals of the interviews were to learn about parents’ experience in the parent language classes; their perceptions of the TWI school; their relationship with the school and other parents; and recommendations they had for the school (See Appendix B and C for the semi-structured interview protocol for parents in English and Spanish respectively).

With three Spanish dominant parents I had the opportunity to conduct two semi-structured interviews with each of them. With four additional Spanish dominant parents I had only one semi-structured interview. With three of the English dominant parents who were present from the first to the third session of classes, I had the chance to conduct three semi-structured interviews with each of them. With five additional English dominant parents I had one semi-structured interview with each of them. In general, the first interview with parents took place in November and December following the end of the first session of language classes. The second interview followed in March at the end of the second session of classes. For those that continued and were willing to have an additional interview, I had third interviews with parents at the end of the school year. However, because of the structure of the classes in which parents entered new and/or dropped out at each session, some parents had their first interview in March and a second interview in May, and only three parents, all

English dominant mothers, were able to participate in three total interviews. Each interview lasted from 45 minutes to two hours. During the first interview with each of the parents, and in keeping with the recommendation from Stake (1995), I found that by sharing with them my personal journey to learn Spanish, my experiences as a public school teacher, and my interest in understanding their experiences, the parents shared openly their own personal stories and were candid in talking about their perspectives.

The semi-structured format of the interviews provided a plan of the questions that I thought I might ask, yet it will also allow me to follow the parents' lead as they discuss their own perceptions and experiences (Glesne, 2011). The conversations often strayed away at least for part of the interview from the questions as parents shared their experiences at school and concerns or perspectives about their children's schooling.

**Parent surveys.** Bilingual paper and pencil surveys were administered to the parents that participated in the language classes. Surveys were distributed and filled out on the last class meeting of the first session on November 21, 2013 and on March 13, 2014 during the second session with parents who were new. Due to irregular class attendance, not every parent in the study filled out a survey. Seventeen surveys were returned by English-dominant parents and eight from Spanish-dominant parents. The surveys sought background information about the parents and attempted to identify concerns of the parents about their children's education. The surveys included general questions about the family (number of children, their classroom teachers, languages spoken at home, origin, and education level); parents' participation at PES and their general involvement in their children's education; and perceptions of TWI education, languages, and relationships at school (See Appendix D and E for the parent surveys in English and Spanish respectively).

**Document collection from language classes.** In addition to the many documents created during the language classes including plans, class materials, and examples of parent work, class evaluations filled out by the parents about the classes at the end of each session provided valuable information about the impressions of the parents about the classes.

**Classroom observations.** The classroom observations at PES were conducted with the goal of learning about the overall school climate and culture as well as the philosophy of the classroom teachers about their role in connecting to their students' culture and home community and involving the parents in the children's learning. Particular attention was paid to references to children's home culture, community, and language used by teachers to children and among children. It was noted whether references to children's home influences are positive, negative, or neutral and what messages are intentionally or subtly relayed (See Appendix F for the classroom observation protocol).

**Teacher interviews.** To expand my understanding of the context of the school and the experience of children and their parents, and in addition to the informal conversations with classroom teachers while I was volunteering and observing in their classrooms, I conducted two semi-structured interviews with the kindergarten and fifth grade teachers. As with the parents' interviews, the semi-structured format of the interviews provided a plan of the questions I wanted to ask, yet it also allowed me to follow the teachers' lead as they discussed their own classrooms and their experiences (Glesne, 2011). Teachers were asked about their efforts to connect the classroom to the families of their students and their home language and culture. They were also asked to hypothesize about what efforts could strengthen these connections. In accordance with Mertens's (2010) suggestions about individual interviews, my questions began with informal and more open-ended questions to

help the interviewee feel comfortable and to expose topics of interest thus “providing a broader lens for the researcher’s gaze” (p. 371). Therefore, I began my interviews by prompting teachers to talk about themselves and their experiences at school including their educational background and how it is that they came to teach at the TWI school (See Appendix G for the semi-structured interview protocol for teachers).

**Additional school member interviews.** In addition to the two classroom teachers, I interviewed Verónica Ramos, the literacy coach a total of four times. In the first interview my goal was to learn about her educational background, her teaching philosophy, and her thoughts on the parent language classes following the first session. The second interview focused on plans for the second session of language classes. The third interview followed the last class of the third session and focused on overall impressions about the school year and language classes. A final follow-up interview in July at the end of the school year explored the closing of the school year and plans for next year. In addition to the “formal” interviews, we had countless informal conversations that helped to inform my understanding of her experience in the school and with the parents in the language classes.

I also interviewed the school counselor, Valencia Acosta, who was involved in the parent education initiatives and a vocal supporter of connecting the school to its families and community. I had an initial meeting with the school principal in which plans for the language classes and school in general were discussed (See Appendix H for the semi-structured interview protocol for faculty and personnel). Finally, I had informal conversations with the social worker, Kelly Jones, the school nurse, the media specialist, and the office receptionist during my school visits.



**Observations of extracurricular activities.** In addition to observations during the school hours, I attended and conducted observations of extracurricular activities. These included PTA Meetings, the Open House, Carnival, the Read-a-thon, Book Fair, and an award ceremony held during the school year. Observations from the events were informative in terms of learning more about the atmosphere of the school and the philosophy of its teachers and administration (See Appendix I for the extracurricular activities observation protocol).

### **Research Sites**

There were two main research sites in the study: PES and the parent language classes. The main research site was the parent language classes, but I spent additional time in the school's classrooms to gain a better understanding of the school environment in which the language classes were embedded.

### **Polk Elementary School**

**General demographics.** PES draws its students from a primarily working-class Latino community, professional middle- and upper-class white families, and a significantly smaller population of students from a working class or lower middle class African American communities. The school, with a total population of 491, is made up of 48.1% Latino/a students and 51.9% non-Latino/a students. Of the non-Latino/a students, there are small percentages of Asian (1.8%), African American (3.5%), Multi-racial (4.5%), and Pacific Islander (.2%) students. White students make up the overwhelming majority of this group with 42% of its membership. The Latino/a student population is much higher at PES than the district-wide figures that show 14.3% of all students throughout its 20 schools are Latino/a. Fifty-one percent of students at PES have free or reduced lunches (district website).

The faculty and staff of this school are almost entirely bilingual with only a few exceptions. The school relies heavily upon a program that helps to recruit and place international teachers in schools in order to have enough bilingual teachers. The community and state of North Carolina are not currently producing enough home-grown bilingual teachers to meet the needs of schools to provide certified bilingual teachers.

**Nature of TWI program.** In contrast with the majority of other schools in the area and in the state of North Carolina, the TWI program is a school-wide program at PES. Other schools often have just one strand of TWI education which students apply to for participation within a traditional curriculum school.

**Main classrooms.** There were two main classrooms, a kindergarten and a fifth grade classroom, where I spent the majority of my time observing to develop a more nuanced understanding of the context by learning about the classroom interactions between students and their teachers and the experience in general of attending a TWI school. I visited these classrooms usually once a week during the school year. Both classrooms were taught entirely in Spanish and were led by charismatic and experienced TWI teachers. The kindergarten classroom followed the 90:10 structure, with 90% of the instruction time in Spanish. The fifth grade classroom followed the 50:50 structure, switching half way through the day to go to the English dominant teacher's classroom. I began my participation in these classroom by serving as a volunteer in the room and as I developed relationships with the teachers and their students, I slowly moved towards participant observer in the classrooms.

The classrooms were warm and vibrant, brightly painted, with big windows letting in natural light, and Spanish posters, word walls, and reminders about policies and procedures posted on all the available walls. In the kindergarten classroom the students' small square

tables sat in rows in the middle of the room. On the floor below the white board and projector screen was a large rectangular carpet with different colored squares. The fifth grade classroom was filled with individual desks that were moved into tables for group activities and back into rows throughout the school day. The fifth grade classroom, for most of the year, held the student-created ecosystems complete with plants, tadpoles, and minnows perched on a ledge extending the width of the classroom's back wall. Student work for both classrooms was hung in the classroom and extended out into the hallway in front of the classrooms.

**Other classrooms.** I also visited from time to time other classrooms in the school due to invitations from other teachers, special events happening in other classrooms, and in effort to develop a wider-understanding of the teachers' practice in the school and children's experience in TWI classrooms both in English and Spanish instructed classrooms. Therefore, I also draw from my observational visits to a variety of classrooms at PES including in kindergarten, first grade, third grade, and fifth grade rooms. However, once I began to develop a sense of how the school worked, I focused my time in the two main instructional classrooms in kindergarten and fifth grade.

**Other school-spaces.** In addition there were occasions, including school-wide events, in which my data was drawn from other school-spaces including the school courtyard, gymnasium, cafeteria, main office, and media center.

### **The Language Classes**

The parent English and Spanish language classes were the other primary site for this study.

**Origins of classes.** During the 2013-2014 school year and in response to parental requests by both Spanish and English dominant parents, PES offered weekly parent language classes in Spanish and English over the span of three periods with a fall, winter, and spring sessions. The parent language classes formed a part of the parent education initiative offered by the school during the academic year. The parents had the choice to participate in language classes, technology classes that focused on computer literacy, or math instruction classes. The principal of the school supported the parent education classes by providing free childcare for all parents attending the classes and some limited funds for materials and food for the classes. The classes were specifically designated for parents of children at PES. Although other school events were open to the entire community, it was indicated by the principal that in this case other family members, friends, or neighbors were not permitted to attend the classes given the priority to meet the demand of the school's parents first.

Parents were invited to participate through a series of announcements via paper flyers sent home with their children and automated phone messages sent out to all the families of the school. The language classes were requested specifically by parents who expressed frustration in not being able to connect with other members of the school community because of language barriers and trouble helping their children with homework in both Spanish and English.

**Instructors of classes.** During the first session there were two instructors to meet the parent demand for the Spanish language classes for English dominant parents-- Verónica Ramos, the literacy specialist from the school, and a community volunteer that was an adjunct Spanish instructor at a university. I taught the English classes for Spanish dominant parents. During the winter and spring sessions, with the drop in attendance of parents, there

were only two teachers – Verónica and I in the Spanish and English classes respectively. My work as the English language instructor throughout the year was offered in part to give back to the school for the opportunity to work with its parents and teachers and also to facilitate getting to know the language class participants.

**Schedule and design of classes.** Parent language classes began on September 26, 2013 and ended May 15, 2014. While initial plans thought to limit parental participation to 25 parents in each language group, parental participation began with a total of 50 parents but reduced to a core group by end of the first session of approximately 15 parents taking Spanish language classes and six parents taking English language classes. In the last session of classes, participation fell even further to a handful of parents in each class.

The language classes began with separate instruction in Spanish and English in two classrooms. Each class focused on a conversational topic and included an ice breaker, exposure to new vocabulary and language in context followed by practice through interactive activities. For example, the initial classes focused on having conversations introducing oneself and describing family, giving information about children including grade and teacher, and talking about pastimes and birthdays. Other topics of the classes included talking about weather, health, making friends, and holiday traditions. During the last fifteen minutes of each class meeting, Spanish dominant and English dominant parents came together in a communal space, first the cafeteria and in later sessions in one of the classrooms, and after being put into small groups they practiced their “target” language learned during the class session. The time was divided, therefore, between speaking in Spanish and speaking in English with a partner or partners. These group conversations incorporated conversations learned during the separate group instruction and gave parents an opportunity to experiment

with the language with speakers of the language they were studying. I found this opportunity to work with the language classes as a potentially fruitful context in which parents were purposefully grouped together with the goal of sharing language expertise. It was hoped that relationships among parents would naturally evolve and grow out of this context.

The language classes were housed in the fourth and fifth grade wings of the school in classrooms Thursday evenings after students had vacated the classrooms. Therefore, the classrooms still had the remnants of an active school day including announcements written on the white boards, cut paper scraps scattered about on the floor, and pencils spilling out of desks. More details about the language classes including their origins and evolution will be provided in Chapter Three.

## **Participants**

### **Participant Selection**

All the parents participating in the language classes were recruited to participate in the research study. All of the parents present agreed to partake in the study in terms of being filmed during the language classes. The interview and survey participation depended upon their availability and individual circumstances. Due to time conflicts, not all the parents were able to participate in an interview or fill out a survey. Parents that participated in at least two interviews and filled out a survey were entered into a drawing for one of two raffle gift cards (one for an English dominant parent and one for a Spanish dominant parent) to a local grocery store for their participation.

Focal parents were selected for their potential for “information-rich cases for study in depth” (Patton, 2002, p. 46) due to their continued participation in the parent language

classes and/or their connection to one of the focal classrooms. I also paid attention to the “accessibility and hospitality” of parents as cautioned by Stake (1995, p. 57) because parents’ willingness and ability to meet with me, as well as their warmth determined in large part the productivity of our discussions in terms of my gaining insights.

An important participant that shared insights with me about the school context and important perspectives about the parent language classes was the literacy specialist for kindergarten and first grade at PES, Verónica Ramos. Verónica also taught and organized the language classes for parents. She was willing to be a participant in the study and throughout the year she met with me to discuss her thoughts about the parent language classes. She has lived in the United States for a few years teaching. She came to the States as a teacher through a program that places international teachers in public schools. She also became bilingual as a child attending a bilingual school where she learned in English and Spanish simultaneously. She believes that “all students should be bilingual in the United States” (Teacher survey) and her work at PES contributes to fulfilling this goal. She also had experience teaching English to parents of her students.

I was also an important participant as well in the parent language classes as the English instructor. I am a dominant English speaker who learned Spanish through traditional world language classes and through studying in Spain and Mexico. I have taught Spanish in a public high school and two universities and ESL to adults at a community college. I also believed that TWI programs were valuable to the community in that they structured the classrooms to provide meaningful instruction for all children and to build proficiency of students in both English and Spanish while also promoting children to work with people that

differ from them and their family in their socio-economic, linguistic, racial, and cultural background.

As previously mentioned, the teacher participants, Alma Morales, a kindergarten teacher, and Isabel García, a fifth grade teacher, were selected because they agreed to have me in their classroom throughout the school year and because they were open to being interviewed twice during the school year. I already had established a relationship with the kindergarten teacher, Sra. Morales, after working with her periodically over the previous two years prior to the current study. The fifth grade teacher, Sra. García, was warm and interested in learning from the “research interests of graduate students” (May 22, 2014) as she was thinking about returning to graduate school herself to pursue a doctorate degree. I also chose both of the teachers because they had a number of years of experience as TWI teachers and were on the “Spanish-side” of the school, meaning that they taught content in Spanish. Sra. Morales’ kindergarten class was part of the 90-10 program in which 90% of the instructional day was taught in Spanish. Sra. García taught Science, Math, and project time in Spanish for the fifth graders, while another fifth grade teacher taught Literature and Social Studies in English. The two fifth-grade teachers split the day so that half their students attended their classroom in the morning and half attended in the afternoon.

Briefly, there were other peripheral members of the school community that contributed to the study including the school principal, the school counselor, and the social worker. They were helpful in sharing insider knowledge about the workings of the school and the conception language classes for the parents.



## **Main Participants: Spanish and English Dominant Parents**

### **Parents' Demographic Characteristics**

Data gathered through written surveys revealed a portrait of the parent groups. Surveys were distributed and filled out on the last class meeting of the first session on November 21, 2013 and with new parents that came to the second session of classes on March 13, 2014. By the third session, all the parents that attended had already filled out a survey. However, since the parents at each class session differed, not everyone that participated in the language classes filled out a survey.

Eight surveys were collected from Spanish-dominant parents. These parents' education levels differed greatly from the English dominant parents. Three parents indicated that they had attended *la primaria*, or primary school; two parents had some *secundaria*, or middle school, education; one parent indicated she had completed *la preparatoria* or high school; and two parents had obtained *títulos* or degrees from a college or university. Of these two parents, one was a trained and practicing engineer and the other had an elementary education teaching degree but had never been able to practice. She explained to me that while she had been able to complete the training to be a teacher, her family couldn't afford to pay the required fee for a teaching *plaza*, or position at a school (Regina, March 5, 2014). The professions or jobs listed by the remaining Spanish-dominant parents included cleaning homes, employee of a hotel, babysitter, and home-maker.

Seventeen surveys in total were returned by English dominant parents. From these surveys it was learned that all of the English dominant parents participating in the classes had completed a four year college degree. Seven of the parents had obtained Bachelor of Arts and

nine parents indicated that they had some level of graduate work. One parent had a PhD and was a practicing psychiatrist and two parents held MBAs. The English-dominant parents were employed in various different sectors; their professions included realtor, a salesperson for a company, a journalist, a massage therapist, and home-makers.

All of the Latino/a parents involved in the language classes were from Mexico with few exceptions-- a father from Guanacaste, Costa Rica and a couple from San Marcos, Guatemala. The cities listed by parents from Mexico included Acapulco, Mexico City, and Celaya. Of the parents that filled out the survey, all of the parents indicated that their primary language at home was Spanish and that they or their spouse also spoke English with conversational fluency. None of the parents indicated that they spoke any additional languages or indigenous dialects of their home country. All of these parents had lived abroad for most of their life and the majority of them had arrived to the United States an average of eight to ten years ago. Many of the parents from the language classes participated in the survey and interviews.

Sixteen of the seventeen English dominant parents surveyed were white or Caucasian. One additional parent indicated his race as Asian. Their dominant language was English in the home with one exception, a couple from Germany that continued to speak German in the home with their daughter. Many parents indicated that they had traveled or continue to travel to other countries. Ten of the parents indicated that they had lived outside the U.S. Of those, seven parents had lived for more than a year and up to 35 years outside the U.S. in Germany, England, and Canada. Three additional parents indicated they had lived abroad for a short period of time of five to six months in Switzerland, China, Spain, and France. Six parents spoke more than one language including German, French, and Italian. For ease of comparing,

I have listed the parents by alphabetical order and divided the white English dominant participants from the Latino/a Spanish dominant participants. I also included a short description for the reader's convenience. (See Table 1 for a list and short description of Latino/a Spanish dominant parents and Table 2 for white English dominant parents).

Table 1: Latino/a Spanish Dominant Parents' Short Description

Name	Short description
Ana María	Spanish dominant mother from Celaya, Mexico; 9 <sup>th</sup> grade education; daughter in 2 <sup>nd</sup> grade; son in 7 <sup>th</sup> grade; attended sessions II and III; hotel employee; husband works away from home all week in construction; works for hotel cleaning rooms
Aracela	Spanish dominant mother from Mexico; son in 1 <sup>st</sup> grade; attended 1 <sup>st</sup> session of language classes; friend with Rachel; stay at home mom
Diana	Spanish dominant mother from Mexico City, Mexico; son in 1 <sup>st</sup> grade; biological child still in Mexico; attended 1 <sup>st</sup> session of language classes; attended math classes 2 <sup>nd</sup> session; high school education; works cleaning homes
Javier	Spanish dominant father from Guanacaste, Costa Rica; son in 3 <sup>rd</sup> grade and one in middle school; high fluency in English; planned to be in U.S. for 3-4 years; engineer
Lucía	Spanish dominant mother from Mexico; has three children; speaks both Spanish and English with children; 1 <sup>st</sup> grade education; stay at home mom
María Carmen	Spanish dominant mother from Mexico; daughter in 5 <sup>th</sup> grade; son in 2 <sup>nd</sup> grade; attended sessions II and III; stay at home mom
Pilar	Spanish dominant mother from San Marcos, Guatemala; attended half of 1 <sup>st</sup> session with her husband also from San Marcos; very high fluency in English; worked as cashier at grocery store
Rachel	Spanish dominant mother from Acapulco, Mexico; son in 1 <sup>st</sup> grade and infant son; attended session I and II; leader in session II; friend of Aracela; high school education; babysitter and stay at home mom
Regina	Spanish dominant mother from Acapulco, Mexico; son in 4 <sup>th</sup> grade and infant daughter; attended sessions II and III; trained as an elementary school teacher in Mexico ("Licenciatura en Educación Primaria"); stay at home mom

Table 2: White English Dominant Parents' Short Description

Name	Short description
Amy	White English dominant mother of daughter in Sra. Morales' kindergarten class; volunteered in classroom 2 <sup>nd</sup> semester and for school events; unsure of TWI for her daughter; attended all 3 sessions; former teacher and master's degree in education; stay at home mom
Ashley	White English dominant mother; attended session I only; ran the Read-a-thon; son in 1 <sup>st</sup> grade and toddler son; BA degree; free-lance journalist; passionate about social justice issues
Bobby	White English dominant father; attended session I and II; son in kindergarten; speaks some French; BA degree; realtor
Cameron	White English dominant mother; attended session I only; was pregnant and did not attend future sessions on account of new baby; son was in Sra. Morales' kindergarten class
David	White English dominant father; attended sessions I and II (periodically); son in Sra. Morales' kindergarten class and daughter in 4 <sup>th</sup> grade; small business owner
Frieda	German/ English dominant mother; attended all 3 sessions, some with her husband as well; volunteered at school by offering free massages; daughter in 2 <sup>nd</sup> grade; BA degree; from Germany; massage therapist
Kimberly	White English dominant mother of daughter in 4 <sup>th</sup> grade; son in 2 <sup>nd</sup> grade; toddler daughter; attended all 3 sessions; active in PTA and volunteering at school; BA degree; stay at home mom
Scarlett	White English dominant mother from England; moved to the U.S. when she married; travels to England frequently with her daughter who was in Sra. Morales' kindergarten class; attended all 3 sessions; sometimes left early prior to joint conversation period and skipped potlucks; BA degree; job in sales division of company
Shannon	White English dominant mother; attended all 3 sessions; children in 5 <sup>th</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> grades; Doctorate degree; psychologist; lived 15 years in Germany; speaks German fluently
Tiffany	White English dominant mother; attended sessions II and III; three children each in different schools; master's degree; lived in Paris during study abroad; part of team working to get teachers higher pay in the state of NC; stay at home mom

### **Parents' Reasons for Enrollment in TWI Program**

Parents' reasons for enrolling their son or daughter in the TWI program demonstrate the motivations and nature of parents who participated in the parent language classes and begins to paint a picture of the type of parents involved in these classes. It also lays some groundwork for understanding how parents approached the parent language classes and opportunities to build relationships cross cultural groups.

English dominant parents expressed many reasons why they had chosen to enroll their child in the TWI school. In addition to wanting them to learn a language other than English “given the population of the U.S.” at a young age when it is “just easier to do it from the beginning with less of the struggle” (Frieda, May 22, 2014), parents reasoned that even if their child did not end up using Spanish later in life, the process of learning an additional language early in life is good for one's brain's development. Many of the parents had researched the benefits of bilingualism for children's neuron development and said that it was after careful deliberation that they decided to enroll their children in the program. Kimberly added that her daughter was already a very bright preschooler and she thought she would be bored in a traditional kindergarten class. Adding Spanish would make it more challenging (May 22, 2014).

Three English dominant parents out of 14 total interviews with English dominant participants in the language classes mentioned that they were attracted to the TWI program because it exposed their children to another culture and increased the likelihood of their son or daughter having different experiences and classmates than in a traditional school in the area.

When we came here, you know, we lived in the neighborhood with lots of middle-class white people. We really wanted [our son] to go to a pre-school and an elementary school where there would be different people from us. To feel economically different, and language, color of skin, different names like all that stuff. We felt like we had the best chance of giving him a diverse picture of life by going to [PES] and learning Spanish and learning that, in fact, there are other cultures out there that not everyone lives the same way and there are people and places to learn about. (Cameron, December 11, 2013)

Likewise, Spanish-dominant parents felt that it was important that their children learn English and Spanish simultaneously so that they could be good speakers in both languages. For example, Diana, who met me with her son for dinner, said that she enrolled him the TWI program with hopes that he would not lose his Spanish: “Que no pierda su español. Porque yo hablo español y su papá habla español...Entonces es el beneficio que él aprenda más cosas y más costumbres de donde soy yo” (*That he not lose his Spanish. Because I speak Spanish and his father speaks Spanish... So, the benefit is that he learns more things and more customs from where I am.*) (December 2, 2014). Parents believed that if their children learned in a classroom where the language of instruction was Spanish, they also would learn more about their culture and their heritage.

Parents also enrolled their children in the TWI program with the fear that their family might be deported back to their home country. In that case, their children would have to know Spanish well enough to pick up their schooling there.

Aquí ha sido prácticamente. Mis hijos han crecido aquí. Nunca han vivido en México. Siempre han vivido aquí. Ellos no conocen México, aunque les hablamos de México, cómo es. Y yo los metí en el programa de dual language para que ellos, dado nuestro status que no es seguro y en cualquier momento pueden sacarnos del país. Entonces, siempre les inculco en ellos que tienen que aprender bien el español. Porque si estuvieran solamente en inglés si el día de mañana nos sacaran a México no sé cómo les vaya a ser en realidad para ellos. (María Carmen, March 5, 2014)

*Here it has been practically. My children have grown up here. They have never lived in Mexico. They have always lived here. They don't know Mexico, although we speak to them about Mexico, what it is like. And I put them in the dual language program so*

*that they, given our status that is not safe and in whatever moment they can pull us out of the country. So, I always instill in them that they have to learn Spanish well. Because if they were only in English and the day of tomorrow they sent us to Mexico, I don't know how it would be for them really.*

These motivations to enroll their children into the TWI program, exposed basic differences as well as similarities among Latino/a and white parents enrolled in the parent language classes. While both sets of parents wanted children to learn another language, English dominant parents saw learning another language as beneficial even if the child did not gain proficiency in the language because there are other related benefits to the brain when learning another language. On the other hand, Latino/a parents needed their children to retain or relearn Spanish in order to preserve their identity, ensure communication with family members, and in case the family was deported back to a Spanish-speaking place where children would have to enroll in school making knowing Spanish imperative.

### **Potential Benefits from Participation**

There were many potential benefits associated with voluntary participation in the study. With classroom teachers, reflection on practice may have given them the opportunity to think more critically about their classroom and brainstorm possibilities for future curricular decisions. For example, Tyrone Howard (2003) has argued that critical teacher reflection, especially about students' race and culture and teachers' personal positionality, is an important component of initiating culturally relevant teaching in the classroom.

Parents expressed appreciation in having time to think about and share their experiences and ideas about the school and language classes. For example, Kimberly, one of the white English mother participants in the study told me that it was helpful to talk over her impressions about the TWI program and the school during interviews. She said that it helped

her to organize her thoughts in a more coherent way and she expressed her hope that I would share the information learned during my study with the school (March 11, 2014). Part of my continued effort to give back to the school is to produce for them a report about key findings from my study. Although not significant, there was a raffle drawing for parents that participated in the study for two gift cards at a local grocery store.

Finally, it is possible that by opening their doors to the members of the research community, the school may have received some benefit; it is my hope that there was a positive effect in exchange for my access to the school. For example, I hope the school was helped by not having to pay for an English language teacher for the parents' classes; for my assistance in the kindergarten and fifth grade classrooms where I created materials, ran photocopies, and worked with small groups of students during instruction time. However, it is likely true that I learned much more from my time at PES interacting with its teachers and faculty members, observing classes, and teaching language classes with their parents, than I could ever repay them.

### **Data Analysis**

Baxter and Jack (2008) urged that in a case study “as in any other qualitative study the data collection and analysis occur concurrently” (p. 554). Therefore, when the study began, so too did the analysis of the data I was collecting. Data analysis is a highly personal endeavor as one attempts to make sense of the whole by breaking down things into its “meaningful parts for the purpose of examining them” (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 434). Therefore, as I collected data, I simultaneously transcribed fieldnotes from classroom observations, observations from the parent language classes, and conversations from interviews with teachers and parents. I included contextual details, initial impressions, and



body language of participants to help frame the interview transcripts. As I engaged in close study of the data through the process of transcription, initial assertions and questions about my observations were generated that in turn directed on-going data collection. One cannot deny the impact that the individual researcher makes upon her analysis of the data and the subsequent decisions made to collect additional data, pursue some leads but not others, and attend to particular participants and events. Charmaz (2005) acknowledged that data analysis is interconnected to everything before it:

The entire research process is interactive; in this sense, we bring past interactions and current interests into our research, and we interact with our empirical materials and emerging ideas...along with research participants and colleagues. Neither data nor ideas are mere objects that we passively observe and compile. (p. 510)

As the data collection ended in July of 2014, I engaged in deep data analysis in which I first immersed myself in the data by reviewing the entirety of the data collected during the previous 11 months and loading all of the data files onto the computer program Atlas TI. From there, I began initial data coding according to themes. Initial thematic analysis (Glesne, 2011) best fit the large quantity of data that I had collected and allowed me to begin to organize and make sense of it. Some of these themes used to code the data were descriptive in nature such as “communication between school and home;” “perceived advantage of TWI;” and “perceived benefits of parent language classes.” Some of the themes were analytical in nature such as “potential third space;” “vigilance and control;” and “school environment detrimental.” I also created codes in vivo, lifting directly from participants’ comments. This allowed me to stay close to the data collected (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). The process of coding itself prompted an additional close reading of the data. Savin-Baden & Major (2013) explained:

Coding allows for noting details and implications of data chunks. It also makes it easier to search data, make comparisons and identify patterns worthy of further investigation. Coding allows for a close study of data, whether the close reading of text, critical listening to an audio or marking of a visual image. (p. 421-422)

At the same time, I began to journal about particular aspects of interest to me, grouping thematic codes together under a heading such as the language classes; my own role as the researcher/ participant; school context; questions remaining; and recommendations for the school. Through journaling and organizing codes into larger categorical themes, initial findings began to emerge from the data. As findings began to coalesce, I sifted back through the data to find additional data sources that supported or discounted the findings of the study. This helped to strengthen the evidence or refine the findings accordingly. In this way, I alternated back and forth from the data to the analysis but always with a close eye on the data collected.

While in the field, during transcription and analysis, and in addition to the on-going thematic analysis of the data, I also was looking constantly at the data to identify potential signs that the third space was emerging. As first explained in the literature review, I followed Gutiérrez's (2008) findings in which she identified four key characteristics of third spaces *in the classroom*. First, students' funds of knowledge and cultures are valued. Secondly, *counterscripts*, or discourse that goes against the officially approved script, are picked up by the people in power positions and allowed to push out the boundaries of the officially accepted spaces and roles. Thirdly, there is collaboration and co-creation of knowledge among members of the space. And finally, there is movement toward reimagining one's future self that honors past experiences and allows for wide possibilities for the future. I applied the third space theory to this new context in which parents worked with one another in a school space, and in which third spaces represented new spaces making connections

across families and bridging school to home that would give new possibilities to the relationships and structures in the school. Openings of third spaces were looked for *during* language class meetings and in subsequent actions and reactions of the parents in moments of interaction and contact. Therefore, data analysis included a priori codes taken from these findings of Gutiérrez (2008) that were hypothesized to point toward the emergence of third spaces as parents and members of the school began: 1) valuing and adopting parents' funds of knowledge and cultures in to the school and classrooms 2) working in collaboration to co-create knowledge about the school and each other; 3) pushing back against the status quo with counterscripts; and 4) reimagining their own roles in the school and their shared future spaces.

### **Critical Ethnography**

Although this is not an ethnographic study, intertwined with the steps of data collection and analysis of the intrinsic case study methodology described above, I approached the research site informed by the epistemological stance promoted in critical ethnography. This critical positionality directed choices that I made in the field especially in terms of selection of participants. Critical ethnography, emerging from the rejection of positivistic paradigms in social science research popular from the 1900s through the 1950s, situates the researcher in the field (1) with an insistence that social inequities exist in our world; (2) the desire to work against these inequities in favor of social justice and an equitable society; (3) and firmly planted in and reflexive of her historical and cultural vantage point (Carspecken, 1996, 2001; Foley, 2002; Foley & Valenzuela, 2005). The researcher cannot put off nor temporarily walk away from these inherent characteristics that define her place in the research site. The ultimate goal of the critical ethnographer's work is

to produce knowledge that is “part of a long dialogic consciousness-raising process... [with] an ‘emancipatory intent’ or a ‘catalytic validity’ that challenges the status quo in some way” (Foley, 2002, p. 472). That is, the researcher hopes that her work will stimulate thinking about other’s experiences by providing an experiential text for the reader that reflects the constantly fluctuating distance between the observer and the observed and ultimately leads the reader to deeper understanding.

Critical ethnography is also dependent upon the researcher’s acquiescence to become a more open and vulnerable “witness” (Behar, 1996). To these ends, Behar (1996) exhorted the researcher to include raw emotions and to consider alternative ways of knowing including intuitive or subjective epistemologies when in the field. In being open, researchers must also be reflexive and revealing in their own emotions and their acknowledgement that “the author is a living, contradictory, vulnerable, evolving multiple self, who speaks in a partial, subjective, culture-bound voice” (Foley, 2002, p. 474). As human beings, each of us is in process of becoming and evolving. The process of studying other human beings necessitates the fact that there is no one objective Truth nor one “reality” that the researcher falsely purports to capture. Rather, this case study portrays my highly personal, highly subjective work with the members of the school community with the modesty and the honesty that my interpretation is only one of many possible portrayals of the same course of events that, with my presence, was forever altered. It is in communion and partnership with my participants that I will attempt to co-create their ethnographic accounts ultimately with the goal of achieving greater equity among parents and with their school.

## **Triangulation of Data**

Also on-going and continuous during the data collection period were efforts to triangulate the data (Stake, 2005). Triangulation of data serves to clarify meaning, not prove the existence of one right definitive reality or interpretation of that reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Stake, 2005). Therefore, I looked for relationships between observations, interviews, and documents as a “strategy that adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 5). Data were pulled from each of the sources to contribute to an understanding of the many individual events that made up the larger picture.

In case study, data from these multiple sources are then converged in the analysis process rather than handled individually. Each data source is one piece of the ‘puzzle,’ with each piece contributing to the researcher’s understanding of the whole phenomenon. (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 554)

## **Credibility of Data**

In order to establish the credibility of the data, I relied upon triangulation of the data from a variety of data sources; prolonged and persistent engagement in the field; member checks; recording my thoughts and impressions during the research process; and identifying a key insider in the field.

First, triangulation of data as described above contributes to the overall credibility of the data because it demonstrates the consistency of evidence across sources of data (Mertens, 2010). In addition, I followed the recommendations by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Mertens (2010) to ensure prolonged and persistent engagement in the research site by spending the entire academic year at the school and in the language classes to “avoid premature closure” (Mertens, 2010, p. 256) of the study. “Time at your research site, time spent in interviewing, and time building sound relationships with participants all contribute

to trustworthy data” (Glesne, 2011, p. 211). I did not stop the collection of additional data until saturation occurred (Glesne, 2011; Mertens, 2010). In both the language classes and the classroom visits, the data became redundant. As the end of the year neared, teachers shifted their attention to standardized testing and in the language classes the participation declined.

In addition, I did informal member checks with participants after interviews when questions arose about a particular passage or experience that the participant shared. This was helpful in ensuring that I had accurately captured the participant’s perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). There were times during the interviews that a participant mentioned something he/she thought I already knew, especially in reference to the history of the school or a particular teacher or event. Not wanting to stop the flow of the interview, I preferred to review the transcript and then check back in with the participant later on to clarify what they had said during the interview.

As an influential part of the research site due to my role as the language teacher, I recorded my personal thoughts, my apprehensions, and my questions that continued to change and evolve during the research process along with the descriptive field notes that I recorded in the classrooms and after language classes. This helped me to better understand how my own positionality and subjectivity changed over time (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Finally, I enlisted an insider at the research site with whom I could speak candidly and share my impressions about the research site. She was able to give me feedback and constructive criticism about my impressions. This follows Glesne’s (2011) advice to enlist others to provide feedback so that you can access if “your interpretation is the right one” (p. 211). While there are multiple “right” interpretations of the data, it lends credibility to the data by seeking other’s opinions about the data collected.

## Writing Choices

Given that TWI programs are still working to gain a strong foothold in the state of North Carolina and in effort to protect the identities of parents, children, their teachers, and administrators that have committed every day to pushing forward the work of TWI education, significant details about the TWI school and the city in which it is located have been omitted from this dissertation. In addition, all names have been changed to pseudonyms throughout the dissertation including the name of the school, the names of the teachers, the other faculty members, the parents, and their children.

I provide all the quotes in the language that they were originally given in order to preserve the intentionality and voice of the speaker as much as possible. Just by putting someone's words down on paper, you lose a lot of the expression, gestures, and other ways that the speaker interacts with you during an interview. As a reader, I appreciate seeing the original language of the quotes in case I want to check the translation made by the author to see if a word might have a different connotation. Therefore, after providing the quotes in the original language in which they were said, I translated them into English for the reader and set the translation off from the text with italics. It is important to note that while I did my best to retain the original meaning of the speakers, with translation nuances can sometimes get lost. I conducted all the interviews with Spanish dominant parents in Spanish. In occasions in which the transcripts of interviews led to more questions or uncertainty about meaning, I followed up with participants during the language classes to clarify my confusion. Bilingual teachers chose English or Spanish according to their preference during our conversations and often used a mix of both languages.

I also made the choice during writing to correct the grammar and reduce occasions in which the speaker used filler words during pauses (such as *hmm*, *like*, *ok*, and the equivalents in Spanish) in cases where the deletions didn't alter the meaning. This was an important part of writing in which I wanted to maintain a valid depiction of the parent and teacher participants as articulate speakers and given that they trusted me to portray them in the best light possible since they shared their personal perceptions and experiences with me.

### **Limitations**

There are a number of limitations associated with this study as referred to earlier. I agree with Glesne (2011) who wrote, "limitations are consistent with the partial state of knowing in social research, and elucidating your limitations helps readers know how they should read and interpret your work" (p. 214). Furthermore, describing limitations of a study up front also helps to demonstrate the trustworthiness of your data (Glesne, 2011). Therefore, I acknowledge in this section the many limitations to the study related to my role as the researcher, the relationships I was able to develop with members of the school community, and my observations in the TWI classrooms. There are also significant limitations of the study in terms of the design of the language classes and joint conversation period between parents and my ability to observe and record the many interactions that occurred between participants during the classes.

First, one major limitation of the study came from a deep sense of distance and cautious apprehension about my presence at the school and in the classrooms. It seemed that there was tension with the administrative team about visitors in general, although a frequent occurrence at the school. And while the principal extended full access to the school to me at the beginning of the school year, I got the impression that I was eyed anxiously because of



my affiliation with a university or perhaps the result of me not building a sufficient relationship with the principal. The principal had warned me that visitors in the past from the university had been critical of the literacy nights held for parents at the school and that while she was open to criticism it should be presented carefully and tactfully.

I was lucky to have an opportunity to talk with the principal prior to the beginning of the school year in which I learned about her vision for the school and her desires for the language classes. However, I was not invited into leadership planning meetings that discussed the parent education classes, although I also did not request access because I anticipated at the time that I would not be welcomed. I did not want to pressure the school members to allow me entry when I got the impression that the planning meetings were an important time for them to sort out internal issues that they preferred to keep private. This prevented me from learning more from the administrative team and from leadership meetings. Because I felt precarious in my position at the school, I did not request interviews with the administrative team members.

In addition, I had a hard time getting access to official school communication and ultimately failed to be included on mailing and call lists for the school despite my repeated requests. This was likely due to the fact that the teachers and faculty at the school were overwhelmed already with the work that they had to do on a daily basis and did not have time to accommodate my request. Had I been an insider at the school or district, I would have had better access to the school's official communication. This prevented me from staying abreast of new information and upcoming events planned at the school. Instead I had to rely on conversations with teachers and parents who were sometimes also unaware of up-coming events at the school.

Secondly, as an outsider to the school, since I was neither a teacher nor a parent of a child at the school, there was reluctance at first to provide clarity about issues related to the school as school members and parents tried to sort out who I was and why I was there. Only after developing relationships with some of the members of the school community was I able to begin to gain a more clear understanding of the experience at the school and classes.

There are also limitations to this study related to the fact that I spent the majority of my time in only two classes at PES, kindergarten and fifth grade. Therefore, I can offer observations from these classroom observations coupled with periodic visits that I was able to make to other classrooms, however, I cannot draw conclusions about the experiences in one classroom compared to those across the school. While parents did share their own impressions and observations from other classrooms in the school, I did not have the opportunity to triangulate that particular data given the large number of teachers and classrooms in the school.

An additional significant limitation of the study is that in my role of language teacher for the English language classes, I gained a more intimate understanding of the data from the English language classes than from the Spanish language classes because I lived the experience of the classes and could pick up on the atmosphere of the class and the discussions among parents. While the videotapes were helpful in providing a preliminary record of what was done and said during the Spanish language classes, the videos were often aimed at one group but picked up the audio from another group. The audio was not usually good enough to transcribe full conversations among parents and therefore, it is likely that I missed some of the interactions among parents and with their teacher.

Finally, a significant limitation of the study, yet one that also reveals future directions for research, is that the design of the language classes combined Spanish and English dominant parents in an effort to develop connections between them and between parents and school. However, this work preceded any real or long-term effort at the school to build those connections first within the Latino/a parent community. Given the context of North Carolina and the disenfranchised status of Latinos as a whole, it may have been premature to draw the parents together in hopes that they would build relationships across linguistic and cultural borders. On the other hand, the findings of the study point to areas of success during the parent language classes and also identify areas in which future efforts should be focused.

### **Statement of Positionality**

Before moving on to share the findings of the qualitative case study, I want to conclude this chapter with a statement of my own positionality that I carried with me to the field, and as I interacted with members of the school community and back at my home where I finished the data analysis and this written report.

I entered the field as a critical researcher. I did not come to this research as an objective and scientific being. I recognize and am troubled by the inequality that forms the base of schools, and when I set out, I hoped that my work would promote critical consciousness of the reader and work to break free from this status quo (Carspecken, 2001). The researcher is present throughout the entire research process and impacts all the decisions made in the field and about the data even when there are claims of objectivity. Therefore, I acknowledge that I bring with me to the field my own past experiences, perspectives, values, skills, and characteristics, coloring the lens through which I observe and record interactions at the school. Yet, I am not a finished work. I am not static nor fixed. I am also changing,

evolving sometimes temporarily according to the environment; sometimes permanently when my beliefs chafe against a new reality that I experience. Foley (2002) wrote about being a critical ethnographer in which, "...the self is a multiple, constructed self that is always becoming and never quite fixed, and the ethnographic productions of such a self and the "cultural other" are always historically and culturally contingent" (p. 473). That is, how we see the world is always situated in time and place and this must be acknowledged in my analysis and portrayal of the people I met and worked with at PES.

In effort to ground my epistemology in "historical experiences with economic, cultural, racial, and gender struggles" (Foley, 2002, p. 475) I share some of the experiences that have shaped me personally, yet may or may not define me today and my positionality.

I was born in the late 1970s in a small town in Kansas, the "heartland" of the U.S. Summers were hot and long; I remember my glee as a young child when the firefighters opened up the hydrants on our street in the middle of the summer, and my sister and I played for hours in the rushing water. Winters dumped feet of snow; I remember my dad building a snow fort out of blocks of ice and finding "reindeer tracks" on Christmas morning. We lived on the corner of a small street in a residential area. Behind our home, a grassy alley connected neighbors' homes and we would ride bikes and play in each other's yards.

We soon moved to the mountains of North Carolina where I spent the rest of my childhood and adolescence. My family's weekends and summer holidays were spent exploring the Blue Ridge Parkway and the Great Smokey Mountains nearby and therefore, I developed from a young age an appreciation of nationally protected parklands.

I was lucky to live in a family that was financially stable and in the middle class. I always had everything I needed for school including school supplies, clothing, breakfast and a packed lunch to take along. Unlike many families living in the United States where it was reported that more than 46.2 million or 15.1% of the population lived in poverty in 2010 (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2011), we were fortunate enough to be able to meet our needs.

Growing up and going to school in North Carolina, I enjoyed many privileges as a member of the dominant white and English-speaking society. Peggy McIntosh (1989) used “an invisible knapsack” as a symbol of the white privilege that people carry around with them oblivious about the “unearned assets which [one] can count on cashing in each day” (p. 30). Coming to understand the many ways my race gave me an unearned advantage was important for working with communities that are culturally, racially, and linguistically different than my own. In common with McIntosh (1989):

My schooling gave me no training in seeing myself as an oppressor, as an unfairly advantaged person, or as a participant in a damaged culture. I was taught to see myself as an individual whose moral state depended on her individual moral will. (p. 31)

I always assumed that I did well in school and got good grades because I worked harder than my classmates. While it may have been true that I was studious, a lot of my success in schooling filtered down from the academic success of my parents who were the first generation of their families to go to college and eventually to graduate school. In general, though, it was my family’s whiteness and the important capacity to blend into the dominant culture that propelled my extended family out of poverty as new immigrants from Poland and Ireland and into the middle class. Darder (2012) wrote about the theory of meritocracy that forms the basis of educational practice in which those that work hard and

are talented move ahead when in reality, it is their reward for mirroring the dominant cultural values and behaviors that schools therefore reify and reproduce. We are trained to think that our whiteness has nothing to do with our success in life when in reality we are complicit in the system that rewards whiteness and constrains those of color.

It wasn't until a Masters seminar in the School of Education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill when I read Beverly Tatum's 1994 article, "Teaching white students about racism: The search for white allies and the restoration of hope" that I began to examine the white privilege that I have benefited from since my childhood. I felt a glimmer of hope when I learned about the notion of *ally* and learned from the example of other white mentors that had connected their professional work as educators to people's struggle for equal rights and opportunities in life.

Beyond race and class, I also bring my gender, my sexuality, my "legal" status, my dominant language of English, and my educational level with me as I travel in and out of the school spaces with the teachers and families. As a female I fit the image of teacher and my experience as a mother afforded me an ability to connect with other mothers in a way that a man in my position might lack. My initial conversations with other parents were often about their children to which I could relate because of my own experiences with my children. My sexuality, status, dominant language, and educational level all set me firmly in the privileged sector of U.S. society that is heteronormative; intolerant toward those without U.S. citizenship; and biased against those that have not attended institutions of higher education. All of these factors lead me toward the possibility of success in this culture. I acknowledge that I participate and get advantages from, yet also struggle against, a system that propagates deficit views about CLD students and their families as being unable or unwilling to "partake

of the educational opportunities so readily, fairly, and freely offered them by a system of free public education” (Darder, 2012, p. 13) and therefore, undeserving of the privileged positions in American society.

I draw, also, upon other historical experiences after being an educator for nine years. I taught English as a Second Language (ESL) to adults that were both newcomers and others that had lived and worked in the community for many years but were originally from other countries including Mexico, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Iran, and China. These adults would gather in the classroom of a community college after a long day of predominately physical work, many of them in construction or house cleaning, to sit in the classroom eager to improve their English. I found them inspiring, brave, and generous. Many of them became my friends that I still see today. I mentioned one of them in the opening of the introduction as she has begun a successful business of selling empanadas, pastries filled with pineapple or sweet caramel, from her home. Through my friendship with these mothers from my ESL class, I have learned about the arduous and complex path to citizenship in this country. Over coffee, they have shared many stories about their children attending public school and facing discrimination by teachers and other children, and how they have worked with their children to try to maintain their self-esteem and love of their Mexican heritage. I see how much they miss their own parents and siblings because of the distance and cost of traveling back and forth to Mexico, and have come to understand their decision to leave that all behind in hope for a better future here in the United States.

I also had the opportunity to work with college-aged students of all backgrounds when I taught Spanish at a nearby university including students who were the first in their family to go to college; Muslim women that wore hijabs to class; visiting students from

China; and adults, including military veterans, that were attending college later in life. It is through these experiences working and learning with others especially as a teacher that I developed an awareness of the beauty and strength of other people's lives no matter how different they initially seemed from my own life. It is with that attitude and perspective that I approached my work with white and Latino/a parents as they learned Spanish or English respectively and with the classroom teachers, two of whom were Latina and one that had come to Spanish language and culture much in the same way that I did, becoming enthralled that learning Spanish opened doors to meeting new people and having new experiences.

My own journey learning Spanish, which I shared individually with mothers at the beginning of our interviews together, has been long and is on-going. It began with the classroom and then living abroad in Spain during my junior year of college, and finally, living in Mexico in preparation to teach Spanish in North Carolina. Yet, it was actually in my position as a teacher of English to students from other language backgrounds years later where I realized the potential that Spanish afforded me. Had I not known Spanish, I would not have had opportunities to meet and get to know many wonderful families living and working in North Carolina.

Finally, there is another layer that adds complexity to my positionality in the field. The work I did at the school and with its teachers and families is against the backdrop of what I am going to do with the information that I am gathering. I understood as I entered the field the possibility of being perceived as in the words of Villenas (1996), "the colonizer, in her university cloak" (p. 712). Academic study of "Others," that is, those that are "different" from you, is problematic if the study objectifies them or attenuates the serious concerns that they have in their current lived situation. Therefore, I attempted to breakdown the artificiality



and distance between myself and my work in the school by spending extended time in the classrooms, working with students one-on-one and in small groups, being present during school events, and teaching the language classes. My interviews with other parents and with some of the teachers were often collaborative in which together we attempted to make sense of the school environment.

Yet, it must be noted that there has been a long history in the social sciences of research “as a tool of domination” (Fine, 1994, p. 70) “deeply colonial, surveilling, and exotic” (Fine, 1994, p. 75). The researched becomes the oppressed, the researcher the oppressor exerting her will upon the Other (Fine, 1994). However, Fine (1994) in her article, “Working the hyphens: Reinventing self and other in qualitative research” urged researchers to “work the hyphen” between Self and Other, that is, stay within the blurry space between binaries without trying to simplify things by classifying things or people one way or another as like yourself or different from yourself. It is my hope that in my position as “ally,” I can “work the hyphen” by being in solidarity with communities of color. White researchers must look for ways in which they can earn trust with the community, offer services in exchange for people’s time, and engage with the community to learn and address concerns that they identify. Wallerstein and Duran (2006) urged “cultural humility” especially for white researchers working with communities of color in which they engage in on-going critical reflection in an effort to check power imbalances and work toward collaborative partnerships in communities. Humility and integrity are keys to making one’s work respectful of the community’s aims to work for justice and equity (Wallerstein & Duran, 2006).

### **CHAPTER 3: PARENT LANGUAGE CLASSES: EXPECTATIONS, EXPERIENCES, AND THIRD SPACES OPENING?**

“Despite their invisibility, questions about equity and social justice are at the core of education. As such, education is always a political undertaking” (Nieto, 2010, p.1).

In July of 2013, I met with the principal, Dr. Rebecca Williams, in her office at PES. It was a typical summer morning in North Carolina—hot and humid. My skirt clung to my legs, moist with sweat despite the air conditioned interior of my car that I had just left, as I walked up to the school. The school had the feeling of summer where you feel the gleefulness and freedom of not having kids there and the wide-open possibilities of making new plans for the next school year. I remembered from my own experience teaching how every year promised the possibility of making things better; doing things differently; and starting over. Yet there is another feeling of panic close on the horizon as August rapidly approached and with it all the work left to be done in preparation for the arrival of children and parents to the classrooms. The weeds and grasses all growing together stood almost one foot tall in the round bed where buses sat parked idly for the summer. Inside, there were other signs of work in progress—old equipment, discarded VCRs, TV carts, and computers from last school year sat heaped in one corner of the main office atrium.

Along the opposite wall were cardboard boxes presumably with new equipment and books for the school waiting to be unpacked and moved to its new home (July 26, 2013).

The morning of July 26, 2013 marked the beginning of my fieldwork at PES. Over the course of the year, I would come to feel a part of this school, mainly through my eventual friendship with Verónica Ramos, the Spanish language teacher, and invested in the possibility of the school to become a humanizing place for children and families alike. In this chapter, I begin to answer the first research question of my study—whether connections, seen through growing understanding and knowledge, are made among parents and between parents and the school during the parent language class. To that end, I will build upon the background of the parent language classes introduced in previous chapters and present further information on the design of the classes and the expectations of the parents, the language teacher, and the administration in hopes of providing the reader with deeper understanding of the starting place of the classes and the mind-set of its participants. Next, I will weave the experiences of the Latino/a and Anglo parents together, examining how bridges were built between parents and from parents to the school and how parents began to learn and gain understanding about each other and the two-way immersion (TWI) school itself. However, many tensions and barriers, which I will describe, limited the success of the parent language classes. I conclude the chapter with an analysis about the degree to which third spaces began to open through the parent language classes.

### **Parent Language Classes Origins**

As I approached the doors to the school on the day of my initial meeting with Dr. Williams, I saw a fellow graduate student, Amanda, waiting for me in the lobby. Facilitated by the relationship that our faculty mentor, Dr. Claudia Cervantes-Soon, had established

previously with Dr. Williams, Amanda and I had arranged to meet with her to discuss our respective research projects that would take place in the school during the academic school year—Amanda’s with students and mine with parents and teachers. Balancing the lily that I had brought for Dr. Williams in one hand, I pulled open the door and felt the cool relief of air conditioning. After waiting for a few minutes in the lobby, Dr. Williams came to welcome us. She gave Amanda a hug and asked her how the summer had been. Amanda’s son also attends PES as a student and Amanda has been an active parent at the school. Turning to me, Dr. Williams said hello and thanked me for the plant. She welcomed us into her office, and we sat down together at a large wooden oblong table. I gave Dr. Williams a typed paper that described the proposed research studies and we discussed her expectations of us and our research at the school. She shared with us her vision for the school that year and challenges that she anticipated. One of her main goals, she reasoned was to build relationships this year - - relationships between students and between teachers. She also emphasized the importance of maintaining connections with the research community and the university, yet warned that we need to present criticism with “delicacy and good timing,” sharing with us previous unpleasant experiences with researchers at her school that she felt unfairly criticized the school programs and its teachers.

Dr. Williams is an efficacious woman. She is focused on her job as principal and the difficult task she has before her to prep a school for the start of the school year each fall requiring her to coordinate the hiring of teachers, moving supplies and equipment to classrooms, and preparing the physical school for the onslaught of visitors, parents, and children in a few short weeks. She is and has been a strong advocate of two way immersion (TWI) programs for a number of years and argued that is it a long-term approach and “not

just a band-aid” (July 26, 2013) for the overwhelming problem that she has seen in her practice as principal, and prior to that as an elementary teacher, of the achievement gap between majority and minority students. She has worked with a TWI program during the eight years that she has been principal after being a classroom teacher in an elementary school for nine additional years. She represents one of the dedicated professionals in public schools with more than 20 years of service and expertise.

Dr. Williams is a white woman. She said that she has had opportunities to take Spanish classes but has not been successful. Dr. Williams insisted she does not know any Spanish beyond “hola” (hello) and “adios” (goodbye) (July 26, 2013). While likely an exaggeration, Dr. Williams was not observed trying to incorporate any Spanish language into her conversations with other teachers, staff, parents, or children. In school-wide assemblies and in parent meetings, she spoke entirely in English. With parents, she always had a translator at her side, but with the children she spoke in English and seemed to assume that they could understand her. For example, at a student assembly in January 2014, she spoke crisply into the microphone welcoming students to a kindergarten assembly and giving commands for the children to sit down and be quiet: “Criss-cross apple sauce, hands in the lap, voices at zero, and ears ready to listen” (January 17, 2014). This is a sharp distinction from the classrooms where most of the language of instruction is in Spanish. On several other occasions, including an end-of-quarter award ceremony for students and parents, an assistant principal or other faculty member co-presented with Dr. Williams on stage, and they took turns speaking in English and then Spanish. In this way, they did not lose a lot of time by translating every sentence. Rather, they complemented each other and relayed that Spanish

and English are the languages of the school. Still, because of Dr. William's lack of Spanish language fluency, often the language of business switched to English.

When I talked with Dr. Williams, I saw the thoughtfulness that she brings to her job. She believes strongly in her work and its worth. She knows the research literature on TWI and that it is beneficial for Latino/a children in terms of building their literacy in both their home language and in English. But there is also a sense of efficiency as she tends to get things done and keep moving. She doesn't look back, but always forward in how to improve what they already have. Dr. Williams will face and has faced resistance from the community on the importance of TWI schools for both Spanish and English dominant children. For this reason, she was cautious about opening the school to us as researchers. She stressed the importance of "emphasizing what was going on good in the school while under the table working on the problems" (July 26, 2013). While Dr. Williams acknowledged that there were areas of improvement at her school, her desire to present everything as polished, while likely protective to a certain point, may have been detrimental in delaying work to make improvements since the problems were all hidden "under the table."

### **Background of Parental Education Classes**

One positive initiative of the school this year was Dr. Williams' decision to support parents' requests by offering a series of parental educational classes. Dr. Williams shared at our initial meeting in July that these classes emerged from focus groups with teachers and parents the previous year where the idea had originally surfaced. From the focus groups, a core group of leaders were identified, and they met to review the suggestions and make plans for the new school year. This planning team, according to Dr. Williams, included both Anglo and Latino/a parents who worked together to create a plan for the year that would be more

“intentional about culture” (July 26, 2013) by making events and parent classes more culturally appropriate for the school’s population. It was not until much later that I learned through my faculty mentor, Dr. Claudia Cervantes-Soon, that Dr. Williams had shared her hopes for the parent language classes that would include a joint conversation time; she had been planning on implementing these classes a year in advance in response to the continuing divisions among parents along cultural and linguistic lines and as a way to structure their interactions in a seemingly natural way (personal communication with Dr. Claudia Cervantes-Soon, September 10, 2014). During our initial meeting, Dr. Williams suggested parents could discuss norms and traditions around cultural celebrations like birthday parties to begin to “build cultural understanding across groups” (July 26, 2013).

In addition to the parent education classes, one of the changes the parent leadership group suggested to make the school more “culturally appropriate” was the school fair traditionally held in June, could instead be “Carnival” this year and correspond with the timing of carnivals held in Spanish-speaking countries prior to Lent each year. Another suggestion made by the parent committee was to move the traditional Read-a-thon to correspond with “El Día del Libro,” the Day of the Book, a holiday held on April 23<sup>rd</sup> in many Spanish-speaking countries (July 26, 2013). Dr. Williams was committed to supporting these efforts that she hoped would counteract the hegemony of English: “I think because we are immersed so much in white American culture, we will go to great lengths to counter that” (July 26, 2013).

As I left the meeting with Dr. Williams and Amanda, I had more questions than when I started. I began to realize how little I knew about the school, its history, and its many players. As Dr. Williams talked, there were so many questions I wanted to ask, (Who made

up the parent leadership group? How is changing school festivals and talking about holidays going to make a significant difference in terms of relationships among two very different parent communities?), but I got the impression that for the moment, it was best to wait and see what happened. One thing was clear—I needed to build relationships with members of the school community to whom I could ask these questions and the ones still to come.

The kindergarten and first grade literacy coach for the school, Verónica Ramos, who had previous experience teaching English language classes to immigrant parents, was appointed by Dr. Williams to lead and coordinate the Spanish/English language parent classes at PES. However, Dr. Williams had not informed Verónica of this job duty nor her vision for the classes and therefore, Verónica knew nothing about the parent classes when I first contacted her via email in late July 2013 to introduce myself and to offer to help teach the language classes.

Verónica and I finally met for the first time on September 9, 2013 in her office. I could tell that she had just moved into her office since it had unopened boxes on the floor and a bare desk. The wall, too, was bare except for a few random bright yellow post-it notes with reminders clinging here and there. On her table, though, were stacks of papers and books that she was labeling for a classroom book set. She pushed them aside and invited me to sit down. I was surprised by how young she was, perhaps based upon my previous experience that the “instructional coaches” that I worked with were always very seasoned teachers at the end of their career. Verónica, on the other hand, is young, in her mid-thirties, and it was clear that she is just getting started in her career and is a talented and passionate educator. Verónica has a lot of positive energy and is the type of person that seems a little intimidating, at first, but as I got to know her, I liked how she jumped into whatever she was doing with confidence.



Verónica is originally from Buenos Aires, Argentina, the only sister to six brothers and therefore, as she explained, a natural-born teacher (December 16, 2013). With a strong ability to pick up languages, she took to English in her childhood. Bilingual education in Spanish and English is standard in Argentina, she explained to me, and by high school she was taking all college placement courses in English. She has made a new life for herself in the United States, living now with her American husband and traveling only to visit family in Argentina from time to time for extended vacations.

During our first meeting, she asked me about my research, and I responded, explaining my plan. She nodded her head listening. I asked her about the plans for the language classes, and she explained that Dr. Williams had instructed her to not do anything yet and to let the year get started first before taking them on. After talking with Verónica later in the year I learned that Dr. Williams did not communicate clearly her desire to have the joint conversation period between parents as an element of the parent language classes in hopes of promoting cross cultural relationships. In addition, this was evident from the fact that after the first session of classes there was a possibility of eliminating the joint conversation period because Verónica thought that it was negatively impacting the number of Latino/a parents participating in the classes. However, Verónica expressed her hesitation because she told me that it was an important part of my research study and that I had implemented the joint conversation period. This indicated that like me, she was also not aware of this aspect of the original intention of her principal regarding the language classes.

In general, Verónica seemed nonplussed about teaching the language classes. Sure, she had taught parent English classes before and had enjoyed becoming “like family” with the parents, but she was unsure of the expectations that Dr. Williams had about these classes

and understood the time and energy commitment that the classes would take. At the end of our short meeting she said that she would contact me as soon as she heard anything more about the classes. I left her office feeling unsettled and still not knowing much about the classes.

Verónica and I communicated several times via email and met again briefly prior to the night of information and registration for the parent classes in late September. That evening parents gathered in the school cafeteria. There was excitement and buzz in the air as parents greeted one another and looked for a spot to sit down. Dr. Williams, with a translator at her side, called the parents together and after welcoming them, she introduced the three options for parent classes by saying:

We are here because when the planning team began meeting last year for preparation... [and] the most important thing that came out of our meetings was the importance of connecting with the families and community of our school. One class is a reflection of a standing collaboration that we have with the university; one class is to close the so-called digital divide; and one class is the result of a parent forum last spring where parents expressed the desire to learn the other language. So, spread the word to your friends and to your neighbors. We are excited to offer three sessions with three options for parents. (September 26, 2013)

Anglo and Latino/a parents in the language classes later confirmed that they had requested the school to host classes for parents and were pleased that they were being offered (Frieda, November 18, 2013 and Ana María, March 17, 2014). Following this brief introduction, parents were directed toward the classrooms where they were divided between Anglo and Latino/a parents for presentations from representatives of each class.

As Dr. Williams had said, the Thursday night parent education classes included other options besides the Spanish/English language classes. The class that was a “standing collaboration...with the university” was a math class, taught in Spanish by a university math

education professor. Its goal was to expose parents to the math topics that their children were learning in the classroom, and it incorporated similar techniques and activities that were used to teach math to children. The school counselor, Valencia Acosta, was involved in the planning and facilitation of this session.

The technology classes, intended to close the “digital divide,” were taught by an instructor from the district in English but translated through a translator simultaneously to Spanish. Topics covered included creating an email account; identifying places in the community where parents could access computers and the internet; navigating the internet; negotiating social networking websites; and setting limits for children with computers and the Internet. The school’s social worker, Kelly Jones, was in charge of running this class and introduced the class to the parents gathered on the info night. She was also in attendance to observe and help out during the class meetings. Kelly later lamented privately to me that originally the technology class participants were going to receive free internet connections at their homes via the local cable provider, but shortly after the classes began, that deal fell through. She was disappointed by this because she knew that even if the school could find donated computers for families in need, without an internet connection, they would not be used for much. The school attempted to make computers more accessible for all parents by putting four desktop computers in the front lobby where parents could check email and work as they desired. However, towards the end of the year, I asked the school’s secretary if any parents ever used the computers, and she told me that it was very rare that anyone used them.

When it was our turn to present, Verónica and I shared information about the goals of the parent language classes. I felt nervous introducing myself in both groups, wanting to make a good impression on the parents, and hopeful that many of them would sign-up to take

the language classes. First, we met with the English dominant parents that were squeezed into an extra classroom filled with large wooden tables. Most parents sat while others stood lining the walls; some moms balanced toddlers on their hips, swaying back and forth as they listened. After introducing ourselves, we described the design of the classes to learn and practice basic conversations in Spanish based upon a central topic each week. During a portion of the class, we explained, parents would work with learners of the English language classes to practice the new language learned during class. Parents nodded and smiled as we presented the information. We passed around cookies and a sign-up sheet for parents to indicate their interest along with their child's name and teacher through which we would send future communication about the classes.

We moved across the hallway and waited for the presentation on the technology class to end. The room was also filled to capacity with Latino/a parents. Again many of them held swaddled babies close and sat or stood watching. They smiled back at us and nodded in agreement as we presented information about the class. Afterward, as parents snacked on cookies, many parents approached Verónica and me to ask questions about joining the class and the level of difficulty of the class. One mother approached me and in very clear English asked me if it would be ok if she accompanied her husband who did not know much English to the classes. I would later learn that this woman was named Pilar. She had a very high proficiency in English but her husband, in contrast, spoke very little English. She was anxious to support him in learning English. I told her that he would be fine but that she was welcome to attend with him if she wanted. I assured her that everyone would be learning and making mistakes together and that he would be ok. Many parents had questions about whether they should take language classes or another class during the first session.

Parents were asked to choose which of the three classes they would like to take each six week session with the intention that parents could rotate through the classes taking the technology, math, and language classes during the course of the year. In reality, most English dominant parents took only the Spanish classes, and most Latino parents attended only one six week session. In some cases, a couple would choose to attend classes together and one parent, typically the mother, would attend language classes, and the other parent would attend the technology or math class. Complimentary childcare was offered in the gymnasium during the time of the classes each week. A teaching assistant from the school was offered supplemental pay to provide the childcare during the classes. Parents liked this because they or their children often knew the childcare provider. The downside was that because of the large number of older children, the school could not provide care for siblings younger than kindergarten age. Therefore, many parents with multiple young children had to provide their own childcare or make other arrangements in order to attend the classes.

And thus, the language classes for parents at PES for the 2013-2014 school year began.

### **Principal's Expectations about Classes**

The goal of the principal, Dr. Williams, was to fulfill a number of promises to parents who had requested language classes and math classes for parents. Math classes had been offered previously to parents with children in a TWI program, and since then, they had been requested by other Latino/a parents. Therefore, a university professor and a teaching assistant taught the classes as volunteers to support the school and its parents (personal communication with Dr. Claudia Cervantes-Soon, September 18, 2014). Dr. Williams also argued that community connections are a “pillar of the school” (July 26, 2013) and therefore,

she was open to university members participating in the school. She saw the parent language classes as a way in which she could support the building of cross-cultural relationships between Latino/a and Anglo parents at the school. Dr. Williams had many years of experience working in TWI programs and recognized the deep-seated divisions among her parent population. It was with the best intentions to build equity and foster real connections among the two communities that Dr. Williams committed to the parent language classes (personal communication with Dr. Claudia Cervantes-Soon, September 10, 2014).

On the other hand, once Dr. Williams set up the parent education classes by enlisting the literacy coach, Verónica, the social worker, Kelly, and the school counselor, Valencia, to take charge of each individual class, and after attending the opening informational session and first night of classes, she was no longer seen. It was likely that Dr. Williams, despite her intentions otherwise, got caught up in the day to day business of the school and her attention to the parent classes was re-directed toward other issues. Principals and teachers have a lot of pressures and concerns to contend with and often succumb to having to let go of one or more of their initial plans. Scholars including Torelli and Gmelch (1992) and Brimm (1983) have explored the many factors that cause stress in the lives of school administrators and their detrimental effects to their job satisfaction and even their health.

Therefore, when Verónica requested to do more for parent recruitment, such as post signs and meet parents in the carpool drop-off lane, the principal told her the all-school phone messages and the flyer sent home with each kid was enough. Likely concerned that her teacher would over-extend herself, Dr. Williams counselled Verónica to stick with the communication methods that they were already using. This went against the tactics Verónica knew worked and had personally used in the past, especially with the minority language

population parents and therefore, she expressed frustration about the principal's response and not being able to do more to recruit parents (July 16, 2014).

### **Language Teachers' Expectations about Classes**

According to Verónica, the goal of the classes was to invite parents to the school and for them to feel comfortable in this setting. She also hoped that each group would learn some language of the opposite group and finally, that parents would become more involved in their children's schooling through the language classes. Verónica explained the goals:

We want parents to come to the school and they feel comfortable and... that both the American parents of English-speaking background at least can learn to communicate a little in Spanish because at least in the lower grades many of the teachers don't speak any English or speak very little English or at least can speak a little with their children too and the same with those of Spanish...[and] to form community and for the parents to begin to get involved more because we all know from the research that parents' involvement in the schooling is fundamental in the success of their children and if the parents don't come to school, then they can't really be involved. (December 16, 2013)

Verónica was operating from a traditional perspective of parental involvement in which "if the parents don't come to school, then they can't really be involved." It is unclear if the desire to "form community" means between parents, across cultural groups, or with the school. Verónica also expected that the classes would not be too different than the English language classes she had taught in the past at another school to a group of parents from Latin American countries, Iran, Iraq, and China.

As the other main language instructor, I also had expectations about the parent language classes. While I never mentioned it to Verónica, I wanted to see if the joint conversation periods between parents could tap into third spaces in which parents began to form strong connections with one another and by sharing with one another about their children's teachers, their experiences in the classroom, and the parents' perceptions of the

school, they would begin to question who benefited most from the TWI program. It is interesting to note that both Verónica and I were under the impression that the joint conversation period was a product of my study and therefore, I was responsible if that part of class did not go well. Therefore, I always felt nervous and under pressure at the joint conversation period to maximize the time the parents had together, to explain the tasks clearly, and to try to capture the interactions between parents during that time.

### **Design of Parent Language Classes**

#### **Schedule of Classes**

The parent language classes in English and Spanish met at the school in classrooms in the fourth and fifth grade wings. There were three sessions of classes: October 10-November 21; February 20-March 20; and April 17-May 15. During the first session, two classes of parents studied Spanish. Parents were organized into the groups depending upon their self-selection of beginning or advanced learner. The language teachers included Verónica, the literacy specialist from the school, an adjunct Spanish instructor from a local university, and myself. Two additional volunteers helped with the English classes. During the first session, the mother-in-law of the school counselor assisted with the English classes, and the second session, a university student volunteered in the class as part of a service component of a class she was taking.

The classes were held on Thursday evenings beginning at 6:00 p.m. and ending at 7:30 p.m. During the first hour, English and Spanish classes met separately for language instruction. From 7:00-7:30 p.m., English and Spanish dominant parents met together for a joint conversation time. Originally, we met in the school's cafeteria for the joint conversation



period due to the number of parents. However, due to limited time together and the inability to rearrange seating in the cafeteria, during the second and third sessions, we accommodated the parents in one of the classrooms for the conversation time. At 7:30 p.m., the parents were asked to pick up their children in the gym or when class went over the allotted time, as it typically did, the childcare providers walked the kids to the cafeteria or to the classrooms for dismissal.

## **Site**

Verónica arranged for the language classes to meet in classrooms in which the target language was also taught during the day with the idea that parents could look around the walls and read the signs and announcements printed in the target language. Since the classes met in the classrooms recently vacated by fourth and fifth grade students and not yet cleaned, evidence of the day's work was still present—papers, pencils, markers, and books filled cubbies and desks.

## **Typical Class Activities**

The language classes were designed to be communicative. At the end of each class meeting, the goal was for parents to be able to talk to another person in the target language about the shared topic of the evening. Classes typically began with a short warm-up or ice-breaker. Then, teachers presented a limited amount of vocabulary or phrases related to a particular topic. For example, the topics covered in the first session included: Getting to know you; family members; birthdays, traditions, and celebrations; food; and health and ailments. Phrases and chunks of language were introduced in context. For example for the health and ailments class, body parts were first reviewed with a “Simon Says” (or “Simón Dice”) game. Next the verb “to have” was introduced to describe symptoms such as to have a

backache, headache, fever, cold, and flu. Next, the parents incorporated the new vocabulary and phrases into context with partners. As parents moved around the classroom they held a picture of a symptom that they described to a classmate. Finally, during the joint conversation period, parents practiced similar conversations in which they described their pretend symptoms and ailments, then gave advice in response as they took turns speaking in English and Spanish.

Given the short amount of time allotted for instruction, rarely was there enough time for a thorough explanation of grammar. However, increasingly toward the end of the year, due to parents' requests for more grammar and writing, more grammar was gradually added into the Spanish and English classes.

### **Parents' Feedback about Classes**

At the end of each class meeting during the first session of classes and then at the end of each subsequent session, Verónica and I solicited feedback from the parents on what they had learned, what they liked, and what they would like to improve or change. A common complaint from English dominant students during the first session was that the classes were not focused enough on grammar. The language classes were not structured like a traditional world language class in which students were introduced to verbs, tenses, and conjugations and then used them in conversation. They also wanted more homework and on-line resources where they could practice during the week. In contrast, the Spanish dominant parents, tended to write “*está bien y gracias*” (*it is ok and thanks*) on feedback forms following each class meeting during the first session. Their responses in Spanish were limited to one word or one phrase. Anglo parents, on the other hand, were more verbose and vocal about their desire and need for more structure in the lessons. Specifically, they wanted to see more grammar

structures and thorough explanations and more structure during joint conversation time with scripts and dialogues.

However, as the class progressed, there were a number of white parents who adjusted to the structure of the course despite the fact that it went against their notions of a traditional language classes. For example, one Anglo mother, Ashley, expressed dissatisfaction that the course did not focus more on grammar, but then added:

But that wasn't the way the class was structured. Which was really uncomfortable. I feel like that is the question that gets most asked. One woman had missed two weeks and she was like, but when are we going to practice the verbs? And she was quite insistent about it. But, I was like hey, you've missed two classes and we are in a groove here. We have a different way of doing this. (November 18, 2013)

White Anglo parents were strongly aware and uncomfortable with the structure of the Spanish class that required them to begin using the language right away. Verónica insisted that she did not believe in teaching languages through discrete grammar or pronunciation lessons. She envisioned the parents learning Spanish as she had learned English, through immersion in the classroom where instruction focused around conversation and learning content. The difference was, of course, that Verónica began learning English as a young child, whereas the parents in these classes are adults with a wide range of knowledge and experience with their first language that they could apply to the learning of Spanish or English respectively. However, it seemed that toward the end of the first session, many parents were becoming more comfortable with the structure of the classes, and felt that it helped them to understand the experience of their child in a TWI classroom in which language is taught naturally through content.

## **Lack of Consistency and Time Frame**

### **“There Has to be Something to Bring [Parents] Back”**

The language classes had trouble with retention over time. This was due in part to the fact that the language classes were introduced by the principal with the expectation that parents were only allowed to attend only one session of classes to provide enough opportunities to meet all the perceived demand from parents to take classes which, unfortunately, did not materialize. However, large gaps of time between sessions also contributed to the difficulty of maintaining a core group of participants throughout the year. Therefore, the start of each new session required recruiting the parents back with flyers and phone calls home. I personally called each student that had participated in the previous session. Many parents verbally committed or sent back the registration form to attend the classes, but then never showed up. Verónica speculated that it was a sign that relationships still had not formed between the language teachers and the students and between the students as well:

[F]rom experience I know that at the beginning of the year you have the most parents and then as the year went by without the continuity and relationships it is hard to maintain. I mean, I didn't know the names of my parents after six weeks. If things had been going on a weekly basis, it would have been different than if we had those stops. At the end of the year, people are done unless they are very committed. The first time we did it was very successful. We had two whole Spanish classes and you had a ton of parents in the English. Then with the break, *there has to be something to bring them back*. We didn't have the food which I think is an important part which we didn't have. (May 28, 2014)

While we speculated on the reasons for the attrition, including not being able to provide dinner to the participants, we were not able to definitively say what the reasons were, since there was no formal follow-up with parents after they discontinued their participation.

### **Lack of Consistency in Teacher Attendance**

There were difficulties in maintaining the program over the entire academic year because of inconsistencies, not only among parent participants, but also with the teachers. For example, Verónica missed three classes during the sessions to attend family weddings in Argentina and then was out for illness. While she arranged for substitutes to teach in her absence, there were often complications and changes resulting in increased confusion among parents. For example, on one occasion in October, Verónica was out of town for the first two Thursday evening classes at the beginning of the second session. As parents began to arrive, it was clear that her substitute was not going to make the class. There was a scramble to find someone to teach the parents that had already begun to arrive. In the end, the assistant principal and the principal intern stepped up and taught the class together. The substitute teachers covered basic greetings with the students. Many of the students had already attended the first session of classes and had progressed beyond greetings.

### **Effects of Inclement Weather**

Several classes were cancelled during the month of February for unanticipated bad weather, and as we neared the end of the year, parents and teachers were occupied with other events and celebrations. All of these factors contributed to the loss in parental participation. Valencia, the school counselor, also thought that the late spring was a bad time to hold classes because "...the spring sports, soccer, baseball, softball, all those games and practices are scheduled 5, 6, 7 o'clock at night. Everyone is excited with the weather so, it eliminates a lot of parents" (May 22, 2014). Therefore, the lack of consistency in teachers and in the cohort of students diminished the sense of momentum that began to develop at the end of the first session of classes.

### **Short Duration of Class Meeting Time**

Despite the relatively long duration of the program from September 26 with the information session and ending with the final potluck on May 15, the actual class meeting time was very short. As explained above, the classes began at 6:00 p.m. and by 7:30 p.m., children had to be picked up from the childcare provided by the school. The doors of the school were typically locked by 8:00 p.m. It was unclear who was in charge of locking up the school after our departure. Some nights Valencia or the school social worker who was also involved in the classes would be waiting, waving the key at us through the window to leave. Other times when we left, we closed the doors behind us but only the janitors remained in the building. When parents arrived late to class, which happened often as they got delayed parking, dropping their kids off in the gym, or were otherwise late, this left little time to engage with new material and to practice with activities. Some parents voiced their disapproval of the short time frame and requested that we meet more than once a week. One English dominant mother, Scarlett, for example wished that the school would offer classes twice a week:

[E]very time I felt it would be great if we could have [class] twice a week, because I almost felt like it wasn't enough. I know it's a lot to ask, but it was becoming so good I just felt that it was almost a shame really that we couldn't do it twice a week to keep ourselves going a bit more. Again coming home during the week, not being a Spanish-speaking family it's easy to kind of let that slide, you know, and then you're just picking it up again on a Thursday. (December 10, 2013)

I asked Verónica about extending the class meetings to give us more time to cover material. However, because the teachers already work long school days it was not possible to further extend the classes.

## **Logistical Issues**

### **Lack of Advanced Planning**

There were a number of issues associated with the fact that this was the first time that the school offered these classes and therefore, there were no previous plans or materials to use for planning the course. As mentioned earlier, Verónica and I met for the first time in September and even by then, several weeks after the start of the school year, she had not discussed the plans for the language classes with Dr. Williams. Therefore, no advanced plans or materials were purchased prior to the beginning of the classes. The classes were planned from week to week. Typically Wednesday afternoons or Thursday mornings, Verónica and I would meet to finalize plans and make or copy materials. Most of the materials we had to make by hand, adding to the amount of time it took to prepare each week. In January, we were finally able to purchase language manuals and other supplies including individual white boards and dry erase markers to use with the two classes.

### **Classroom Issues**

The first few weeks of classes, we encountered a number of problems in the classroom in addition to their cleanliness as discussed earlier. The other problems included not having a key to access the classrooms, not being able to hook up to the projector, the internet not working, and no clear board space to use during class instruction. For example, despite arriving early each class to set up, I still encountered many problems with the technology and felt unprepared as parents came in through the doors. I expressed the frustration with the technology in the classroom in my fieldnotes from October 2013:

As I struggled to get my laptop hooked up to the smart board and the projector, parents began arriving. I felt thrown off because I wasn't able to concentrate on greeting them or asking them to take a snack and fill out a name tag. To make matters worse, I ended up having to use Valencia's computer, and apparently she had no idea how to use it either and couldn't even identify where the flash drive was located on the computer. Finally, we found the presentation and her computer was able to hook up to the projector after a great delay.

While they may seem minor or insignificant, these technology glitches slowed down my preparation to teach and often delayed our start of class. Finally in January, I met with the school's technology officer who helped me download the correct application in order to use the document projector and helped me to iron out many of the technological issues I had encountered teaching in the classrooms.

Without a key to unlock the doors and since Verónica came to the classes only a few minutes before they were scheduled to begin, I would knock on the door of the hallway until a teacher who worked late would emerge from her classroom to open the door. Other times, I had to wait until Verónica arrived to enter the classroom. Parents, too, reported that they made circles around the school building looking for a way into the building. One English dominant father reported when he attended the third session that he had tried to come during the second session but finding the doors locked, he assumed the session had been cancelled and did not return. In retrospect, I could have requested a key from the principal to facilitate this process but at the time, I did not think that the administration would be able to loan me a key.

### **Planning Issues**

In general, there was a feeling of "getting through it" and "survival" on the part of the contributors from the school. Verónica felt overwhelmed with the work she already had as a coach for teachers, many of whom were new to the country and experiencing some difficulty



getting their classrooms off the ground, and the extra duties that she had to take on including planning professional development for the teachers, giving tours, and attending meetings and workshops. I noticed that when we worked together to make plans, she worked at a frenetic pace that I had a hard time sustaining. Verónica also had a number of small tutoring jobs outside of school to earn extra money that took up a few of her afternoons during the week. Therefore, by Thursday afternoon, she was already exhausted and still had to make her preparations for the language classes for that evening. She explained her frustration in the ineffectiveness of the planning process because initially she felt responsible for all the plans and materials of the three classes (Beginning Spanish, Advanced Spanish, and English). She had a three-hour gap between the school day and the language classes on Thursdays and so she set that afternoon aside to make the plans:

The fact was also the timing. In my head I knew what I wanted to do but...on Thursday I have three hours here. So, I don't want to touch anything before that day.... It was like prepare all the materials for both and translate into both languages. For me it was a lot of work. And then I didn't know the students, so it wasn't very effective because I wasn't in those rooms. (December 9, 2013)

During the first session, Verónica planned the classes for herself, the other Spanish teacher, and me even though I told her not to do so because I wanted to plan my own activities. As she learned that I was not following her plans, she stopped preparing materials for the English language classes.

### **Funding Issues**

There was a lack of clarity and transparency regarding the classes and the funds to pay for the classes. It was unclear, first, if there were funds to support the classes, what they would support, and their limits. For example, at one point Verónica was told that the funds to support the classes came out of Title I funds, that is, financial assistance for the education of

low-income children of the school. However, later she thought that they might have been from Title III funds, that is moneys set aside for “Language Instruction for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students” (June 13, 2014). She was told that the funds available could only be used for materials, such as school supplies and textbooks, not to pay childcare or to pay teachers. However, after buying supplies and food for an end of session potluck, Verónica was told that she had surpassed the “allotted amount” and needed to pay back \$50 of her personal money to the school. This clearly angered Verónica who felt upset that the allotted amount was never made clear and felt insulted because she had already given so much of her time to the teaching of the classes, time for which she was not paid.

Several parents also inquired about the language class instructors’ compensation. They were concerned that it was a volunteer position and asked how they could contribute to supporting the classes financially (Frieda, March 11, 2014). Therefore, it was clear that the parents also were left in the dark about the funds and support of the program.

## **Parental Participation**

### **Started High**

The parent interest in the classes was high, at least initially. At the first informational meeting, there were more than 50 parents in attendance. Dr. Williams also assured Verónica that there was high demand for the language classes based upon the requests and feedback from parents last year (July, 26, 2014).

The first session of classes, which began on October 10, 2013, had 37 parents divided into beginning and advanced Spanish classes and 18 parents in the English class. However, the classes of the first session ended on November 21, 2013 with only 15 parents total in the

two Spanish classes and only five parents in the English class (See Table 3 for the number of parents participating in English and Spanish classes during Session I).

Table 3: Number of parents participating in English and Spanish classes during Session I

Session I- Class Dates	October 10	October 17	October 24	October 31- No classes	November 7	November 14	November 21
English class	18	12	12	n/a	7	5	5
Spanish class	37	19	18	n/a	12	12	15

**Attrition in the Program: “At the Beginning, I Thought There was More Excitement, More Novelty”**

The second session began with six parents in the English language classes and 14 in the Spanish language classes; the third session began with three parents in the English language classes and eight in the Spanish language classes. Generally speaking, while the numbers in both classes diminished rapidly from the first session to the subsequent sessions, the Spanish language classes maintained at least double the number of parents as the English language classes. The low numbers of parents in the English classes restricted the effectiveness of the communicative activities that could be done during class time and affected the pairing of parents during joint conversation periods since often one Latino/a parent would be paired up with two and sometimes three Anglo parents (See Table 4 for the number of parents present at the first and last class of each session of classes).

Table 4: Number of parents participating in English and Spanish classes each session

Session #	Start/English Class	Start/Spanish Class	End/English Class	End/Spanish Class
1	October 10 - 18 parents	October 10 - 40 parents	November 21- 5 parents	November 21- 5 parents
2	February 20 - 6 parents	February 20 - 14 parents	March 20 - 5 parents	March 20 - 9 parents
3	April 17- 3 parents	April 17 - 8 parents	May 15 - 2 parents	May 15 - 5 parents

When possible, parents were asked why they stopped coming to the classes. For example, one English dominant mother, Ashley, who attended every class the first session and was motivated to learn Spanish said that she was too busy with her work schedule in January and that something had to give. The language classes were cut. Verónica reflected on the attrition in the parents in the Spanish classes during the year:

*[A]t the beginning, I thought there was more excitement, more novelty. It was the beginning of the year... Well, the parents were like, well, you know, I want my kids to do well. I want to be here. I want to learn Spanish. It was something more meaningful. And then for some reason, either the classes didn't meet their expectations or it didn't become what they wanted or as important, or they had something else more important. And I felt, you know, that it went down. (July 16, 2014)*

Most Latino/a parents cited changes in their work schedule or that of their spouse, pressures at home, or inability to find reliable transportation to the classes. For example, Javier, the father from Costa Rica, stopped attending after the second session because he obtained the needed work visa and found full-time employment in an engineering firm where he felt he was becoming immersed in English. One Latina mother, Rachel, told me that she had run into a few of the previous class participants and had asked them why they were not coming any longer to the classes. She reported that one said that her work schedule had

changed, and she got home too late to attend the classes, and another mother thought that she had missed so many classes that she was not going to be able to catch up (May 22, 2014). When Rachel, herself, stopped coming to the classes after attending faithfully the first and second sessions, she reported that her husband's job had changed and that he was getting home too late for her to make the classes (May 6, 2014). She had to leave her toddler son with him since there was no childcare for his age at the school. Even though I assured her that she could bring her son with her to the class, she said that she did not feel comfortable doing that to the other mothers. Other times, when I directly asked parents why they were not attending, they said that they were planning on attending the next class or next session but then never showed up at the classes (February 18, 2014).

### **Parental Expectations about the Classes**

In this section, I will unpack the parents' expectations about the classes to explain the Anglo and Latino/a parents' motivations to enroll in the parent language classes at PES. From this discussion emerges an understanding of the differences among the two groups of parents in terms of the imperativeness of learning the second language and ways in which they envisioned helping their children with their schooling. As such, TWI schools had an important job to bridge the many differences among the two communities brought together in the school. It is also important to think about parental expectations about the classes in terms of considering the work needed to build connections among the parent groups prior to the possibility of opening third spaces.

As parents began the language classes at PES, they brought with them expectations about the classes and goals for themselves. While both English dominant and Spanish dominant parents both expected to learn the language that they were studying, there were

differences in the nuances of why that was important for them. For English dominant parents, learning Spanish represented a responsibility that they felt in supporting their children's learning at the TWI school. It helped them understand the experience of their children in the classroom and gave them the skills to better help their children with homework. For Spanish dominant parents, learning English represented a way to have access to greater job opportunities and more success in everyday interactions that would indirectly help their families and children. In addition, Latino/a parents felt that their learning English would be a help to their children's schooling in general by supporting their progress toward bilingualism and biliteracy.

### **Learn the Language**

The most common goal that both Spanish and English dominant parents shared was to learn the target language. For example, English dominant parents argued that they expected a course not unlike the language classes that they might have taken in high school or college. For example, one mother, Ashley, explained her expectation of the class when she signed up saying, "Well, I really pictured a beginning language class. Like a college level elementary Spanish class. Like you sit down, practice verb conjugations, you do some nouns, you talk about some of the structure. That sort of thing" (November 18, 2013). Diana, a Spanish dominant mother, agreed that she wanted to learn more of the grammar of English like conjugating verbs and speaking aloud.

Quería aprender a conjugar los verbos. Porque hay veces cuando yo digo una palabra pero yo no sé mucho lo de... she, he, we have... or esto....Pero es lo que no puedo yo. Cuando decimos que vamos a *hablar*, es algo que no tengo. Yo solamente puedo decir el verbo pero no la forma. Quería aprender a hablar bien el idioma. (December 2, 2013)

*I wanted to learn to conjugate the verbs. Because there are times when I say a word but I don't know much about the... she, he, we have... or this... But it is what I cannot do. When we say that we are going to speak, that is something I don't have. I only can say the verb but not the form. I wanted to learn to speak the language well.*

Another Spanish dominant mother, Regina argued that the opportunity to practice speaking and listening with English dominant speakers was what most attracted her to the classes:

*Realmente lo que quería es mejorar mucho mi inglés. A mí me facilita escribir y leerlo, pero me hace muy difícil hablarlo y escucharlo. Cuando alguien me habla me hace muy difícil. Cuando supe que hay padres americanos en la clase, y sí estoy contenta porque es como un complemento porque es como una clase, con preguntas. Como Latina es lo que más buscamos es con quien practicar. (March 5, 2014)*

*Really what I wanted is to really improve my English. I have an easier time writing and reading it, but it is difficult to speak it and listen to it. When someone speaks to me it is very difficult for me. When I found out that there are American parents in the class, and yes I am happy because it is like a complement because it is like a class, with questions. As a Latina that is what we look for the most with whom to practice.*

Many parents reflected that the class provided them with their first opportunities to try to speak with speakers of the other language instead of just working with their children on their reading and writing assignments at home.

### **Language Classes as a Way to Learn about the School**

There was a difference in how parents framed their language learning. On one side, white English dominant parents saw enrolling in the parent language classes and learning Spanish as a way to learn more about the school. Anxious and unsure of how their children might fare in a school where the language of instruction was Spanish, and therefore, likely different from their personal monolingual elementary experience, they saw the language classes as an opportunity to learn more about the school, the TWI program, and the experience that their child might have in the classroom. For example, Frieda, a mother who emigrated from Germany, explained why she would recommend the language class to other

parents, “because it is really getting into the school, having some contact and seeing who are these other parents and get a feel for it. Where is my daughter coming to everyday?”

(November 18, 2013). Likewise, Amy, a white mother who was previously an elementary school teacher and has a Master’s degree in education, was very worried about her kindergartener in the 90/10 Spanish program. She requested that the language classes,

...have one night where we were broken into parents by grade level. So, you know, like kindergarten, first grade, and it could even be the Spanish, English parents of kindergarten, 1st, or second, third, or something like that. I don't know exactly what we would do there, but just focus more on...what's going on in those grades with our kids. (December 18, 2013)

In this way Amy attempted to request more opportunities to connect with other parents who found themselves in similar circumstances as her with children in the lower grades at the school. Parents were grouped by grade level during the first class however, it appears from Amy’s comment that additional evenings divided by grade would have been desirable.

### **Learn the Language for Survival**

In contrast, Spanish dominant parents’ desire to learn English was based upon the fact that they were living in the United States where the dominant language is English, and better fluency in English could mean more access to opportunities and greater chances of survival. For example, some parents discussed wanting to learn English to improve their job opportunities and employability. María Carmen recounted when she had hit a *barrera*, (a barrier), at her previous job in a pizza restaurant for not knowing enough English:

En el restaurante donde yo trabajaba, ya me estaba poniendo a cobrar. Yo podía cobrar perfectamente pero tomar la orden con las personas sí, que la pizza quedaba así pero cuando me pusieron a hablar con los clientes y decían otras cosas que no estaba acostumbrada a escuchar, me paré y tuve que ir a buscar a alguien que me ayudara. Entonces esto fue una barrera en mí... en mí. (May 15, 2014)



*In the restaurant where I used to work, they had me at the register charging people. I could charge perfectly but to take orders with people that yes, that the pizza was like this but when they put me to speak with the clients and they were saying other things that I wasn't accustomed to hearing, I stood up and had to go to look for someone that could help me. Therefore this was a barrier in me... in me.*

María Carmen felt unable to perform her job requirements when English-speakers went off the typical script of ordering a pizza. At the time of our interview she had already left her job at the restaurant and was working side jobs with family members.

Javier, a father from Costa Rica, who was trained as an engineer, also wanted to find work in the United States but felt that he was unqualified given his lack of high proficiency in English (however, by the spring he had found employment). Back home, as well, in Costa Rica, he was often passed up for job opportunities because they wanted Spanish/English bilingual candidates for the job:

*Incluso en mi propia experiencia con nuevos trabajos aunque yo vengo saliendo de una empresa. Tenía un trabajo estable. Entonces, yo buscaba otros trabajos pero tenía la desventaja de que me pedirán ser bilingüe cien por ciento. Entonces, no podía aspirar a otro trabajo por la limitación de idioma. (December 9, 2013)*

*Including in my own experience with new jobs that although I come leaving from a company. I had a stable job. So, I looked for other jobs but I had the disadvantage that they would ask me to be bilingual one hundred percent. So, I couldn't aspire to another job for the limitation of language.*

Therefore, Javier saw the language classes as having the potential to help him not only in his search for employment in the States but also back home.

Spanish dominant parents also wanted to learn English to facilitate day-to-day activities especially when they involved their children. A few mothers mentioned that they were hesitant to involve their children in activities with classmates and enroll them in summer camps because they had a hard time communicating with English dominant parents, or they were not sure how to negotiate registration processes since they almost exclusively

asked for an application to be filled out in English. For example, Regina explained her difficulty in helping her older son to register for activities and camps because of her lack of English and the necessity to find someone that spoke Spanish to help her:

[Mi hijo]...él es mucho pedir por ejemplo alguna actividad. Pero no sabemos a dónde llevarlo. Hemos chequeado a veces. Y a veces los campamentos son muy baratos y a veces son muy costosos. Sólo cuando encuentras a una persona que hable tu idioma y eso te facilita mucho. Porque incluso que al inicio me costaba mucho pero ahora veo que a veces muchas personas llenan los formularios por ti porque son muy complejos. Porque éstos solamente vienen en inglés. (March 5, 2014)

*[My son]... he asks a lot for example for some activity. But we don't know to where to take him. We have checked sometimes. And sometimes the camps are very cheap and sometimes they are very expensive. Only when you meet a person that speaks your language and that helps you a lot. Because also at first it was very hard for me but now I see that sometimes many people fill out the [registration] forms for you because they are complicated. Because these only come in English.*

Because of the lack of bilingual applications, finding a person that spoke Spanish and who could help her negotiate the application process was very helpful for Regina for successfully enrolling her son in extracurricular activities. Often Regina spoke about the frustration she felt at not being able to do things easily and without relying on the help of others.

For instance, when seeking medical care for their children, Regina and other mothers spoke of their frustration in not being able to communicate well and not understanding the basic signs posted in the hospitals.

Te limita mucho cuando no hablas inglés. Por ejemplo con los letreros. Paso al doctor. Yo con [mi hijo] -- No es un enfermizo, pero está muy debajo de peso. Me acuerdo cuando fuimos al hospital, ¿para dónde? Arriba, abajo... ahora veo que hay muchos letreros en español y facilita pero yo creo que mucho se limita mucho para hacer una vida, para ir a la escuela, para poder salir, viajar, ir al médico, visitas. Uno se limita mucho. (Regina, March 5, 2014)

*It limits you a lot when you don't speak English. For example with the signs. I go to the doctor. My son and I — he isn't sickly, but he is very below weight. And I remember when we went to the hospital, to where? Up, down...now I see that there*

*are many signs in Spanish and that helps but I think that a lot limits a person in trying to make a life, trying to go to school, to be able to go out, to travel, to go to the doctor, visits. One is very limited.*

In general, the parents felt limited by their inability to speak and understand English well. They hoped that the class would help to provide them with additional language learning to support their day to day interactions in an English dominant society.

### **Learn the Language to Help Children in School**

Many English dominant parents saw learning the language as their responsibility as a parent in helping their children as they moved through PES's TWI program. Because of the importance of Spanish as the language of instruction, they reasoned that if they were better able to read and understand Spanish, they might have an easier time supporting their child in his/her work. For example, Scarlett, a mother who immigrated as an adult to the United States from a small town outside London, England and a beginner in Spanish, explained why she enrolled in the language classes:

I was hoping to... for me I'm very conscious of the fact that we don't speak Spanish in this household. We have minimal knowledge of Spanish apart from [my daughter]. So I just wanted to do it because I feel kind of a responsibility to her to be able to understand what she's learning. That's just my personal opinion. So I really just wanted to try and be more familiar with what she's learning in her class. I mean in all honesty that's another reason why I volunteered to go into the class, because it really helps me with my Spanish because I listen to what's being said and just so I understand how she's working on a day to day basis. I just... I wanted to be able to... when she gets her homework, trying to understand what's being asked of her, how she has to respond to her work and just kind of going forward have more of a connection with her I guess really. (December 10, 2013)

Scarlett thought that by learning some Spanish she would be able to better help her daughter with her academic work including her homework, and in this way parents viewed their own language learning as a way to help ensure the success of their child in the TWI program.

Kimberly, another white English dominant mother, also felt that taking the steps necessary to learn Spanish was just a part of being a mother to three children in the TWI program. Kimberly did the “research on the benefits of dual languages” and due to her husband’s long work hours, they decided that she “would be the person to interact with the kids in Spanish” (December 9, 2013). Likewise, another mother, Cameron saw the language classes as a way to connect with her son by stepping into his shoes and also help him in the future with his homework:

I felt like if I went to the class it would really show him I was interested in what he was doing and willing to put myself a little bit in his shoes. I don’t speak Spanish. I took French in high school and barely remember any of it and figured that would help me with helping him with his homework. (December 11, 2013)

“To help with homework” was a common response from white parents about their participation in the language classes. Verónica confirmed that, from her point of view, about half of the parents took the classes as a way to “get ahead,” to be able to better understand and help their children with their homework. However, it was Verónica’s hope that no matter what reason brought the parents to the language classes, once there, they would have the chance to meet and interact with other people and maybe that would make an impact on them:

But, still the people... there was like a bunch--out of ten maybe half of them that were interested in the mixed conversation to connect with one another. The other ones wanted to improve their language. They were always asking how they could help their kids at home. It was more of a *personal* thing. I mean, I can see that if you are a parent that is your goal, but then you meet people that are Spanish-speakers and if you have an open personality that is kinda accepting or whatever, then you would benefit from those conversations. But, they came because they wanted to learn Spanish and they wanted to help their kid. And that’s what they were doing. (July 16, 2014)

The promise of English or Spanish instruction may initially lure parents in to the classes but Verónica's hope was that once in the classes, parents would also begin to establish relationships with one another.

Spanish dominant parents also talked about their desire to learn English to help their children, but not in the same way as English dominant parents. Among Latino/a parents there was a significant gap between their own schooling opportunities and the schooling opportunities their children have today. Many expressed feeling "surpassed" by their children academically in the topics they were covering in the classroom and no longer able to help their son or daughter with their homework like they wanted. Learning English, in a way, would help level the playing field to that of their children who were more immersed in conversational and academic English at school. For example, Regina lamented that she was unable to help her son in his academic work because of her lack of English:

Y llega un momento en lo que es la escuela. Uno se limita porque... ya no puede uno enseñar más ni corregir. Yo el año pasado tuvimos, por ejemplo, problemas con [mi hijo] en las matemáticas. Él estuvo bajando mucho y su nivel de lectura también bajó mucho y entonces, le dije al maestro, "¿cómo lo podría ayudar?" Porque yo en español yo lo corrijo y yo veo que practica su español, la lectura, pero en el inglés ya nos hace difícil porque [mi hijo] nos corrige a nosotros. Entonces sí a nosotros creo que nos limita mucho el inglés bastante. (March 5, 2014)

*And a moment arrives in the schooling. One is limited because... already one can't teach more or correct. Last year we had, for example, problems with [my son] in mathematics. His grades were falling a lot and his reading level too fell a lot as well and so, I told the teacher, "How can we help him?" Because for me in Spanish I correct him and I see that he practices his Spanish, reading, but in English it is already difficult for us because [my son] corrects us. So yes, we think that we are very limited a lot by English.*

Regina, therefore, while able to continue to model and correct her son's Spanish, did not feel capable of helping her son with his academic development in English because he already commanded better use of English than the parents.

Latino/a parents, like Anglo parents, saw learning English as a way to support their children's academic progress, not only to get higher grades or scores on a test, but also as a way of supporting their children's progress toward bilingualism and biliteracy so that one day they could use their skills to have a better life than what the parents had. Aracela explained her goals for her two sons: "Para que el día de mañana pueda agarrar un mejor trabajo y que agarre lo mejor posible. Que llegue a un trabajo que le pague mejor. Que no sea limpiador de casas, bombero, o pintor..." (*So that tomorrow he can get a better job and get the best possible. That a job arrives that pays better. That he not be a house cleaner, a firefighter, or painter*) (December 4, 2013).

Bilingualism for Latino families and children also maintained important cultural ties to their home communities and their extended families. While for English dominant children, speaking Spanish meant an additive quality, maintaining Spanish and learning English was a matter of identity and survival for Latino/a Spanish dominant children.

### **Experiences of Parents in Language Classes**

While the data ultimately showed that third spaces between Latino/a and Anglo parents and with the school did not open fully, some groundwork was laid toward tapping into third spaces (see analysis in final section of this chapter). In this section, I draw heavily upon the language class observations and interviews with parent participants to begin to build the evidence of the progress toward third space opening. My goal here is to begin to establish that movement toward third space is evident by giving examples of initial relationships and connections being made among parents and with the school. As time progressed in the classes, both English dominant and Spanish dominant parents began to feel more comfortable with one another and more at ease at school. This is laying the necessary foundation to move

toward relationships based upon authentic caring and trust that would accompany the full opening of third spaces. Therefore, in this section, I describe the experiences of parents during the language classes and as members of the TWI school community. In general, the findings point to both Anglo and Latino/a parents building connections to each other and to the school. Anglo parents found new understanding as they gained knowledge about the lived realities of Latino/a parents, and some movement toward a future shared space was made as parents discussed ways in which connections between parents could be strengthened. Yet, continued tensions, barriers, and contradictions pointed to the work remaining for the schools and parents to work for opportunities in which third spaces can open.

### **Building Bridges**

Both English dominant and Spanish dominant parents reported feeling more connected to other parents and the school by participating in the language classes. Parents also felt that some of the distance felt between home and school was bridged through participation in the language classes.

#### **English dominant parents' connections with other English dominant parents.**

English dominant parents began to bond with one another during the Spanish language instruction time and with their teacher, Verónica. In comparison with first session's class meetings, by session II and III, parents began to greet one another, talk before class, and talk at breaks between activities even overlapping the teacher talk. For example, during the language class on the evening of May 1, parents had side conversations between activities that continued even as the teacher moved on to the next activity. This marked an increase in conversation among parents.

Comradery grew during the language classes not only with the teacher but with small groups within the English dominant parents (May 1, 2014). Verónica fostered this in the classroom by infusing personal vignettes into the class between activities and during discussion of new vocabulary. For example, an explanation of the expression “tener sueño” (to be sleepy) led to a discussion about “terapia de sueño” or dream therapy in which Verónica shared that she does once a month to analyze her dreams. “Look what I’m sharing with you!” she laughed (April 17, 2014).

Verónica’s openness to share about herself encouraged others to share stories about themselves and interact with others in the class. For example, one white parent, Tiffany, who joined the classes because she was worried that her youngest son was not performing well in Spanish, shared at the end of one class meeting that she would not be at the next class because she was rallying at the state capital for higher teacher pay (May 1, 2014). The other parents gathered around her to ask her questions about how they could also help out. There was a feeling that the parents not only supported one another, but also were concerned about teachers and public education in general in North Carolina.

In another occasion, Verónica slipped out of class a few minutes early to change into a dress and heels to attend a formal dance with her husband. The parents whistled and clapped when Verónica returned to say goodbye. There was a feeling of personal interest and caring about one another and their teacher in the class (April 24, 2014). The relationship building between parents began to create a sense of community in which their personal lives began to spread into the classes. Amy, a parent that attended faithfully all three sessions confirmed that “the relationship building happens in the margins of the class activities--while working on an activity with parents or before or after the class, but not because of the



specific activity” (May 22, 2014).

Finally, in an interview with Cameron, a white mother participant, she said that her feelings of connectivity to other white parents had grown during the language classes because they were the first significant opportunity she had to meet and get to know other Anglo parents who had children in her son’s kindergarten class. At the beginning of the classes, Verónica grouped parents together according to the grade level of their children, and then once I realized that there were several parents that had children all in the same kindergarten class, I introduced them to each other during the pot luck at the end of the first session. Cameron reflected on the importance of having the opportunity to meet several parents from her son’s kindergarten class with Sra. Morales:

Let’s say I’m only at the very beginning [of feeling connected to the school and other parents]. I was feeling that way, and I think it’s because I work forty hours a week, and I’m just not able to be in the school and go to a number of events. I signed up for the PTA, but a lot of the stuff, I just don’t have time to do, so I don’t feel like I’ve connected a lot with other parents or even Ms. Morales (her son’s teacher) on a personal level. Really, the Spanish class was really my first time meeting other parents and like, as you pointed out there were other parents of kids that were in [my son’s] class. I had no idea, but [girl A] and [girl B] are two of [my son’s] favorite people, but that was really my first exposure to their parents. We ended up going to their birthday parties so I saw them a little bit more. (December 11, 2013)

The fact that Cameron was able to connect with parents, although all white English dominant parents (there were no Latino/a parents from Sra. Morales’ class in the parents’ language classes), from her son’s class was significant in creating relationships that extended beyond the language classes, demonstrated by being invited to attend children’s birthday parties.

**English dominant parents’ connections with Spanish dominant parents.** English dominant parents also found the classes to be helpful in terms of connecting with Latino/a parents at the school and a welcomed change from other programs that they had attended at

the school in which, to a large degree, Latino/a parents and Anglo parents self-separated.

Kimberly explained this previous experience with school events:

With the exception of the pot luck dinner once a year... with both groups, there was never any formal facilitation of conversation at those events. It was almost uncomfortable in the sense that “they” are over there and “we” are over here. I knew the English-speaking parents so well that there was almost no motivation to even go over there. I always hated that. It always made me feel bad, but that was the way it worked out. (December 9, 2013)

Kimberly seemed as if she had given up trying to make connections across the linguistic groups that she often saw dividing during school events. However, later in the year she shared ideas about how the school could continue to facilitate cross-cultural interactions like done during the language classes.

The language classes did require the parents to work together in the same physical space. Parents were assigned to small groups with Latino/a parents and were given tasks to complete such as to practice a dialogue, present something they wrote in class, or share a picture or story that they had brought from home. Many parents felt that their participation in the classes helped to break down some of the barriers present at the school between Latinos and Anglos. Parents reported that they were more likely to say hello to Latino/a parents and teachers they encountered at the school and in the community because, in part, they realized how much they had in common with one another.

I think it is just good to just have that reminder that we have so much in common even though the language and the culture may be different. We want to send our kids to school, we have challenges with homework. They want to learn English and we want to learn Spanish. That commonality... I think that commonality is brought to life. (Kimberly, December 9, 2013)

**English dominant parents’ connections with the school.** English dominant parents also connected with the school through the language classes in the sense that they began to

identify with the school as members of its community. For example, I asked Kimberly about her feelings of connectedness to the school at the end of the first session of parent classes.

Ali: Do you feel at all more or less or about the same in terms of your feelings of connections with the school since the time before you took the classes to now?

Kimberly: I think more. I mean it isn't a huge change. I think maybe there was maybe psychologically something nice about feeling like I'm in the group of the bigger group of Spanish-speaking parents. (December 9, 2013)

Through her participation in the classes, Kimberly had begun to identify herself as *a part* of the Spanish-speaking parents rather than *apart* from them. Her improvement in Spanish and the experience speaking Spanish with other parents changed the way she perceived herself and how she hoped other also perceived her as well contributing to her feeling of fitting-in better at the school.

As members of the school community, parents from the language classes were also seen at the school-wide events including Carnival, the book fair, the Read-a-thon, multiple events during the "Hispanic Awareness" week, and "Teacher Appreciation" week. For example, Spanish class participant Frieda gave free massages to teachers during the Teacher Appreciation week in the teacher's lounge (May 8, 2014). Another mother, Amy, who had a kindergarten daughter at school, decorated the outside of a classroom door with miniature flags that had been created by students as part of the preparation for Hispanic Awareness week (September 27, 2013). Many Anglo parents were involved with the various activities associated with Carnival including helping with games, passing out prizes, and cleaning up after the event (February 28, 2014). While it is possible that the white parents that attended the language classes were the same parents that already regularly attended and volunteered at school events, parents were seen, for example, discussing the upcoming Carnival and their plans to attend (February 27, 2014). It is possible that these discussions with other parents

influenced their desire to attend the other school events given that they felt more connected to one another and to the school.

**Spanish dominant parents' connections with other Spanish dominant parents.**

Latino/a parents likewise made some limited connections with other Latino/a parents during the language classes by sharing techniques for practicing English, their personal and familial experiences, and by connecting outside the classroom.

Initially during the parent classes, parents were shy and reserved with one another. Parents talked with their partner as they did activities together, but there was not significant evidence that they went out of their way to introduce themselves to each other or make connections. I remember looking up from my plans and feeling surprised when I saw that all the parents had listed their current city in North Carolina as their city of origin on their name plaques that sat on their desks during the first class. It seemed that parents did not even want to share at that point where they were from originally. During the second and third sessions of classes, there was more informality and growing comfortableness among parents. Many of the parents had already met each other during the first session and there was greater evidence of parents greeting one another and talking to each other during class activities. However, because the number of parents had dwindled significantly since the first session of classes, the relationships among parents in the English language classes continued to be limited.

I noted in my fieldnotes that I was also surprised to find that the majority of conversational interactions moved between me and the parents instead of among the parents. For example, on the class meeting following Easter Sunday, I asked the parents how their Easter weekend had been spent. One mother, Ana María, shared pictures and video taken from a reenactment of the Passion of Christ that her church had performed. While she talked,

I noted that the other two mothers in attendance, María Carmen and Lucía, busied themselves by flipping through handouts I had given them in folders and texting on their phones. I became sensitive to the fact that the other mothers were waiting for me to start the class. I shared briefly what my family had done during Easter and at this point, María Carmen looked up and listened. As Ana María continued, María Carmen again looked away (April 24, 2014). It is possible that María Carmen looked up when I was talking not because she was particularly interested in my family traditions for Easter but because of my role as teacher which is typically treated with respect in the Latino culture (Valdés, 1996). However, it was clear that the other two mothers were not particularly interested in listening to Ana María talk about her experiences.

There were other examples, however, in which parents did begin to build connections with one another. For instance, during the second session of classes, Rachel, a Latina mother with a high level of English fluency and who had continued on from the first session of classes, shared with the group of parents how much she uses and likes the application *Duolingo*. *Duolingo* is a free interactive teaching application that can be used on a smart phone or computer and is designed to teach another language through short activities that incorporate reading, writing, listening, and even, speaking aloud. Rachel demonstrated the program and helped the other parents download the application on their smart phones during the class break (February 20, 2014). I set up an account as well and invited the parents to connect with one another via the application. Rachel's leadership and initiative to share with others about *Duolingo* showed that she felt increasingly more confident and comfortable in the group and willing to take on a more vocal role in the group.

There were also connections made between parents in which they recognized each other from other school events and meetings, or from apartment complexes. For example, at the beginning of the second session as parents were introducing themselves, one mother said, “I think I’ve seen you before.” The two mothers determined that they lived in the same apartment complex a few years ago but hadn’t seen each other since then (February 20, 2014). In this way the classes provided a space for both new relationships to form and old relationships to resurface among Latina mothers.

Parents also began to support one another during the language classes. For example, during the first session of classes, Aracela, a mother from Mexico, shared with other Latino/a parents that she was hoping to start a baking business from her kitchen. She listed off all the types of pies that she liked to bake. One other Latina mother and I both ordered pies to be delivered the following week in class. Aracela walked in the next week with a cardboard box balanced precariously on her hip. We all oohed and awed as we unwrapped a chocolate flan pie, a strawberry pie, and a cherry cheesecake, which we ate together (November 21, 2013).

Parents also supported one another by sharing stories and empathizing with one another. After several weeks of bad weather had prevented the language classes from meeting, one mother shared her ordeal in which she had to walk home through the snow after the car she had been traveling in from work, quit working. The other mothers shook their heads hearing how she walked several miles in the bad weather in order to finally get home. In turn, they related similar stories about their ordeals related to the bad weather (February 20, 2014). By sharing personal stories, the parents began to create a sense of caring and community.

Finally, there was a moment during the last regular night of language classes during the final session in which the first mention of immigration, race, and racism faced by Latinos emerged in the classroom. It was a warm evening in May, and I had the door propped open to the outside. Ana María, Lucía, María Carmen, and I were seated at a table in the classroom as we ate fudge brownies and worked on the topic of the evening: talking about common activities during holidays. The goal was to use the past tense that we had been practicing to describe how they had celebrated a particular holiday last year or in the past. We began by listing some of the holidays that they celebrated with their families, ones adopted from their time in the United States and ones that originated with their families in Mexico. They shared that they continued to celebrate many holidays from their home country: “el Día del Niño” (Day of the child), “el Día de los Inocentes” (Day of the innocents), “el Día de los Muertos” (Day of the dead), and “el Día de Independencia de México” (Mexican independence day). As we began to talk about the celebration of Saint Patrick’s Day, I shared how this is a particular holiday that my family celebrates because my ancestors were originally from Ireland. I described this interaction in my fieldnotes:

After brainstorming some vocabulary associated with the holiday, María Carmen asked how I personally celebrated it at home. She watched me as I described how we cook corn beef and cabbage and follow the tradition of wearing the color green while I wrote up the words “corn beef,” “cabbage,” and “green” on the white board in front of the parents. I mentioned that the holiday originated with the Irish who when they immigrated to the United States at the turn of the 1900s were considered the lowest class of immigrants and faced fierce discrimination. María Carmen and Ana María looked at me intently while Lucía looked down, writing on her paper. María Carmen sighed loudly as she said, “Como nosotros” (*Like us.*) Ana María and Lucía, her head popping up from her paper, smiled nervously back at me. We smiled at each other. A moment of silence. Then, I said, “sí y ojalá que en diez, quince años todo haya cambiado por lo mejor.” (*Yes, and hopefully in ten, fifteen years everything will have changed for the better.*) María Carmen looked back at me nodding her head and held up her fingers as she crossed them as in for good luck hoping that it may be true. Ana María broke the tensión saying, “y todos van a estar celebrando el 16 de septiembre.”

*(And everyone is going to be celebrating the 16th of September, [Mexico's Independence Day].) Everyone laughed together. (May 8, 2014)*

This interaction while brief, indicated that these mothers were feeling a little safer in the classroom and with each other to the point that issues of ethnicity, class, and immigration surfaced during our discussion especially when compared with the fact that on the first day of the classes the parents were reluctant to even share the name of their home city. The mothers were very clear that they recognized their socially constructed placement on the bottom rung of society and like many immigrants before them, hoped that the future would be better in terms of the treatment and marginalization based on ethnicity that they faced. Although the conversation moved beyond this instance in which ethnicity was acknowledged, its presence lingered with the group and had we had more time, perhaps this conversation may have given way to sharing more about their personal experiences as Latina women in North Carolina and in the United States.

Some parents reported that even outside the classes, the relationships formed in the classroom continued and there was comfort in recognizing each other at school-wide events. For example, María Carmen and Rachel, two mothers involved in the second session of language classes together, saw each other at Carnival in February. María Carmen laughed, recounting to me:

*Había muchos latinos y entonces nos sentíamos en casa. De hecho encontré con Rachel y le pregunté, ¿quieres que tome una foto de ti y tu hijo? Me dijo sí. Entonces, le dije te cuesta un dólar. Fue muy divertido. (March 5, 2014)*

*There were a lot of Latinos and so we felt like we were at home. In fact I met up with Rachel and I asked her, do you want me to take a picture of you and your son? She said yes. Then, I told her that it would cost her a dollar. It was very fun.*



The school felt a little more intimate for parents following their participation in the language classes because they began to recognize other parents at the school and realized that they were not alone in their efforts to learn English.

**Spanish dominant parents' connections with English dominant parents.** The Latino/a parents also created some initial connections with the white English dominant parents that took language classes. While the relationships built may not have been very deep or long-lasting, they did represent a start in the process of connecting parents across cultural and linguistic borders at the school. When parents did connect with others, it was typically around a particularly personal situation. For example, there were two mothers in the classes that had infant baby girls. Both of the mothers, one Latina and one white, carried their babies with them to the language classes in a baby carrier or sling. We took pictures of them together and they compared baby developments and how well they were sleeping through the night each week (November 21, 2013).

Other parents connected if they had children in the same class or grade. Ana María, a Latina mother, connected with Kimberly and Shannon, two white English dominant mothers who had children in the same second grade classroom. They talked with one another about the classroom teacher and about upcoming class events and fieldtrips. In fact, toward the end of the year, Kimberly and Ana María shared a ride on the way to one of the field trips (May 22, 2014).

In another example, two mothers, one Anglo and one Latina, connected during the language classes because their husbands worked together. Regina's husband worked for a landscaping company owned by Shannon's husband. While they had some contact previously, it was always in English. When Shannon entered the classroom for the first joint

conversation period of the second session, she cried out in excitement when she saw Regina. At the time, I did not realize that Shannon already knew Regina and interpreted this in my fieldnotes as a slightly aggressive way to enter the room given that everyone was feeling uncomfortable with the merging of the classes (February 20, 2014). Regina and Shannon worked together during the joint conversation time. Later, Regina reflected on the impact that working with Shannon had on her by helping her to realize that English dominant speakers also struggled with learning a second language:

Las pocas ocasiones cuando [Shannon y yo] nos hemos encontrado siempre nos saludamos en inglés. Ahora que encontramos en la clase veo que ella habla bien el español. Y yo le pregunté a ella, “tú hablas mucho español, no lo sabía.” Y me dice, “oh, es que no me gusta mi acento porque suena a alemán.” Me dijo que le da pena a veces hablar español porque su acento no es bueno. Entonces nos ocurre a nosotras dos. (Regina, March 5, 2014)

*The few times when [Shannon and I] have met up we always say hello in English. Now that we meet in the class I see that she speaks Spanish well. And I asked her, “you speak a lot of Spanish and I didn’t know that.” And she tells me, “Oh, it’s because I don’t like my accent because it sounds German.” She told me that she feels embarrassed sometimes to speak Spanish because her accent is not good. So, it happens to both of us.*

Regina felt a shared experience with Shannon in that they both felt uncomfortable with their accents in speaking English or Spanish respectively. Shannon was also pleased to have the time to connect with Regina during the language classes because she felt it was an opportunity to break down some of the barriers that she felt between them:

Well, I really don’t have much contact with [Regina]. I feel a warm feeling towards them, and I hate that there is a language barrier there, and I hate that I feel that there is a superiority thing there that I am the boss’s wife and that it intensified with the language barrier. (March 28, 2014)

However, by working together and sharing their language learning experience, the mothers connected in the same physical space and came to greater understanding and empathy about one another.

Parents who met during the language classes also had opportunities to interact during school-wide events such as the school's Carnival in February 2014. Regina explained that the majority of the time at Carnival, she did speak in Spanish but that she ran into one of the mothers from the English language classes and they practiced speaking in English and Spanish together.

Me encontré a una señora, Frieda, que viene a las clases. Ella es muy sociable. Estamos en línea y de lejos empezamos a practicar-- un poquito en inglés y un poquito en español. Me preguntaba, "tengo que practicar." Y yo le decía "yo también." (March 5, 2014).

*I ran into a woman, Frieda, who comes to the classes. She is very social. We are in line and from afar we begin to practice—a little in English and a little in Spanish. She was telling me, "I have to practice." And I was telling her "me too."*

Parents were starting to open doors to communicate with one another across languages and cultures. While many parents testified to the separateness of parents during whole school events, these brief interludes in which parents did make contact with each other across cultural lines, showed that some change was occurring and that there was the potential for greater bridges if work continued.

**Spanish dominant parents' connections with the school.** Spanish dominant parents also built connections with the school by interacting with parents and teachers in conversations in which they shared their worries about their children and gained important insider information about the school.

Informal conversation time, especially during the final potluck parties at the end of each session, provided time in which mothers could interact more freely and at length with others in the classes. It gave parents time to voice concerns about their children's behavior and grades with other parents and teachers and to gain important insider information about the school. For example, María Carmen in the final class of the last session spent

considerable time talking about her two children at the school with a member of the school faculty that was also in attendance at the language classes. This allowed her to get feedback from the teacher without having to set up an official conference or meeting during school hours. The teacher was heard telling the mother about choices that her daughter will have in terms of electives (chorus or band) as she graduated to sixth grade in the fall. She recommended particular teachers and classes for her daughter (May 15, 2014).

In this section, I demonstrated that new connections among parents and with the school were established aided by the parents' participation in the language classes. While these relationships may have been lacking in depth, they, nevertheless, represent progress toward creating authentic cross-cultural relationships and bridging the gap between school and parents, moving toward the possibility of opening up of third spaces. In the next section, I will continue to build on this argument by describing the ways in which parents showed that they were growing in their knowledge and understanding through the language classes, which in turn strengthens connections and relationships among the communities.

### **Learning During the Parent Language Classes**

Both Latino/a and Anglo parents alike gained new knowledge and understanding during the parent language classes. First, both sets of parents learned that practicing the other language helped them to feel more confident and secure when speaking to a person of that language group. This is a significant finding of the study because greater confidence potentially contributed to parents' growing feelings of comfort among other parents and at the school. It also exposed the severity of the barrier of communication faced by both parent groups in interacting with others at the school of a different language background. Secondly, white parents gained new understanding, albeit focused on negative aspects, of the lived

realities of their Latino/a classmates. And finally, Latino/a parents expressed surprise that there were so many Anglo parents with interest in learning Spanish. They attributed white parents' desire to learn Spanish to their hope to better connect with the Spanish dominant parents especially at their children's school.

**Confidence building.** Anglo and Latino/a parents both reported gaining confidence in trying to hold a conversation in the other language through their work in the language classes. Both sets of parents reported that their work with the other group of parents was encouraging to them because they learned that most people, in a conversation, were going to help a speaker and try to come to an understanding even if language skills were not perfect. They learned that conversations were negotiations of meaning in which parents expressed their ideas with a combination of their home language, the new language, and gestures to relay their message. For most parents, both English and Spanish dominant, it was difficult to launch into a conversation in the other language with speakers of that language. During the first few weeks, many expressed trepidation about the joint conversation period of the class, but later reflected that it was good to push themselves given that the other parents were open to helping them and also struggling to learn a new language as well.

For instance, Anglo parents showed that they had learned confidence in speaking in Spanish and therefore, more likely to strike up a conversation with a dominant Spanish-speaking parent at the school following language classes. Kimberly, an English dominant mother with two children already enrolled in the TWI program and a rising kindergartener for next year, felt that prior to this class, she had never had a real conversation with another person in Spanish.

Well, I just got that... I don't know the right word. I wasn't speaking Spanish. I was reading or doing some homework with my kids in Spanish but I hadn't tried to have a

conversation in Spanish. To know that I could really have one even as rudimentary as it might have been. I think I'll feel quite a bit more comfortable now when we are in a group where there are Spanish speakers that I could get some point across. I feel like I got the ball rolling. (December 9, 2013)

Forcing herself to try to speak in Spanish with another person, especially a Spanish dominant person, helped Kimberly to feel more comfortable because she reported having many positive experiences during the joint conversation period in which the other speaker made an effort to understand her. It also increased the likelihood that there would be future occasions in which she might attempt to have a conversation with a Spanish dominant parent at school that prior to her participation in the classes, she would have avoided.

Another white mother, Scarlett, originally from London, agreed that she gained confidence through the class by feeling like she was part of a larger language learning group that was supportive ("we're all in it together") and in which mistakes were seen as a natural part of learning a language. She also gained empathy for understanding the difficulty of learning another language.

I got confidence, that's for sure, that is a good thing... For me personally I am not one to stand up in front of people and talk in front of people, especially people that I don't know. So the first evening that we all came together I... almost ran out the door, because even when we had to stand up and say our name, you know in English for me that was an issue. I'm just not one of those kind of people. That alone is to help me develop in myself to be honest. I think it just gives the confidence to know that nobody in that room was perfect; we all make mistakes; we're all learning the same thing. So, if you don't pronounce a word or a sentence properly it's not a problem. You know, *everybody is in it together*. Whereas I think initially you know, you're self-conscious of how you're sounding, the way you're pronouncing things. You know, that kind of stuff. I think after the second or third lesson it was... to me it was just very clear that *we're all in it together*, you know and you just... you take it not as fun but you have to relax about it, and just go with the flow somewhat. (December 10, 2013)

White parents benefited from the fact that a few of the Latino/a parents in attendance in the classes already had fairly strong command of the English language. Therefore, they

were able to help Anglo parents by acting as teachers. During the joint conversation time, they would stop them and repeat a word for clarification or teach them a vocabulary word they were missing. One evening, a Latina mother gave a mini-lesson on pronunciation in Spanish for her small group during the joint conversation period. She taught them that the “h” in Spanish is always silent like in the words “hola,” “hermano/a,” “huevo,” and “helado” (*hello, brother/sister, egg, ice cream*). The parents repeated the words after she said them, noticing the silent “h” (October 17, 2013). In this way, Spanish dominant parents put Anglo parents more at ease because they had a partner who could negotiate a conversation in English and Spanish and could interpret what they were trying to express in Spanish. Furthermore, these interactions in which the Latino/a parents played the role of language expert, were significant in that they countered typical interactions between Latino/a and Anglo parents in which, Latinos are constructed as subordinate, “lacking,” or deficient in some way (Fraga, Garcia, Hero, Jones-Correa, Martinez-Ebers, Segura, 2010; Nieto, 2010).

Spanish dominant parents likewise reported losing some of the *pena* or embarrassment that they previously felt when speaking English. For example, Diana, who has a first grade son in the TWI program, shared a similar experience with the English dominant mothers described above, Kimberly and Scarlett, in which she learned that making mistakes is a natural part of language learning. Other people are going to be able to understand her and it is better to try than to be silenced with fear of how you might sound to others.

Pues, aprendí que uno tiene que participar... como que quitar el miedo de querer hablar inglés. O sea porque yo creo que con el miedo, la pena, la vergüenza, como que uno no atreve hablarlo porque uno está como si lo digo me van a reír de mí. Porque me digo, si no me sale bien... me van a entender [todavía]. Entonces ahora yo digo como me salga... Entonces, ahora es lo que hago. Si no me sale bien pero trato

de comunicarlo bien... si yo no sabía [decirlo], ellos lo repetían y me decían exactamente cómo se decía. Entonces lo repetía y me decían que sí está bien (December 2, 2013).

*Well, I learned that one has to participate... as a way of getting rid of the fear of wanting to speak English. Or because I believe that it is with fear, shame, embarrassment, like one does not dare to speak it because one feels like if I say it, they are going to laugh at me. Because I tell myself, if it doesn't come out right... they are still going to understand me. So now, I say it however it comes out... So, now that is what I do. If it doesn't come out well but I try to communicate it well... if I don't know how to say it, they will repeat it and they will tell me exactly how one says it. So, I repeat it and they tell me that yes, it is ok.*

Aracela, a Latina mother also with a first grade son in the TWI program, also reported feeling less embarrassment and less uncomfortable speaking English with English dominant parents: “Yo, yo tenía menos pena. Pero menos pena. Yo sí... al final tuve... Podía hablar más al final que al principio. Perdí un poquito de mi timidez. Y me pareció bien para poder hablar bien y practicar” (*I had less shame. But less shame, I yes, at the end I had... I could speak more at the end than at the beginning. I lost some of my tendency to be timid. And it seemed good to me that I could speak well and practice*) (December 4, 2013).

In general, the parents reported gaining more “confidence” in their ability to have a conversation with a speaker of the other language. This was achieved, not by greatly improving in their Spanish or English fluency or skills over the duration of the classes, but, in part, because they realized that making mistakes is a part of learning. They also began to feel safe in the language classes where everyone, by being there, expressed an interest in improving in the target language and an interest in connecting with others at the school. Latino/a parents also benefited from the fact that this was an opportunity in which they saw up-close white English dominant parents struggling to overcome their own embarrassment and lack of proficiency as they tried to learn and speak a different language, something that was more common for Latino/a parents living in an English dominant society.



**Learning (some) realities of Latinos: “This class has really made me think about what it would be like.”** English dominant white parents also grew in their understanding and knowledge about their Latino/a classmates through their participation in the parent language classes. English dominant parents expressed having their “eyes opened” about the lived reality of the majority of Latino families who lived in or slightly above poverty and without the guarantees afforded by legal documentation. However, it is important to note that understanding the “reality,” focused on the negative aspects of Latinos’ lives in comparison with their own experiences. For example, many Anglo parents had not considered that Latino/a parents may have work on the weekend per their job requirements or to earn extra money. Kimberly, a stay-at-home mother that attended all three sessions of classes, related her surprise when she learned through conversation that the weekend plans for Ana María, a Latina mother participant in the second and third sessions of classes and the mother of her daughter’s classmate, were not to go to the pool or shuttle kids to swim lessons. Rather her weekends were filled by working:

We are talking about what we are going to do this weekend. And we were talking about going to the pool and she said that she had to go to work and she cleans hotel rooms at the x hotel. It was one of those like, ugh, starting to feel... And I don’t know how she wanted us to feel. I don’t think she wanted us to feel sorry for her. But it is one of those where you notice the difference in that aspect of life. (May 22, 2014)

This was an important moment for Kimberly and indicated that she had learned something new about the lived experience of Latino/a parents at her children’s school. She brought it up to me twice and shared it with other white Anglo parents on one occasion. It also seemed to motivate her thinking about how her family could better connect with Latino families at the school.

White parents also learned what it feels like to be in the linguistic minority at the school and to be surrounded by speakers of a different language and cultural background. For example, Ashley, a freelance reporter and mother to a kindergartener, who was attending an end-of-quarter award ceremony with her husband, told me she felt like she was “in a foreign land.” She shook her head, saying that she was only getting about half of what was being said, and that half was the part said in English. Ashley’s kindergarten son received an award for children that make an effort to speak their target language in the classroom whether it was Spanish or English (January 17, 2014). In an earlier interview together, Ashley explained the impact attending the language classes had made on her after the first session by making her step in the shoes of Spanish dominant parents in society surrounded with English:

*This class has really made me think what it would be like...And I work in social justice, and I have a bleeding heart anyways. But, it has given me all this sympathy about the idea of recent immigrants to our country and coming through all the noise. Because we sit in that cafeteria and all the instructions are in Spanish, and there is a comfort there. We are not comfortable. As a native English speaker, I am not comfortable. (November 18, 2013)*

Ashley continued to explain that after her experiences in the parent language classes, she feels even stronger about her commitment to the TWI program for its ability to provide schooling and services to the Latino community.

*It has really made me think about how happy I am to be a part of this school to give those families a comfortable place because they know that when they show up in the principal’s office... even if they have a little English someone can help them [by speaking with them] in Spanish or whatever. I’ve had all these deep thoughts about how nice to be a part of a community that is giving that. And what it would be like in the opposite situation were I in Germany or Russia where I had the survival language, and I was getting by but always felt like I was missing things. But here at this school, we are giving that safety net. That they can turn to someone and be like, *what was that?* (November 18, 2013)*

White parents in the parent language classes, also trying to learn another language, gained understanding and empathy about the difficulties that Spanish dominant parents face in navigating through a society of predominately monolingual English speakers.

**Latino/a parents' new knowledge: “Si ellos hablan español, tenemos una plática.”** Latino/a parents expressed surprise about the number of white English dominant parents that attended the language classes consistently over the three sessions and their interest in learning Spanish. Latino/a parents, including María Carmen, believed that the white Anglo parents wanted to learn Spanish to connect with the Latino/a parents: “Siento que ellos quieren comunicarse, quieren hablar, platicar con nosotros. Quieren tratar de entendernos” (*I feel like they want to communicate with us, they want to speak, chat with us. They want to try to understand us.*) (May 15, 2014). Regina, another Spanish dominant mother, remarked that she felt comfortable at the school where many people both white and Latino/a spoke Spanish: “Y el hecho también que vienen muchos americanos que vienen a aprender el español. Vemos que muchos de ellos ya hablan español” (*And the fact also that many American come and they come to learn Spanish. We see that a lot of them already speak Spanish*) (March 5, 2014). A new community of bilingual speakers was beginning to take form and the Latino/a parents looked favorably at this as a sign of mutual adaptation between the two language and cultural groups and as a way to increase the connections between them. María Carmen expressed her belief that this was a sign of progress toward greater understanding between the two cultures although she downplayed the cultural contributions of the Latino families to the school community.

...[S]í, [los padres anglohablantes] se están entendiendo. Ellos están adoptando a nuestra forma de ser que somos muy escandalosos. Que todo que queremos celebrar hasta el día del perro. Ellos están atendiendo a esto. Están aprendiendo y aprender el

español para ellos es divertido porque cuando venimos a la escuela y si ellos hablan español, tenemos una plática. Si no, hi y ¿cómo estás?...y se acabó. Entonces, pienso que sí. (May 15, 2014)

*...Yes, [the English speaking parents] are beginning to understand. They are adopting our way of being that we are very scandalous. That we want to celebrate everything up to the day of the dog. They are paying attention to this. They are learning and learning Spanish for them is fun because when we come to school and if they speak Spanish, we can chat. If not, hi and how are you? And it is over. So, I think yes.*

Although María Carmen spoke in a playful way about the “scandalous” nature of Latinos and their desire to celebrate everything, including the “day of the dog,” she described her sentiment that she has felt some efforts to bridge the cultural divide between parents at the school that begins with learning Spanish. Ana María agreed adding that the Anglo parents do understand and relate to Latinos and were the ones that proposed a school for parents in which they could learn each other’s language:

Y sí entienden la situación de nosotros porque cuando mi hija estaba en [otra escuela], unos amiguitos de [mi hija]--sus papás eran americanos; venían a la escuela. En pláticas que teníamos cuando íbamos a reuniones durante el transcurso de verano cuando ya no había clases, ellos allí proponían... vamos a proponer que haga una escuela para que cuando los niños están aprendiendo durante el día, los papás también estemos aprendiendo el español y Ustedes estén aprendiendo el inglés. (May 15, 2014)

*And yes, they understand our situation because when my daughter was at [another school], some friends of [my daughter]—her parents were American; they would come to the school. In conversations that we had when I went to meetings during the summer break when there weren’t any classes, they proposed there... we are going to propose that they make a school so that when the children are learning during the day, the parents also are learning Spanish and you all are learning English.*

Ana María repeated the fact that white parents were the ones behind suggesting parent language classes for both Spanish and English dominant parents a few times during the course of the year as evidence of parents’ desire to support one another and also the children who all faced the necessity to learn another language.

Regina, a mother originally from Acapulco, also learned that perceived barriers that previously kept her separate from English dominant parents can be surmounted at events like the language classes and others hosted by the school that purposefully unite families.

En inglés uno se cohíbe, y yo veo que pasa con mucha gente. Uno quisiera intercambiar ideas o platicar sobre los niños. Pero ves esta barrera. Y ahorita aunque... no hablamos nosotros mucho inglés y ellos no hablan mucho español, este tipo de eventos une... las familias. Me parece muy bueno. (March 5, 2014)

*In English one becomes inhibited and I see that that happens to many people. One wants to exchange ideas or have a conversation about the children. But you see this barrier. And now although... we don't speak much English and they don't speak much Spanish, this type of events unites...the families. It seems very good to me.*

The knowledge learned by parents in the form of greater understanding about each other and about being a language learner helped foster the newly forming relationships among parents in the classes, a precursor for third space openings. It also strengthened parents' ties to the school as parents learned more about the TWI program and the experience their children were having in a bilingual and bicultural classroom.

### **White Parents Imagine a New Future: “You Have to Almost Force Yourself”**

As members of the dominant and relatively affluent community who are accustomed to being in positions of power and voicing their opinions, Anglo parents were much more apt than the Latino/a parents to make suggestions about how the school could better connect to parents and encourage cross-cultural connections among parents and families. They argued that bridges must first be built from the school to the families so that school was no longer “this bubble, this mystery” (Kimberly, March 11, 2014). Many white parents agreed that there was simply not enough communication coming home from the school. They felt left in the dark about what was going on in the classroom both academically and socially. Yet, they wanted to trust the school and its professionals to do what was right. At the same time,

parents made clear that it was a provisional period in which they were waiting and watching to see what developed and how the school performed.

In addition to strengthening the connections in general from the school to home, white parents also expressed their desire to connect with all the members of the school community. They imagined eliminating barriers between parents by providing opportunities in which families could socialize during informal family picnics or game nights. The events would be informal and fun but would provide structured opportunities for parents to spend time with one another, removing the pressure on parents to overcome the linguistic and cultural barriers alone. Amy, a participant that attended all three sessions of language classes, agreed that informal get-togethers in which parents have fun with one another “*is education-- just to get to know the other people on a personal level and to break down those barriers*” (May 22, 2014). The Anglo parents argued that they needed to be pushed out of their comfort zone during whole school events when they admitted their tendency to congregate with people most like themselves out of comfort and familiarity. “*You have to almost force yourself* and tell yourself that at an event I am not just going to stand around and talk to my neighbors the whole night” (Kimberly, December 9, 2013). Parents wondered if assigned seating, school-organized partnerships between families, and ice breaker activities would help to stimulate more cultural mixing during school events. During end of year focus groups and surveys, Verónica, the literacy coach, confirmed that parents throughout the school confirmed that they wanted the school to organize more activities in which families across cultures could mix (July 16, 2014).

In addition to familial gatherings to build relationships between parents, English dominant parents also imagined a future in which families could support one another. For

example, Kimberly, after learning about classmate Ana María working during the weekends, was vocal about the school's potential role in matching parents and families to "figure out how we can help each other." She argued that the first step was learning about one another and identifying ways in which families could support one another:

One thing I always think is that... is like after hearing [Ana María] that she works all weekend, that we need some way to help people... if we knew more about each other... if there were a way to find out strengths, weaknesses, schedules like maybe we could bring [her daughter] with us one weekend to do something or if someone needed help with a subject like "my fourth grader could help your second grader with spelling." There are so many personal ways we could be addressing some of the other needs but because we don't communicate that or know that about each other... and again, this is just a pipe dream like thinking big picture. But, I do feel like if we could start facilitating that... I think Dr. Williams also has this dream too because it was the advantage of having everybody under one roof is that shared resources both in terms of school and teachers but also families. Everybody's kids are doing the same thing. (May 22, 2014)

Amy, another white mother, imagined a set-up in which parents from a particular class from both Spanish dominant and English dominant families would contribute all year long to a class project. This would help parents feel that they were contributing to their child's learning and his/her classroom. For example, she suggested that throughout the year, parents and their children would meet to plan and create the float representing a particular country for the yearly Carnival celebration. Amy lamented that this past year, the float for her daughter's classroom was created by one parent, and the kids did not contribute to its creation. Amy explained,

But, what if [the float] was built through the entire year, that in August each class gets its country, and that's what brings them all together, and then, there are things you do throughout the year in groups or as families to work towards it. (May 22, 2014)

Parents could organize different evenings in which they learn about their particular country such as a cooking night where they would sample foods from their country.

In concluding this section, I return to the significance of imagining a new shared future, which is a characteristic found in third spaces (Gutiérrez, 2008). In this section my hope was to establish that there was a growing sense of a shared future--a feeling that we are in this together so we should support one another. However, the vision was somewhat skewed since it did not represent the collective desires of both parent groups. It was still only the product of the white English dominant parents. This, along with other tensions and contradictions that undermined the intention of the parent language classes, is explored more in the subsequent section.

### **Tensions, Contradictions, and Barriers to Success**

#### **Avoiding Issues of Race, Ethnicity, and Privilege**

One important issue that warrants further research was whether white English dominant parents felt that they faced similar or different pressures as the Spanish dominant parents. It was unclear whether white parents understood or acknowledged their own privileges and those of their children in the classroom and the larger societal context. Although this issue emerged during only one conversation involving three white women and myself, also a white woman, the mothers claimed that there was great diversity among Latinos and therefore impossible to generalize about their life circumstances. For instance, Amy, a white English dominant mother shared that there was great diversity among the Spanish dominant parents in her daughter's kindergarten class:

I'm thinking about all the Spanish speaking parents in [my daughter's] classroom. I know one... I know some... It really spans from doctor down to someone who is cleaning houses. I mean it really looks like America in terms of the Spanish-speaking families. So, that's what I think is so cool about this. I think that's what is so cool about all this. (May 22, 2014)



Kimberly, also a white English dominant mother, agreed that there was wide variety of diversity among Latino families and that personal connections based upon similar circumstances was what fostered cross-cultural connections: “There is a lot of diversity within [the Latino] population too. I just think having that one on one conversations when you find that commonality like we both have three kids” (May 22, 2014).

While it is true that there is great diversity among Latino families, discussions about the role of race or ethnicity were missing from conversations. One mother, Frieda, argued that how she treats another person is based upon personal differences rather than cultural ones.

To me, yeah, what comes up from that is that I want to stay as *personal*, but not cultural... that’s what I was thinking that this isn’t *cultural* differences, but rather *personal* differences... That is my personal goal to really practice equality. It doesn’t matter what nationality you are.... That would be my goal to equalize... to not really make it about nationality someone is. But also see all the difference and specialty in the cultures but maybe probably with as less judgment as possible that would be my thing too to get to learn or know and understand them here. And whoever is here. It doesn’t really matter because, I mean, I am an immigrant! (laughs) I hope people don’t think less of me because I am also an immigrant. (May 22, 2014)

Frieda had immigrated to the United States 11 years ago from Germany. However, she has a fair complexion and light brown hair; speaks English fluently; has legal documentation for living and working in the United States; and continues to maintain a home in Germany. She enjoys many privileges that the Latino/a parents in the parent language classes did not have that have helped her and her family to assimilate into American society. Therefore, arguably, her immigrant status would differ from the majority of the Latino/a parents in the English language classes.

Likewise, Amy argued that she hoped that the children were learning from parents' example to look at the individual rather than the ethnic, cultural, or racial group to which one might belong:

I just hope that will be engrained into our kids that we look at *the individual*...I don't think that our children are looking at it in any other way than that way. But, maybe I'm wrong. And maybe it will change as they get older. I don't know. It would be interesting to get the kids' responses to that question. (May 22, 2014)

Amy's comment reflected her own doubts about what she was saying that while she hoped that her children judged people on the individual level, she wondered if that was true and if it would always be true.

Furthermore, white parents in the language classes felt that by learning Spanish, they practiced "anti-racism," by connecting with speakers of that language and, therefore, bridging the linguistic gaps between them. They likewise argued that since their children were in TWI classrooms, learning in Spanish alongside Latino/a children, they would grow up with "an immunity to racism" (Ashley, November 18, 2014). This is an oversimplification of a complex racial situation that the kids encountered in the classroom. Just because the language of some (and increasingly less as the children moved up in grade) of the instruction at the school was in Spanish, did not make it necessarily true that children were not getting the typical "lessons of white supremacy" (Lawrence, 1995, p. 3) predominant in American schools.

Classroom observations even at the kindergarten level revealed that children were quite aware of differences along racial, cultural, and class lines and the school counselor, Valencia Acosta, confirmed that as children got older "they start to awaken a little bit from the dreamy stage where everything is all pink, roses, rainbows, and unicorns" (May 22, 2014)

and “start to awaken to the realities and especially the realities of how different they can be whether it is disability, physical appearance, race and even SES (socioeconomic status)” (May 22, 2014). Therefore, the oversimplification or at a minimum an avoidance among white parents to discuss issues of race, ethnicity, and privilege about the complex racial situation at the school called for further attention.

While many white parents claimed that their goal in enrolling their child in the TWI program was to give him or her a schooling experience alongside children that may be different culturally, linguistically, or racially, at the same time white parents criticized the schools’ supposed focus on social justice, claiming that “while it is noble and important,” it clouded the real task of the school which should be “academic progress as a priority for *everyone*” (Kimberly, May 22, 2014). Citing the lack of data available to them about the test scores comparing children in TWI classrooms and those that are in traditional, mainstream classrooms, parents seemed willing to work for equity at the school as long as these goals did not negatively affect their own children’s achievement or success. Many parents reminded me that they were still in “an information gathering phase” (Ashley, November 18, 2014) in deciding their opinion of the TWI program for their children: “Often I’m like I don’t know how I feel about this, but I’m going to keep watching” (Ashley, November 18, 2014). This vigilance on the part of the white English dominant parents suggested that if they were not satisfied with the experience for their child, they were ready and able to pull their support and re-enroll their son or daughter in another school.

Ignoring or avoiding issues of race or ethnicity has been referred to as “color-blindness” (Lawrence, 1995) and the vehicle through which racism has continued to thrive even after “our professed commitment to its eradication” (p. 3). Lawrence continued, “the

primary mechanism by which ‘color-blindness’ sustains itself is denial. The cultural practice that enables and sustains this denial is a societal taboo against honest talk about what we see, feel, and know about racism” (1995, p. 3). Further research is needed to affirm whether white parents were indeed making claims of color-blindness or if the lack of conversation about race and ethnicity was a result of the type of conversations supported during the language classes. Claiming color-blindness prevents real examination and honest conversation about treatment of people because it is argued that everyone’s treatment is based upon their behavior and qualities and not their skin color or ethnicity. It thereby supports the myth of meritocracy in which people’s success is attributed to their work ethic and moral fortitude rather than the many advantages that they have simply because of their race, class, gender, and language group (Darder, 2012). Murillo’s (2002) ethnographic research also found that despite claims of living in a post-race society, race continues to play a real and important role in preserving white superiority and nativism in communities especially in the South that has had a long history of racism and segregation.

### **Intragroup Discrimination: “Echarles Tierra a Ellos”**

During our work together in the English language classes, personal stories emerged recounting discrimination faced by them or a family member on the part of English dominant speakers. For example, one mother, Ana María, shared the story of her parents’ last visit from Mexico to the States several years back, and how they were detained on the plane and interrogated even when they had the correct travel documents:

[D]ejaron [a mis padres] en el avión porque la inmigración...en [una ciudad de Carolina del Norte]. No sé... como de tipo racista....Les preguntaban tantas cosas. Mis padres no saben ni leer y escribir y menos en inglés. Entonces, se pusieron nerviosos y luego decían otra cosa. Ya se confundieron. Entonces, no, les digo que no van a entrar por allí. (May 1, 2014)

*They left [my parents] in the airport because immigration... in [a North Carolina city]. I don't know... like racist type....They asked them so many things. My parents don't know how to read and write and less in English. So, they became nervous and then they said another thing. And they got all confused. So, no, I tell them that they are not going to enter through there.*

At the time of our classes, Ana María's parents were preparing for another visit to the States to visit their grandchildren, and it was evident that she felt anxious about their traveling alone since they were likely to face further interrogation and discrimination. She discussed with me some strategies that they were going to employ in order to avoid problems including entering the United States first by stopping in Texas, where they are more accustomed to receiving visitors from Mexico, instead of direct to North Carolina.

However, another tension that emerged during the language classes was among Latino/a parents in the English language classes. Latino/a parents reported that they felt uneasy about other Latino/a parents in the class because they felt that some acted superior than them, and they feared bearing the brunt of *burla*, or mockery. It may have been evidence of what Paulo Freire (2010) discussed in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in which oppressed people take on the will of their oppressors and perpetuate, in turn, that oppression against people of their own group. In this way the hegemony of the oppressors continues and strengthens over time.

The parents in the English language classes tended to be reserved in class, keeping to themselves and not interacting much with others, especially during the first session when there were the most parental participants. As their teacher, I noted their reservations and tried to build comfort among parents with ice breakers, get to know you activities, and cooperative group activities. I did not suspect that they felt unsafe or scared to make a mistake since everyone was learning together. However, in interviews, the parents revealed to me that it

was often with other Latinos that they faced the most obvious scrutiny. In reflection with Verónica about the difficult dynamics of the class, she commented “there are social dynamics, economic dynamics... you have lived here longer....There are those that don’t even know how to read or write. That kind of discrimination amongst each other [exists]” (December 9, 2013). Parents seemed to operate from an unspoken hierarchy in terms of where someone was from; how long they had been in the United States; whether they had documentation; their level of English fluency; their employment; and skin color.

The 2006 Latino National Survey indicated that out of 2,868 Latino/a respondents, almost 65% reported that “in the most recent incident of being treated unfairly,” it was by a white person. Yet, a resounding 13% of the respondents said that they were last treated unfairly by other Latinos (Fraga et al., 2010, p. 75). In focus groups in various cities around the United States, Fraga et al. (2010) confirmed that participants discussed differences in language and origin that contributed to discrimination among Latinos and made claims that Latinos don’t help each other as much as other minority groups.

Held-over as a lasting effect from Latin American’s history of colonization, there is a legacy of competition among people based on their race and skin color, class, education level, and gender. Peter Wade (1997) detailed the system of socioracial stratification, or *sociedad de castas* (breed or caste society), that dominated Latin America beginning in the colonial period in which “...whites were at the top, Indians and blacks were at the bottom, and positions in the middle were defined by various criteria of status, among which colour and descent were very important...” (p. 29). This historical precedent in which whiter-skinned people were considered “more pure” and “more castellano,” given that the colonizers of Latin America were predominately white Europeans, continues to manifest today.

Whiteness, then, became indicative of a person's relative worth and access to power (Wade, 1997). Now that many Latinos find themselves in the United States, where there is, arguably, even more hostility against them, the intragroup discrimination becomes more pronounced as they are positioned against each other in their competition for resources and validation on the basis of race, class, gender, and their ability to assimilate to U.S. dominant culture.

In making plans for the classes, Verónica and I worried about having enough time for the Spanish and English classes to mix for conversation time. However, we failed to take into account that the Latino/a parents felt vulnerable even among the other Latinos and needed more time and support in building those connections first. The first time I learned of the potential of divisions within the Latino/a parental group was in December when talking with two mothers, Aracela and Rachel, in the school's media center together. Aracela and Rachel were friends prior to the language classes. Aracela explained that their husbands are from the same *pueblo* in Mexico: "Son de la misma ranca, el mismo pueblito" (*They are from the same ranch, the same little town.*) (December 4, 2013), and the families have reconnected recently. In addition, both families have sons in the first grade that like to play together. Aracela and Rachel typically came to the classes together and worked together. It is perhaps due to their close relationship with one another that they felt at liberty to speak more candidly with me about their experiences in the U.S. Aracela shared that she had learned some English by working here. However, working with other "hispanos" was difficult in her experience: "Los hispanos... es como... a veces nos queremos *echar tierra*. No nos queremos que se aprovechen... Eso es lo que no me gusta" (*Hispanics... it is like... sometimes we want to throw dirt at ourselves. We don't want others to take advantage... that is what I don't like.*) (December 4, 2013). When I asked her what she meant Rachel explained, "Es como hablar

mal de otros hispanos. Como en el trabajo de hablar mal de los compañeros. O, no te quieren ayudar. Lo mismo...” (*It is like speak badly about other Hispanics. Like at work to speak badly about the colleagues. Or, they don’t want to help you. The same...*) (December 4, 2013).

The fact that they would mention that other Latinos *les echan tierra*, or throw dirt at other Latinos, was surprising to me but also understandable given the complicated social situation of Latinos in the U.S. where one’s “legal” status, fluency in English, and prior educational level could help or hinder their family’s chance at survival.

Although Aracela said at first that she didn’t find this antagonism among Latinos in the English language class, a few moments later, Rachel mentioned the air of superiority of one Latina mother “que sabía más inglés que todos nosotros,” (“*that knew more English than all of us*”) who was attending the class to support her husband who had very low literacy in English and Spanish. Rachel and Aracela related an experience they had with the mother once when they were out shopping together and had seen her give a disapproving look to another Latina woman that was having trouble communicating in English. Aracela explained:

En una tienda había una persona antes de yo en frente de [mi hijo]. Y la hablaban en inglés y no entendía y la señora ésta sólo volteaba y la miraba de arriba a abajo. Y yo era como pero, ¿por qué? ¿Por qué no armarme para ayudarla? Mejor yo la ayudé... qué la está diciendo. “Mire, usted puede contestar con esto o esto o esto...” Y la otra señora sólo se quedó viendo así. (December 4, 2013)

*In a store there was a person before me, facing [my son]. And they spoke to her in English and she didn’t understand and this woman only turned around and looked at her from top to bottom. And I was like but, why? Why not get ready (arm myself) to help her? Better off I helped her... what they are telling you. “Look, you can answer with this or this or this”... And the other woman only stayed there looking like this.*

In this vignette told by Aracela she showed how she values when Latinos take care of each other in helping people overcome typical daily barriers like understanding English at a



store. However, this was not a common practice among Latinos according to these mothers.

As the language classes went into the second session, I was more aware of conflicts among Latinos in the English language classes and noted that one other parent, Javier, intentionally set himself apart from the others and in doing so, caused a division among parents in the class. Javier was from Costa Rica and had light sandy brown hair, a light complexion, and a friendly smile. When I first met Javier he had just arrived two months earlier to North Carolina with his wife and two sons for the start of the school year. They had come because his wife had been hired by the school district. Javier was an engineer in Costa Rica and was in the process of trying to get a work visa so that he could continue to work while they were in the States over the next three to four years. He had one of the highest proficiency of English in the class and seemed most to enjoy the joint conversation time with the English dominant parents. The thing that made Javier stand out the most, though, in the classes was not his English proficiency. Rather, it was his tendency to sit silently with his head down, staring at papers and ignoring his classmates seated at the same table. With so few parents in the second session of classes, it was painful to see him not interact with what became all other women participants. For example, when one woman asked him a question, he responded with a one word answer or else, as he later explained to me, he would turn the question around back to them. He said that he felt uncomfortable being the only parent not from Mexico in the classes and the only parent with “education.” In his interview with me it became clear that he did not see himself in the same light as his classmates. For example, he criticized the English of Mexicans and their tendency to pronounce English words with a Mexican accent:

Nos sucede mucho con la parte de México. Han hecho al inglés por pronunciarlo como si fuera el español. Lo que la gente llama “spanglish” pero no es spanglish. Si

me muestras una palabra en inglés, por ejemplo, ‘bridges,’ que sabemos que es puentes. Pero yo diría “bri-ge-s” por decirte algo. Nosotros diríamos vamos al puente y hablamos. Entonces yo me he dado cuenta de las distorsiones en el idioma que entonces esta palabra ahora cambia la frase a “vamos a hablar en el bri-ge-s.” (December 9, 2013)

*This happens a lot to us with Mexico. They have made it into English by pronouncing it as if it were Spanish. What the people call “Spanglish” but it isn’t Spanglish. If you show me a word in English, for example, “bridges,” that we know is “puentes.” But, I would say it “bri-ge-s” to tell you something. We would say we go to the bridge and we talk. So, I have realized that the distortions in the language that now this word changes the sentence to “we are going to talk in the bri-ge-s.”*

Javier also attempted to link Costa Rica with the United States in terms of its immigration “problem”:

Tenemos en Costa Rica el mismo *problema* como en Los Estados Unidos. Que la gente migra y migra a este país. Y son personas que aunque vengan legalmente o ilegalmente en el momento y deciden quedarse aquí por el nivel de vida es mucho más alta aquí. (December 9, 2013, my italics)

*We have in Costa Rica the same problem as the United States. That the people migrate and migrate to this country. And they are personas that while they may come legally or illegally at the moment and then decide to stay here because the level of life is much higher here.*

Javier also related that for him the joint conversation period was easier even though he had to speak in English than working with other Latinos because English dominant parents were more open and outgoing:

Yo considero que la parte más fácil... aunque difícil por la comunicación pero es sí, con las personas de acá de los Estados Unidos. Hablar con los estadounidenses... Es más fácil. Más difícil por el idioma. Pero es más fácil por el recibimiento por el querer aproximarse a otros. ¿Por qué? Porque la cultura latina es muy tímida. Bueno, cuando ya haya confianza se abre un poquito más. Al principio es complicado porque hay mucho timidez. (December 9, 2013)

*I consider the easiest part... although difficult for the communication but it is yes, with the people from here, from the United States. To speak with the people from the United States... it is easier. More difficult for the language. But easier for the reception for the want to get close to others. Why? Because the Latino culture is very shy. Well, when there is confidence it opens up a little more. But at the beginning it is complicated because there is a lot of shyness.*

Javier blamed the Latinos/as for their “shyness” and reluctance to be open with one another when in reality, their behavior may be more attributable to the fact that for safety and survival, Latino/a parents feel that they must protect themselves from others that dismiss them, as Javier did in the language classes. As well, in North Carolina and throughout the United States Latinos may hold back from interacting or engaging in the community due to the need to maintain anonymity due to the system of criminalization of immigrants in our country. Javier also touched on a very important factor of *confianza*, or trust. He acknowledged that when parents feel trust and confidence, they are more open. Therefore, it is possible that there was a lack of *confianza* in the classes and that it affected how much parents related to one another. It is also understandable that other parents may have acted “timid” around him because of the air of superiority that he projected. Javier described other Latinos reaction to him when they learned that he was *costarricense* (Costa Rican):

Por ejemplo cuando ellos me hablan conmigo, muchos piensan que soy colombiano. Porque hay mucho colombiano y nuestro acento tiene cierta similitud. Entonces la primera es que me preguntan si soy colombiano. “Pues, no. Soy de Costa Rica.” Pero Costa Rica es el país en mejor condición que está en Sudamérica. Entonces cuando yo digo que soy costarricense... no sé si conoces la palabra “recelo.” Es que están celosos. Muchas veces es así. Pero cuando percibo que la situación de la persona no es muy grata, la presencia, no la persona específica, lo que haces es enfocarte en la situación o te vuelves más amistoso y no hablas para nada del país donde vienes y te preocupas más por la otra persona. (December 9, 2013)

*For example when they speak with me, many think that I am Colombian. Because there are a lot of Columbians and our accent has a certain similarity. So, the first is that they ask me if I am Colombian. “Well, no. I am from Costa Rica.” But Costa Rica is the country in the best condition in South America. So when I say that I am Costa Rican... I don’t know if you know the word “recelo” (suspicious). It is that they are jealous. Many times it is this way. But when I perceive that the situation of the person is not very good, the presence, not the specific person, what you do is focus in on the situation or you become friendlier and you don’t speak of anything of the country from where you come and you worry more about the other person.*

Javier demonstrated that he was self-aggrandizing and treated the other parents

condescendingly. This likely emerged from a combination of factors including his proficiency in English, his “legal” status, his level of education and profession, the light color of his skin, and even because he was one of very few men that attended the classes. Therefore the fears of Aracela and Rachel about the possibility to be judged and made fun of during the language classes were not far-fetched. It appeared that parents were indeed making comparisons and judgments about one another.

In trying to understand the attrition of Latino/a parents from the classes, Verónica agreed that the social dynamic among the Latino parents may have contributed to parents not returning.

[T]he dynamic amongst the Hispanics can be very intense, and they are very like... you know, we are mean [bangs lightly on desk] and someone would say something and people would laugh and then that person doesn't want to come again. There are the million social differences among the Hispanics. And there are the cultural differences and the country differences and there are so many differences among the Hispanic parents. With the English-speaking parents it is more unified and they are more all the same. So, it is huge. (December 16, 2013)

This discussion of intergroup discrimination is very significant in thinking about implications of this study and implications on the possibility to open third spaces in the parent language classes. While the Latino/a parents came from, perhaps, differing circumstances, they shared many of the same goals and desires for themselves and their family. Therefore, trust and relationships among these parents bears consideration prior to engaging them across cultural, social, and racial groups.

### **Appreciation...But Not Trust**

In addition to feeling apprehensive about interacting with other Latinos, Latino/a parents also felt isolated from Anglo parents. On one hand, Latino/a parents expressed appreciation toward Anglo parents who were learning Spanish as they argued that the more

people spoke their language, the better off things would be for their day to day experiences in the doctor's office, stores, and restaurants. As mentioned earlier, Latino/a parents felt that the Anglo parents at the school were interested in learning more about them and wanted to learn Spanish so that they could talk with them at school.

Yet, at the same time, Latino/a parents expressed the distance that they continued to maintain from Anglo parents. For example, María Carmen related that she hid the birthday party invitations that her second grade son received from Anglo classmates because she felt so uncomfortable trying to have a conversation with the parents at the party. She preferred to simply tell her son that they couldn't go after the party had already passed. Whereas when they would get an invitation from a Latino classmate, they readily attended.

De hecho...yo a las fiestas casi nunca voy. Mi hijo este año trae tres veces invitaciones de los compañeros de clase y no le dije....Porque... por lo mismo. Por no poder participar. Me hace difícil preguntar, ¿Y cómo estuvo la fiesta? ¿Se divirtieron? Son cosas que a mí me gusta preguntar claro para tener plática y no solamente para agarrar al hijo e irme. Entonces por eso ni le dije y no se enterró hasta después de la fiesta cuando regresó a la escuela y sus amigos le preguntaron por qué no fue. Y me pregunta, “¿por qué no me dijiste que fui invitado a una fiesta?” Y le dije, “es que no pudimos.” Pero este domingo le invitó un niño hispano a una fiesta de cumpleaños y sí vamos a ir. (María Carmen, May 15, 2014)

*In fact... to the parties I almost never go. My son this year has brought three times invitations from classmates and I don't tell him... because...for the same thing. For not wanting to participate. It is hard for me to ask, And how was the party? Did they have fun? These are things that I like to ask of course to have a conversation and not to just grab my son and leave. So for that reason I didn't even tell him and he didn't find out until after the party when he returned to school and his friends asked him why he didn't go. And he asks me, “why didn't you tell me that I was invited to a party?” And I told him, “we couldn't go.” But this Sunday a Hispanic boy invited him to a birthday party and yes, we are going to go.*

María Carmen, despite her participation in the language classes, continued to feel uncomfortable when speaking with English dominant parents even during the short time for drop off and pick up from a classmate's birthday party so much, that she denied her son the

opportunity to go and play with his classmates. This indicated the severity of the feelings of ill-ease around English dominant speakers, given that these were not strangers, but her son's classmates.

Continuing to hold Anglo parents at a distance and limiting opportunities in which their children could interact with them indicated a debilitating lack of trust with these parents. Without trust, parents could not form real relationships between each other and would not encourage the same among their children. Rodríguez-Brown (2010) argued that *respeto*, respect, and *confianza*, mutual trust, were required at school and must form the basis of relationships and interactions. *Confianza* was clearly still missing since, in general, at birthday parties and at school events there was marked division between Latinos and Anglos. Both groups tended to stay separated from one another. Even in the classroom, relationships were not forming between Latino/a and Anglo children. Amy, a white mother, disclosed, "I don't hear [my daughter] talking about any of the native Spanish speaking kids in her class to be honest. And I know that we certainly haven't connected [with Latino parents]..." (May 22, 2014).

### **Barriers to Offering Criticism about School**

Latino/a parents, in comparison to white parents, and due in part to their positionality in the community and school, did not feel able, willing, and/or comfortable criticizing the school. For example when speaking with Diana at a local Burger King where we had dinner with her son, she felt that she did not know enough about the school or her son's teacher to make a judgment (December 2, 2013). Rather, she felt overwhelmed and worried about her son's behavior and his lack of advancement academically. She blamed her son for his

behavior and believed that his classroom teacher was doing everything possible to help her son.

Aracela, another mother with a first grade son, had the opposite situation. Her son was doing very well academically in the classroom and therefore, she considered her son's teacher to be very good. When I asked her in what ways the teacher was a good teacher, she repeated that her son was doing well and was being moved into a higher level reading group, and so, she was happy (December 4, 2013).

On feedback forms filled out after each class meeting during the first session, Latino/a parents listed the topic and things learned during the class and wrote that everything was good and that they were happy with the class activities (November 21, 2013). Likewise, in discussion about the language classes and whether they were meeting their needs, many parents reported that they were grateful for the classes and that they were a good excuse to get out of the house and do something different. Often the discussion turned, instead, to their disappointment with the lack of interest and the number of Latino/a parents that had dropped out of the classes. One example was from Rachel who was one of the few parents to continue from the first session into the second session:

Refiriendo a los [padres anglohablantes] que asisten las clases, ellos tratan de hablar español y ellos apenas también. Pero me han tocado algunos que sí se esfuerzan y sí tratan de hablar español. Y tal vez se esfuerzan un poquito más... quizás más que nosotros. He visto varios que han venido desde el principio mientras nosotros... Javier y yo somos los únicos graduados de la otra sesión. Pero de los otros desde que empezaron las clases, varios de ellos siguen tomando las clases. También se dificulta ellos con el idioma pero quizás no tanto como para nosotros. (March 25, 2014)

*Referring to the [English speaking parents] that attended the classes, they try to speak Spanish and they also feel embarrassed. But I have had turns with some that do really make an effort and they do try to speak Spanish. And perhaps they make a greater effort... perhaps more than us. I have seen various [parents] that have come since the beginning while we... Javier and I are the only graduates from the other*

*session. But the others since the classes began, some of them keep taking the classes. The language is also difficult for them but perhaps not as much as for us.*

Verónica, the Spanish language teacher and literacy coach, argued that Latino/a parents are not going to critique the school or the society where they are living because the majority of them are undocumented and therefore they are living hidden in the community.

They never will [critique their situation]. You know, it is the ruling race... or the dominant and you are in their country. They are never going to criticize it. They are here. If they were in Mexico or their own country, they might because I hear a lot of criticism. They are here, they are working here, living here, they are sending their kids to school here... they will not criticize anything. They will just check out and not do things that they don't want to do. They are either embarrassed or unreachable. (May 28, 2014)

It is a likely that a combination of factors contributed to Latino/a parents' reluctance to offer their critique of the school or teachers. First, they might have felt restricted and uncomfortable talking to me about other teachers or the school in a negative way given that I was their language teacher and, although I was very aware of my outsider status, I may have also represented the school in their eyes.

Furthermore, the majority of the Latino/a parents had limited schooling themselves, and in many cases, they were still learning about the school system in the United States. They were in a period of learning how things worked and how to approach problem situations that involved their children and preferred to learn through others' experiences first before acting. On the other hand, these parents' knew best what their child needed and what his/her difficulties were, and when they felt it was necessary to act, they worked hard to inquire about and obtain the needed resources and services for their children.

### **Tensions Around Joint Conversation Time**

"I mean there are so many things that come up. And you are putting all these things together that they are running away from all day. And if I were one of them I wouldn't want



to stay. I would go away...” (Verónica, June 13, 2014).

The joint conversation time at the end of each class meeting was the part of the class that many parents, both Latinos and Anglos, said that they enjoyed most. Yet, it was also the most uncomfortable part of the evening for many, including myself. For me, it was uncomfortable because it was difficult coordinating the movement of the parents into small groups and explaining the tasks to the parents while being cognizant of the little time remaining in the class meeting. I also felt that it was the most important time of the classes and wanted to capitalize on the time remaining with the parents. Although it differed during some of the early class meetings, by session II and III, the English dominant parents came into the Spanish dominant classroom. I posted the directions of the task in English and Spanish on the overhead while I explained verbally again, in English and Spanish, what we wanted them to practice together. I kept time, announcing when it was time to change languages. Despite these efforts to organize our time, there were always numerous questions and confusion about what the parents were to do. It is likely that parents were overwhelmed by meeting with the other parents, getting comfortable and then understanding what we were asking them to do. More time and a slower pace may have been helpful in reducing some of this frustration around the joint conversation time.

In addition to these logistical issues including the over-dominance in numbers of Anglo parents in participation mentioned earlier in this chapter, these conversations played out some of the difficult social situations that Spanish dominant parents face each day in the community. Verónica, the Spanish language teacher, imagined that the Latino/a parents might have felt taken aback after the first class and after only one hour of instruction, when we said that it was time to go practice with the other parents. Verónica speculated that they

would think, “Whoa, I don’t want to do that. I don’t feel comfortable. What will they ask me? What am I going to say? This is my kids’ school” (June 13, 2014). In the school setting, they are not anonymous. Rather, they are members of the school community and connected to a child or children that attend the school. Therefore, the stakes are higher in terms of the impression made and how comfortable or uncomfortable they felt with others.

For many white English dominant parents, the joint conversation time was also a little uncomfortable, but they found it ultimately, worthwhile in terms of interacting with dominant Spanish speakers and trying out their new language skills. For example, Kimberly reflected on the value of the joint conversation time for pushing her to do something she would otherwise be too self-conscious to do.

I thought it was fun. I think it is something I always want to do but I’m not brave enough sometimes to just do it without it being in a format like that. I would love it if there were more of that and I think it helps us a lot. You get a topic and explore it together. I like when they spoke English. It was fun to realize probably how we sound to them. I thought they did a great job and even though they made some mistakes, I totally could understand what they were saying. I could... correct them and I thought well, that is how I sound to them. Maybe that is presumptuous but that made me feel more comfortable. (December 9, 2013)

However, the joint conversation period was more difficult for Spanish dominant parents who, in addition to being out-numbered by English dominant parents and facing many social and cultural issues that distinguished them from their English dominant partners, felt put on the spot because of the nature of the conversation practice. As parents were meeting each other for the first time questions including where are you from, how long have you lived here, and who are your children may have been perceived as interrogatory by parents. Verónica shared that Javier also speculated on why many Latino parents had dropped out of the classes:

[M]any [parents] are illegal and the fact that when it was the common part, many of

the questions were around: where are they from; what is their occupation; how long they have been there; and why they came here. Many of them are illegal and so the questions were a little... And [Javier] thought that might be part of it. (December 16, 2013)

In addition, Anglo parents were much more demanding in terms of articulating what they needed in order to help them learn Spanish. They had experience taking foreign language classes in high school and college. Many of them had in fact studied Spanish in high school or college, and therefore, they already held expectations regarding what a language class should look like, the role of teacher, and the role of student. They were also more adept at asking questions and making the joint conversation time “worth” their time in terms of what they would gain in language instruction. They would frequently ask Spanish speakers about pronunciation or other rules that extended beyond the immediate task at hand. Although a timer was used to try to keep the time even between Spanish language time and English language time, when the parents were left to talk in small groups they often resorted to English because the parents learning Spanish had such low proficiencies. Verónica again explained her impressions about the joint conversation time:

The Spanish speakers’ English is a lot better than the English speakers’ Spanish. They have been here, they’ve worked. They can communicate in a society in English. With all their mistakes it doesn’t matter but yes, they can. They can have a conversation with these people. But what that means, and what they will say, it will be so limited. There are so many things that have to happen before that. (June 13, 2014)

As parent participation dropped off considerably with the second session of classes, Verónica and I considered eliminating all together or making the joint conversation period optional. However, the parents (both Latino and Anglo) that remained in the second session reported that they enjoyed the joint conversation time and in fact, some came to the classes, precisely for the opportunity to practice the language with dominant language speakers:

The parents in the Spanish classes were very happy and involved. But, the idea was to

have the joint conversation period. The people in my class really enjoyed that part of the class at the end which to me was surprising to me because some even told me that they come because of that. (May 28, 2014)

The intention was to mirror the dynamic in the children's TWI classroom with a split population and time in English and time in Spanish. The hope was that giving parents the space to work together on a shared task, they would overcome some of the many barriers that existed between them and possibly begin to change the space in light of new understandings and shared experiences. Yet, there were other factors at work that we could not control that derailed the efforts and pointed to areas in which future work can be done.

### **My Role as Teacher/ Researcher**

My role as a language teacher and as a researcher in this space was also problematic. First, as the language teacher for the Latino/a parents learning English, it is possible that a Latino/a teacher may have had more consistent return participants without such a steep decline. The parents, of course, did not express any dissatisfaction with me as the teacher neither in written feedback nor in personal interviews. If they were hesitant to critique the classroom teachers of their children, they would be equally (or more) hesitant to tell me directly what they thought of me in the role of their teacher. Many reported that they were happy that they could speak to me in their dominant language of Spanish. Yet, it may have been more powerful for them to have had a Latino/a teacher that could better relate to their experiences living as a member of the language minority group in an English dominant society while they worked to negotiate public schools. It is possible that they may have felt more inclined to form a stronger personal connection with a Latino/a teacher based upon their shared history.

It may have also had an impact had the language teacher been a classroom teacher at

PES as well. This would have given the parents even more insider information, and the teacher would have been able to pass information about the families to their child's classroom teacher more readily. As it was, I had some limited information and knowledge about the school as the language classes began, but I was learning along with the parents about teachers, about the policies and procedures, and the tone of the school. For example, when parents introduced themselves and shared the names of their child's teacher, I was unfamiliar with the majority of them. Slowly over the course of the year I developed more intimate understanding of the school and its key players, yet this information would have been helpful at the beginning of the course.

Verónica and other members of the faculty speculated that my positionality may have negatively affected the classes. Verónica told me that in trying to account for the decline in parental attendance over the first session to the principal and parent education team, one issue that came up was the fact that I was not Latina and could that have been a factor in the steep decline in parental participation of Latinos.

I was wondering... and I don't know if this will affect... but the fact that I am Hispanic... the rapport that I could have with those parents is different from yours. It's not bad or better, just different. So, when we had our debrief... because I have done it for many years. You know, I have never taught, like, white Americans in Spanish. It was my first time and you know, they came because of the class. But the rapport with those parents who there is all this situation going on and we were wondering If I had taught that class, would it have been different. I don't know. (December 9, 2013)

The white parents continued coming, according to Verónica, because of their interest in the language class whereas, she believed that the Latino/a parents typically continue coming to school events because of relationships that they have formed, not so much because of the event itself. At the same time Verónica acknowledged that she did see that I had rapport with the parents.

I mean you did it. I saw you had the rapport. But, it is one thing that maybe... Valencia also said that--she said what if you had taught it, would they have left like that? I mean it is different because the English-speaking parents no. They came to learn and it didn't really matter who taught them. For the other parents, it might matter. (December 9, 2013)

Verónica had experienced similar rates of attrition when she taught English language classes to parents of other language backgrounds previously at another school. However, PES and the leadership team was looking for a way to explain what happened in the classes and to think about making improvements for the next year. Verónica explained,

Every year it was the same I'd start with 15 and end up with 8 every year or 7. That was kinda the norm. But, it was a year round thing. Those people... I was like part of their family and they were like....(May 28, 2014)

Still, attrition from 18 to five Latino/a parents in the first session of classes is a large decline of about 72% loss in participation, and inquiry into why that might have happened was warranted.

To compound matters, my role as a researcher with all the trappings of video cameras, flip cameras, tripods, and consent forms could have added to the feelings of unease among parents, especially Latino/a parents that may have already felt unsure about being at the school and uneasy about people inquiring about their opinions about their children's school. While everything possible was done to assure them of their anonymity and the anonymity of the school and fact that their participation in the study was optional, my involvement as a researcher in the classes may have contributed to parents' feelings of uneasiness in the classes.

### **Analysis/ Discussion: Third Space Opening?**

In this section I will take into account, now, the findings shared above 1) building bridges between parents and between home and school; 2) learning or knowledge gained, and

3) an imagined new future. I also keep in mind the tensions, contradictions, and barriers that ultimately prevented the success of the parent language classes to fully realize its potential to allow third spaces, that is, more equitable school spaces that incorporate and honor the experience and knowledge of the Latino community, to open. Applying the lens of third space theory, I turn now to the analysis of these themes to assess whether third spaces indeed opened or remained dormant during this work in the parent language classes. The characteristics of a third space as identified by the literature include 1) valuing funds of knowledge (González et al., 2005) and cultural contributions of families; 2) creating new spaces within the accepted and official space through contestation and counterscripts; 3) collaboration and co-creation of knowledge; and 4) the movement toward a new future and creation of new identities (Benson, 2010; Bhabha, 1994; Gutiérrez, 2008; Moje et al., 2004).

The data analysis revealed that third spaces did not open during the parent language classes. However, instead of having the binary that third spaces opened or did not open as they are typically theorized, I argue that a more nuanced understanding of the levels of third space openings would help educators and others understand and identify progress being made while also looking to see how they could make progress toward a more fully opened third space. Therefore, I have divided third space opening into three levels along a continuum: *initial, intermediary, and developed*. Figure 2 depicts the levels of third space openings and a description of each level.

Figure 2: Levels of Third Space Opening, Description, and Source

Level of third space opening	Description and characteristics	Source
<i>Initial</i>	<p>Avoiding issues of race, ethnicity, and privilege</p> <p>Intragroup discrimination</p> <p>Seek/desire connections with other parents/families and with the school</p> <p>Initial connections made, become acquainted with other parents and families and the school</p> <p>Arrival to some limited knowledge particularly in the form of “awareness” and “empathy” and primarily about negative aspects of people’s lives</p> <p>Some conceptualization about future roles but not in collaboration with others</p>	Mined from the data collected at PES from 2013-2014
<i>Intermediary</i>	<p>Knowledge formation: learn about, acknowledge, accept roles of race and racism in our society and schools</p> <p>Understand “realities” of other person’s life</p> <p>Share spaces, experiences with other people</p> <p>Connections strengthened between parents and with the school based upon mutual trust (<i>confianza</i>) (Dyrness, 2007)</p> <p>Understand the need to work toward a common goal</p> <p>Work toward a common identified “good”</p> <p>Begin to question and push back against the status quo</p> <p>Seek ways to be meaningfully engaged in issues of weakness or injustice</p>	Needs to be explored and tested in future research
<i>Developed</i>	<p>Knowledge formation: learn about family’s funds of knowledge, epistemological and ontological stances</p> <p>Honor and incorporate this knowledge into daily interactions</p> <p>Collaboration in space that leads to co-creation of new knowledge</p> <p>Action to change the status quo- act on areas identified as “unjust” or “weak”</p> <p>Imagination of a different future role/ self</p> <p>Put steps in place to work toward a more just future based upon equity</p> <p>Unpack privilege and engage in continuous self and collective reflexivity</p> <p>Advocate for school policies and practices that support an equitable and humanizing space that blends school and home</p>	<p>Gutiérrez (2008); González et al. (2005); Moll et al. (1992)</p> <p>Benson (2010); Moje et al. (2004)</p> <p>Lawrence (1995); McIntosh (1989)</p>



It is important to note that the openings of third spaces is on a continuum and that its arrow extends beyond the *developed stage of third space* to suggest possibilities beyond what is conceptualized here as a fully developed third space opening. A school or group of classes, as in this present case study, could move between levels or even straddle two levels by having characteristics of both. Therefore the figure includes arrows doubling back to earlier levels or skipping forward from the initial to the developed level of third space opening as there are no set steps that third space opening has been shown to follow. The opening of third spaces is not a harmonious process. It is one marked by ruptures, doubling back, regaining ground, and periods of stagnation. Gutiérrez (2008) explained, "...work in these spaces is difficult and filled with contradictions, setbacks, and struggle. It remains an unfinished work" (p. 160). And thus, should be seen in that way, as "an unfinished work" for PES. I must emphasize that the parent language classes sponsored by PES under the leadership of the principal did significantly move this group of parents toward third space opening, and I believe that in the coming years, they will continue to strive toward more fully opened third spaces.

*Initial openings of third space* are marked by limited connections made between parents and between the home and school. There is also some progress made in which parents arrive to awareness and empathy about the reality of others. There may even be some conceptualization about a shared future. However at this level, work is not done in collaboration with one another. Avoiding issues of race, ethnicity, and privilege and intragroup discrimination may even continue to operate and undermine efforts at this level. This is considered the initial step in moving away from the status quo toward change for a

more just and equitable future. The characteristics for the initial openings of third space have been mined from the data collected in the field at PES.

*Intermediary openings of third space* are characterized by greater knowledge formation by its members in which people come to understand more clearly the other person's life especially by sharing spaces and experiences with other people. Connections are strengthened between parents and with the school because they are based now on mutual trust. Members begin to work toward commonly identified goals, and by doing so begin to question and push back against the status quo. As a group, they seek ways to be meaningfully engaged in areas of injustice that they identify. This level of third space openings needs to be further explored in subsequent studies to learn more about characteristics that might manifest itself as groups move between the initial and developed levels of third space openings.

*Developed openings of third space* represent reaching the full potential of third space. Based upon the work of Kris Gutiérrez (2008), González et al. (2005), and Moll et al. (1992), through collaboration with one another, its participants co-construct new knowledge realizing not only the negative "realities" of families lived experiences but also their funds of knowledge and their epistemological and ontological strengths. They honor and incorporate these knowledges into daily practices and see them as worthy of teaching to their children. Following the work of Lawrence (1995) and McIntosh (1989) participants in this space also unpack privilege and engage in continuous self and collective reflexivity as they continue to grow in awareness of the ways that their positionality gives them unearned advantages. Members reimagine future roles and positions that they might occupy (Benson, 2010; Moje et al., 2004). Participants are actively changing the status quo, pushing back against those areas that they have identified as unjust or weak. They work toward a future space based

upon equity and advocate for school policies and practices that support their goal of creating an equitable and humanizing school/home space (Gutiérrez, 2008).

The parent language classes at PES arrived to the *initial level of third space opening*. While there were areas of weakness, including intragroup discrimination among Latinos and tensions during the joint conversation period, there were also areas of strength, including language-class parents seeking and desiring to make connections between parents and with the school; the initial connections made; limited knowledge production; and some limited conceptualization about future roles of parents.

In this section I will review the characteristics of the language classes as they relate to third space opening and in Chapter Six: Implications and Conclusions, I will address ways in which the parents and the school can continue to move forward along the continuum toward *developed opening of third spaces*.

### **Valuing Family's Funds of Knowledge, Cultural Ontologies, and Epistemologies**

While further research is needed to further substantiate whether this was characteristic of all the white parents involved in the parent language classes, or isolated to one group of the parents, the parents' actions and words exposed areas that needed further development to promote authentic relationships across parent groups as well as within the Latino/a parent group necessary for third space openings. The avoidance of issues of race and ethnicity as well as acknowledging their own privileges and privileges of their children among white English dominant parents limited their ability to articulate ways in which the Spanish dominant parents were held back collectively by their ethnicity, class, language ability, immigration status, and education levels in the United States. Their beliefs needed to

be couched more in understanding the history and continued existence of racism and white privilege that benefits them and their families and is detrimental to the lives of Latino families and other non-dominant cultural, linguistic, and racial groups.

Likewise, Latino/a parents' intragroup discrimination and limited sense of responsibility to each other prevented Latino/a parents from growing meaningful and supportive relationships with one another. Given the many challenges the Latino/a parents faced in schools and society, their solidarity with one another must be grown and supported first, before entering into partnerships with Anglo parents. Gloria Anzaldúa (2007) wrote about the double silencing of Latinos/Chicanos in which "el anglo con cara de inocente nos arrancó la lengua" (*the English speaker with an innocent face will pull out our tongue*) (p. 75) while "even our own people, other Spanish speakers, nos quieren poner candados en la boca (*they want to put locks on our mouth*). They would hold us back with their bag of relgas de academia" (*academic rules*) (p. 76). At PES, likewise, Latino/a parents faced discrimination and silencing from Anglos as well as other Latinos. Other Latino/a parents, with a sense of superiority based upon their country of origin, their length of time in the United States, and their fluency in English among other factors, refused to connect with other parents. They maintained, instead, distance and reluctance to identify with other Latinos, including women and those from lower status or social classes. Even some Latina teachers at the school, as I explore in the next chapter, did not appear to demonstrate their valuing of their Latino/a students' culture and include it in the curriculum in substantial ways.

The goal of the parent language classes was to engage parents in the learning of the other language but to also open spaces in which parents could interact with one another and exchange ideas. The hope was that parents would begin to identify strengths and skills that

all parents brought with them to the school setting, and begin to demand that the school and classroom educational spaces valued and incorporated these skills as well.

### **Creating New Spaces Through Contestation and Counterscripts**

First, the parent language classes did represent a new deliberate space within the confines of the “official” school-sanctioned space in which Latino/a and Anglo parents were intended to interact and build relationships together. However, due to a number of constraints-- including the short duration of class meetings; the insistence on three separate sections separated by lengthy breaks in instruction; the lack of advance planning; and other logistical issues-- these language classes never evolved into a space in which parents had the time to truly develop authentic relationships of trust and time to share their concerns and observations about the school and its classrooms. Therefore, there were no instances in which counterscripts emerged or parents pushed back on the status quo. In fact, there was little communal talk that was critical of the school, teachers, or curriculum of the classroom. The closest example of pushing back on the status quo was the conversation among white parents after a class meeting in which one mother talked about attending a protest in effort to secure more funding for teachers and public schools. However, there was no criticism made among parents about a teacher or the school during the language classes. It is possible that as the parents move along the continuum toward developed third space openings, that the language classes could serve in this capacity. Some white parents individually went to Verónica, the literacy coach, to voice their concerns about their own child’s progress in the classroom and the teacher’s practices in another classroom. Their opportunity to get to know Verónica during the language classes is likely to have positively influenced them to go and talk with her since they had established some trust with her.

The language classes, therefore, in many ways continued the already established patterns of separation and discrimination between parents and did not push out on the status quo. Verónica reflected on the language classes at the end of the school year:

I mean it was a very interesting situation, but it reflects a lot of things from society that these people face. And maybe a lot of what these English speakers think about Latinos-- about their preconceptions and what they bring, the baggage that the Spanish speakers bring. I don't know. I don't know. There are so many things involved. It is like the white person dominating because that is how it is in this country and that is what it is in this society. It was kinda a replica. (July 16, 2014)

The language classes might have served to replicate Latinos' subordination to English dominant speakers, as Verónica argued, and the internal divisions within their community. However, I believe there were signs of progress and movement toward a more equitable "school community" through the work of the parent language classes seen, for example, in the next section about parents' progress toward collaboration and co-creation of knowledge.

### **Collaboration and Co-Creation of Knowledge**

Both white and Latino/a parents gained new understanding and new knowledge through their work in the parent language classes including new confidence speaking in another language and identifying with a larger group of language learners that makes mistakes and supports one another in their efforts. While this is a good first step in moving parents toward forming new communal knowledge together, it falls short of coming to knowledge that reveals the reality of experiences of one or both groups of parents. Therefore, it continues to fit within the initial level of third space openings.

There was also individual group learning that occurred during the parent language classes. For example, white parents learned (or reaffirmed what they knew) about Latino/a parents' experiences, difficulties and challenges in their day to day lives, and their desires for

their children to do well in school. However, there is more to learn about Latino families' assets and richness and their unique ways of living and being. Whereas, Latino/a parents learned that white English dominant parents were interested in learning their language and hoped to better connect with them.

To move into the intermediary or developed level of opening third spaces, parents must begin to talk with one another about their experiences and perspectives about the school's routines, practices, procedures, and curriculum. Then, more critical knowledge about one another and greater understanding of other children's experiences at school could lead to the tapping into third space potential.

### **Non-Learning**

There were failures to learn as well that also firmly kept the language classes in the initial third space openings. In comparison with white English dominant parents, Latino/a parents were not able and/or did not want to criticize the schools, its teachers, its administration, the language classes, or anything else associated with their children's schooling as seen previously. And in the few cases in which they did suggest a hesitation or concern about a particular aspect of the school (such as the placement of their child with a particular teacher and access to needed resources for their child), they were not able to surpass this concern by addressing it through the correct channels. On the other hand, white parents were ever-present at the school to advocate for their son or daughter, to complain, or make requests. Verónica affirmed that a large part of Dr. Williams' attention was taken up by white parents:

She was only there for the white parents. Every day of the week they would be in her office asking for things. Whereas the Latino parents would go to see [the school

counselor] or [the assistant principal]. I don't know [if they got the same results]. I just know that Dr. Williams was always there for the white parents. The white parents were always there every day demanding, complaining; they were always there. (July 16, 2014)

In contrast, Latina mother, Regina lamented that because of her lack of English, she felt very limited in terms of her ability to know about and to seek out resources for her children. Even with so many teachers and faculty at the school that were bilingual, Regina still felt isolated because she did not understand the U.S. educational system and felt ill-prepared for obtaining the needed services and information about resources for her children:

En general... sobre todo en la escuela creo que nos limita mucho porque uno no está involucrado como uno quisiera. Y creo que el sistema es muy diferente. Nosotros... aparte de no tener el idioma, también no sabemos nada de este sistema. A veces nosotros no sabemos que si hay recursos o no sabemos dónde están. Yo veo diferencias con los americanos que son nativos. Incluso que sus niveles de lectura y matemáticas son más altas. Pero también sus papás les facilitan a ellos porque es lo mismo como estudiaron y conocen donde hay recursos, los lleva. No, no, no. Se limita bastante. A veces no sabemos que hay recursos y a veces sí son gratis pero no sabemos dónde están o cómo pedirlos. (March 5, 2014)

*In general... above all in the school I think that we are limited a lot because one is not involved as one would like. And I think that the system is very different. We... aside from not having the language, we also don't know anything about the system. Sometimes we don't know if there are resources or we don't know where they are. I see differences with the American that are natives. Including in their levels of reading and math that are higher. But also their parents make it easier for them because it is the same as how they studied and they know where there are resources and they carry them. No, no, no. One is very limited. Sometimes we don't know that there are resources and sometimes they are free but we don't know where they are or how to ask for them.*

It is important to consider that the parents' participation in the language classes did not lead them to a significantly better understanding of the school, the resources available to them, and how to navigate the retrieval of needed resources. While not explicitly stated by parents as an expectation about the language classes, it would be helpful to think about this as a potential goal of future language classes for parents offered by a school. It also represents an area in which parents should share with one another what they know, their



insider knowledge about school and community resources, and it offers a way in which cooperation and mutual trust could be built among parents.

### **Movement Toward a New Future and Creation of New Identities**

White English dominant imagined a future in which the school provided multiple on-going activities and events that would bring together parents and build relationships eliminating cultural and linguistic barriers. The language classes provided a launching pad for white parents to identify goals that they wanted the school to pursue. For example, at the end of the language classes a group of three women that had attended the classes throughout the three sessions, brainstormed ways in which they would like the school to build a better support network of parents both in providing more structured events to mix families and by creating a system to identify needs and match families to help one another (May 22, 2014). Together, they realized how little they and their children actually interacted with the Spanish dominant community of the school and their desire to help make necessary changes at the school to better facilitate these interactions.

While these parents had good intentions, efforts done alone are likely to fail before they even begin. Only when done in solidarity with the Latino/a parents and because these desires have also emerged organically out of work with the Latino/a parents, is it their chance for success greater.

### **Conclusion and Next Steps**

To summarize, the third spaces opened only to the *initial stage* in which some progress is made in laying the groundwork for further opening of third spaces among parents and between the school and home. PES was not able to escape the deeply entrenched

function of public schools as an assimilator nor its role in reifying the hegemonic power of the white English-speaking dominant class. Antonia Darder (2010) reflected on this historic role of public schools in the lives of CLD students:

Public schooling has functioned as a deeply colonizing force in the lives of bilingual/bicultural children and their communities. Toward this end, traditional classroom pedagogy and curriculum has been used to systematically strip away the primary culture and languages of racialized communities, replacing them, instead, with an assimilative “American” identity -- a national identity that works to conserve the consolidated power and control of the wealthy and powerful within the nation-state, over those who were historically colonized and enslaved populations. (pp. xii-xiii)

In this case, PES, despite its stated goals to create bilingual and bicultural students, was still largely shaped by the society in which it exists. Its goals were overpowered by the society which is primarily assimilationist-- open to bringing in newcomers yet, requiring that people assimilate to the structures and practices already in place. In the end, this restricts schools and society from enjoying the strengths and advantages of a diverse population with a multitude of experiences, knowledges, and goals in life while reaffirming the power held by a select few.

In the next chapter, I will explore further the context of the school environment in which the language classes were embedded in effort to understand which school factors supported and which did not the connections between parents and between parents and the school so that third space openings could be initiated in the parent language classes.

#### **CHAPTER 4: The Impact of the School-Wide Context on Parent Language Classes**

In this chapter, I will explore the school-wide context of the parent language classes to answer the second research question regarding the factors that supported or did not support the parent language classes in their goal to create cross-cultural relationships among parents and connections between parents and the school. Like Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological model of human development that stipulates that human development does not happen in a vacuum but rather is impacted by complex interrelated levels of context, the experiences and identity of a group, in this case the parent language classes, are also impacted by multiple levels of context and the interactions between those levels. Therefore, interactions between families and between families and the school both affect the experiences of the individuals in the classes. The individual is embedded in multiple contexts that simultaneously impact their experience. The parent language classes, likewise, were impacted to a great extent by the context of the school that created them and, to a large degree, sustained them over the school year.

The classes were a product of the school and embedded in the school context due to the efforts of the administration who had a vision for them and set aside funds for them; the parents who requested the classes; and the teachers who organized, planned, and taught the classes. It is reasonable to assume that parents' relationship with the school and with other parents impacted to a degree parents' role in the language classes. How parents felt visiting and volunteering in the school, attending events, meeting with teachers and administrators,

about the treatment and resources they perceived their children receiving, and the school atmosphere in general may have impacted, at least in part, parents' likelihood of trusting and feeling connected to the school and to other parents and their perception of the effectiveness or power that their voice and agency had in the school. This, in turn, affected parents' initial desire to participate in the classes, their perceptions about the importance the school placed on creating relationships among parents and with the school, and their subsequent decisions about continuing participation in the classes over time.

Therefore, in this section, I will present several positive factors which supported the goal of parent language classes to build authentic relationships across parents of differing social and cultural background: adoption of a full school TWI model in which instruction is in both English and Spanish; addition of bilingual faculty and staff; incorporation of Latino culture into school events; and a school-wide orientation to social justice. I will also explore negative contextual factors including the deficit perspective towards Latino/a children and their families; top-down transmission of knowledge from school to home with children and parents; over-emphasis on skill teaching; and division of the student body into those that participate in the Academic and Intellectual Gifted (AIG) program and those that do not. These factors were detrimental to the feelings of connectivity and trust of parents with other parents and with the school.

### **Positive Contextual Factors Encouraged Participation of Parents**

PES had many positive aspects, which I will highlight here, in terms of the work that they did to invite parents and their culture into the school space and encourage them to connect with one another and with the school. Feeling connected and invested in the school

led parents to seek out opportunities to participate further in the school including through parent language classes.

### **Two-Way Immersion Model**

It is important to acknowledge that the school's dedication to the TWI model in the classroom in which instruction to all students is taught not just in English, but also includes a percentage of time in Spanish, contributed to a positive context for the parent language classes. Although there are many complexities regarding the equity of educational experiences of children in the classes as discussed in Chapter One's literature review, the TWI school helps to level the playing field in a small way for parents because it requires English dominant parents to face anxieties that they would not otherwise have to face as they send their child to a school where instruction is taught in a language other than their home language of English. They encounter similar fears and anxieties that Spanish dominant parents face on a daily basis with their children navigating an English dominant society. Spanish dominant parents, on the other hand, have the opportunity through TWI schools to provide schooling to their children in their home language despite living in a society dominated by English-speakers. This educational arrangement can have powerful impact on Latino/a students as they are able to continue to learn content in their dominant language while also becoming bilingual.

The parent language classes followed the model provided by the TWI classrooms of their children by asking parents from different linguistic backgrounds to work together, providing for some parents the first encounter in which they attempted to have a conversation with a person from the other linguistic group. This also gave parents an opportunity to experience first-hand the classroom dynamics that their children had at PES in which they sat

in a room in which the dominant language was different than their own. Parents, especially white parents who were unaccustomed to feeling in the minority, reported feeling more empathetic toward language learners and more understanding of the difficulty of holding a conversation in a non-dominant language after working with learners of their language. This helped to build feelings of connectivity among parents given that they were all in a similar linguistic situation as their children went to school in which a language not spoken at home was used during part of the instruction time.

### **Bilingual Faculty and Staff**

It is also important to point out that the majority of teachers and staff at PES, including the secretary, assistant principal, school counselor, school psychologist, AIG teacher, resource teachers, and assistant to the principal were bilingual. This is no small feat given the majority monolingual English speakers in the community and in nearby schools. In contrast with other schools, PES stood out because of the overwhelming number of people that spoke both Spanish and English at the school. As a result, Latino/a parents reported feeling more at ease interacting with members of the school since they did not have to contend with a language gap. One Latina language class participant mentioned that she no longer sat in her car, rehearsing what she planned to say in English to the school secretary, since now she can easily communicate with her in Spanish. Likewise, for Latina mother Regina, the difference was significant because she felt less awkward since so many people speak Spanish:

Se siente menos cohibida [en la escuela]. Y tiene más personas aquí que puedes preguntar. Creo que este año han implementado muchas cosas muy buenas. Y el hecho también que vienen muchos americanos que vienen a aprender el español. Vemos que muchos de ellos ya hablan español. (March 5, 2014)

*One feels less self-conscious (restricted/restrained) [at school]. And it has more people here that you can ask. I think that this year they have implemented many good things. We see that many of them already speak Spanish.*

Regina feels more comfortable and confident that she can seek help or information as needed since so many people speak Spanish at the school. She also noted that it is a positive development that many dominant English speakers have shown interest in learning Spanish adding to the community of Spanish speakers.

While the majority of the teachers and the staff spoke Spanish at PES, it is important to note that the school and the district as a whole depended upon the recruitment of “visiting teachers” from other countries in exchange for a two- to four-year teaching contract, to meet the bilingual staffing demands. Although praised for giving the school an “international appeal,” this practice contributed to the cultural and class differences between Latino/a parents and Latino/a teachers, given that very few of the teachers were from Mexico, the country of origin of the majority of Latino/a parents at the school. Therefore, even though they shared the language of Spanish, many of the Latino/a teachers may have had trouble relating to children from lower class backgrounds because of their own privileged experiences. On the other hand, there were some teachers that were able to navigate between the multiple varieties of Spanish-speakers. For example, the school counselor, Valencia, noted that one teacher code-switched back and forth between an academic Spanish, and a different version of Spanish used allegedly in more urban, lower socio-economic class settings and in doing so, helped to negotiate a conflict among fourth and fifth graders about rules for kickball: “[He] is very knowledgeable about both languages... the more affluent and the more and lower class ways of talking [in Spanish]. He can kinda code switch back and forth and make sure that everyone understands” (Valencia, May 22, 2014). In this regard,

due to their language background and experiences (in some cases), the teaching staff at PES could potentially be much more effective in connecting to Latino/a students and parents than the typical monolingual English-speaking public school teacher in neighboring schools. This helped to build a sense of trust in the school where Latino/a parents knew that they could at least communicate clearly with their children's teachers and other members of the school faculty and administration. In addition, some Latina mothers that participated in the classes also indicated that they believed that many of the teachers understood their family's personal situation because they had experienced similar situations having moved from a Spanish-speaking country to the United States.

### **Incorporation of Latino Culture in School Events**

There were many school-wide events throughout the year including Hispanic Awareness month, Read-a-thon events, and Carnival that attempted to acknowledge and draw upon the unique contributions of the Latino families and their culture in the school community. For example, during Hispanic Awareness month, among other events held each day, parents were invited to read a story to a class related to Latinos in either English or Spanish. The morning of September 27, 2013, I observed several mothers that read to various classes. The majority were white and read books in English about a Latino celebration or folktale. However, one couple that came to share a book with their son's second grade classroom about the Cuban poet, José Martí, stood out. "José Martí escribió poesía y este libro también está escrito en verso" (*José Martí wrote poetry and this book is also written in verse*) explained the father to the class as he took a seat in front of the classroom with the students gathered on the carpet. The man asked if anyone in the class was from Cuba, and one boy raised his hand. He asked him if he knew the famous song that incorporated Martí's



*Versos Sencillos*, “Guatanamera.” Together the boy from Cuba and the father sang and classmates danced to the beat: “Guantanamera, guajira Guantanamera. Guantanamera, guajira Guantanamera” (September 27, 2013). The father went on to read the book to the class, pausing to look at pictures. After he finished reading the book, he opened up the discussion to the class. He asked the students if they liked the story. After a moment of silence, the teacher reminded the students of the importance of “asking good questions with our question words, dónde, cómo, por qué, cuándo” (*where, how, why, when*) (September 27, 2013). One child asked why Martí was put in jail. The father responded that when people disagree, they can either react by having a war like Cuba and Spain did, or “podemos luchar con las palabras, las ideas, los pensamientos” (*we can fight with words, ideas, and thoughts*) like José Martí. After the book reading, I accompanied the couple to the school’s main office and along the way, the father told me that he wanted to share the story of Martí with the children because he thought it was a powerful example of a person that chose to use words to fight against injustice that he perceived (September 27, 2013). This example, in which the parent shared a story about a Cuban leader as a model of behavior for the children, demonstrated that the Hispanic Awareness Month was planned in a way that provided the opportunity and flexibility to the schools’ parents to contribute in a meaningful way to the classroom conversations.

Another school-wide event that incorporated Latino culture was the Read-a-thon that was organized by one of the language class participants from the first session, Ashley, and mother of a kindergartener. She told me that when she agreed to lead the Read-a-thon, she didn’t realize how involved it was at PES. It had multiple events including the kick-off assembly/ pep rally, a family reading night, and an award ceremony. I was in attendance at

the kick-off assembly as the whole school gathered in the school's gymnasium on the morning of April 10, 2014. Ashley, herself a former journalist and current freelance writer, had taken upon herself and the committee that helped her, to plan an event that was culturally rich for the students. She invited two notable Latino journalists working in North Carolina to make short presentations to the children about their own love of reading. Both journalist spoke in Spanish to the group as they told the children about their origins (one from Columbia; one born in North Carolina but with family from Mexico) and their favorite authors as children (Beverly Clearly and Agatha Christie). While the journalists did not touch upon the topic of the benefits of being bilingual and how their work allows them to draw upon their experiences and their family's culture, the fact that they were both bilingual Spanish-English speakers that were successful in their jobs in North Carolina, provided a model for the children, especially the Latino/a children, in their efforts to also attain a career in which their Spanish and cultural origins would be valued. This was a powerful example in which the school and its parents made a positive impact on the student body by attempting to highlight bilingual leaders in the community.

Finally, this year's Carnival at the end of February 2014 was the school's biggest and most attended event. According to Dr. Williams through email communication, about 800 people attended and it raised approximately \$10,000 for the PTA. She estimated 50 staff members attended and more than 120 parent volunteers helped. There were also 30 business sponsors for the event. Carnival took the place of the traditional end-of-year school fair, as mentioned earlier, to correspond with the celebration of Carnival around the world, especially in Latin American countries including Columbia and Brazil. It required a lot of work from parents, children (in some grades), and the administration team that worked the

night of the event. Surprisingly, it did not require much work on the part of the teachers, and many teachers were not even present at the actual event. Each class chose or were assigned a country or continent, some Spanish-speaking such as Puerto Rico, Spain, and Mexico and many non-Spanish-speaking countries, including France, Australia, Greece, Ireland, Russia, China, Egypt, and India, that they represented with a float.

I arrived to the school that Friday evening about an hour prior to the beginning of Carnival, and I was surprised to find the parking lot fairly empty. As I walked toward the school, two Latino fathers got out of a pick-up truck with two daughters in tow. The four of them seemed excited as they walked through the parking lot, laughing and joking with one another. The girls looked lovely, dressed in pink and white gowns with their hair pulled up in a fancy style and make-up on their faces.

Inside the school there was a last minute rush to get everything ready for the event and I asked where I could help out. The principal and assistant principals were dashing around the school, putting up signs to designate classrooms for particular games, and giving commands through their walkie-talkies. The kindergarten hallway was lined with the class floats ready to be paraded by the students. Soon parents began spilling through the doors and quickly the entire courtyard was lined with eager parents perching with cameras and cell phones ready to capture the passing parade. Finally, the event got underway, beginning with a parade of all the class floats through the main courtyard of the school. Parents clapped and cheered as their little ones passed by, snapping pictures and video recording. Games and activities were set up in classrooms throughout the school, including face painting, ring toss, and bowling, where children played and earned prizes and then families lined up for pizza

and cupcakes in the cafeteria. I poured drinks and helped clear tables to keep up with the rush in the cafeteria.

Parents who attended from the language classes enjoyed the event but said that it was chaotic; could have been better organized; and the Latina mothers said had it been in Mexico, it would have had music, more snacks for people to enjoy, and a greater feeling of *convivencia*, harmony or coexistence. Yet, both groups of parents felt like it was a step in the right direction in terms of joining families together in the same school space. Regina explained her point of view of Carnival as an opportunity in which families begin to unite across cultural and linguistic borders:

También ayuda porque empiezas a tratar a otros papás y uno hace el enlace de estar juntos y preguntar ya como que corta un poquito unas paredes que ves... yo digo por mi parte como Latina-- uno mismo nos apartamos de los americanos y no es a veces otra cosa más que el idioma. El idioma... (Regina, March 5, 2014)

*It also helps because you start to get to know the other parents and one makes a connection be together and to ask questions like as if it cuts a little the walls that you see... I say for my part as Latina—one's self, we separate ourselves from the Americans and it isn't sometimes another thing more than the language. The language...*

The TWI model, the bilingual school staff, and the school-wide events, therefore, helped to infuse Latino language and culture throughout the school and classroom by teaching about celebrations and other countries where Spanish is spoken and by providing models of Spanish-speaking leaders both from history and from the community. It is possible that this inclusion of Latinidad at school may have contributed positively to moving the school forward in its goal, and likewise, in the goal of the language classes, to connect families across cultural divides and to make all parents feel connected to the school and as valued members.

However one caveat is worth noting here-- the primary focus of Carnival outside of the United States and on Spanish as something “foreign,” instead of focusing on U.S. Latinos’ influence and strengths in North Carolina and in the United States, could contribute to the notion that learning Spanish is good only for traveling abroad or “international business,” instead of considering its worth in our everyday relationships and interactions in our present communities. Terry Osborn (2006) in *Teaching World Languages for Social Justice: A Sourcebook of Principles and Practices* argued that the typical language curricula in the United States has been “sterilized” and a far cry from the “growing vibrancy of linguistic diversity, which is enriching communities of the United States with increasing frequency” (p. 1). Instead of seeing language learning as something separate and distinct from those around us, learning a language should focus on learning to communicate with those speaking other languages in the here and now. Therefore, PES in its mission to make connections across cultures, would benefit from more school events like the kick-off to the Read-a-thon in which bilingual journalists were invited to the school. These Latino/a professionals, and I would argue, leaders of the community could serve as role models for young Latino/a students wondering about their future place in society right here in the United States.

### **Social Justice Orientation of School**

PES’s school-wide mission statement declared that as a community they are dedicated to and working toward social justice. One of their core beliefs was: “Recognize, advocate, and take action on issues for social justice” (PES Parent Handbook). Along these ends, a PTA meeting was called on October 8, 2013 dedicated specifically to finding ways

that the school and the PTA could support this mission. During the meeting, one mother designated to talk about the school's social justice goals, stood up and showed a short video entitled *What does social justice mean to you?* (International Labour Organization, 2011) that features famous speakers including Koffi Annan, Marlee Martin, and Shakira. Social justice, the parents decided in the subsequent discussion, is defined as having "equal access, equal opportunity for everyone regardless of gender, language, immigration status, culture, and religion" (October 8, 2013). However, the members of the PTA realized before they could really move toward social justice, they needed to help fulfill the needs of the PES families: "Social justice starts with providing basic needs of children and families. How can there be social justice when there is such a difference between the haves and the have nots?" (PTA mother, October 8, 2013). Therefore, the participants in the PTA meeting elected to invite a non-profit local organization to partner with them to provide healthy and fresh foods for children in need to take home each weekend. The PTA committed to sponsoring a number of initial families that had the most need. Dr. Williams, who was present at the meeting, reminded the meeting attendees that "a number of our families are undocumented, and so they don't feel comfortable going to other organizations but do feel safe at school...." The PTA concluded that while there are other possible routes to assistance for families in the community, working to meet families' needs at school is a good way to start the path toward ensuring equity among all families. In this way, the parents worked to build a caring community at PES in which its members were sensitive to each other's needs.

The PTA grew in its orientation to social justice, and its choices reflected this priority. The school counselor, Valencia Acosta, shared that she thought that the PTA, while still made-up of a majority of white English dominant parents, had made progress from

previous years and had become more inclusive and more aware of social issues related to TWI education.

The PTA parents, you know, they worked from the beginning trying to find a way to bring in the Latino parents to the table. They say, we are willing to do *anything* to bring them in. Anything we can do, to do that. And if you look at the PTA from last year to the PTA that is right now, the amount of growth that they have done since last year in looking at the world and our school in a more equitable lens, and it is all because of their good attitude, and they have a desire to learn. They say, yea, I didn't realize that I used to do that. We need to change that. (May 22, 2014)

Their orientation toward social justice was demonstrated in how the PTA allocated funds, such as in the case to sponsor families in need of supplemental weekend food, were aligned with this overarching goal.

In addition to the PTA, the school's dedication to social justice was also seen in individual teacher's classrooms who saw it as an important part of their role as teacher. For example, fifth grade teacher Isabel García recounted an on-going conflict that erupted at recess among fourth and fifth graders playing kickball. Disagreements about rules and cultural norms of competition led to an escalation of conflict in which several fights broke out and resulted in rumors circulating about a potential Latino/a versus Anglo brawl at the school. However, the situation was de-escalated quickly, according to Sra. García, with the help of the school counselor, Valencia, who supported the students as they met to discuss their conflict and came to an agreement about the rules of play at school. Sra. García saw this conflict between cultures as a natural part and a *strength* of TWI schools compared to a traditional school:

Socially, I think it is very important for children learn about the world, and how to interact with people from different cultures. So if you have a bicultural or multicultural school, where you have to learn the language, you aren't just touching the surface of culture, you are getting really deep into it. (November 20, 2013)

She argued that the fact that TWI schools require students to learn both in English and Spanish, prevents a surface understanding between children. Through language learning, children more authentically engage with and build understanding about their classmates. Even so, Sra. García acknowledged that racism and discrimination were an issue at the school and in her own classroom. She invited the school counselor, Valencia, to do a lesson with the class on understanding the origins of racism and addressing how it continued to manifest itself today. Sra. García shared her vision of a lesson on racism:

If it were me teaching the lesson, I would first talk about differences in pigmentation, I would just go back to the science first. I'd say, "Ok, this is how people look in this part of the country. This is how people look in this part of the world. People have different color skins because of pigmentation." "So what happens with this?" Later when we talk about social justice, we will talk about civil rights and how the color of skin made it easier for white people to capture slaves, way back then. And it made it harder for them to escape partially because they were not familiar with the territory and partially because their skin color made them stand out. Whereas Native Americans blended in to the background or died of diseases...It didn't use to be like this before slavery started in the 1600s wholesale. There was slavery, but it wasn't based upon race. You know, it was based upon -- you captured this group of people, and they got to be your slaves. But, it became institutionalized because people rationalized. They felt like we can't treat another human being like this, so let's make them less than human. So, talking about that and then saying, "How does that carry over to the present day and in the classroom? There are so many implications. And last year we had pretty good conversations about it in class. (November 20, 2014)

This was not the first time that Sra. García had conversations about race and racism with her students as she indicated in the quote above. She worked to support students in understanding and recognizing racism at school and was not afraid to identify the issues and to talk about them openly. Again, these conversations about differences and marginalization of people may have been more possible because of the nature of the TWI classroom, the personality of the teacher, or both. Sra. García also sponsored a Friday afternoon service club that was attended by both white and Latino/a fifth grade students. The club was held in Spanish and regularly discussed issues of importance including discrimination. It was



designed with a service component in which students completed small service jobs around the school (November 20, 2014).

I had a club after school where we could get into it a little more, a service club, and we talked about that there are people more fortunate and there are people less fortunate. And all of us have the potential to be of service to others so that we can overcome these issues of racism if we look at the insides rather than outsides...that sort of thing. So, there are so many lessons and they could go on and on. (November 20, 2014)

While both the PTA and some talented teachers at PES worked to support greater equity among children and their families by fulfilling basic needs and supporting students to recognize and fight against racism, the school counselor, Valencia, indicated toward the end of the year that the school faculty also recognized that they still had a lot of work to do in terms of achieving social justice at school:

Is there still a division [between the white English dominant community and the Latino/a Spanish dominant community]? Yes, there is. It is something that we are very aware of. The administration is very aware of it. It will be one of the priority challenges for next year. As we go into the [next] year of the school, how are we going to integrate the community? From the parents to the students? How are we going to do it? A lot of people are already talking about that. (May 22, 2014)

This sensitivity and reflexivity about the reality of divisions among Latinos and white children and parents and the desire to work for social justice were significant first steps toward promoting projects and an overall school climate dedicated to fostering relationships among parents and with the school in hopes of eventually building greater understanding and equity at the school. Parents, who felt the importance placed by the school on these efforts, may have been more apt to participate in school-sponsored events and initiatives, including parent language classes, since the school was taking steps to acknowledge their social position and work to change situations of inequity.

### **Negative Contextual Factors Discouraged Participation of Parents**

While there were many positive aspects of PES that potentially contributed to families' feeling of being welcomed to the school, there were also many examples of how the school's subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999) environment was detrimental both to Latino/a children attending this school as well as the parents, both Anglo and Latino/a, in their feelings of connectivity with the school and the degree to which their agency was welcomed into the school and classrooms. This feeling of alienation and lack of power in the classroom may have affected the participation of parents at the school including in the parent language classes. Again, I emphasize that the context in which these classes were founded and operated affected the classes because parents carried perceptions about the school and their position in the school and with other parents with them.

The school's subtractive schooling was particularly felt by the Latino/a students and their parents because as in most schools in the United States, the school culture reflected the culture held by the white English dominant parents (Apple & King, 1977). Schools have traditionally reified values and ideologies of this group. However, as indicated previously in the dissertation, the norm of schools as culturally and linguistically diverse has become more common and will continue to be the norm in the foreseeable future. Therefore, it is important to examine factors of the school like subtractive schooling that limit the potential success among members of the non-dominant groups including Latino/a children and their families.

Subtractive schooling is one in which "rather than building on students' cultural and linguistic knowledge and heritage to create biculturally and bilingually competent youth, schools subtract these identifications from them to their social and academic detriment" (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 25). I would add to this theory that *parents* also face subtractive

schooling when the school fails to recognize their unique contributions to the school community and in effect, silences their participation. This was also seen in Chapter One's literature review of the impact of the traditional model of family involvement with schools' attempts to "reform" Latino/a parents. The impact of subtractive schooling on Latina/o children and their parents can be devastating to their overall sense of worth—they internalize messages that they are considered deficient and in need of rehabilitation (Flores, 2005) and a "problem" (Murillo, 2002) to the school and society. There is no stronger messages for children and their parents than those that critique their family or their culture. In subtractive schooling, "Mexican youth... learn perhaps no stronger lesson in school than to devalue the Spanish language, Mexico, Mexican culture, and all things Mexican" (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 19).

Despite the school's intentions to the contrary, data from field observations and interviews with parents, teachers, and support faculty revealed that the school environment was largely "subtractive" in its treatment of Latino/a children and their parents. Operating from a deficit perspective about Latino/a parents and families, the school emphasized a top-down approach in which the school was positioned as the expert, and the parents were given support roles as long as they followed what the school prescribed. Also referred to by Freire (2010) as the "banking-concept of education" (p.72) in which the school makes deposits of knowledge into both children and their parents with little regard for people's previous learning, there was little space for parents or children to voice their own concerns or agency at the school. As the following discussion will reveal, teachers, motivated by deficit perspectives, relied on skill-based instruction to "fill" the children with their "missing knowledge." Children, and subsequently, their parents interpreted differences in

opportunities at school as messages about their family's worth and value contributing to a divisive environment among Latinos and Anglos and eroding away at trust between parents, as well as, between parents and the school.

### **Deficit Perspective of Latino/a Parents and Families**

The deficit perspectives toward Latino/a parents and families voiced by teachers was likely an influential factor in parents' experiences in the parent language classes. While my observations of teachers' classrooms was limited, it is significant that many of teachers that I did come into contact with operated from a deficit view of Latino/a parents and families. Yet I cannot claim that this was the case throughout the school. In fact, I spent significant time in Sra. García's fifth grade classroom, and it was evident that she did not operate from this perspective. It is possible that there were more teachers in the school that approached Latino families' contributions to their classroom in a similarly, positive manner. Still, given the constraints of the current research study, it is viable to consider the situations in which overt deficit perspectives were voiced and to consider the effects of this negative discourse on the experience of the children and their families at the school. It is safe to argue that when parents or children encounter a teacher or classroom that operates on a deficit perspective, its effects can be lasting. In this section, I share examples from classroom observations in two different kindergarten classes.

I met Laura Delgado, a charismatic kindergarten teacher who loved to dance and sing and do creative projects with her students and observed her weekly during the first six weeks of the school year. I also had the opportunity to sit-in during her Open House presentation for parents. Her room was designated for parents whose preferred language was Spanish and drew parents from her own classroom and that of Sra. Morales, her neighboring teacher.

There were only three Latino/a parents that attended out of two classrooms. Following her presentation with the parents, we discussed the upcoming parent language classes, and I asked her if she might help recruit some of her Latino/a parents to the class. Her reaction took me by surprise. She said that I would be hard pressed to get them to come to any classes. “They don’t pick up the telephone and they work late and don’t have email. Es otro mundo. Otro mundo completamente” (*It is another world. Another world completely.*) (September 25, 2013). Sra. Delgado’s reaction that it was not worth it to even give Latino/a parents the information showed that she was resigned to her belief that the Latino/a parents were cut off from school and stuck in “another world” and therefore not worth the time and effort needed to recruit them to a school event.

Likewise, the kindergarten teacher, Sra. Alma Morales, operated from a deficit view of the Latino/a children in her classroom. Sra. Morales’ classroom, in particular, is an interesting case given that five of the total 15 students at the final pot luck of the first session of classes (on November 21, 2013) were her students’ parents, including Amy (featured in Chapter 5), Ashley, Scarlett, Cameron, and David. Therefore, their experience with their child’s classroom teacher likely affected their impressions about the school and the degree to which they felt connected to other parents and to the classroom teacher. The fact that five of Sra. Morales’ parents were enrolled in the parent language classes was unbeknownst to her. When I shared that information with her later in the year, she indicated that she did not know the school was offering parent language classes.

Sra. Morales’ classroom was made up of a majority of white monolingual English-speaking children (14 in total). There were only eight Latino/a children in her class, one in each of the small groups of three children. Sra. Morales spoke in candor about her students

when we talked in mid-October following a lesson observation. She explained, while two of the Spanish dominant students were “from educated families and doing fine, the other ones are from poor, humble backgrounds and yes, they are *lacking* a lot” (October 24, 2013). For example, she shared that the Latino/a children come to her classroom not even knowing how to hold a pencil and this makes her job as teacher much harder because “differentiation is a must.” (October 24, 2013). A class of all English-speaking children learning Spanish, she insisted, would be easier for her to teach than Latino/a children that come to the classroom already knowing Spanish.

In my observations, Alma Morales and Laura Delgado failed to recognize the strengths and unique contributions that their Latino/a children and their parents brought to the school and classroom, and there were few attempts seen to draw their culture into the classroom curriculum, which was kept decidedly separate. Sra. Morales, trying to maintain neutrality in the classroom, described to me how she avoided bringing in even her own culture, that as a Puerto Rican woman, into the classroom. The other teachers, she thought, should work to do the same --eliminate the cultural referents in the classroom including specialized vocabulary that came from their home country. Rather, she insisted, the culture of the classroom is the culture of the students. While a student-centered classroom is an important goal of instruction, it seemed that Sra. Morales had made the choice to eliminate all mention of culture because it was a distraction from the real priority of moving children toward proficiency in skills and language. And therefore, she made no attempts to identify or draw upon the cultures brought to her room.

No es que no respetamos a nuestra cultura. Debemos respetar la cultura de ellos. Yo hablo de Puerto Rico si soy de Puerto Rico y si ocasionamos en Puerto Rico- ¡perfecto! Pero, no me baso la clase en Puerto Rico. Mi clase es en base a ellos. En

los mexicanos, en los hondureños, en los de Perú, lo que son ellos. Mi cultura es de ellos. Mi cultura lleva respeto a Puerto Rico. Es algo que quiero mucho. Soy de Puerto Rico. Es algo que llevo conmigo. Pero en mi clase, yo no soy para enseñar mi cultura. (May 29, 2014)

*It is not that we don't respect our culture. We must respect the culture of them. I speak of Puerto Rico because I am from Puerto Rico and if we sometimes bring up Puerto Rico—perfect! But I don't base the class in Puerto Rico. My class is based in them. In the Mexicans, the Hondurans, in those from Peru, that they are. My culture is of them. My culture brings respect to Puerto Rico. It is something that I love a lot. I am from Puerto Rico. It is something that I bring with me. But in my case, I am not to teach my culture.*

During my weekly observations throughout the year I did not ever hear her share about her home country Puerto Rico in the classroom with her students. I asked her if she could recall a time when she drew from her knowledge of Puerto Rico and its culture in the classroom as an example. However, she responded by explaining that while she could do cultural activities with her students, they would not be appropriate for Latinos in North Carolina:

También culturalmente, podemos hacer muchas actividades culturas en nuestros propios países pero estamos en Carolina del Norte y no van a estar apropiados. ¿Cuán lejos podemos llegar con la cultura? ¿O cuán corto podemos llegar con la cultura? Es algo que tienes que manejar... un poquito diferente, yo diría. Un poquito más diferente. (May 29, 2014)

*Also culturally, we can do many cultural activities in our own countries but we are in North Carolina and they aren't going to be appropriate. How far can you arrive with the culture? Or how short can you arrive with the culture? It is something that you have to drive... a little different, I'd say. A little more different.*

Perhaps out of concern that her Puerto Rican background was different culturally than that of her Latino/a students whose parents were mainly from Mexico, the only cultural references ever noted during her classroom instruction were during word study in which she led the students through a list of new words that shared similar pronunciations. Occasionally, the opportunity would arise in which she would check a word with her assistant teacher who was from Colombia asking her, “¿Así se dice en tu país?” (*Is that how it is said in your*

*country?*). A brief exchange would follow in which the teacher and assistant compared words used in their home countries for particular things. However, these conversations, even as extremely limited examples of drawing upon culture in the classroom, were done literally above the heads of the students and not with the intention of sharing this information with them. The effect of not including the children's culture into the classroom served in effect to silence the cultural contributions and experiences that Latino/a children brought into the classroom.

I caution that the teachers' tendency to express such negative opinions about their Latino/a students and families may have been related to the fact that I am white, English-dominant speaker. On the other hand, it could demonstrate the pervasiveness of the deficit culture of the school where such talk among teachers is common and allowed. It seemed as if Sra. Morales talked to me as if a sympathetic teacher who understood and related to what she was saying.

### **Top-Down Approach to Working with Families**

The teachers and school, in general, emphasized a top-down approach when working with families. For example, instead of making the school open to parents to contribute whenever and however they wanted to, the school and teachers set specific parameters about how parents could choose to help and when they could visit. I draw primarily, now, for examples from Sra. Morales' class because she was more active in recruiting parents for visits into the classroom. It seemed not as common to request parent volunteers for the fifth grade classroom except in cases of field trips and student performances. At the beginning of the school year Sra. Morales sent home a letter to all her parents about volunteering in the classroom. If parents wanted to volunteer, she asked them to commit to coming during a



particular block of time each week such as during math instruction each Friday morning. Many parents that I later talked to said that this was disappointing to them because the possible time slots were not convenient to them but they did not feel welcome to visit during alternative times. Many parents, like Amy, whose daughter was in Sra. Morales class, were busy at that time dropping off a younger sibling at preschool and therefore felt discouraged about coming into the classroom (December 18, 2013).

When parents did volunteer in Sra. Morales' classroom, it was primarily to collate papers in the "Friday folders." Friday folders went home with the children Friday afternoons and contained all the student work from the week, a reader to practice, and flyers and letters from the school or teacher. Parents also came to the class when their son or daughter was recognized for having a birthday or for a short presentation or performance for the parents. Likewise, in the fifth grade class, parents were invited to attend end of year student presentations where they shared their class projects with the parents. In general, parent visitors were either attending a student performance, doing menial tasks of photocopying or collating papers into folders, or helping with a field trip instead of taking advantage of the richness of experience and knowledge of the parents to add to the classroom experience.

The top-down approach to working with families was also seen during the beginning of the year "Open House" presentation for parents on September 10, 2013. In the kindergarten, the teachers explained the many expectations of children in the classroom and the role of parents in supporting and extending their learning at home. Parents were told to buy flashcards and magnetic white boards and letters to practice letter and number recognition. Sra. Delgado, the kindergarten teacher mentioned earlier in this chapter, who had only three Latino/a parents in her Open House presentation, singled out one particular

Latina woman that had a dark indigenous complexion and who later introduced herself to me, telling me that she was originally from Chiapas, Mexico, by asking her, “Do you know what magnetized letters are? Do you know what flash cards are? Are you ok?” In this way, the teachers failed to recognize the many ways that parents already encouraged their children’s learning in the home and asked them to alter their way of teaching to those “approved” by the school. However, it must be noted that the teacher was following the grade-wide presentation and “script” for the Open House and this was presented to both the English dominant and the Spanish dominant families. While it was not clear who had put the presentation together, it appeared that it and the accompanying powerpoint presentation had been used for several years in the past. However, an alternative possibility would have been for the teacher to encourage the parents to continue teaching their children at home as they always have-- emphasizing the opportunities to read, talk, play, and share with their children about their culture, their work, their beliefs, and their values. Instead, parents were left with a daunting task to “play teacher” at home. The opportunity to connect with parents and build connections between parents at the Open House was compromised. In its place was a top-down transmission of the expert opinion about how parents should replicate schools in their living rooms. Unable to live up to the expectation of the teachers, it is possible that some of these parents may have given up before they even began to try.

Later in the year, I met with Sra. Morales and we talked about end of first quarter parent-teacher conferences. I asked her what kind of questions parents had for her when they came to the conferences. She said they asked how they could better support their child and that she, continuing the top-down transmission of information from the school to the parents, gave them specific activities to do at home:

I gave them the activities so I say, ‘Do this, do this, do this, do this,’ kind of guiding them. Practice this every day. Do this every single day. I told them choose one sound per day, just writing this over in a natural way... (November 20, 2013)

Again she dictated the way in which the parents should support the student with no regard for the many alternative ways the parents were already supporting their child’s learning at home.

Finally, even in plans for next year, the top-down model of working with parents was evident. Valencia Acosta, the school counselor, in preparation for next year’s parent outreach program, told me that she planned to offer a “parenting class” for Latino/a and Anglo parents. It would cover topics like disciplining children in a positive way, solving problems in the home, and solving conflicts among siblings (May 22, 2014). However, once again this assumed that there is one right way to discipline children and solve problems and furthermore, that these answers come from the experts, that is, the school and its faculty. Even if the class were taught by another Latino/a, it still stands that there are different ways in which family’s approach and solve their personal problems.

### **Emphasis on Skill Instruction in the Classroom: “Banking Method of Education”**

Just as there existed evidence of some teachers using a top-down approach toward relating to parents and families at the school, there was also evidence of reliance on top-down instruction from classroom teachers, as expert, to children, who acted predominately as passive receptors of knowledge during instruction time. This component of the context of the school affected the relationships between teachers and children the atmosphere of the school in general, as well as, parents’ relationships with the school. An emphasis on skill instruction for children at the expense of creative, cooperative, and discursive classroom activities shaped the atmosphere of the school to seem somewhat inflexible and intolerant of

“distractions” from the main curriculum. Again, this was observed in the two focal classrooms throughout the year-- in Sra. Morales’ kindergarten class and Sra. García’s fifth grade classroom-- and increasingly so, as the end of the year standardized tests grew near. Emphasis on skill instruction was also evident in other classrooms that I periodically observed in the kindergarten, first, and fifth grades. This is not to say, however, that this was the mode of all instruction in the school. The inability to generalize across the school is a significant limitation of the study given that I restricted classroom observations to a few classrooms at the school due to the desire to get to know a classroom teacher and the classroom experience deeply and due to time constraints.

Freire (2010) critiqued the banking method of education in which the teacher makes deposits of knowledge into children as if they were empty bank accounts needing to be “filled up.” Based upon deficit thinking, many schools succumb to the banking method of education because they believe it is the fastest way to fill up students who are “missing out on knowledge and experiences that are valued by the mainstream society” (Yosso, 2005).

Returning briefly to the vignette about the couple who shared the book about José Martí, this example demonstrated the school’s efforts to invite parents into the school to contribute in an interesting way to the classroom, while simultaneously showing how that contribution was undermined and ignored by the classroom teacher. Instead of helping the children to think critically about the story just read to them by emphasizing the importance of Martí as an influential historical figure or to consider Martí’s message that we need to speak up and question things that we don’t think are right, the teacher emphasized the grammatical accuracy of children’s questions. She focused their attention not on the message of the book but on the mechanics of the children’s questions, reminding them to use their interrogative

words to form good questions (September 27, 2013). There was no sense that the classroom curriculum was going to build upon, or that the teacher would even mention, what the students had learned about Jose Martí in later classes. Rather, the Hispanic Awareness Month events were isolated away from the “normal” classroom curriculum when they could have been easily integrated with the curriculum or used to complement or extend what students’ were already learning.

This revealed a reoccurring weakness of the school. While there were efforts made to introduce elements of Latino culture and experiences into the school day, they were often kept separate from the “real” classroom curriculum, that is, the time that “counted” especially toward preparations for end of year tests. This represents a potential place in which the TWI school is at odds with the standards of learning applied to other schools. Because of the goal of TWI schools to create bicultural and bilingual students, the needs of its students differ from those in monolingual English classrooms. However, the classroom teachers still seemed to succumb to the pressure to prepare for standardized testing, supplanting other concerns about connecting learning to real life and real people. The need for one’s students to do well was a realistic concern among teachers and for the administration not only for job security but to continue to grow the TWI program by showcasing the rigor and success of the program and thus, attracting more families to the school.

Again, I return to Sra. Alma Morales’ kindergarten classroom where skill practice dominated. A fast-paced routine moving and directing kids from one activity to the next with periodic singing songs and dancing with videos on the screen, was essentially all focused on learning a skill, drilling it, and then testing for mastery. Verónica, the literacy coach and parent language teacher, who periodically observed Sra. Morales and worked with her,

confirmed this observation saying, “And as you saw, she drills the kids, no talking, just drill, drill, drill. Kids are not experiencing the language, there is no exploring, no playing. It’s check, check. Let’s move on” (July 16, 2014). For example, a typical observation of a math lesson was reflected in my fieldnotes from January 16, 2014. Following a short review from the class from the day prior and a demonstration of each table’s assignment students went to work in “centers”:

Students are assigned to their math center tables. Some tables work on an iPad program balancing things – the students slide objects to one side of a scale, and on the other side they slide weights until the scale showed equilibrium. One group estimates the size of friend’s shoe using a piece of string; one group works with [Popsicle] sticks. This assignment is not tied to any real use of measurement or estimation of size. A simple scenario about how you are trying to estimate the size of your mom’s shoe so that you can buy her a present for Valentine’s Day would help to give these tasks a real-life basis.

The students repeated these centers over the course of a week, repeating the same activities each day until they were tested on the skill and moved on to the next skill. I reflected on the use of “centers” in the kindergarten classroom in my fieldnotes. These were not the centers that I anticipated in which students worked in small groups with sand, with water, making arts and crafts, or met with the teacher:

Even the expression “working in centers” is misleading because it is not the centers like I use to do in kindergarten. The students are all working at their desks, seated, and doing more rote tasks that one would imagine in centers. (Fieldnotes, January 23, 2014)

This skill-based curriculum was also seen in other classrooms. For instance, increasingly in May the curriculum and practice in the fifth grade classrooms, seen in both Sra. García (Spanish-instruction teacher) and Ms. Martin’s (English-instruction teacher) classrooms, became almost entirely skill-focused as the teachers tried to prepare students for

the North Carolina End of Grade tests in math, science, and literacy that were scheduled to begin on May 30th through June 2<sup>nd</sup>.

On May 1, 2014, I had the opportunity to observe the English instruction side of the fifth grade where Ms. Martin was leading her students in a review activity about reading comprehension. The class had been studying the topic of space exploration and it appeared from the work hanging on the walls that they had done a “gallery walk” in which students walked around the room and observed images or read short texts and made observations about what they anticipated they might learn in the unit on space. The lesson I observed, in contrast, was much more skill-oriented in which the students received a portion of a text on space exploration and discussion questions about the article. They repeated after the teacher the steps that they had to follow in writing their responses to questions: “Number one, remember to restate the question. Number two, remember to name the paragraph and quote the sentence. Number three, remember to explain how your evidence supports the opinion.” The literacy specialist for the upper grades came into the classroom following this explanation and led the students in a similar review of identifying the main idea of the text (the roof of the house) and the supporting details (the walls of the house). Then, students worked for 20 minutes independently on reading decontextualized tests and identifying the main idea and supporting details. The students’ entire afternoon was spent reviewing test-taking strategies. This observation illustrated the pressure of the tests at the end of the year that made teachers increasingly rely upon skill-based instruction to “prepare” children to do the type of tasks that they would encounter on the test.

Similarly in Sra. García’s fifth grade math class, instruction became increasingly related to the upcoming standardized tests. For example, she greeted the students returning

from lunch on May 15, 2014 saying, “Hoy vamos a trabajar un poquito diferente en las matemáticas. Van a trabajar en grupos de mesa en un paquete hasta cierto punto...” (*Today we are going to work a little different in math. You all are going to work in table groups on a packet until a certain point....*) At this moment, one student grumbled aloud “¿Otro paquete?” (*Another packet?*). Sra. García responded with a note of anger in her voice, “Si no se ponen serios, van a hacer muy mal en los exámenes y será su culpa. Si oigo que están hablando de otros temas, voy a quitar puntos. Está bien si hablan en inglés o español” (*If you all don’t get serious, you all are going to do very poorly on the exams and it will be your fault. If I hear you all talking about other topics, I’m going to take away points. It is ok if you speak in English or Spanish*) (May 15, 2014). After a few minutes in which the groups worked on the review worksheets, Sra. García announced, clearly exasperated, in English for students to move their desks into “testing rows” and to pay attention as she walked the class through the worksheets since they were obviously having trouble. She proceeded to work all the math problems for the students on the white board while the majority of students stared off into space. Sra. García’s classroom by May hardly resembled the dynamic Spanish language classroom that had engaged students in cooperative and creative projects during the year. It seemed as if all the work of the year including the emphasis on speaking and learning in Spanish was unraveling in the final weeks of the school year.

While some skill practice is common place in any grade and reflects the pressure felt by schools and teachers for students to perform well on tests, it appeared that skill practice, drill, and testing were the main activities of at least one classroom throughout the year, leaving little time for activities that connected with real life and allowed students to use language to create discourse. In the next chapter, I will explore the experiences of two



individual parents, and it will become more evident how this emphasis on skills in the classroom undermined parents' likelihood of feeling connected to the school and classroom teacher.

**AIG Program: “We are the Kids, the Brown Kids that Go to Summer School”**

PES's Academically and Intellectually Gifted (AIG) program represented a school within a school, effectively dividing the student body into two groups: those that were “identified” as AIG and those that were not. The program's exclusivity and the fact that the large majority of AIG students were white English dominant children likely was a contributing factor to feelings of alienation of Latino/a children and families at the school and division between the English dominant and Spanish dominant parents. It is likely that programs that split the student population, reinforcing the lines between ethnic and cultural groups, contributed to the feeling by Latino/a parents that Latino/a families were at an unfair disadvantage at the school and missed out on resources that could help their children succeed while white parents more easily negotiated the school system and obtained extra resources.

It was in the AIG program in which white English dominant parents felt that their children began to excel in the TWI school. For example, white English dominant mother, Kimberly, who had two children in the TWI program, told Amy, the mother of a kindergartener who worried about the rigidity of her daughter's classroom, to “hold on” because despite their worries about the curriculum in their children's classrooms, things would improve once her child was identified for the AIG program that began in third grade. In her experience, her daughter was bored in the classroom until she began working with the AIG teacher:

Once [my daughter] started working with the gifted specialist, there was more clarity on what she was doing, and she was being challenged more. So that was really, really helpful. [The AIG teacher] was great. And I think her Spanish has progressed a lot. (May 22, 2014)

The impact of the AIG supplemental instruction was also seen during classroom observations of the fifth grade classes. According to fifth grade teacher Sra. García, at the mid-year point, there were great disparities among Latino/a and Anglo students in terms of academic achievement. In math and science, all of the Anglo students in her class, with one exception, were at or above grade level while, all of the Latino/a students, with one exception, were below grade level (November 20, 2013). Likewise, all of the AIG-identified students in the fifth grade were white English dominant speakers. It is likely that in other grades, the AIG program included Latino/a students; however, in the fifth grade it was entirely white students. I asked the school counselor, Valencia, about this, and she said that the previous AIG teacher had worked hard to identify Latino/a and African American students for the program, and the fact that it was currently made up of a majority of white students was problematic:

You know from my experience [the AIG program] had been working very well at PES the last two years. There were a lot of Hispanic and African Americans that were AIG identified or nurtured.... [we] were shocked at the number of students that were nurtured or gifted. Because in the past at PES, they didn't do the traditional way of identifying to try to make it more equitable. Since that moment... until now, I don't know what happened. But, I do know that it is very apparent, and it needs to be fixed because it does a lot for the mental state... you know. (May 22, 2014)

It appeared that because of a change in the AIG teacher, the more equitable way of identifying students for AIG had been lost.

In addition, students' participation in AIG was also disruptive to the class instruction. During whole class instruction, the AIG teacher would enter the classroom and begin working individually with AIG students at their desk. While this provided needed

differentiation for students that were performing above grade level, it was also disruptive to the other children and to the teacher who was working hard to keep children's attention focused on the lesson. As an observer, I felt the classroom teacher's frustration when students became inevitably distracted by the AIG teacher talking loudly with students during full-class instruction time. Even when the AIG teacher wasn't present in the classroom, the AIG students were at liberty to leave their cooperative groups and work independently on their AIG projects (May 15, 2014).

Disruption to instruction time was, however, not the most detrimental effect of the AIG program to non-AIG students. In addition to leaving their group in a lurch to complete an assignment without them, other students were sent the clear message that they were not as bright or worthy as the AIG students. The fact that English dominant children were doing creative projects in Spanish was not lost on the Spanish dominant students. Again, Valencia, the school counselor, reflected on the cumulative effect of these messages on students' sense of self-worth:

But, one thing to keep in mind is that this is just the beginning because they are going to go to middle school and they will see the same. And then they go to high school and what you see in high school [is that] they already know that the white kids are the smart kids and *we are the kids, the brown kids that go to summer school*. One of the most shocking things that I saw when I went to [the high school] during summer school last year, was a whole two classrooms full of students and the entire class was brown. Somewhere along the way the messages that we are sending, also coupled with a whole bunch of other factors, but I think we definitely need to do a better job on the messages that we are sending these kids. (May 22, 2014)

This atmosphere of advanced or accelerated classes for white students contributed to the atmosphere of the school as having unequal opportunities for white and Latino/a children and potentially added to the sense of division among children and parents at the school. It is possible that this affected the likelihood of parents' not feeling connected to the school and

teachers and this, therefore, could have negatively affected their decision to participate in the school-sponsored classes. If parents did not feel that their children were receiving the same opportunities as their white classmates and that there were divisions at the school among ethnic and language backgrounds of students, they would be less likely to want to engage with white parents while trying to learn English.

### **Conclusion**

There were several positive factors of the school context that supported the work of the language classes in building community among parents and with the school, including its TWI model, bilingual nature of its faculty and staff, the infusion of Latino culture into school-wide events, and the school's goal to work for social justice. While these factors were very important, they were still in their infancy stage and not fully developed to adjust for the many complexities and challenges present in a TWI school. For example while one stated goal of the school was for social justice, it was unclear to what extent the school was effective in meeting this goal even though some efforts to that end were evident in one teacher's practice and in the actions of the PTA.

Instead, the subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999) environment characterized by deficit perspectives about Latino/a children and their parents, top-down approach to working with children and parents, over-reliance on skill instruction in the classroom, and the segregation of the student body through the school's AIG program, largely discounted and ignored the contributions of the Latino/a children and their parents to the school and denied the ways in which Latino/a parents contribute to their children's learning. Even with the removal of linguistic barriers so that parents felt more comfortable entering the school building because they knew that they could speak their dominant language and be

understood, it was not enough to counteract the negative messages received by children and their parents from the school and its school members. These negative contextual factors, found in at least some of the classrooms at the school, contributed to feelings of alienation from the school and division among parent groups which were detrimental to parents' trust in each other and in the school. For example, some parents reported being unaware or feeling ineffective in obtaining potential resources that their children might need for academic success. They felt that they were at a real disadvantage because of their limited understanding and experience in the educational system and because of their lack of English language fluency. Realizing that other parents were taking advantage of these resources, parents were often left feeling unsure about the school and its promise to help their children succeed. Therefore, parents were likely more reluctant to trust the school as well as other parents who they saw as unfairly advantaged. These feelings, ultimately, eroded the possibilities to open third spaces, which require authentic relationships across parents and between parents and the school that are founded with *confianza*, during the work of the parent language classes. It pointed to the need for more effort to build relationships with parents and among parents, awareness and understanding of the Latino community at the school, and understanding of the resources available to children and their families and how to acquire them.

In the next chapter, I will continue to build on this argument by providing two portraits-- one Latina mother and one Anglo mother-- whose experience at school affected their feelings of connectivity to the school and to other parents and ultimately limited their efforts to contribute to the opening of third spaces during their participation in the parent language classes. Their portraits will also provide greater detail, a “variety of lenses” from

which to view the language classes (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 544), and richness of description about the experience of the parents in the language classes and their interactions with the school in general through their children, Mateo and Sophia respectively.

## **CHAPTER 5: INDIVIDUAL CASE STUDIES**

### **Case Study**

In following Stake's (2005) recommendation to better understand the experiences of individual parents enrolled in the Spanish and English parent language classes, I draw now upon the particular cases of two of the mothers to lend a more intimate perspective of the case and reveal the ways in which the parents' experiences in the language classes were related to and interconnected with the larger context of the school and its community. The two mothers, Rachel, a Latina Spanish dominant mother, and Amy, an English dominant white mother, were in many ways representative of the parent participants in the language classes, yet also unique in their experiences with the parent classes and the classrooms of their children as I will present in this chapter. I also had the fortune of forming a personal connection with each of them as the English-language teacher of the parent classes.

The success of the language classes in opening third spaces among parents and with the school was affected by the atmosphere and practices of the school and its teachers. As I argued in the previous chapter, the ambience of the school as largely subtractive limited the

likelihood that parents engaged closely with the school and the classroom teachers. In addition, it eroded a general sense of feeling of ease and comfort at the school and damaged the possibility of building real connections based upon mutual trust with other parents and with school members to the detriment of third space openings.

### **Rachel: Latina Mother Participant in Language Classes**

I knocked lightly on the door of a third-story apartment that faced out toward the highway. The rush of cars below a narrow line of pine trees could be easily heard on this spring morning in late March. There was no answer at the door. A neighbor emerged from her apartment, and we said hello. I recognized her as a mother from the school. I knocked again, this time a little louder, on the door. Rachel finally came to the door, running her fingers through her dark shoulder length hair and up into a ponytail. She invited me in and showed me the kitchen where we could talk at the table. I came through the door balancing the coffees and muffins in one hand, my researcher things in the other—a voice recorder and a notebook. “Te llevo un café” (*I brought you a coffee*), I told her motioning at the coffee. “Ay, gracias. Lo necesito” (*Oh, thanks. I need it*), she smiled back hanging a towel over her shoulder from having dried dishes. We sat down together at her kitchen table that had a light yellow table cloth covering it and a bowl in the middle of the table filled with bananas and oranges. Rachel’s home was lovely. It smelled of a mix of frying oil and soap. A soap that I have tried to identify because it transports me back to my time studying abroad in Spain. It has a sweet smell almost like lavender, and I recognized it in an instant. I took off my coat as I got settled, and we chatted about her two-year-old son still sleeping in the back bedroom and her husband that left much earlier that morning for work. We both took sips of coffee, each with lots of cream and sugar. In the background laughter from *Despierta América*, a



morning news show, rung out. A cord ran up the ceiling and down behind the TV. Two couches, light brown and worn, lined the back walls of the living room facing the TV and on the wall there were family pictures—one in front of a cathedral with two lines of workers in front and another of her two sons posing with Santa Claus at the Bass Pro Shop at Concord Mills, a shopping center outside Charlotte, North Carolina. Outside of the kitchen hung a religious calendar and plastic bags on a plastic hook. Only a few brightly colored kids' toys sat idle on the carpet--a kid-sized plastic chair and a walker with large orange wheels and a side with lights and buttons for the child to push.

Rachel was the most consistent participant attending the English class each week during both the first and second sessions. She brought energy with her and openness with the other students. She always greeted everyone before sliding into her seat and opening her composition notebook. On the potluck nights she baked the best desserts--a chocolate cake the first pot luck and flan the second pot luck. She was always eager for everyone to try them and enjoyed when everyone praised how delicious they were. I liked Rachel from the first day that I met her and found that we also connected because we both have toddler sons separated only by a few months of age, and each week we would discuss their latest development.

Rachel stood out from the other mothers. Even her name was unusual. It had more of an American sound to it. I asked her about her name and if her mother and father when they named her knew that she would one day make the United States her home. She waved her hands at me, “*Por eso no me gusta,*” (*For that reason I don't like it*) she insisted. She explained that when people asked her name here she would reply, and they would think it was an Americanized version of her real name: “Cuando los hispanos me preguntan, ‘¿Cómo

te llamas?’ Y les digo ‘Rachel.’ Y me dicen, ‘No, tu nombre de verdad, no tu nombre para los Estados Unidos.’ Como si este nombre no va muy bien conmigo” (March 25, 2014).

*(When Hispanics ask me, “What is your name?” I tell them, “Rachel.” And they say to me, “No, your true name, not your name for the United States.” It’s as if this name doesn’t go very well with me.)* Her mother, preferring unusual names, chose names for Rachel and her sister that no one else had in Mexico. And now Rachel continues the tradition choosing for her two sons first names not typically heard in Latino families.

Rachel never imagined that she would be living in the United States nor raising her two young sons here. She was born and raised in Acapulco, Mexico, attending school through high school, where she studied sewing, and beginning a life and a career there. But when her aunt needed someone to accompany her to the United States to join her husband already living in the U.S., Rachel volunteered to go with her.

Yo venía porque una tía iba a venir para estar con su esposo. Pero ella no quería venir sola entonces, como valiente, decidí acompañarla. Pensaba acompañarla y luego regresar. Pero después me quedé a trabajar y aquí me quedé. (March 25, 2014)

*I came because an aunt was going to come to be with her husband. But she did not want to come alone so, as the brave one, I decided to accompany her. I thought I would accompany her and then return. But, then I stayed to work and here I stayed.*

Rachel, the second daughter of four children, volunteered to go with her aunt and risked leaving her home and the life that she had already established for herself in Acapulco. However, once here, things inevitably changed when she met her future husband, and then, started a family. After moving around a few times following a company that promised work to her husband, they settled in North Carolina where a boom in home construction in the 2000s brought a high demand for workers. Yet, Rachel and her husband still plan on returning to México with their two young sons because there she has the possibility of

owning a home and opening her own cooking business. Her husband also wants to run his own business with his brothers. They hope to own a fleet of tractor trailer trucks to transport goods. It's not that Rachel wants to move because she misses Mexico ("no soy muy patriota" (*I'm not very patriotic*) she told me) but because of the limitations of living here without documentation:

Para mí estaría bien quedarme aquí. Me parece que es un buen lugar. Tiene cosas buenas y cosas malas como todos los lugares. Si pudiera quedarme aquí, me quedaría... Si pudiera vivir y poner un negocio y tener una casa... (March 25, 2014)

*For me it would be ok to stay here. It seems that it is a good place. It has good things and bad things like all places. If I could stay here, I would stay... If I could live and set up a business and have a house...*

Given that both her husband and she are undocumented, she feared more the threat of deportation and uncertainty with her children, than the life that awaited them in Mexico. She was confident that they could build a good life for themselves in Mexico "esforzándonos y trabajando duro" (*exerting ourselves and working hard*) although she feared the violence in her hometown and worried that something might happen to her sons (March 25, 2014).

Yet, in the meantime she has a family to raise here. Rachel worked previously for a family as their nanny but was let go, and then she had the new baby and has stayed home since then. Her day follows the routine and schedule of her sons and her husband. And like many mothers, Rachel is in the process of negotiating how to best raise her children given that they are now in a totally different setting than the one in which she grew up. At first she worried that her eldest son was not learning English and therefore, was not able to relate to other children. Then, when her son began preferring English to Spanish and was unable or unwilling to respond back to her in Spanish, she searched for alternatives to the all English day care in which he was enrolled that would help him to develop his English fluency but

also continue to reinforce his Spanish language. As a mother she is constantly considering what options are best for her son at that moment and how to get the best treatment for him.

Hasta los tres años, cuatro... él estuvo, lo tenía conmigo en casa. Pero a los cuatro años empezó en la guardería pero allí sólo hablaba inglés. Porque cuando él era más pequeño yo lo llevaba a jugar al parque, y no entendía a los otros niños que le hablaban inglés. Por eso, yo lo metí en la guardería para que aprendiera el inglés y jugar con los niños en el parque y hablar bien. [Porque antes] él les hablaba en español y ellos estaban así. Y luego ellos le hablaban en inglés y él estaba así. Y por eso lo metí en la guardería. (December 4, 2013)

*Until three years old, four... he was, I had him with me at home. But at four years old he began at daycare but there he only spoke English. Because when he was younger and I use to bring him to play at the park, he didn't understand the other children that talked to him in English. Therefore, I enrolled him in daycare so that he would learn English and play with the children at the park and speak well. [Because before] he would speak to them in Spanish and they would be like. And then they spoke to him in English and he would be like. And so, I enrolled him in daycare.*

This is the first year that Rachel sent her son, now a first grader, to PES with its TWI program. The previous two years, beginning with preschool, her son had been in all-English schools. However, last year when her son began speaking only in English, she feared that he would totally lose his Spanish and sought out the TWI program with hope that it would help her son.

Porque antes no hablaba nada de español. El año pasado no quería hablar nada de español. Sí, yo sí entendía cuando me hablaba en inglés y tal vez podía entender aunque no podía responderle en inglés pero sí entendía todo. Y me daba todo en inglés y yo sí, le decía “no, no, en español, en español” y me decía, “no, no puedo.” Pero ahora sí habla más español y pienso que para poder estar en el nivel del grado sólo le falta poco. (March 25, 2014)

*Because before he didn't speak any Spanish. Last year he didn't want to speak any Spanish. Yes, I did understand when he spoke to me in English and perhaps I could understand although I couldn't respond to him in English but I did understand everything. And he gave me everything in English, and I would say, “no, no, in Spanish, in Spanish” and he would say, “no, I can't.” But now he speaks more Spanish and I think that in order to be on grade level he is only lacking a little.*

Rachel sees her children's ability to speak Spanish as a practical necessity especially if the family moves back to Mexico. But, their ability to speak Spanish also has to do with

the identity of the children as Latinos and as Spanish-speakers. She explained why she wanted her children in the TWI program as a way of maintaining connection to their Mexican roots:

Yo pienso que para que no... no pierdan lo que son sus raíces. Muchos niños...yo he notado que hay muchos niños que sólo hablan el inglés y la escuela sólo en inglés pero como que y después el español les viene a hablar un poco mal. Yo pienso que es mejor... para mí es mejor... no está bien que mi hijo sólo hable medio español. Para mí yo quiero que mi niño hable bien el español. Si alguna vez va a otro lugar o va a México por decisión propia, que pueda hablarlo bien. Que tiene raíces y aspectos hispanos y que lo hable bien. (March 25, 2014)

*I think that in order to not... not lose what are their roots. Many children... I have noted that there are many children that only speak English and at school only in English but as if and then, they begin to speak poorly in Spanish. I think that it is better... for me it is better... it is not ok that my son only speaks half Spanish. For me I want my child to speak well in Spanish. If sometime he goes to another place or he goes to Mexico by his own decision, that he can speak it well. That he has roots and Hispanic characteristics and that he speak it well.*

In this way, she sees the TWI program as supporting her work in fostering the bilingualism of her son and important in his development as both an English and Spanish speaker.

But, Rachel does not want her children to only be able to speak English and Spanish. She wants them to have exposure to many languages and many countries and to know that there is more to the world than just the U.S. and Mexico. For example, she appreciated the international focus of the school's Carnival in which each class designed a float for a particular country, many of which were not Spanish-speaking. She liked that the children "trataran o investigaran otros países, no solamente México y los países hispanohablantes, sino Venecia, Rusia. A mi hijo le gusta... a veces llega diciendo que tal país hace esto o esto que le interesan otros países" (*dealed with or researched other countries, not just Mexico or the Spanish-speaking countries, but also Venice, Russia. My son likes... sometimes he arrives*

*talking about a country that does this and this interests him about other countries)* (March 25, 2014). Likewise, while Rachel did not personally have the opportunity to learn another language during her schooling, she would like her children to learn multiple languages because she sees them as an important way to connect with others and as an important skill set for the work force. She described her goal for her son to learn not only English and Spanish, but other languages as well:

Que él pueda seguir aprendiendo inglés y español juntos, igual como él habla bien el inglés que hable también bien en español. Si yo pudiera meterlo en clases de chino o ruso, lo haría, lo metería. Porque para mí yo creo... me imagino... que es un arma más de trabajo de poder hablar más de un idioma, tres, o cuatro idiomas. Para que en cualquier trabajo que tenga futuro o que pueda.... Para poder hablar los tres idiomas...so... cualquier... (December 4, 2013).

*That he can continue learning English and Spanish together, equally as he speaks English well that he also speaks well in Spanish. If I could enroll him in Chinese or Russian classes, I'd do it, I'd enroll him. Because for me I think... I imagine... that it is another weapon of work to be able to speak more than one language, three, four languages. So that in whatever work he would have a future or he could... to be able to speak three languages... so... whatever...*

Rachel's sense of the value of raising children to be internationally-minded demonstrated that beyond just developing skills for future work, she desired her children to be well-rounded and able to extend beyond the confines of their community. Earlier in the year when we met, she shared a similar desire about her children to become multilingual as a way of being able to connect with others regardless of their origin or dominant language:

Pues me imagino que para un maestro, un doctor, o un abogado que pueda hablar más de un idioma más en este país que es bien bicultural – que hay chinos, japoneses, rusos, alemanes, franceses... que pueda... convivir con más personas y que pueda hablar bien. A veces las personas consideran que si se puede hablar bien, hablo español y la gente ah! Como la gente más te agarra con confianza que hablas el mismo idioma. (December 4, 2013)

*Well I imagine that for a teacher, a doctor, or a lawyer that can speak more than one language more so in this country that is very bicultural—there are Chinese, Japanese, Russians, Germans, French... that one can... get along with more people and that they can speak well. Sometimes people consider that if a person can speak*

*well, I speak Spanish and the people ahh! Like the people grasp onto you with trust that you speak the same language.*

In general, Rachel wants a better life for her children than she and her husband have had. She wants them to be able to study, if that is what they want to do, and choose a career that works their mind more than their body: “Por eso quiero ahorrar mucho para que si quieren estudiar que pueden estudiar.... A ver si ellos pueden estudiar algo que les gusta más. Que trabajen mucho la cabeza y no el cuerpo” (*For that reason I want to save a lot so that if they want to study, that they are able to study... Let's see if they can study something that they like more. That they work their heads a lot and not their body*) (March 25, 2014).

Rachel pursued enrolling her son in the TWI school by inquiring about the school at the district's central office and making a point to transfer him from another school to PES. She also felt that her enrollment in the parent language classes was important as she hoped to improve her speaking abilities in English. She expressed her hopes in taking the classes:

*Quería aprender el inglés [para] poder comunicarme. A veces, no sé, por pena o por no saber qué decir exactamente con las palabras exactas... para hablar con las personas o hablar con el director, o en la tienda o alguna cosa que necesito pero por pena de no decirlo bien... (December 4, 2013)*

*I wanted to learn English to be able to communicate. Sometimes, I don't know, because of embarrassment or for not knowing what to say exactly with the exact words... to be able to speak with people or to speak with the principal, or in the store or something that I need but because of embarrassment in not saying it well...*

Through the classes, while she admitted that they did not help her improve substantially in her English speaking, she did gain new connections with both Spanish dominant and English dominant parents that prior to the classes she did not have.

[Y]o pienso que para mí por lo menos las clases de inglés me sirven para ok, nos conocemos o cuando venimos para un evento... apenas había uno cuando iban a cantar los niños y...allí hubo varios padres americanos o sea que hablan inglés y otros padres que hablan español... y este para convivir no tanto no tan cercamente pero para convivir un poco sí. (December 4, 2013)

*I think that for me at least the English classes served me for ok, we know each other or when we come for an event... just recently there was one when the children were going to sing and... there were various American parents or those that speak English and the parents that speak Spanish... and this to get along well not so much, not so close but to get a long a little yes.*

Therefore, Rachel did not form deep relationships with anyone through the classes, yet, the classes did facilitate some connection-building in that she at least recognized other parents at school events. Rachel did have stronger relationships with other Latino/a parents than white parents because of the difficulty of the language barriers. However, she still expressed that relationships were limited among Latino/a parents because of the tendency to self-segregate. I asked her how I could have better promoted relationships between parents in the English language classes and she responded that the class itself did not determine the nature of the relationships among parents: “No tiene que ver con lo que tú hiciste o en lo que no hiciste. Es que así somos. Nosotros mismos nos dividimos. No es el hecho de la escuela o de la maestra” (*It doesn't have to do with what you did or in what you didn't do. It is the way we are. We separate ourselves. It is not done by the school or the teacher*) (December 4, 2013). In addition to “la mujer que sabía más que todos nosotros” (*the woman who knew more than all of us*) (December 4, 2013), Pilar, who attended the first session of language classes and was very advanced in her proficiency in English and acted bored in class, Rachel also reflected on the presence of Javier, the father from Costa Rica, in the classes.

No sé si él es el más avanzado de este grupo. Sí, me hace que él sabe un poco más. No sé si fue por su educación universitaria. A lo mejor no es verdad pero así me parece.... He tratado de hablar con él y sí, me contesta respetuosamente y amablemente pero lo que le pregunto-- no para poder tener un intercambio de ideas. Yo pregunto algo y él me contesta muy bien. Pero solamente me contesta. No me pregunta nada. (March 25, 2014)

*I don't know if he is the most advanced of this group. Yes, it seems to me that he knows a little more. I don't know if it was for his university education. Probably it isn't true but that's how it seemed to me....I have tried to talk with him and yes, he answers me respectfully and kindly but only what I ask him—not in order to have an*



*Exchange of ideas. I ask him something and he answers me very well. But he only answers me. He doesn't ask me anything.*

Javier's presence in the class because of his refusal to engage with the other women including Rachel was detrimental to creating a sense of community in the English language classes.

Rachel also expressed regret several times throughout the year about other Latino/a parents not participating more or continuing on with the classes. For example, despite her enjoyment in the second session of language classes in which the parents seemed to begin to form tighter connections she reflected,

Pero me hubiera gustado que habría más gente interesada en ir. Aunque a veces no vamos porque hay cosas para hacer o no llegamos a tiempo o hay nieve. Pero que hicieran más esfuerzo para poder aprender. Claro no es la culpa de nadie. Pero sí me habría gustado que la gente tratara de ir más. He visto a personas que fueron y ya no van, y les pregunto por qué... Oh, porque ahora trabajo. Porque... no sé. Incluso que una mujer aquí en el apartamento que vino sólo una vez. Me dijo como que había faltado tantas clases, no iba a regresar porque ya se había retrasado. Pero sí me hubiera gustado que más fueran con más frecuencia. (March 25, 2014)

*But I would have liked that more people had been interested in going. Although sometimes we don't go because there are things to do or we don't arrive on time or there is snow. But that they make a greater effort to be able to learn. Of course it is not the fault of anyone. But yes, I would have liked that more people had tried to go more. I have seen people that went and now don't go, and I ask them why... Oh, because now I work. Because... I don't know. Even a woman here in the apartment that went only one time. She told me that since she had missed so many classes, she wasn't going to return because she was already behind. But yes, I would have liked that more had gone with more frequency.*

Rachel expressed disappointment that other Latino/a parents had not attended or had dropped out of the classes after a few weeks. She seemed eager to get to know these parents and form a community with them but this was limited by their hesitation or their inability to continue to participate.

In addition to feeling some tensions among the Latino/a parents, Rachel also experienced tensions working with the English dominant parents during the joint conversation period because she believed that they knew more Spanish than she knew English and that they were more consistent with their class attendance which added to their success. Yet, she also pointed out that the joint conversation period did encourage the parents to work together to understand one another which helped Rachel to feel less shy speaking in English:

Yo creo que por lo menos en mi caso, aprendí tener menos timidez de hablar con alguien en otro idioma. [Los otros padres] hicieron un esfuerzo para poder entenderme y hablarme, y yo también hice un esfuerzo para entenderlos y hablarles. Por lo menos hablando de mí... en mi ejemplo, yo veía con los que me tocaron ellos hablaron mejor el español que yo hablo en inglés. Que avanzaron más rápidamente que nosotros. Pero cuando me tocaron hablar con ellos, podían hablar más español que yo en inglés. (December 4, 2013)

*I think that at least in my case, I learned to be less shy speaking with someone in another language. [The other parents] made an effort to be able to understand me and talk to me, and I also made an effort to understand them and speak to them. At least speaking about me... in my case, I saw with those that paired up with me that they spoke better in Spanish than I speak in English. That they advanced more rapidly than us. But when it was my turn to talk with them, they were able to speak more Spanish than me in English.*

After participating in the parent language classes, Rachel reported that she felt more connected with the school because she felt supported by a school that was invested in helping parents, like the children, become bilingual.

Creo que es muy interesante que a la escuela le importa que los padres hablen inglés que sólo saben español y los otros que hablen español que sólo saben inglés. Y esta es una escuela bilingüe. [Es] como que le interesa la escuela en los dos lados. (December 4, 2013)

*I think it is very interesting that it is important to the school that the parents speak English that only know Spanish and that the others speak Spanish that only know English. And this is a bilingual school. [It is] as if the school is interested in the two sides.*

During the language classes, Rachel evolved from a quiet woman in the group to a leader, taking up more agency, among the Latina mothers. The first session, Rachel sat huddled next to her friend, Aracela, also a Mexican mother that attended the language classes, and during joint conversation time she ducked her head and tried not to make eye contact as groups were formed for conversation. Even at the first pot luck at the end of the six week period, she stayed off to one side with Aracela and Aracela's husband that joined her at the end of each class after returning from work, not interacting with the other mostly white parents in the room.

However, when Rachel returned for the second session, she seemed much more determined and confident. Aracela, the other Latina mother, had decided not to continue with the classes and so Rachel arrived alone. On the first day of the new session she introduced to the group the application "Duolingo" that can be used on a smart phone to practice reading, writing, speaking, and listening in English. She had been practicing English through this interactive application during the break between class sessions. The other mothers present in the class, gathered around her wanting to know more about the application. One other mother looked at her intently and asked her if that was how she learned so much English (February 20, 2014). Rachel was more open and talkative with the other mothers, beginning in the second session, introducing herself to a mother that was new to the classes that Rachel had seen at a previous school event. And she began to organize the mothers in the English language class by entering their phone numbers into her phone. Despite the fact that I had passed out a list of the contact information of all the parents in the classes, Rachel went personally to each person and asked for their phone number. These seemingly insignificant actions actually contributed to a much more open and cooperative sense among parents in the

English language classes during the second session. As the teacher, I noticed the change in the atmosphere of the classes and the greater interactions among the language class participants, and so I asked Rachel about why she thought there was a change and a greater sense of *convivencia*, which literally translates to “co-existence” in English but also entails a sense of community and mutual enjoyment and feeling of affection toward others, during the second session of classes:

Sí, por lo menos [más convivencia] en la última sesión. Sí... Traté de llamarlas o pedí sus números de teléfono para hablarlas. Llamarlas por una cosa de la escuela. Pero sí, sí... Y parecen que también están un poquito más avanzadas... No sé si traían ellas más del español, como que sabían un poquito más. Me di cuenta que varias de las señoras sabían más del inglés. Por lo menos en teoría aunque quizás no para poder hablarlo. (March 25, 2014)

*Yes, at least [more co-existence] in the last session. Yes...I tried to call them or I asked for their telephone numbers to call them. Calling them for something related to the school. But yes, yes... And they seemed that they also were a little more advanced... I don't know if they brought more of Spanish, like they knew a little more. I realized that several of the women knew more English. At least in theory although perhaps not to be able to speak it.*

Rachel was also more determined about influencing the schooling of her son. Beginning in March when we met for an interview and continuing in May when we met again at her home, Rachel became convinced that her son's first grade classroom teacher, Sra. Colón, was not a good teacher for him and that her son was losing interest and becoming frustrated at school. She told me that she hoped that she could get her son a different teacher for next year. The issue, according to Rachel, was that the classroom teacher was extremely demanding and more so with her son given that he is Latino and his parents speak Spanish at home. Rachel intuited that the teacher assumed that her son was capable of more and therefore, expected him to produce more academic Spanish than her son was able to do at this point, especially given his lack of schooling in Spanish the previous few years.

Furthermore, Rachel reported that Sra. Colón made the parents feel unwelcomed in the classroom. Although Rachel said that she hardly gets out with the baby given that it was still early spring and cold out, she said that she had heard from other parents that the teacher is never available when they come to the school. Someone always makes an excuse about her whereabouts. Rachel had a similar experience trying to communicate with her on the phone:

Casi no puedo salir por el bebé especialmente por el frío pero una señora del salón me ha dicho que ha ido muy seguida porque ya no tiene niños pequeños y puede ir más en seguida y que cuando va, la maestra nunca está. La asistente le dice que está en “una sesión.” Ha ido varias veces y nunca la encuentra. Que nunca está disponible. Siempre está la ayudante que le dice, no es que no está la maestra. Está en una junta. La he hablado por teléfono. Me ha costado comunicarme con ella. Cuando llamo, la asistente contesta y me dice que no está. Ok, está bien... Fue a tal lugar... A lo mejor es solamente lo que pienso yo, pero quiero buscar a otra maestra para que él se sienta mejor. (March 25, 2014)

*I almost can't go out because of the baby especially because of the cold but one woman from the classroom has told me that she has gone very often because she doesn't have little children now and she can go more often and that when she goes, the teacher is never there. The assistant tells her that she is in a “session.” She has gone various times and has never encounters her. That she is never available. The assistant is always there and tells her, that it isn't that the teacher isn't there. She is in a meeting. I have called her by telephone. It has been difficult to get in contact with her. When I call, the assistant answers and she tells me that [the teacher] isn't here. Ok, it's ok... She went to such and such place... Perhaps it is only what I think, but I want to look for another teacher so that [my son] feels better.*

Rachel compared this experience with Sra. Colón and her inaccessibility with the experience that she had with the long-term substitute teacher who taught in Sra. Colón's place at the beginning of the year while she was on maternity leave. The substitute teacher was in frequent contact with her about her son's behavior in the classroom as well as strategies to help him become a better reader in Spanish. Therefore, Rachel was in frequent contact with him via the telephone and notes between home and school.

I knew that Sra. Colón was planning on moving up a grade the following year through my communication with Verónica, the literacy coach, and so Rachel and I talked about how

she had the right to go to the principal, as the mother, and request a teacher change for her son if she thought that the teacher was detrimental to her son's academic or social development. After a pause, Rachel asked if parents really did that. I assured her that lots of parents request teacher changes for their children, and she said that she would remember that and would think about talking to the principal if her son was placed with the same teacher in the fall (personal communication, May 6, 2014). Rachel also expressed uncertainty about whether the TWI program at PES was even the right fit for her son or if he might be better suited for another school's TWI program in the area that operated with a 50-50 model of instruction time in Spanish and in English given his language learning background.

On the morning of April 10, 2014, I visited Sra. Colón's classroom. Prior to visiting the classroom, I made contact with her and mentioned that I was interested in observing Rachel's son, Mateo, to see how he interacted with others and worked in the classroom. So, as I entered the room and took a seat in the back of the classroom, the teacher came over and pointed out Mateo to me. But I had already recognized him. I had seen him once with his mother at the school's Carnival. He sat with his head down and his longish brown hair hanging over his eyes and ears at one of the classroom's large lima bean shaped tables. Pushing his glasses up off his eyes with his hands, he rubbed both eyes and blinked looking up at the ceiling. Sra. Colón's classroom had a different ambience than the classroom I was most accustomed to being in, that of the kindergarten teacher, Sra. Morales. In contrast, in Sra. Colón's classroom, there was a feeling of haphazardness in which things were placed all around without organization and seemingly without reason. There was also a lack of direction for the children—some milled about the classroom and others sat at their tables idle like Mateo. The children had just returned from the playground prior to my arrival and were

settling back into the classroom routine, visiting the bathroom, and waiting for the teacher. During the recess, there was an incident—a Latino classmate allegedly pushed and hit two other girls on the playground. The teacher and teaching assistant were huddled at their desk, sighing loudly, as they filled out an incident report on what had happened. With the teachers occupied with the report, the children went to the bathroom, got water, and visited with friends. Others fiddled through their backpacks hanging at cubbies. Mateo continued to sit at his table rubbing his eyes. After ten minutes, Sra. Colón called all the students to the carpet for instruction. Mateo followed, still rubbing his eyes. Sixteen children in total sat on the carpet and Sra. Colón perched above them in a kid-sized chair and pulling up an easel with markers next to her. The teacher and students began the “Estudio de Palabras” (*Study of Words*) time. After a short explanation of the task ahead and passing out to the children pieces of paper that had words printed on them, Sra. Colón dismissed the children back to their tables. She asked the children to cut out the words but since there were not enough words to go around, some of the children were instructed to “just watch this time” (April 10, 2014). Some minutes later and with the cutting complete, children re-gathered on the carpet to tape their word to the easel and divide the word into syllables one by one. Mateo, still rubbing his eyes, was called over by Sra. Colón who asked him what was wrong with his eyes. Glancing over at me, she sent him to the nurse’s office for eye drops. A short time later Mateo returned and rejoined his classmates still on the carpet where they were continuing the word study activity. “No tengo una palabra,” (*I don’t have a word*) announced one white girl from the floor. I saw frustration erupt from Sra. Colón. “Then, think of one and add it,” she replied to the student. A short time later, the girl that had announced her lack of word, added “trompeta” (*trompet*) to the list of words ending with “-eta.” I was impressed by her

insistence in participating. Sra. Colón glanced up at the clock mid-activity, “Ok, tiempo de estudio de palabras se ha acabado. Mañana seguimos. Todos van a tener un chance. Pueden guardar sus palabras en la carpeta de lectura ahora y regresar al piso” (*Ok, word study time has ended. Tomorrow we will continue. Everyone will have a chance. You all can store your words in the reading folder now and return to the floor*) (April 10, 2014). It seemed arbitrary to the teacher and to the students that they had not completed the activity. Rather, it seemed to be a continuation of drills that the students did each day.

During the last few minutes of my observation, the students transitioned to work on “historias sobre como se hace algo” (*stories about how to do something*). On a sheet of paper divided in half, students drew pictures and described the steps they would need to take to complete the task. For example, some students wrote about how to make a cake; how to do a cartwheel; and how to make tacos. Mateo was writing about how to make a Mexican flag. He wrote out the steps and added illustrations as required in the left margin. His assignment was mostly finished when the designated time began to work on their stories. The students were instructed that under no circumstance should they talk during this time: “Estamos en silencio. Es un examen. No quiero que nadie venga a mí hasta que estén listos para entregar su trabajo. En silencio vayan a sus sillas” (*We are in silence. It is an exam. I don’t want anyone to come to me until they are ready to turn in their work. In silence go to your chairs*) (April 10, 2014). After the teacher dismissed the children to work on their “examen,” immediately three white girls gathered in front of her desk. Exasperated she began to revile the girls, “What? “What?” she shouted at them in English. Then, stopping herself abruptly, she pulled the three girls into her side office but the class could still hear her yell at them in English, “Unless it is an emergency, sit down!” (April 10, 2014). And so, Rachel’s son, Mateo, put his head back



down toward the table and fiddled with his pencil and rummaged through his desk for the remaining time of my visit.

My observations recorded during this one morning in Señora Colón's class provided a glimpse into the experience of children, including Rachel's son, during one particular school day in this classroom. It is not to provide an evaluation of instruction in this classroom or the whole experience of Rachel's son. Rather, it is the portrayal of only one class meeting. Yet, the class observed confirmed the fears that Rachel had voiced about her son's learning and his subsequent declining motivation in Sra. Colón's classroom. In this case, Rachel shared the same language as the teacher and so unlike in other school settings, she did not have to contend with securing a translator or fearing that she would not be understood during the meeting. However, she still felt hesitant about voicing her concerns. Upon reflection, I realized that I felt uncomfortable when talking to Señora Colón during my visit, and it is possible that Rachel also felt similarly intimidated by her. This could have contributed to Rachel's reluctance to talk directly to the teacher about her son's frustration at school and her feelings about not wanting to go to the principal to make a request about a teacher change for her son. One can relate to her unspoken fear that if she voiced criticism about the teacher during the school year and her son was not moved at this late point in the school year, then, her son may have suffered consequences in the classroom from his mother's actions.

Rachel ended up not being able to attend the parent English classes in the final session of the year. She told me that she had tried to figure out a way to work around her husband's new schedule in order to both get a ride to the school and provide care for her two year old son (there was not child care provided for the children under kindergarten age at the school during the language classes). I stayed in contact with her during the last session of

classes and invited her to come back for the final class and pot luck celebration. I wanted to present her with the gift card she had won in a raffle for her participation in the research study. However, that evening, there was a big storm and tornado warning. She texted me to tell me that she wasn't going to be able to travel by bus to the school like she had planned after all especially with her two children.

Understanding Rachel's motivations to enroll her son in the TWI program, her preoccupation about her son's experience at PES, as well as her own evolution during the parent language classes as she became a more outspoken leader among the mothers, demonstrated how the school context both positively and negatively affected this mother's experience at the school. On one hand, the mother and son's relationship with the classroom teacher did not encourage (and at worse, was detrimental to) Rachel's participation and feelings of connectivity and trust with the school. It was clear that Rachel did not feel comfortable expressing her feelings about her son's experience in Sra. Colón's classroom. Furthermore, when Rachel began the language classes, she reported having few connections to other parents in the school. During the language classes she began to establish initial connections with other parents, including Latina mothers and white parents. In addition, through participation in the language classes, Rachel gained some of the needed confidence in her knowledge and agency, which may encourage her subsequent participation and voicing her opinion in the school in the future.

### **Amy: White Mother Participant in Language Classes**

On the first day of school in August, Amy brought her daughter Sophia to her kindergarten classroom. Sophia clung to her mother's hand on one side and clung to the long pink ears of a white stuffed bunny in the other hand. You could tell that the mother-daughter

combination were nervous and even tearful about the first day of school. I observed the pair entering the front office and greeting the principal, Dr. Williams. Dr. Williams was in the main office moving parents through the office and out the backdoor toward the kindergarten wing. Sophia kept her eyes down but Amy moved ahead smiling at everyone. Sophia was dropped off in Sra. Morales' classroom. When Amy returned, this time free of Sophia, back to the main office before departing, we talked for a moment on the steps leading to the parking lot. "This is the right thing, right?" she asked me her eyes moving anxiously across my face. "Dual language?" I asked her back. "Yes, exactly. I just left my daughter in a room where everyone is speaking Spanish," she sighed. I explained to her that Sophia wouldn't be expected to speak Spanish right away and that fairly quickly, she would understand the routines and phrases of the classroom. "Sophia is such a sensitive child," warned Amy. "She'll be fine," I said trying to soothe her (August 26, 2013).

Amy has shoulder-length light brown hair and wears glasses. She has a friendly smile and a comfortable style--preferring to wear jeans and a tee-shirt with a pull-over sweater. From the beginning, you could see that her daughter's passage into kindergarten would mark a significant transition for Amy who had stayed home with her since her birth. I felt an instant connection with Amy because I myself anticipated feeling sad and apprehensive about bringing my daughter to kindergarten the following fall.

Amy ended up enrolling in the parent language classes with the goal to refresh her rusty Spanish. She had taken more than seven years of Spanish in high school and college. We got to know one another as we talked on the phone and met several times to talk about her daughter's progress, Amy's perceptions about the language classes, and her concerns

about the classroom. I also got to know Sophia by observing her each week in Sra. Morales' class throughout the year.

Amy is not new to schools or to public education. In fact, she was an elementary school teacher in Boston for several years before moving to the area to be closer to family. She explained to me her family's history in the area:

I was living in Boston. I was teaching ... I did not ... as a teacher in Boston, I could not afford an apartment in the city by myself. I was tired of a roommate, and I also just kind of knew that big-city life was sort of a temporary thing after four years. And so I wanted to make a move. I kept visiting my sister who lives [in North Carolina]. I loved the people, I loved the weather, and I wanted to be closer to family and so I ... I moved to another job. I just moved. Moved in with her for a month and then I ended up getting another teaching job at [a local elementary school] and it all worked out. But I was just determined to live here. (December 18, 2013)

Amy taught at a local elementary school and then took time off with the plan to pursue a doctorate degree in education. However, her plans changed when she decided to take an attractive job after completing the Masters of Curriculum in Education program. Still, the master's degree program was influential for her in terms of opening her eyes to "social justice" and pursuing change through teaching. She was hired as a public school liaison by a private university in the area and was put in charge of placing 250 undergraduate and graduate students each semester from the university into public schools where they tutored children in literacy and math. While it was a very rewarding job, it was overwhelming due to the sheer number of placements that had to be made each semester and the subsequent supervision of the tutors. After three years at this job, Amy and her husband had their first child, and so she decided to leave her job to be at home with her daughter (December 18, 2013).

Despite Amy's initial concern about TWI as the best option for her daughter, Amy already had experience with TWI education while in high school. She had even dreamed at one time of becoming a dual language teacher.

Long ago, when I was in high school taking Spanish, my teacher was phenomenal. He took us to a dual language elementary school, and I loved it. I was fired up, and that actually made me go to college and be a dual language Spanish/English teacher. And then I transferred. I studied abroad, but not in a Spanish-speaking country, and all these things sort of... I had to drop the Spanish because of timing and all that sort of thing. So I feel like the seed was planted so long ago where I thought, "Oh, this is an amazing type of education." Now it all comes full-circle and it all makes sense. (December 18, 2013)

As Sophia neared the age to go to kindergarten, Amy and her husband looked at their options for public schools. Their neighborhood school also offered a TWI program but only in part of the school, and Amy did not like the idea that Sophia would be with the same small group of kids as they tracked upward through the grades. So, when they learned of PES with its whole school TWI program, they felt that alleviated the concerns they had about TWI, and so they applied for admission.

It just seemed like a real natural fit, so we just decided to put our name in, we didn't get our hopes up. We just figured the decision would be decided for us. If our name was drawn ... And it was, the first go-around, which was sort of like a clear sign to us... that this is what we're doing. (December 18, 2013)

Amy was different from the majority of the other Anglo parents enrolled in the language classes, although curiously similar to Rachel in this respect, in terms of their goals for enrolling their children in the TWI program. While many of the other parents only mentioned the goal of learning a second language, Spanish, and the benefits in terms of brain development in children, the first thing that Amy mentioned was that she hoped her children would gain awareness of other cultures and people in the world.

I hope that [they will gain]... cultural appreciation, awareness of that there's just not... there's not one culture out there; there's not one just one language spoken; there's not

one set of traditions; there's not one... that the world is a much bigger place than our own little... white, English-speaking... So that's my number one thing. Then the whole... everything I've read just about whether or not she finishes this whole thing and never speaks, utters, another word of Spanish the rest of her life; it just seems to do amazing things to your brain to be able to learn this way. (December 18, 2014)

Amy was motivated in her school decision by the desire to give her daughters (Sophia and her younger sibling) exposure to a variety of people, cultures, and ways of living.

Perhaps influenced by the classes she was exposed to during the Masters of Curriculum in Education program, her experiences working with tutors and under-performing children at local schools, or her own experiences as a classroom teacher, Amy recognized that there was value in learning with people different than yourself as a way to better understand the world and each other.

I checked in with Amy in October to ask how she was doing and to hear about her participation during the Hispanic Awareness week. Amy had decorated a classroom door with information about a Spanish-speaking country. While she had hoped to be involved with Señora Morales' classroom, she was sent to the fifth grade after a mix-up of parent volunteers. Although she was disappointed by that, on the phone with me she was positive about her daughter's teacher Señora Morales: "I think we have hit the jackpot with Señora Morales. She sounds really engaging from what Sophia has said" (October 13, 2013). However, Amy also shared with me that Sophia cried every morning and said that she did not want to go to school. Amy was unsure if this could have been attributed to feelings of separation anxiety being away from her, the continued transition into kindergarten, her daughter's experience in the classroom, or a combination of these three.

Then, in December marking a semester that Sophia had been in Sra. Morales' classroom and following the conclusion of the first session of language classes for parents,

Amy and I met in the media center of the school. Amy seemed pleased with the progress that Sophia had made in learning Spanish and with the high use of technology in the classroom.

Sophia's learning an enormous amount. I'm not at all concerned. And she's happy. That's the key... And having fun in school... The only thing that I wanted [to discuss]... the technology piece, which I think is incredible -- and I know this is just who they are and where they're going; everything is going to be technology. I am amazed about...at how much she talks about, "I've used the Smartboard today." What percentage of their day... Do you have any idea? Is that typical of elementary school now? (December 18, 2013)

Amy also expressed her appreciation of the classroom teacher, Señora Morales:

[Sra. Morales] seems high energy and caring, and she seems to have... it's like the whole package, because then she just seems, from parent-teacher conference and from communication, she's incredibly organized and incredibly on top of things. I think the classroom, it seems like a pretty dynamic place. (December 18, 2013)

But, as the conversation continued, and we began to talk about her own experience as an elementary school teacher, some of Amy's concerns began to surface. Careful to try to separate her criticism away from the particular teacher and school, Amy wondered about the quality of education from public schools.

Sometimes I worry, just in general, with... I don't know with public education. I don't know... But you know how when you... Let's say like a science museum, your family goes probably all the time or whatever, like when you do something with your family or you do something with friends, it's a true experience and you have the time to... to experience it. But when you're on a field trip or when you're with a massive group of kids and two teachers, it becomes much more... rushed and almost automated experience. You experience it, but you don't... *really* experience it. This isn't a knock on her classroom, it's just... sometimes I worry about that just in general of public education. And I don't know if that's how that classroom is. I don't know how a public school classroom could *not* be sort of set up that way. (December 18, 2013)

From Amy's personal experience, she understands the pressures that a classroom teacher faces and admits that she does not know how it would be possible for a public school classroom not to follow some sort of automated, factory model of teaching. Amy understands this but fears most that her daughter is facing a curriculum devoid of real learning because of

the inability to take the time for the experiential learning that children need most. Rather, all the kids are marched through a curriculum, or a tour of a pumpkin patch in this case, as if on a conveyor belt and then pop-out on the other side not having really learned or experienced anything at all except that they “got through it.”

I went to the pumpkin patch with them, their field trip... and it was a lasting example of public schools, like, “Now we’re going to look at the goats; now we’re going to look at ...” And they touch them, and [then they] hand sanitize. And you have to have structure. But sometimes I worry about, “Oh, how much time does she spend standing around in line throughout the day? How much time does she spend following others?” And that’s just... that’s public school. (December 18, 2013)

Amy and I had an opportunity to get together again in March 2014 and by then, Amy’s concerns about her daughter’s educational experience at PES had solidified more. She continued to try to sort out if her concerns had to do with TWI or Sra. Morales’ teaching style because she was in the process of deciding whether they should continue in the TWI program again next year or move Sophia to another school. She shared her disappointment that Sophia’s class does not do any creative activities or projects that connect school with real life and seem to spend most of their time filling out worksheets:

[L]ast night at a church meeting, I ran into this student teacher at [another local elementary school], so she is in the thick of it. And she is doing all these cool dynamic projects like they set up a museum in the classroom and they are doing all this writing and taking pictures and doing these big projects, and I was like that’s really cool. I don’t know if that is going on in Sophia’s classroom... But, I don’t get the sense... I get the sense that they are doing all worksheets, and very traditional. Is that the classroom or the school? (March 11, 2014)

Later in May 2014, over coffee and pastries, Amy shared her concerns about her daughter’s schooling with two other Anglo mothers from the parent language classes. She used an example from Sophia’s study of roly-polies in the classroom to explore how Sophia’s learning had become very cut and dry. She knew facts about roly-polies (they are black and brown) but did not express any complex thinking or ask any questions about roly-polies.



My only dual language question... and I can't decide if it is Sophia's particular teacher's teaching style. And maybe you all can help me with this with your experience with dual language. It is really hard to have a conversation with her about school beyond the literal level. So, they are learning about roly-polies right now. "So, what have you learned?" "They are black and brown." "Well, what else did you learn?" "That they are black and brown. I never knew they were black and brown. I thought they were just grey. They are black and brown." This is a kid that before this year has been curious and had questions. And like blah! I just have this fear that there isn't an enormous amount of creativity this year. From what I get... it is very... I don't know. That is my fear. I don't know if I am expecting too much from public education. I don't know if this is a part of the common core. I don't know if I would be feeling this way if she was in English-only [curriculum]. I don't know if and again... I am not saying anything negative about her teacher. Her teacher has clearly taught her an enormous amount but, there's... It just seems kinda... rigid. And so... My feeling is that if dual language is rigid, I'm not willing to give over my daughter's childhood educational experience to rigid education for the sake of learning language. And if it's not, and that just happens to be my personal impression of this year, and again we are moving forward to try another year, that's great. But there is so much more life than learning language, and she can learn Spanish later in life. So, to put it out there bluntly that is my greatest fear of what happened this year. (May 22, 2014)

While couched in disclaimers that the rigidity of the classroom could be the result of many other factors including the Common Core curriculum, or the demands on public school teachers, Amy, as a mother and as an educator herself, was clearly very concerned about the long-term effects of the classroom on her daughter's curiosity and love of learning about the world around her. After Amy shared her concerns, Frieda, the mother from the language classes originally from Germany, did not skip a beat and said that she did not have any complaints about her daughter's teacher's communication with the family. Perhaps misunderstanding Amy's concerns, I asked Frieda if she thought her daughter's classroom was rigid like Amy had expressed, and then, Frieda explained that she did not think that was the role of the school to provide creative outlets for children; teachers' job was to provide and teach the facts because after all, there were so many facts to learn, how could they possibly have time for more to do in the classroom:

I haven't really been in the classroom, not really, to see how creative or not, or rigid they are. According to [her daughter's teacher]... I know they have to follow their curriculum. And it seems like from the feedback from the teachers... at that time that they really don't have any time to teach anything else. It was when the [common core] test was implemented, and they were struggling to put extra 50 hours in there just for the test. Everything else doesn't really matter. (May 22, 2014)

The pressures of standardized testing, according to this mother, had eliminated all other concerns of the classroom and "everything else [didn't] really matter."

The other mother present, Kimberly, the white English dominant mother who also attended all three session of classes, listened patiently to the discussion and then added that her daughter's experience, who was now in fourth grade, had been richer in terms of creative activities and projects in the classroom especially in kindergarten. But that things really improved when her daughter entered the AIG program and got turned onto new projects:

Some of the stuff that I have been most happy with has been through the AIG curriculum. She was given a packet where she gave them of floor plans and dimensions and she had to solve all kind of math problems with it with all this house-related stuff. And now she draws floor plans all the time. (May 22, 2014)

This seemed to offer some solace to Amy who also reminded the group, "for the record," that given her daughter's hard time transitioning separating from being at home and going to school every day, she had not volunteered in the classroom as she had hoped until March, and therefore her experience in the classroom had only been during the last few months of the school year, from March to May.

Up until Spring Break when I would leave, my daughter would have a major breakdown. So, I did not come in and volunteer in the classroom at all until after Spring Break. So, I should really keep my mouth shut, since I don't know what I am talking about. Because what I am getting is from a six-year-old, which isn't always reliable. But, it is just my gut feeling and I can't shake it. It is driving me a little nuts. (May 22, 2014)

Kimberly, however, supported Amy's gut feeling and confirmed that she had heard similar feedback from other parents at the school about the lack of creative projects and

reliance on worksheets in the classroom: “Well, like I said, I’ve heard it from other parents as well on other occasions” (May 22, 2014).

I observed Sophia in Sra. Morales’ classroom throughout the year. It was clear that Sophia was one of the brightest students in the classroom. She was in the highest reading group, always finished her assignments quickly, and would even invent new math problems to solve when she finished early. She began to catch on to Spanish quickly and by the end of the year was able to fulfill Señora Morales’ questions with one word or a phrase in Spanish. Yet, throughout the year, she kept the little white bunny, which had accompanied her on the first day of school, by her side, carrying it with her when she sat on the carpet and hugging it when she worked independently at her table. A couple of times, when I visited the classroom, I found Sophia crying quietly in the back of the classroom. When I would ask her what was wrong, she wouldn’t answer, or she would say that she missed her mom. Emotionally, it seemed that Sophia was adjusting to the long school day and the demands of her teacher and the curriculum.

Yet, on the other hand I also saw Sophia excel in the classroom, answering questions that the teacher posed, dancing and laughing during the dance videos during class transitions, and talking with her classmates at her table. Often placed with weaker students, Sophia was asked to help keep students on track and to help them get started with an assignment. Sophia met this responsibility with an air of superiority, but it was clear that she did not really enjoy helping the students that were off-track or distracted. She preferred to work quietly on her own tasks and at her own pace.

Señora Morales is in many ways an exceptional teacher for her energy, organization, and experience moving children ahead in their readiness for first grade. In fact, Sra. Morales’

children scored well on the end-of-the-year achievement tests because her students were well practiced in test-taking. She reported that on the end of year assessments in reading and math, 85 percent of her students reached grade level (May 29, 2014). For her, she explained, this is the goal each year—to have all but two or three students reach this benchmark. Her success is attributed to her insistence that children master skills by practicing them continuously. Assessment, too, in Sra. Morales’ classroom is a constant. It may take place with the whole class with choral repetition, or as an individual in front of the whole class, in pairs at the small tables, or individually with Sra. Morales. All of the assessments leading up to the one with Sra. Morales were just practice but the one with Sra. Morales “counted.” Assessment might also be disguised as “center work” or “project time” and children may be seated at small tables together, yet, the goal is the same: to practice and assess skills as they are learned in the classroom.

Amy’s impressions about her daughter’s classroom and the lack of creative projects that tried to connect learning to the real world seemed to be collaborated by my observations. The constant checking and measuring of progress did not leave much time for collaborative, creative, and discursive work in the classroom. I rarely observed any collaboration among students during my many field visits. The most “collaborative” activity observed was when children were asked to “play the teacher” and test their partner, essentially another way to assess students. For example, one morning in early September, Sra. Morales had just reviewed the two numbers of the day—numbers three and four—as students sat on the carpeted floor. Excused to their tables, children were instructed to hold up a card to their partner and ask the partner to name the number, count the number of objects represented on a card, write the number on a white board, and then make their own representation of the

number using other manipulatives including cubes and buttons. In this way, each child became a “teacher” watching students for mistakes and reinforcing the skills taught by the teacher (fieldnotes, September 4, 2013).

Furthermore, my observations revealed a “rigid” classroom as also suspected by Amy. Sra. Morales’ classroom was largely characterized by strict control and silence of the children. Techniques to control students’ movement and silence the children were used simultaneously to maintain order in the classroom and to quell any resistance by the children about doing the same monotonous activities day in and day out. At each transition in the classroom, when the children moved from working at their tables to sitting on the carpet or simply to refocus the children on the carpet by reminding them of expectations, Sra. Morales led the children singing this song: “Me siento derechito, como un soldadito. Las manos en la falda. Las piernas cruzadas. Qué lindo yo me veo sentado así.” (*I sit straight up like a little soldier. My hands are in my lap. My legs are crossed. How nice I look seated like this.*) Other times, for variation, she would chant, “¡uno, dos y tres, ojos en mí!” (*one, two and three, eyes on me!*) to which the students responded back in choral form, “¡uno, dos y tres, ojos en ti!” (*one, two, and three, eyes on you!*). Students were often praised for sitting “como si fueran estatuas” (*as if they were statues*) (September 9, 2013). Given the long duration of time from 9:30 in the morning until 2:00 in the afternoon (with a half an hour in the middle for lunch), in which the students were in the classroom, working on the main kindergarten curriculum, reminders about behavior were likely a necessity to maintain focus.

Had the classroom experience been richer with more projects, fewer worksheets, fewer assessments, or more opportunities to work collaboratively with other children on meaningful activities, perhaps less reliance on strict control of children’s movement and

talking would have been needed, and Sophia and other children might have emerged from kindergarten with a greater love for school and with a greater capacity to work with other students. Amy described what she had observed when she went to volunteer on a Friday morning:

Well, the day I went in to volunteer to do the Friday folders, [the children] were seated in front of the smart board doing songs, and then they went back to their desks and put up their carrel things [poster board sized cardboard boxes placed between each child] and I think the next 20 minutes or so they were working on writing. (May 22, 2014)

Amy lamented the lack of enrichment and creativity in the classroom throughout the year and worried about its effects on her daughter:

It has been a year without... you know, you see kids come out of school around Mother's Day and they all have projects. Nothing for ours! There seems to be an enormous time spent in front of the screen watching videos! That's what I hear. That's the feedback I get from [my daughter] and maybe they aren't watching too many videos. But, aye! How many videos can you watch? For holidays, there is nothing anymore. Maybe I'm thinking old school, but where's the love there? Where's the life? Where's the enrichment? (May 22, 2014)

On one hand, Amy differed from Rachel in that she brought her concerns to the attention of the school. First, Amy met privately with Verónica Ramos, the kindergarten literacy specialist and also her Spanish language teacher, to discuss her concerns about TWI programs, in general, and the experience of her daughter in Sra. Morales' classroom. Then, toward the end of the school year, Amy conferenced with Sra. Morales. However, I did not learn if Amy directly addressed her concerns with Sra. Morales during the meeting. It seemed that Amy did not want to talk about it at length and only said that she felt better about Sophia's role and experience in Sra. Morales' classroom following the meeting and felt that they would continue in the TWI program the next year. However, the conference with Sra. Morales proceeded the discussion between Anglo mothers on May 22, in which Amy

continued to voice the same concerns about the rigidity and lack of creative thinking fostered in Sra. Morales' TWI classroom. Therefore, it appeared that her original fears and apprehensions about the classroom had not been completely alleviated.

On the other hand, Amy and Rachel were similar to one another in that they both attended the parent language classes faithfully. Amy attended all three sessions of classes, only missing two classes during the third session because of travel, she apologetically explained to me. She was extremely conscientious about attending and participating. Unlike the majority of the other parents in the classes, Amy's hopes in learning Spanish were to be able to personally connect with many different people, including other families at her daughter's school, people that currently she felt disconnected from because of her inability to really engage in conversation with them.

I think learning another language opens you up to an entirely new group of people that you wouldn't be able to communicate with if you didn't know their language. And, I think it is exciting and the direction that our country is going being more diverse. In this immediate area yes, but overall and in the lives of our children, and their children, the need for Spanish is going to just grow, grow, grow. (May 22, 2014)

Despite her desire to enter into conversation with other parents, she reported that the joint conversation period was "stressful" (December 18, 2013) and awkward for her. I observed Amy working several weeks in a row with Javier, the Latino father from Costa Rica, because they sought each other out. While she seemed comfortable and confident during the actual joint conversation time, she expressed her frustration at not being able to say what she would have said had the conversation been in English.

[Conversation time] was hard. I knew what I wanted to say but I couldn't. I don't know. It was kind of embarrassing. I don't know. It was hard. It was just... it's kind of... it's one of those things where you think you... I don't know. You just... I don't know. It's just hard. Embarrassing is not the right word; it's just sort of uncomfortable. You just don't... I just didn't... You don't know what to say. You

don't know how to say it. You normally can converse. You normally can get your point across, and you just can't... I couldn't. (December 18, 2013)

Even in her reflection about the conversation period, her language is halting and filled with "I don't know" demonstrating the difficulty that Amy had in relating this experience to the many other educational experience she has had in the past. Yet, because of her attendance and her efforts to connect with other parents, Amy expressed as early as December during our first interview that she had connected with a few of the other parents.

Yeah, I did [make connections with other parents]. I definitely think it was a good way ... I met [Sophia's classmate's] mom and then there were parents that I had met along the way, but I could continue to ... I do feel connected to some parents in the class, which is good. (December 18, 2013)

She also felt that she had connected with Spanish dominant parents including Aracela, the mother from Mexico that brought her baby daughter with her to class, Pilar, that worked at a local supermarket, and Javier, the father from Costa Rica. Their connection began in the joint conversation period where they worked together. Her relationship with each Latino/a parent was different. For instance, Pilar, because of her higher proficiency in Spanish and English, tended to take on the role of teacher with Amy. Amy explained their time spent working together during the joint conversation period:

Well... it was helpful. It was very helpful. I felt like when I worked with them, and they, because they both just seem like really open, helpful people. It felt good because we didn't know each other, but from the beginning, they were willing to correct your pronunciation or just to truly help out; it felt like a real learning experience; you were sitting there... well... Pilar, I felt like... just knew English. I felt like that in a way... she was helping me, and I didn't try to help her that much. With Javier, I felt like it was more of a give or take and we actually were helping each other with things, which is great. It was all... it was very structured... we always had a very structured sort of dialogue or something we were supposed to tackle. (December 18, 2013)

However, even beyond the value that Aracela, Javier, and Pilar offered to Amy in terms of learning Spanish, she felt that the most important part of their work together was being with people different from herself:



I think it's always good to... always good to talk, and hangout, and be with other people that are other than you... Our personal lives are not very diverse, I'm sad to say. So, I'm always fascinated by other peoples... the way other people of different backgrounds do things. (December 18, 2013)

Finally, Amy expressed her hope that they could create more opportunities in which Spanish dominant and English dominant parents could interact by doing things together. She brought up her involvement decorating the classroom door for the Hispanic Heritage Week and how by working alongside two other Latina mothers, she felt somehow more connected to them and to the school because she felt that everyone was working together for the good of the school and their children's learning.

It's having the opportunities to be together – It was a great experience for me, for Hispanic Heritage week, to decorate a door. You know? It was great because there were two other moms, Spanish-speaking moms, who were there decorating doors, and it was kind of like this little, “Okay. We all have to decorate doors, and I'm trying to communicate with you, and you ...” and it was... I can feel like their shared experience, that's where the connection is. (December 18, 2013)

Amy began to imagine a new direction for the school to take in which its yearly school wide event, Carnival, was the culmination of a year of family events organized by the classroom. Along the course of the year, beginning in the fall, the parents and children would decide on their class's country and get together at events to learn about their country and create portions of the costumes, float, and games. Then, each class would come together bringing their piece of the puzzle to make an amazing Carnival spectacle.

If the school is looking for something big, the Carnival is already there built-in, and it is mid-year. And so, somehow if your class was working on something. I mean, one of the thoughts I had about Carnival was that those floats were amazing, and I don't know how all those floats were made, but I know in kindergarten that was the work of one parent. One parent that did an amazing job! But, I hope in the future the kids will... And given, that it is kindergarten and maybe there wasn't such a big push as for the older kids. How cool if the kids had a bigger part in putting that together. But, what if it was built through the entire year that in August each class gets its country and that's what brings them all together and then there are things you do throughout

the year in groups or as families to work towards it... like, a cooking night. We need to try out something from our country. Right! (May 22, 2014)

In this way, Amy began to imagine a joint future in which parents across cultural backgrounds would unite through a common project of preparing for Carnival. Parents and children alike, reasoned Amy, would be excited to contribute to the work related to Carnival and at the same time they would begin to build relationships with parents in the same class.

Amy's experience, similar to Rachel in terms of her desires to connect with the school and her belief in the value of bilingualism as a way to open doors to making connections with other people, but her ultimate, frustration with her child's experience in the classroom and limited opportunities to interact with the teacher and other parents of her daughter's classroom, had a negative impact on her feelings of connection to the school and with other parents. Despite her intentions to be engaged and participatory in the school, even imagining a more collaborative future with parents at the school, with only a few weeks left of the school year when we last met, it was clear that Amy was not happy with the quality of educational experience that her daughter had received in kindergarten and therefore, she questioned even keeping her daughter in the program for the subsequent year. Therefore, there was a strong likelihood that Amy's experiences with her daughter in the classroom during the day, impacted her feelings of trust and connectivity with the school and other parents. Amy often remarked that it was only with me during the year that she was able to voice her concerns about Sra. Morales' classroom revealing a sense of isolation. She brought these feelings with her to the language classes, and it is likely that they contributed to the undermining of third space openings given that more work needed to be done to build authentic relationships among all members of the school community and between parents and the school before tapping into new spaces.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I shared a more detailed account of the experiences of two mothers as they negotiated the schooling of their children at PES and participated in language classes to explore ways in which the school context affected the possibility of third space openings. With close to forty total teachers, it is highly unlikely that all the children and all the parents involved in the language classes had similar experiences as Rachel and Amy, the two mothers highlighted here. However, the goal was to show that the parents' experiences in the school through their children did impact the degree to which they felt connected to the school and other parents. Both Rachel and Amy expressed hesitations and apprehensions about PES as the best place for their child. They also felt limited in their ability to communicate honestly with their children's classroom teachers and in opportunities to interact with other parents in the classroom. As explored earlier, Rachel did not feel trust or connected to her son's classroom teacher, Sra. Colón. And while Rachel established some initial connections with parents through the language classes, she also felt tensions when working with other Latino/a parents as well as white parents. Eventually, she stopped coming to the classes. Likewise, Amy was unsure of the educational experiences of her daughter in Sra. Morales' classroom. Prior to the language classes, Amy had made few connections to other parents at the school. However, during the language classes she was introduced to several other English dominant parents with children in Sra. Morales' classroom and began to make some initial relationships with Latino/a parents. Therefore, as Bronfenbrenner (1994) argued, each of us is embedded in multiple layers that interact with one another and affect our development. Similarly, Rachel's and Amy's experiences in the school interacting with the classroom teachers and the lack of contact with other parents negatively affected the possibility of third

spaces opening during their meeting in the parent language classes. Unpacking the experiences of these mothers, through their children and in their own personal lives, then, leads to greater understanding of the parent language classes and the implications for future work with parents which I turn to in the last chapter, Chapter Six.

## CHAPTER 6: IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I mean, it was a great opportunity that we did, [and] I'm glad we did it, but it showed so many of the things... But, they are not things that we can change overnight. They aren't school issues, they go beyond. And of course you have to start small, and we have to keep doing these things because they will make a difference. And maybe for the eight people that finished, it made a difference for them. And I'm ok with that. I mean that was how it was too with the school I worked with in [another state]. For the six or seven people we finished with, it made a difference for them. (Verónica Ramos, July 15, 2014)

### Summary of Findings

This case study examined the experiences of parents and their language teachers, including myself, who participated in the school-sponsored Spanish and English language classes during the 2013-2014 school year at PES. The primary purpose of this study was to explore if connections were made between parents and between the home and school during the parent language classes with the goal of understanding to what degree, if at all, third spaces, hybrid spaces that represent an alternative to the official school controlled spaces, opened. Using Gutiérrez's (2008) framework to analyze the data, it was learned that while third spaces did not open fully, some groundwork was laid for third spaces during the parent language classes. Therefore, a continuum of third space openings emerged and was presented in Chapter Three. Before third spaces could open fully, to the *developed level of openings* of third spaces, the school and parents needed time to develop authentic relationships based upon mutual trust possible only when the school and parents began to understand and acknowledge Latino families' funds of knowledge (González et al., 2005) and cultural contributions to the school community. Furthermore, parents needed more time and support

to discuss together their mutual concerns and begin to push back against the official school policies' and practices that they found to be unjust to their families or their children. Moreover, while there was evidence of new learning on the part of both groups of parents during the current study, more collaboration was needed to co-create new knowledge in collaboration with one another and consider new future spaces and identities. Therefore, third space openings stopped short at the *initial level of openings*. The parent language classes provided a space in which there was some progress in parents building connections, creating new knowledge, and envisioning future spaces that would better connect parents and connect families to schools, yet, barriers and tensions ultimately limited the opening of third spaces. These tensions included: discrimination; lack of trust; barriers to parents' offering criticism; issues related to the joint conversation time; and my role as the teacher/researcher. In addition, as explored in Chapter Four and seen in the examples of the two mother participants, Rachel and Amy, in Chapter Five, the classes, embedded in the school context, were impacted both positively and negatively by school and classroom practices and environment, ultimately limiting the ability to ensure *developed openings* of third spaces.

This chapter, then, turns to address the third research question of the study by considering the implications for furthering the school's efforts to build connections between parents and between parents and the school to open third spaces more fully. The language classes, embedded in the school context, impacted parents' feelings of connectivity to the school and to other parents. This was ultimately to the detriment of fully opening third spaces. Therefore both the context and the parent language classes must be deliberately arranged to promote connectivity to school and with other parents in order to support the *developed openings* of third spaces. Therefore I will present the five major implications of

the study including the need to 1) re-conceptualize the traditional notion of “parental involvement;” 2) build relationships based upon *confianza* between Latino/a parents; 3) educate white parents on privilege, racism, as well as, the reality of Latinos in America; 4) address contextual issues of the school that are detrimental to the school environment; 5) address needed changes to parent language classes

## **Implications and Recommendations**

### **Re-conceptualize “Parental Involvement” in CLD Schools**

Throughout this dissertation, evidence of the school’s continued reliance on traditional notions of “parental involvement,” or what I referred to as “home-school connections,” have been evident in their concept of parents’ presence and limited role in the school; how parents’ participation is kept separate from the curriculum and “what really matters;” and largely normalizing the white middle class experience over that of the CLD student body and families of the school. It is clear, after considering the findings of this study, that we should break free from the traditional model of parental involvement to encourage a more meaningful, collaborative, and mutually beneficial role for families in schools. Therefore, following efforts of other scholars (including Baquedano-López, Hernandez, and Alexander (2014); Griffin (2011); Hong (2011); Olivos (2006); and Warren et al. (2009)) who have also argued for a reconceptualization of parental involvement, I suggest a widening of this term to take into account the findings from the parent language classes at PES. I term the newly reconfigured model of parental involvement, “The Collaborative Integration Model of Family-School Connections” (“Collaborative Integration Model” for short).

In the traditional model of parental involvement, parents engage in the school individually, isolated from other parents, to support the school or a classroom teacher. They perform tasks that are largely mundane and meaningless to the “things that really matter” at school. While their participation at school may be seen or felt in the immediate location, like a drop of oil in water, it stays relatively isolated from spreading throughout the school. Their involvement does not affect the curricular decisions, classroom practices, or school policies. Involvement, then, is narrowly defined and based upon the notion that the school is the expert and knowledge and instruction flows downward from the school to the families that are deficient or lacking in some way.

In comparison, in the Collaborative Integration Model, parents work in collaboration with one another on important tasks that are central to the classroom and impact curricular decisions and school practices and policies. Like a drop of food coloring into a cup of water that diffuses throughout all the water, the influence of parents can be felt throughout the school, and their impact has a lasting effect. It is important to acknowledge that parents already have a voice; they have agency; they have something to say. They just need to be given space to collaborate with other members of the school community to flex their voices and from there, decisions on practices and policies must originate out of the parents’ common concerns and demands. All parents, including Latino/a, African American, Asian, and white, work with one another, establishing relationships of authentic trust and *confianza* and joining efforts for the benefit of their children’s schooling. Parents, “integrated together” in union, work to create more equitable and humanizing spaces within schools for all children and families.



Yet, integration, like its historical meaning, does not imply that individual groups lose their unique cultural, linguistic, ethnic identities as in a “melting pot” analogy. Rather, parents will bring with them different histories and experiences with schools, different goals and interests, and differing degrees of power based on their language, knowledge and experience navigating the educational system. Therefore, it is likely that integrating parents together will not be easy or without set-backs. Yet, it is hoped that by building a core group of parents who have established mutual understanding and authentic caring relationships that cross cultural and linguistic groups, parents will learn to work together over time and following the leadership of other parents, precisely because they learn to acknowledge and value families’ funds of knowledge and epistemological and ontological underpinnings that parents bring with them to schools, even in cases when the school does not currently acknowledge them. This model is designed by CLD parents, educators, and their allies for a CLD student body that defines the majority of public schools of the United States today and is especially suited for TWI schools. This helps to re-center schools away from normalizing the experience of white monolingual English-speaking middle class families to those of CLD families. Finally, it is based upon the realization that everyone who comes into contact with children, contributes to their learning and that learning is not isolated to school spaces.

Furthermore, the parents, as one unified group, are “integrated” into the school as strong mutual connections are formed from the school to the parents. In comparison with the Traditional Model in which the parents are asked to support the school in its missions yet are kept quite separate from the school, in the Collaborative Integration Model, both parents and the school work together and therefore, both receive benefits and help one another. For example, parents could give input on how specialized cultural knowledge and experiences

from the school community could be integrated into the curriculum in each grade by offering suggestions of topics that parents could share with classes. The school benefits by creating a locally responsive curriculum that would connect well with the students' prior knowledge and experiences and the parents benefit by feeling that they have significantly contributed to the school by working on meaningful tasks with other parents and in collaboration with the teachers.

Finally, it is hoped that as parents engage in the school and with one another through the Collaborative Integration Model, counterscripts (Moje, et al., 2004), talk back or critical discourse, would emerge, and would propel parents to push out on the traditional boundaries of accepted school and home spaces to open a new more equitable third spaces and reimagine their future selves in these spaces.

Table 5 compares the characteristics of Traditional Parental Involvement Model with the Collaborative Integration Model which forms the base for the remaining implications of the study discussed below.

Table 5: Comparison of “Traditional Parental Involvement” Model and “Collaborative Integration Model”

<b>Traditional Parental Involvement Model</b>	<b>Collaborative Integration Model</b>
Individual parent working to support school or particular classroom	Groups of parents and families working in collaboration with one another
Unidirectional efforts of parent toward school	Mutual direction of efforts by school and families to connect with one another
School receives benefit, parents may benefit in small way	Mutual and equal benefits for school and parents
Parents work in isolation of one another	Parent groups “integrated” with one another across cultural, social, linguistic differences

Do mundane, meaningless tasks	Help with important tasks, central to classroom or school
Does not impact curricular decisions, school policies, or classroom practices	Decisions impact curricular decisions, school policies, and classroom practices
Impact felt only locally if at all	Impact felt throughout school; effects diffuse through school, imparting lasting effect on school practices and school members
Designed by white female educators with other white female mothers in mind	Designed by CLD educators, parents, community members, and their allies with CLD student body and families in mind
Centers school on experience of white, monolingual English-speaking, middle class families	Centers school on the experiences of CLD families
Based upon notion that school is the expert and top-down diffusion of knowledge (from school to home)	Based upon notion that everyone contributes to the teaching of children; Learning is not isolated to school spaces
Based upon deficit hypothesis of families and need to “fix” homes and communities	Based upon strengths of families through funds of knowledge and epistemologies and ontologies brought by families to the school
Usually consists of parent education programs, efforts to teach parents how to be more like the teacher at home, programs to learn about navigating the school or school system	Could include working with teachers to plan curriculum units and co-teaching or guest teaching a small part of a lesson or sharing a personal experience related to content
Hinders third space openings among parents and between parents and the school	Promotes third spaces openings among parents and between parents and the school

### **Foster Relationships Based upon *Confianza* Between Latino/a Parents**

In addition to re-conceptualizing the notion of parental involvement at school, a necessary component to better “integrate” parents under the Collaborative Integration Model of family-school connections, and a contributing factor to the failure of third space openings, is the lack of authentic relationships among Latino/a parents based upon mutual trust and caring among parents, evident through casual relationships and intragroup discrimination.

For instance, the parent language classes at PES revealed that Latino/a parents in the English language classes were uncomfortable not only when joining the white English dominant parents but also working with each other. There were instances in which some parents believed that other Latino/a parents acted superior or looked down at them because of their country of origin, their legal status, and because of their relative level of fluency in English. Parents referred back to previous experiences when they had faced similar situations in which other Latinos made fun of them, talked badly about them, or wanted to hold them back from succeeding. As explored earlier, these examples of intragroup discrimination are considered a lasting effect of Latin America's long history of colonization and resulting division among people based predominately on race and skin color. Especially given that the general public sees all Latinos as part of one monolithic, pan-ethnic group (Fraga et al., 2010), there are, therefore, efforts to set oneself apart and above the rest which come across as lack of cooperation, or at worst, hostility among parents.

For this reason, it is important that the first step to take in working toward connections between all parents to open third spaces, is to provide spaces in which Latino/a parents can build connections with one another with *confianza*, mutual trust. *Confianza* translates to a combination of “trust” and “confidence” (Dyrness, 2007) and formed the cornerstone of the success that *Madres Unidas*, a group of Latina mothers organized by Dyrness, to “critiqu[e] and disrupt[t] the marginalization of Latino parents,” (p. 266), enjoyed. *Confianza* is not built “...on false pretenses of getting along or avoiding conflict: it [comes] with the open expression of ones likes and dislikes, as long as these [are] voiced with respect” (Dyrness, 2007, p. 266).

*Confianza* among parents also is built as parents meet and discuss concerns they have about their children's schooling. Parents begin to realize that their experiences are not isolated events and that their treatment may be part of a larger systematic treatment of CLD families and their children at the school. Protected from critique or intimidation, parents begin to flex their communal voice, stating their dissatisfaction and moving to change practices and policies (Cervantes-Soon, 2014).

Referred to by Edward Olivos (2006) as "transformative parental involvement," once parents have established relationships of *confianza*, they work to develop their critical consciousness (Freire, 2010) and open third spaces in which they push out on the official school-sanctioned boundaries and reimagine their future roles at the school. Therefore, building relationships of mutual trust among Latino/a parents would allow third spaces to fully open as parents began to push out on the official boundaries of the school practices and policies and alter the political, social, and cultural landscape of the school. Once third spaces were opened by Latino/a parents in collaboration with one another and Latino/a parents were, therefore, more securely situated in the school in terms of having their collective voice heard, the potential for success when working in collaboration with white English dominant parents would be greater. Given the local context in North Carolina with a relatively short history of Latino presence, there is a need for greater collaborative spaces in which Latinos can organize and work in solidarity with one another to improve their children's schooling before engaging with white dominant parents (Cervantes-Soon, 2014).

### **Educate White Parents on Privilege, Racism, and Reality of Latinos in America**

On the other hand, evidence of white English dominant parents' avoiding talk that included acknowledgement of the role of race and ethnicity in relationships pointed to the

need to support these conversations among parents. Data also showed that parents tended not to point to their own privileges and to emphasize their belief that they treat others based upon their individual personalities. Therefore, just as protected time to work together strengthens Latino/a parents' resolve about critiques they have about the school, white Anglo parents need time together in effort to prepare themselves to enter into solidarity with Latino/a parents as allies with the goal of eradicating inequality at the school and move toward the *developed level* of opening third spaces. White parents must learn to address issues of race and ethnicity and work to eliminate personal racist behaviors and beliefs that they may hold while also recognizing the privileges they have as white people. At the same time, white parents need to learn about Latino families' funds of knowledge and epistemological and ontological stances that they bring with them to the school community and work to partner with them to incorporate and acknowledge these strengths in school practices and thereby, work to reduce discrimination.

This educational initiative for combating racism held by English dominant parents could be headed up by a charismatic bilingual speaker, whether a parent, a teacher, or a cultural liaison, from the school, who can help "bridge" the gap so that white parents in particular are exposed to the reality of Latinos' experiences as well as their own unearned advantages as white English dominant speakers. Rong (2012) argued that pre-service teacher education programs should include preparation of new teachers to work in similar programs in which they take on positions of active engagement and critical advocacy when working with immigrant students in general. Teachers should not only be active participants in school-sponsored events that specifically target the needs of Latino and immigrant families but also work to change policies and to get resources to families as needed. This specific initiative to

raise awareness about racism and white privilege could provide an opportunity for parents to discuss and think critically about what this means for their personal lives, the lives of their children at school, and their role in working for better conditions for all families.

Ideally, the principal of PES, herself a white monolingual English speaker, could lead discussions about white privilege. As the leader of the school, her involvement in this initiative would be influential in setting the tone for the school and demonstrating to teachers, parents, and students her commitment to working for equity and acknowledging her privileges as a white woman living and working in the United States. In addition to discussing racism and privilege in parents' personal lives, ways in which issues of racism and discrimination could be explored with children could also be discussed in the parent group to help parents think about their role in modeling anti-racist behaviors at home.

Shelia Shannon (2011) detailed a case study of a dual language school where, after hiring a white monolingual English speaker as principal of the school over a Latina candidate, many of its Mexican-American teachers left the school in search of alternative teaching positions. There was an escalating tension among Latino/a and Anglo parents and among teachers as well. Teachers applied for a grant and began to take a graduate course on equity. These teachers, who included a mix of white and Latina women, began to change their practices in light of the readings and conversations they had during the class in effort to recognize white privilege and elevate the status of Latinos and all things related to Spanish. However, it was clear that the “obvious missing participants in these meetings and discussions were parents—White or Latino” (Shannon, 2011, p. 95) and the school's white principal. Therefore, it stands that equity classes at schools with CLD teachers, administration, and families would benefit from equity training for all its members.

### **Address Detrimental Contextual Issues of the School**

In addition to working with both parent groups separately before introducing them to working together, some changes need to be made, as well, to combat the negative contextual factors explored in Chapter Four including deficit perspectives about Latino/a children and their families and over-emphasis on top-down transmission and skill instruction in the classroom. While efforts to changes these factors should also originate with parents who identify these as issues that are detrimental to the equity of a school, the administration team should also take a leadership role in the addressing these issues.

**White principal at a TWI school.** While the principal of PES, Dr. Williams, is passionate about TWI education, dedicated to eradicating the achievement gap between Latinos and non-Latinos, and a talented and experienced educator, the fact that she is not Latina and is not a Spanish-speaker are important factors that cannot be ignored. Whether or not it is true, she is perceived by the Spanish dominant community and by the teachers as mostly serving the needs of the white English dominant parents. Therefore, she must take steps to deliberately and publically position herself as an ally of the Latino community by surrounding herself with Latino/a educators, parents, and friends that can enter into a relationship with her based on mutual trust, and then she should draw upon their counsel when making school decisions. People cannot feel afraid to tell her what they really think or point out to her areas in which they identify unjust practices, attitudes, or behaviors that are detrimental to the Latino community's engagement at school. As a non-Latina, she needs to be sensitive to the feedback from those who are and work to make time to address the concerns of the Latino/a parents and teachers. A key characteristic of a leader that is at the head of driving change must be to promote and build collaboration all along the way (Stolp,



1994). It is even more important to build collaboration given that PES serves a bilingual and bicultural student community and employs a majority bilingual and bicultural faculty. Given that Dr. Williams is not bilingual or bicultural herself, she must tap into the expertise and intuition of the Latino/a faculty and parents at the school to better meet the needs of people in her school.

A key example of Dr. Williams' failure to do this was when the literacy coach, Verónica Ramos, shared with the principal the strategies she found to be effective in recruiting parents to language classes at her former school, and her ideas were dismissed outright. The language classes may have been more successful in retaining parent participants had Dr. Williams listened to Verónica's advice. Verónica drew upon five years of experience working with language minority parents in language classes and knew from experience about attrition of parents and the importance of personally recruiting people and motivating them to return each week. Furthermore, since Verónica is Latina, she had particular insights about recruiting Latino/a parents to the classes that Dr. Williams could have potentially overlooked or underestimated. Instead Dr. Williams' perception that their efforts were "good enough" could have been a contributing factor to limiting the potential success of the classes given that attrition in parental participation was an issue.

However, as indicated previously in the dissertation, the intentions of the principal for the language classes were to promote cross cultural connections among parents. Therefore, it is possible that the principal moved her attention from the parent classes to focus on other concerns at school rather than simply disregarding the suggestions by Verónica.

**Efforts to eliminate deficit perspectives about Latino families.** The administration and leadership teams of the school, composed of parents and teachers, could also lead the

way in eliminating deficit perspectives about the Latino community by acknowledging the unique perspectives, experiences, and knowledges that Latinos bring to the school. The administration and leadership teams should build, or at least participate in, a program that honors and makes space for the epistemologies of Latina mothers at the school, as they are the main connectors between school and home.

If teachers and administrators learn to value mothers' life experiences, their will to *sobrevivir* and orientation to knowledge (*la facultad*) that is transmitted to children as *consejos*, *historias* (stories), and testimonies as well as through the physical body, then the very notion of parental involvement may also be transformed. (Villenas, Godinez, Delgado Bernal, & Elenes, 2006, p. 5)

Adopting the "Collaborative Integration Model" in place of the traditional conceptualization of parental involvement, the administration and leadership teams could simply provide the space and support for Latina mothers to gather and discuss issues of importance to their community. There, mothers' knowledge and experiences that they bring to the school and to their children's education, as well as, their questions and concerns would naturally emerge replacing the reliance on following the status quo of attempting to "fill in" what the school has determined that parents lack (Freire, 2010) through parent outreach programs. Members of the administration and leadership teams should be present and observe these conversations, putting aside their concerns to keep the school's "issues" under wraps. The principal and other administrators could use this as an opportunity to inform their understanding of school conflicts and future directions for the school community. This would, however, take some acceptance on the administration's part to open themselves and the school up to criticism. However, in the long run, parents would respect the administration team and would be more inclined to integrate with the school if they saw the administration

truly engaging with them and attempting to honor the requests that emerged during these conversations.

**Efforts to eliminate top-down transmission and instruction in classroom.** It is also important that the administrative team, the entire faculty, and other members of the school including the social worker and school counselor work to combat the over-reliance on top-down transmission and instruction in the classrooms, which was detrimental to the school environment and the strength of connections felt between parents and the school seen through the experience of English dominant mother, Amy, and the Spanish dominant mother, Rachel. The school must insist that classrooms are places of creativity, cooperation, discourse, and inquiry. Verónica, the literacy specialist, indicated that the “Word Study” program observed in multiple classrooms, a clear example of top-down transmission of instruction from the teacher to the students, was done because the program had been purchased by the school. This and other programs that emphasize learning decontextualized and discrete skills at the expense of making real connections to the world and the lives of the students, need to be eliminated or reconfigured to emerge from authentic children’s literature used in the classroom or from the experiences of the daily lives of children. Dr. Williams must encourage all the members of the school community to try to remain confident, despite the many obstacles and set-backs that they encounter, about the effectiveness of TWI education in which it takes a minimum of six years, with eight years preferred, for students to gain full proficiency in an academic second language (Collier & Thomas, 2004). It must reinforced that given quality TWI education throughout elementary school, students will hit their strides in middle school, in terms of knowing both Spanish and English and being able

to perform academic tasks in either language, and therefore efforts should be made to protect PES's teachers from the pressures of standardized testing as much as possible.

**Efforts to reduce divisions among the student body along cultural/ethnic lines.**

The school's leadership team including teachers, administration, parents, and the school counselor should consider the current policies in place for identification in the AIG program. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction website that describes the state policies on defining AIG students clearly states that all students are equally considered for entrance into the AIG program: "Outstanding abilities are present in students from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor" (NCDPI, 2013). However, the statistics of students enrolled in this program in PES's district paint a different picture. From the most recent data published by NCDPI (2011), out of a total of 172,947 only 5.47 percent of AIG students in North Carolina schools were Latinos; 10.82 percent were African Americans; 4.5 percent were Asian; .062 percent were Pacific Islander; .82 percent were Native American; and the overwhelming number of students, 75 percent, were white. Underrepresenting African Americans, Latinos, and American Indian students has been a persistent problem in gifted education and advanced placement (AP) classes throughout the United States (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008). While the current study did not investigate the AIG identification processes in place at PES, it stands to argue that changes need to be made given the dismal percentage of Latino/a children in the program. Ford et al. (2008) argued that attention needs to be given to reducing deficit thinking, the use of traditional IQ tests, and to addressing the lack of teacher referral of CLD students for screening. They argue that efforts for additional recruitment and retention (which is often ignored in the literature) of CLD students is needed. It goes without saying that it is to the

benefit of all, that Latino/a students like all CLD students have their talents supported by the school systems because otherwise wasting their talents “adds an incalculable amount to the price of prejudice in this country” (Ford et al., 2008) that has already cost so much.

By decreasing the reliance on skill-based, top-down transmission of skills from the school to the children and their parents, and divisions among students in terms of who belongs and who does not in the AIG program, parents will begin to feel more comfortable at school and more connected to the mission of the TWI school to help children develop as bilingual and bicultural learners. This will also allow more opportunities to draw upon the many rich experiences and knowledge that children and parents bring to the school, therefore contributing to the efforts to open third spaces.

### **Address Issues of Parent Language Classes**

**Change curriculum of parent language classes.** Changes should be made to adjust the curriculum of the parent language classes. Rather than rely solely on thematic and grammatical topics to organize the class, the language class curriculum should become more transformative in the school community by forming an important part of the Collaborative Integration Model in which parents identify their concerns and common goals for the schools. Toward these ends, the classes could adopt a Freirean approach in which the goal toward language learning is shifted in favor of parents learning what Freire called, “emancipatory literacy.” That is, literacy is not just the learning of letters and words; it is a way of interacting with and transforming the world.

Literacy cannot be reduced to the treatment of letters and words as purely mechanical domain. We need to go beyond this rigid comprehension of literacy and begin to view it as the relationship of learners to the world, mediated by the transforming practice of this world taking place in the very general milieu in which learners travel. (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. viii)

In this way, parents would come to “read the world,” that is, reflect and think critically about the school environment and community and their place in it, as they learn to “read and speak the word” (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Parents engaged in collaborative reflection, dialogue, and then action (*praxis*) with one another come to a critical understanding of how their past experiences and histories have shaped their identities and may have positioned them arbitrarily in positions of less opportunity or less access to power. Parents use this knowledge to collaboratively push back against the present unjust circumstances that they or their children encounter in the school.

Reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world.... In a way, however, we can go further and say that reading the word is not preceded merely by reading the world, but by a certain form of writing it or rewriting it, that is, of transforming it by means of conscious, practical work. For me, this dynamic movement is central to the literacy practice. (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 35)

Therefore, the parent language classes following a Freireian approach to literacy would first engage parents, from both Spanish dominant and English dominant groups, in understanding critically the world in which they live where issues of racism and privilege play significant roles. Then, armed with authentic understanding of the world, collaborative language learning around issues of concern, identified by the parents, could fulfill the need to learn the word--grammatical structures of the language while sharpening the ability to transform the practices identified as unjust and inhumane.

At the same time, it is also important to provide information to parents regarding the available resources and programs for children and families and how to access them, as well as, information about the school, the school district, and the students’ future schools if students are going to graduate shortly from the current school. Latino/a parents expressed a real frustration, as described earlier in Chapter Three, in not being able to negotiate the

school system like English dominant parents who they viewed as more adept at identifying and obtaining needed resources for their children's academic advantage. This was a contributing factor for parents' lack of trust in the school and feeling of unfair disadvantage compared to their children's white classmates. While not the only focus of the classes, this would be an important component to also address.

**Extend classes through year.** Parent language classes intended to promote parents' learning "to read the world and the word" should be offered throughout the year. The classes should be designed to maximize the momentum of the classes both in terms of language instruction and in terms of developing relationships by beginning in the early fall and concluding at the end of the academic year with the breaks only following those allotted by the school for winter break and spring break. For example, Verónica reflected after the first six week session of parent language classes about the limitations of achieving all of our goals given the short period of contact that we had with parents:

I think with all the things considered it was good. It was very short. We are only giving a six-week class thing. For it to do *all the rest* then we need it to be year round. It has to be. And we had a break in the middle and that was when that community was built. I mean maybe we could have a break. But, we barely have time to teach.  
(December 9, 2013)

Parents who sign-up for the classes would need to know that the goal of the classes is not just to improve language abilities; initially the goals of the language classes would also include building relationships of trust among parents and families. As parents' grow in their critical consciousness about the school environment, the goals of the classes would shift also to include tapping into third spaces and dismantling systems of inequality in the school and even in the larger community by pursuing ways to push back against the status quo.

**Pay language instructors.** The language instructors should be paid for teaching the parent classes and their planning time in preparation for the classes to ensure consistency in teachers over the course of the year. Payment for their time and work would also acknowledge their value to the school community. Verónica was paid a small coaching stipend for her work throughout the year, but the other volunteers including the Spanish language teacher from the community during the first session of classes and the adult and student volunteers in the first and second sessions who helped make classes run smoothly, were not paid for their time and commitment.

In addition, ensuring that future instructors of the language classes for parents are educators with strong connections to the school, ideally through their position as parent-school liaisons hired by the school or district, would ensure that connections were more readily made from parent participants to the school and its classroom teachers. It is important that the teachers of the language classes are also “insiders” at PES so that they can offer specific information and announcements to parents about policies, practices, and events. They would also channel information learned about parents and their children through the classes to their children’s teachers. Verónica agreed that for next year the language teachers should all come from the school:

Whoever does it next year should be a school teacher because you know, you get a lot of information from [the parents] and that is very valuable. If not, you don’t. It was like an opened door to talk about their concerns with their kids whereas if I hadn’t taught their classes, they wouldn’t have. (May 28, 2014)

Verónica suggested that parents’ involvement in the classes offered an open door in which the language teacher naturally becomes privy to parents’ concerns about the school, school practices, and their children’s social and academic development. The benefits of the classes can be realized if this information is shared with the classroom teachers and school



administration on a timely basis. As Olivos (2009) wrote, “the Latino child’s teacher is often the person in the school whom Latino families trust most” (p. 114) and therefore the language instructor occupies a position of importance in their ability to work closely with parents and develop the needed trust to establish a lasting relationship.

While I fulfilled a need of the school for an additional language teacher, I was myself learning about the school, its teachers, and its community. Therefore, I was not as able to easily connect parents to needed resources, and I did not have the channels to relay the information I learned from parents back to the teachers and administration as I could have done had I been an insider of the school. Furthermore, I was not in the school on a daily basis to make contact with parents and encourage their continued attendance. In contrast, teachers and other professionals at the school are immersed in the school immediately and know a great deal about its organization, its teachers, and resources available to parents and children, and therefore can share this information readily with the families.

**Plan in advance.** Using feedback provided by parents during this initial year of parent language classes, plans for future classes should be made in advance and with the continued advice from a few key parents from each class that express plans to take subsequent classes. Plans should cover the scope and sequence of the course and should be distributed to parents in advance of the classes. Again the classes should include time for dialogue among parent groups and across parent groups about the school community and the experiences of their children and themselves at the school. Resources including textbooks and websites should also be identified in advance.

A minimal fee per person could be considered to cover the cost of materials and to promote less attrition of parent participation over time. The fee could be waived if requested.

Most parents expressed that they would be happy to pay something for the classes. In fact, a group of Anglo parents from the school that could not attend the Thursday evening classes, set up their own Spanish classes with a private tutor to meet in the morning with them in the cafeteria for a fee. The class organizers would need to see to it that paying for the course did not cause any hardship or dissuade a parent from taking the classes. Research studies have shown that a consumer's perception of the ratio of cost to benefit determines, in part, if they will continue patronizing a business (McDougall & Levesque, 2000), or in this case—the parent language classes. Furthermore, it is often shown that when something costs more, it is perceived as having greater value (Beck, 2014) and greater exclusivity. Therefore, it stands to reason that parents making a small financial contribution to the classes may feel more invested and committed to the classes and therefore, less likely to drop out mid-session.

**Involve children and other school members.** Children of the participants should be involved by inviting them to participate with their parents once a month in the class meetings. Verónica, the language teacher, had success previously with her parent language classes in which children joined the parents during holiday celebrations such as Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year, Valentine's Day, and Mother's Day to have socializing time and to do an activity or craft related to the holiday (May 28, 2014). This was especially helpful in building community in the classes as parents and children worked together. Involving children in the parent outreach also helps to reinforce the priority that children have in the family's lives and in the focus of the elementary school.

Extended family members should also be encouraged to attend classes. Whereas the principal insisted that participants in the class were parents of children in the school, Arias and Morillo-Campbell (2008) recommended including extended family members in school

activities to help positively change perceptions about schools and contribute to the efforts to recognize Latino families' strengths. In a few of the English language classes this year, some mothers brought aunts and friends with them, and they were welcomed into the group. It is common in Latino families, although perhaps not as common in newly Latinized contexts, to have a large extended family network that includes multiple generations and friends.

*Compadrazgo/ comadrazgo* is the relationship between parents and godmothers and godfathers that contributes to the raising of children and an important element of Latino families (Delgado-Gaitán, 2004). Delgado-Gaitán (2004) explained that the extended family plays an important role in preserving the unit of the family as a “resource for coping with the pressures life brings. Its preservation is critical to the continuity of social, political, religious, and cultural order” (p. 3). Therefore, being open to the possibility that language class participants could bring family members with them, is critical so that schools also support these efforts for families to remain a strong cultural institution especially in the lives of children.

Finally, to be more successful, the parent language classes also need buy-in from teachers and administration at the school. They should be involved in the fund allotment, recruitment of parents, and visiting the classes to show their support and to meet the parents in attendance. For example, classroom teachers may be better able to identify and recruit particular parents of their students for the language classes. My experience with the kindergarten and fifth grade teachers revealed that they were not even aware that the classes were being offered at the school and that some of their students' parents were taking the classes. Teachers and administrators may suggest topics or issues that they would like to

discuss with the parents including getting their feedback about school events or providing information about available resources for families.

**Make language classes one component of efforts to open third spaces.** As seen throughout this dissertation, a significant contribution made by the principal to the school was the push for the parent language classes, designed with the intention to build cross-cultural relationships among parents. The language classes for parents represented a positive way in which parents shared a school space to work toward a common goal. The classes were innovative in that they were unlike any outreach program offered by other local schools and instrumental in moving parents toward *initial openings* of third spaces by promoting relationships and connections across parents and with the school. They were also sites of learning, which extended beyond language learning, for both Spanish dominant and English dominant parents. Finally, they contributed to the *initial opening* of third spaces by prompting parents to think about future collaborative spaces between parents.

These language classes marked a radical shift away from the traditional ESL classes offered to parents by schools as described in the literature review in which Spanish-speakers, framed as needy and deficient, were offered remedial work in English. Rather, despite the flaws of the classes explored at length in the dissertation, the setup of these parent classes to include language instruction for both Spanish dominant and English dominant parents, provided the real possibility that Spanish dominant parents were placed in positions of expertise while white parents found themselves positioned as learners. Learning another language is a process in which the learner goes through multiple humbling experiences as they make mistake after mistake, stumble over words and through pronunciations, and botch intended meaning of a statement. Therefore, sitting face to face with a Latino/a parent who,

although still learning English, in many cases commanded greater control over both languages, was important in altering positions of power among parents found in traditional school settings where Anglo parents are typically framed as knowing all and Latino/a parents are represented as knowing nothing and worth nothing (Murillo, 2002).

Therefore, given their potential, joint parent language classes should not be eliminated in future years; they should, however, be one component of the Collaborative Integration Model of family-school connections that includes additional family events and programs that are on-going throughout the year and offer a variety of ways that families could be involved with the school in meaningful ways and could form authentic connections with other families in effort to promote third space openings in the future. Rather than waiting for the school to plan and structure parent-school events, the parents, themselves, should pursue activities that they consider to be meaningful for the school's development. Still, a leader or group of leaders among the parents would need to emerge to help organize and advertise these activities with other parents, and schools must be open to parents' planning the events.

It is important to consider that it is not enough to simply invite parents to share the same physical space with one another in hopes that they will interact. Actions must be more deliberate and thoughtful. Parents should be engaged in working to improve the school or the classroom for their children. This may include activities such as beautification of the school, planting a community garden, or planning and making materials for a school wide event such as Carnival. As Glazier (2003) noted, it is not enough for parents to "be together" to create these bonds. The needed "cultural fluency," not unlike linguistic fluency, only develops when parents put things into practice by working together toward a common goal, learning to

listen to one another, and gaining understanding and empathy of the other's position and experience. "Contact alone will not allow us to arrive at cultural fluency, will not move us across the borders. Individuals must engage in ongoing, meaningful, and shared tasks in order to develop cultural fluency" (Glazier, 2003, p. 159). This is no small order for parents and the teachers who are often overwhelmed with the duties of the classrooms and efforts to provide quality instruction to students. Therefore, increasingly, school districts are hiring parent-school liaisons (Bryan, 2005) or working with Community Based Organizations (CBOs) (Hong, 2011; Warren et al., 2009) to fulfill this need to organize parent outreach programs with their many interconnected components, and explicitly facilitate connections, in collaboration with parents, back to the classroom teachers and the school.

### **Areas of Future Research**

Therefore, while I have offered many recommendations that would make progress in ensuring the parent language classes could tap into *developed openings* of third spaces, the worth of the language classes in restructuring parent opportunities to connect with one another and with the school is significant. Further research is needed to continue to build this scholarship and encourage other schools to build similar programs.

First, research is needed about the feasibility and potential effects of implementing the Collaborative Integration Model of family-school connections in CLD schools. Are there complications and additional nuances that need to be considered when re-conceptualizing a school's notion of parental involvement? Are there schools or programs within schools that are already pursuing this model from whom we could learn about potential set-backs and obstacles?

In addition, more research is needed to examine the process and effects of joining Latino/a parents together at school to build relationships of *confianza* (mutual trust) (Dyrness, 2007). There is growing body of literature that mentions the role of *confianza* as the basis of relationships among mothers at a school (Dyrness, 2007); between an ESL teacher and her students (Salazar and Fránquiz, 2008); between immigrant youth and their mentors (Stanton-Salazar & Urso Spina, 2003); and in the family and with their child's English dominant mentor (Rodríguez, 2013). Rodríguez's (2013) case study is an important example of work already done to identify how Latina mothers define *confianza* and what effect living in the new Latino Diaspora, specifically in North Carolina, has had on the mothers' desire and ability to create relationships based upon *confianza* with others outside the family in the community. Rodríguez (2013) argued that a quickly growing Latino population and reactionary stringent anti-immigrant laws in North Carolina during the study impacted the mothers in her case study who felt a "sense of constant surveillance and questioning" (p. 38) that discouraged them from going out during the evenings and developing relationships of *confianza* with others and with the town. However, one Latina mother and her family did find *confianza* with the daughter's mentor from an after-school program after the mentor spent considerable time with the family making tamales, attending events including birthdays and Christmas celebrations, becoming the godmother for the *quinceañera* (15<sup>th</sup> birthday) of the daughter, and improving her Spanish to better communicate. Rodríguez (2013) called for further studies to define *confianza* in other relationships including with fathers and teachers within the new Latino Diaspora.

This current dissertation reaffirmed the importance of building *confianza* among Latino/a parents in the context of the new Latino Diaspora and in school settings, traditional

and TWI. Further questions for research include how do efforts to build relationships of *confianza* occur in the school setting? Who structures it? What are the implications if it is started by a person outside the school? What are the emotional impacts and physical manifestations of Latino/a parents meeting with one another to discuss issues of concern related to the school?

Conversations with white English dominant mothers suggested that they avoided talking about issues of race and ethnicity as they related to classroom and school dynamics. However, further investigation into whether this was characteristic of all the parents in the language classes or just a select few is needed. White parents may be asked if they perceive their pressures as a parent to be similar to or different from those of Latino/a parents in the English language classes. In addition, while there is research about engaging in conversations about race and racism with teachers and their conversations in the K-12 classroom with students (Roman, 1993; Sleeter, 1993; Solomona, Portelli, Daniel, & Campbell, 2005; Tatum, 1994) and in college classrooms (Tatum, 1992), there is a lack of research regarding these discussions with parents of children at a school. Therefore, future research should also focus on understanding the experience of white English dominant parents as they engage in seminars about racism and white privilege at their child's school. What political or social barriers, if any, are there to overcome to have these school-sponsored classes? What are the effects, if any, on parents' attitudes and behaviors? What are the experiences of parents as they interrogate notions of racism and white privilege in their own lives? In what ways, if any, do they begin to engage conversations about race and discrimination with their children?

If both of these activities with parents (*confianza*-building spaces for Latinos and seminars for white English dominant parents on understanding racism and white privilege in



America) are done prior to joining parents together with the common goal of learning the other language, is greater progress made in terms of their ability to connect with one another and build connections to the school? Do third spaces between parents and with the school open more fully? Finally, how do subsequent parent involvement programs, built upon the base of *confianza* and mutual understanding and respect among parents and with the school, ultimately reduce the size of the achievement gap of students in TWI school?

### **Concluding Thoughts**

To conclude, working with the parents, teachers, and students at PES provided the opportunity to learn more about a TWI school located in North Carolina, part of the new Latino Diaspora, and its efforts to connect parents from differing socio-economic, cultural, and racial groups through parent language classes. It was extremely promising that although the parent classes did not result in third spaces opening fully at this time, they did reveal parents' interest and concern in their children's schooling and their desires to build connections with each other and with the school and led to a reconsideration of the traditional notion of parental involvement at school. This was a testament, given the many personal pressures and obligations that each family faced in their daily lives, to the central role that schools play, not only in the lives of children, but also in the lives of its many families as an anchor to the community. It was also a sign of the positive intentions of the school in promoting equity among all its members.

As issues identified in this dissertation that limited the success of opening third spaces are addressed by the school, teachers, and parents, especially by widening the traditional notion of parental involvement to the "Collaborative Integration Model," then it is possible that parent language classes and TWI schools will be able to provide empowering

educational spaces for all its members, but especially Latino/a children and their parents, whose knowledge and experiences are often marginalized or at worst, ignored, in public schools. By bringing these into the center, schools are acknowledging and building upon the many strengths of its bicultural and bilingual community of learners and making schools more equitable places for all.

The work of the school to provide equitable spaces in which children and families can thrive, however, may continue to be an up-hill struggle until issues of immigration and documentation for families can be resolved. Regina, a Latina mother and language class participant, argued that the Latino culture and Spanish language was spreading and opening up new spaces but worried that issues of immigration would ultimately affect the newly Latinized communities like North Carolina: “Ahora no cabe duda que la gente que habla español se están abriendo espacios. El problema es el inglés y no sé... la parte de inmigración... de papeles y de ser ilegal” (Regina, March 5, 2014). (*Now there is no doubt that the Spanish speaking people are opening up spaces. The problem is the English, and I don't know... the part of immigration... of papers and of being legal.*) As the Congress stalemates on finding a solution to the 11.2 million undocumented people that call the United States their home and send their children to local public schools (Passel & Cohn, 2011), as approximately 63,000 additional minors have arrived in the past year to the U.S. border seeking immunity from the violence and poverty that has dominated their childhood (Park, 2014, August 7), it is up to the schools, their teachers, and the parents of both Spanish and English dominant children at the school to seek ways in which they can preserve the humanity of the family by bringing parents into the fold, helping them build new support networks and demanding equity and dignity for all people.

## **REFLECTIONS FROM THE FIELD**

The year spent observing and teaching at Polk Elementary School was very informative and also highly personal and emotional. My role and perspective of public schools continues to shift as my own life circumstances change. My first experiences with schools were as a student and later, as a high school teacher and then, a researcher, and now, as a mother of two children, Erynn and James. Over the past two years I have been coming to terms about the school options available for my daughter, Erynn, who will begin kindergarten next fall. I began graduate school when Erynn was only nine months old and since then she has been in numerous daycares and preschools until I found her current preschool, a Spanish immersion school, where we have felt part of a family. Her teachers have loved my daughter and have taught her so many things that I could not. Because of her experience there I think that she has developed into a considerate and confident child. Her teachers have taught her to choose work that is satisfying to her; to do the best possible work according to her capabilities at that point; and to consider others' feelings all while providing a very loving environment. But, soon, she will have to leave this school and face going to a public elementary school of upwards of 600 to 700 students. In the recent weeks, I have spent mornings visiting the many options available for public schools and talking with principals and teachers as my husband and I try to make a decision about where we might send her. The classrooms I have observed, unfortunately, have appeared to be examples of banking education as kindergartners are led through phonics activities, guided reading, and skill drills in math, not unlike some of the classroom activities that I observed at Polk Elementary School. Studying the experience of parents at a TWI elementary school in Spanish and

English, then, was a natural way for me to learn about this educational experience for students and their parents as well and allowed me to connect my life as a mother with my scholarship.

Because this topic was highly personal for me, I often found myself writing with frustration at what I observed students and parents facing at the school as if it were my child and my own experience as a parent at the school. I felt that as I wrote, I was also self-censoring, eliminating parts that were too expressive or too personal about my own experience conducting this research and my interactions with people in the field. It was arguably not “detached,” “objective,” nor “neutral.” However, this emotion came out of the fact that my “motherhood” accompanied me into the field; I did not drop it off along with the bags and lunch box with my children at their school. I deeply empathized with the mothers and fathers in the study that expressed anxieties and frustrations about their children’s education and schooling experience. It was difficult to sit in the classrooms and observe classroom interactions. I often felt that connections between the academic content and children’s lives were missing; children’s movements were highly controlled and children’s voices were silenced; and I felt that some children were ignored and were slipping through the cracks while others dominated the classroom discourse every day. I tended to sympathize more with the parents than the teachers even though I had also lived their frustrations as a high school teacher who faced too many demands and not enough time or energy to meet them all. Yet, I still could not escape thoughts about whether the classroom teachers were kind enough to their students and their students’ parents. Did the teachers understand or appreciate the different perspectives, experience, and knowledge that children and their families brought each day to their classroom? I wondered if teachers were making an effort

to create lesson plans that could meet the tremendous potential among the children sitting in their classroom.

I also struggled throughout the year and still today with the feeling that after parents shared with me their concerns and perceptions about the school or their child's experience in the classroom, I had no way to address the issues and felt unsure about how to proceed. I felt responsible to the many parents that I was working with and carried home their concerns after each visit. I could see that their children were not being stimulated or supported as they needed to be to honor the unique experiences and knowledge that each one of them brought with them to the classroom. When my time came to an end at the school, I had to move on to the academic task ahead of me, taking my memories of these women but unsure if I left any impact on them or their lives. This is something that continues to trouble me today. I have reached out to a few of the mothers since writing the dissertation to inquire about their children and one emailed me asking for advice about her child's current teacher and situation. This has given me hope that they felt confident that they could continue to share their concerns about the school with me and saw me as a source of support. Yet, I continue to be limited in the real ways that I can help in my current position.

My research brought me into intimate contact with some of the mothers and fathers at the elementary school that participated in the parent language classes. They loved their children and were genuinely interested in learning another language in order to help their children with their schooling and to connect with other school members. Over the course of the year and because I worked more closely with the Latina mothers learning English, I came to know them more intimately. We often connected first over the desire to learn another language. I have learned Spanish through classes and continue to learn today, and they were

learning English. We compared frustrations in not being understood in the other language and our initial anxieties in speaking another language. Then, as we began to share stories about our personal lives, we also connected over the fact that we were mothers. It was clear that, like me, they also wanted others that worked with their children to love them and for their children to receive a humanizing schooling that focused on their development as whole persons.

Yet, there were also many differences between my own life and the life of these mothers and their experiences raising children in North Carolina. This dissertation study made clear that I have enjoyed and continue to have many privileges, the “invisible knapsack” (McIntosh, 1989) that I referred to in the dissertation, which I sometimes take for granted. First, the Latina mothers often did not have easy and reliable access to transportation. For instance one mother expressed that she wanted to attend the parent language classes not only to improve her English but to connect with other mothers at the school. However, sometimes it wasn’t possible for her to attend since she didn’t have a car or a driver’s license and had to depend upon her husband taking her or riding the bus. Often her husband was delayed returning from his job (because they had to drive a long circuit dropping off other workers) or had to work late and then she couldn’t attend. Once when she rode the bus to the school, she told me that it circled the opposite way away from the school and therefore, what would have been a two mile drive to the school took over an hour. This trip would have been impossible during bad weather especially since she had to bring her two young children with her.

More than just access to reliable transportation, these mothers also faced the uncertainty and insecurity raising a family while dealing with issues of poverty and having

enough money to provide for their family's needs. They often had to take undesirable jobs that were unpredictable—for instance, they could not say for sure when they would be allowed to leave for the day or what days they would be needed to work making it difficult to commit to after-school meetings or activities with their children. They often had to work on weekends when their children were home from school. Some spouses worked in another city away from the home the entire week because the pay was slightly higher. They might sleep on couches or in hotel rooms with other employees and could be fired without warning from one week to the next. Meanwhile, the fathers missed living at home and seeing their children every evening. This created considerable stress for the mothers who were often the sole caregiver available for their children during the week and had to adjust to unexpected sicknesses and necessary doctor appointments. They also were trying to balance the need to pay for the many necessities of the family and their children's desires to buy clothes and toys or attend special events and programs including summer camps.

There was also the threat of being deported that the Latina mothers faced. Mothers expressed how they were fearful when they did drive that a policeman would pull them over. They tried to protect their children from these fears but acknowledged that their children feared the police and especially being separated from their parents. One related that her daughter burst into tears once when they were stopped for a minor offense thinking that her mother was going to be deported.

My children and my family have faced none of these fears or these uncertainties. We live comfortably with easy access to cars; we have financial security; we speak the dominant language of the country and have white skin. We are legal citizens here and assume that we will be provided with a legal course of justice if we were to be arrested or pulled over by the

law enforcement. All of these factors make it possible that my children, my husband, and myself are accepted everywhere we go. Furthermore, my children are praised for being able to speak Spanish although they are white.

I still have much to learn about the lives of Latinos in North Carolina and especially Latina mothers who must be strong examples for their children facing great insecurities and real dangers and supportive for their husbands who are likely working long hours in a physical job. Who is it that is strong for them?

I made the decision to pursue this line of research long ago not because I thought I could solve the problem of inequity in the school especially between Latino/a and white children and their families but because I hoped to be a small part of the solution. I hoped to work in collaboration as a white ally (Tatum, 1994) not pretending that I knew the answer or dictating what needed to be done, but engaging in open dialogue with others to understand their concerns and their needs. I believe in what Freire (2010) argued that we have to break free from our passive receptive positions simply accepting the way things are in schools and in our communities and work for “the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality” (p. 81). Collaboration with one another, I believe, is needed to make in-roads to altering the system of inequities that exists so that all of our children have an equal shot at quality education and high expectations for their future. For that reason, this dissertation study in which third spaces began to open among Latino/a and white parents working together in parent English and Spanish language classes, although very limited in its results, did provide some hope that school members with support can grow in their understanding and knowledge of one another. Further work, of course, is needed for deeper understanding of these efforts to open third spaces as well as exploring in what ways the remaining



obstacles among parents from different groups can be surmounted so that the school community in collaboration with one another can pursue equity for all children and their families.

## **APPENDIX A: OBSERVATION PROTOCOL FOR PARENTS' LANGUAGE CLASSES**

1. What is your general impression about the language class session?
2. What is the physical setting of the classroom/ meeting space? What is on the walls?  
How are the desks arranged?
3. What was the emotional atmosphere of the class?
4. Who was in attendance? (came late, left early?)
5. What activities were planned for the class and which activities were done?
6. Did any significant events occur during the class time (ex: parent left, interruption, visitor etc.)
7. How was joint conversation time structured by the teachers and/or parents?
8. How were parents put into pairs or small groups during the joint conversation time? (assigned? Self-initiated?)
9. What happens at the end of the designated class time?

### Language instruction time:

10. How did parents greet each other as they entered the classroom?
11. How did parents initiate conversation and/or work on an assigned activity?
12. How did parents negotiate communicating with one another?
13. What conversations occurred outside the official activities?
14. Were there any moments of silence? If so, why did they seem to occur and how did they end?
15. How did parents generally relate to one another?
16. Did anyone tend to dominate the classroom activities?
17. Did anyone tend to stay silent or avoid participation during the classroom activities?

### Joint conversation time:

18. How did parents greet each other as they entered the classroom and paired up?
19. How did parents initiate conversation and/or work on an assigned activity?
20. How did parents negotiate communicating with one another?
21. What conversations occurred outside the official activities?
22. Were there any moments of silence? If so, why did they seem to occur and how did they end?
23. How did parents generally relate to one another?
24. What was the general atmosphere of the joint conversation time?
25. Did anyone tend to dominate the joint conversation time?
26. Did anyone tend to stay silent or avoid participation during the joint conversation time?

## **APPENDIX B: ENGLISH-SEPAKING PARENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

Introduction: Thank you for agreeing to speak with me today. My goal of this interview is to learn more about your experience as a parent of a child in the dual language education program in effort to find ways to better connect the school with its communities and families. Research has shown the importance and benefit of school-home connections on student achievement and feelings of well-being at school. The dual language education program presents a unique setting in which families from diverse backgrounds have the opportunity to work and learn together. Your participation in this interview is voluntary. All of your responses will be kept confidential and I will use a pseudonym o fake name to protect your identity. I am going to audio record the interview but at any moment if you feel uncomfortable with a question or with the audio-taping, please ask me to stop or skip to another question. Also, please feel at liberty to extend your answers as you would like. This will be more like a conversation. Do you have any questions before we begin?

### **Background**

1. Please tell me a little about yourself and your family.
  - a. Where are you from?
  - b. How long have you lived here?
  - c. What is your occupation?
  - d. Who are the members in your family?
  - e. How many of your children attend this school?
  - f. What grades are they in?

### **Language of the Home**

2. Do you speak any Spanish or any other languages?
  - a. Do you speak this (these) language(s) with your children at home?
  - b. With what frequency and ability do your children speak Spanish or other home languages?
  - c. Do you believe that your son/daughter likes speaking these languages? With whom?
3. Who are the friends that your son/daughter hangs out with the most?
  - a. In what language do they speak when they hang out?

### **Opinions about School**

4. How did you come to learn about the dual language education program at this school?
5. What are your motivations for sending your child to the dual language education program? What do you hope that he/she will get out of the program?
6. In your opinion, what are the strengths and weaknesses of the school or your son or daughter's classroom?

### **Parental Participation at School and Education:**

7. Do you feel connected to this school?
  - a. With what frequency do you have the opportunity to communicate your opinions and ideas with teachers, principals, or with other parents in the school?
  - b. Do you feel that attention is given to your opinions and ideas?
  - c. Do you feel that the school reflects your beliefs and values?
  - d. Do you feel that you have open communication with the teachers and principal when needed?
8. Tell me about your involvement at school.
  - a. Participation in PTA? Or other school group?
  - b. Volunteer? Fund-raise?
  - c. Relationship with classroom teacher?
  - d. Relationships with other families?
9. What could the school/ teachers/ administrators do to encourage more involvement of families at the school?
10. Tell me about your involvement in your child's education.
  - a. Moral education?
  - b. Help with homework?
  - c. Reading with your son/daughter?
  - d. Extracurricular classes, camps, vacations, trips?

### **Intercultural Relationships**

11. Specifically, in what ways do you have contact with other parents at the school?
  - a. With English-speaking parents?
  - b. With Spanish-speaking parents?
12. Do you have any thoughts about what the school/ teachers/ administrators could do to encourage children and parents from diverse backgrounds to interact with one another more?

### **Language Classes for Parents**

13. Why did you enroll in a parents' language class?
  - a. What did you hope to learn from the class?
  - b. What benefits did you perceive in taking the class?
    - i. Learning new skill?
    - ii. Feeling more connected to school community?
    - iii. Developing relationships with other parents?

- iv. Learning more about what goes on at school?
- v. Other?

14. What did you learn in the language class?

15. What did you like best from the class?

16. What did you like least from the class? / How could the class be improved?

17. Did you find interacting with parents from a different language/culture beneficial? In what ways?

18. How did you participate in the language classes?

19. Do you think that there were equal opportunities for all parents to participate and express themselves? How so?

20. In what ways do you feel more (or less) connected to the school community and other parents?

21. Have you or your views/perspectives changed as a result of interacting with parents from diverse backgrounds? In what ways?

22. Have there been opportunities in which your family has spent time with other families of different linguistic, cultural and social backgrounds over the past three months since school started? Can you describe these opportunities? How did they go?

Conclusion: Thank you for your time today in answering these questions. Your answers help me to better understand your experience as a parent in this program and to explore efforts to better connect the school with its communities and families. Should I have follow-up questions in the future, I will contact you. You may contact me at any time with any concerns or questions at [alison.tu@live.unc.edu](mailto:alison.tu@live.unc.edu).

## **APPENDIX C: SPANISH-SPEAKING PARENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

Introducción: Gracias por aceptar conversar conmigo hoy. La meta de esta entrevista es aprender más sobre su experiencia como padre de un hijo/a en el programa de educación de lenguaje dual, con la esperanza de encontrar mejores maneras de conectar la escuela con sus comunidades y sus familias. Todos sus comentarios serán confidenciales y usaremos un seudónimo o nombre falso para proteger su identidad. Voy a grabar la entrevista en audio, pero en cualquier momento en el que usted se sienta incómodo/a con una pregunta o con la audio-grabación, por favor pida que me detenga, o bien salte a otra pregunta. También siéntase con la libertad de extender sus respuestas como usted lo desee. Esto será más bien como una conversación. ¿Tiene usted alguna pregunta antes de empezar?

### **Antecedentes**

1. Por favor, dígame un poco sobre quién es usted y su familia.
  - a. ¿De dónde es?
  - b. ¿Por cuánto tiempo ha vivido aquí?
  - c. ¿Cuál es su ocupación?
  - d. ¿Quiénes son los miembros de su familia?
  - e. ¿Cuántos de sus hijos asisten a esta escuela?
  - f. ¿En qué grados están?

### **El lenguaje del hogar**

2. ¿Habla usted español u otros idiomas?
  - a. ¿Habla estos idiomas con sus hijos en casa?
  - b. ¿Con qué frecuencia y habilidad hablan sus hijos el español u otros lenguajes nativos?
  - c. ¿Cree que a su hijo/a le gusta hablar estos idiomas? ¿Con quién?
3. ¿Cuáles son los amigos/as de su hijo/a con los que convive más?
  - a. ¿En qué lenguaje conviven?

### **Opiniones respecto a la escuela**

4. ¿Cómo se enteró sobre el programa de educación de lenguaje dual en esta escuela?
5. ¿Cuáles son sus motivaciones para mandar a su hijo/a al programa de lenguaje dual? ¿Qué beneficio espera que su hijo/a obtenga al estar dentro del programa?
6. En su opinión, ¿cuáles son las fortalezas y cuáles son las debilidades del salón de su hijo/a?

### **Participación de padres en la escuela y educación**

7. ¿Se siente usted conectado/a a la escuela?
  - a. ¿Con qué frecuencia tiene la oportunidad de comunicar sus opiniones o ideas con maestr@s, directores, etc., u otros padres, en la escuela?
  - b. ¿Piensa que se le da atención a sus opiniones e ideas?

- c. ¿Piensa que la escuela refleja sus creencias y valores?
  - d. ¿Tiene comunicación abierta con las maestras y la directora cuando es necesario?
8. Hábleme de su involucramiento en la escuela.
- a. ¿Participa en el PTA o en otro grupo escolar?
  - b. ¿Participa como voluntario/a? ¿Recauda fondos?
  - c. ¿Tiene relaciones con las maestras?
  - d. ¿Tiene relaciones con otras familias?
9. ¿Qué podría hacer la escuela / los maestros / los directores para aumentar el involucramiento de familias en la escuela?
10. Hábleme de su involucramiento en la educación de su hijo/a.
- a. ¿La educación moral?
  - b. ¿Ayuda con la tarea?
  - c. ¿Lee con sus hijo/a?
  - d. ¿Juegos u otras actividades educativas en el hogar?
  - e. ¿Clases extracurriculares, campamentos, vacaciones, viajes?

### **Relaciones interculturales**

11. Específicamente, ¿De qué manera tiene usted contacto con otros padres de familia en la escuela?
- a. ¿Con padres anglohablantes?
  - b. ¿Con padres hispanohablantes?
12. ¿Tiene Usted unas ideas sobre qué podría hacer la escuela / los maestros / los directores para aumentar la interacción entre niños y padres de antepasados diversos en la escuela?
13. Antes de pasar a preguntas específicas sobre la clase de inglés que tomó usted, ¿hay unos temas que no hemos tocado de que le gustaría hablar?

### **Clase de Idioma para Padres:**

14. ¿Por qué se inscribió para la clase de idiomas para padres?
- a. ¿Qué quería aprender de la clase?
  - b. ¿Qué beneficios percibió usted en tomar la clase?
    - i. ¿Aprender una habilidad nueva?
    - ii. ¿Sentirse más conectado/a con la comunidad escolar?
    - iii. ¿Desarrollar relaciones con otros padres?
    - iv. ¿Aprender más sobre qué pasa en la escuela?
    - v. ¿Otro(s) beneficio(s)?
15. ¿Qué aprendió usted en la clase de idiomas?

16. ¿Les recomendaría a otros padres que tomaran la clase? ¿Por qué sí o por qué no?
17. ¿A usted qué le gustó de la clase?
18. ¿Qué no le gustó de la clase? / ¿Cómo se mejoraría la clase?
19. ¿Le benefició a usted interaccionar con padres de otro lenguaje/ cultura? ¿En qué maneras?
20. ¿Cómo participó usted en las clases de idiomas?
21. ¿Cree usted que hubo oportunidades iguales para todos los padres a participar y expresarse? ¿Cómo fue logrado?
22. ¿En qué manera se siente usted más (o menos) conectado/a con la comunidad escolar y con los otros padres?
23. ¿Han cambiado sus puntos de vista/ perspectivas como resultado de las interacciones entre padres de antecedentes diversos? ¿En qué maneras?
24. ¿Hubo unas oportunidades cuando su familia pasó tiempo con familias de antecedentes diversos durante los últimos tres meses desde cuando el año escolar empezó? Describa usted estas oportunidades. ¿Cómo estuvieron?

Conclusión: Gracias por su tiempo del día de hoy y por responder a las preguntas. Sus respuestas me ayudarán a entender mejor su experiencia como padre/madre en este programa y explorar los esfuerzos para conectar mejor a la escuela con sus comunidades y sus familias. En caso de que tenga preguntas adicionales en el futuro, pondré en contacto con usted. Así mismo, usted puede contactarme en cual quiere momento con inquietudes o preguntas a través de [alisonu@live.unc.edu](mailto:alisonu@live.unc.edu).



## APPENDIX D: PARENT SURVEY IN ENGLISH

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Telephone Number:** \_\_\_\_\_

## I. Familial Information

1. Describe each of your children. (Names, grades, teacher)

--

2. What language do you speak most often with your child/children? If more than one language is spoken in your home on a regular basis, please estimate the percentage of time each language is used (check one or indicate percentage).

English \_\_\_\_\_ Spanish \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

3. Please list all languages that you consider yourself to **speak** with *at least* moderate fluency (can participate in a conversation in that language).

Mother \_\_\_\_\_

Father\_\_\_\_\_

4. Race/Ethnicity (please mark all that apply).

## Mother

☐ Hispanic/Latina☐ Black/African-American☐ White☐ Asian☐ Native American/Indigenous Peoples☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander☐ Multi-racial☐ Other

## Father

☐ Hispanic/Latino☐ Black/African-American☐ White☐ Asian☐ Native American/Indigenous Peoples☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander☐ Multi-racial☐ Other

5. Highest level of school completed (indicate grade level or highest degree attained):

Mother \_\_\_\_\_  
Father \_\_\_\_\_

6. Lived outside the U.S.? Yes/No, for how long?

Mother \_\_\_\_\_  
Father \_\_\_\_\_  
Child/Children \_\_\_\_\_

7. Traveled outside of the U.S.? Yes/No? (circle one for each)

Mother:            Yes      No  
Father:            Yes      No  
Child/children:    Yes      No

## **II.          Participation at School**

In what ways do you participate at FPG? Please mark all that apply.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Member of PTA  
\_\_\_\_\_ Volunteer in the school  
\_\_\_\_\_ Communicate with my child's teachers through email and phone calls  
\_\_\_\_\_ Visit the classroom of my child and talk with the teacher  
\_\_\_\_\_ Participate in parents' classes  
\_\_\_\_\_ Attend activities and meetings at the school (such as Open House and Celebrations of Hispanic Month)

## **III.          Participation in Your Children's Education**

In what ways do you participate in the education of your children? Mark all that apply.

- \_\_\_\_\_ I help them with homework.  
\_\_\_\_\_ I read to them in English / Spanish.  
\_\_\_\_\_ We travel to other countries.  
\_\_\_\_\_ I give them educational opportunities during the weekends and summers.  
\_\_\_\_\_ I enroll them in classes before and after the school day.

- \_\_\_\_\_ I tell them about my personal experiences.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I share with them cultural information about our family.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I teach them our home/ heritage language.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I bring them to the library and to museums.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I bring them to the church and/or religious education classes.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I teach them good manners.

#### IV. Perceptions about the TWI program

Mark True or False according to your opinions.

- |   |            |             |
|---|------------|-------------|
| 1. I am satisfied with the Two Way immersion program.             | _____ True | _____ False |
| 2. I am satisfied with the teachers in the school.                | _____ True | _____ False |
| 3. I have enough ways to be in communication with the teachers.   | _____ True | _____ False |
| 4. I have some doubts/worries about the education of my children. | _____ True | _____ False |

Please write in what areas you have doubts/worries or areas that you would like to discuss in our conversations:

Why did you enroll your child/children in a Two Way Immersion school? Please rank order these options with a number 1-8, with **"1" being the most important reason**, and **"8" being the least important**:

- \_\_\_\_\_ I would like my child to be able to speak, read and write in two languages.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I would like my child to be able to relate to his/her culture and heritage.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I would like my child to be comfortable relating to different people and cultures.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I would like my child to be with teachers that speak our home/ heritage language.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I would like my child to be successful in a global society that requires more than one culture/language.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I want my child to have self-esteem and be proud of who he/she is
- \_\_\_\_\_ This is our neighborhood school, and therefore we were placed here.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## V. Relationships at Schools

Mark your answer according to your opinions.

1. The teachers are convinced that I do everything possible to support my children at school. \_\_\_\_\_ True \_\_\_\_\_ False
2. The teachers are experts in education and it isn't my role to interfere in the classroom activities. \_\_\_\_\_ True \_\_\_\_\_ False
3. The teacher and I have open and continuous communication. \_\_\_\_\_ True \_\_\_\_\_ False
4. The teacher understands what my child needs. \_\_\_\_\_ True \_\_\_\_\_ False
5. The teacher knows very well all the things that I do to help my child. \_\_\_\_\_ True \_\_\_\_\_ False
6. All of the students are equal before the eyes of the teacher. \_\_\_\_\_ True \_\_\_\_\_ False
7. The teacher incorporates our culture in the classroom. \_\_\_\_\_ True \_\_\_\_\_ False
8. My knowledge and my experiences are valued in the classroom. \_\_\_\_\_ True \_\_\_\_\_ False
9. I know some Spanish speaking parents at the school. \_\_\_\_\_ True \_\_\_\_\_ False
10. I know some English speaking parents at the school. \_\_\_\_\_ True \_\_\_\_\_ False
11. When I have a criticism, the teachers and administration pay attention to what I have to say. \_\_\_\_\_ True \_\_\_\_\_ False
12. I want my child to be bilingual so that he/she will have opportunities to communicate with people of various cultures. \_\_\_\_\_ True \_\_\_\_\_ False
13. It is important that my child has friends of other cultures. \_\_\_\_\_ True \_\_\_\_\_ False
14. Choose a number from **1-10** to represent how you feel in terms of being part of a community at the school. **1** represents that you are not part of any community here and **10** represents that you are very strongly connected to a community here. \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX E: PARENT SURVEY IN SPANISH

Nombre: \_\_\_\_\_

Número de Teléfono: \_\_\_\_\_

### I. Información Sobre La Familia

1. Describe los hijo/a(s) de Usted (Nombres, grado, maestro)

--

2. ¿En qué idioma habla Usted con más frecuencia con su/s hijo/as? (Ponga un cheque.) Si habla más de un idioma en su casa regularmente, por favor ponga qué porcentaje de tiempo pasa hablando en cada idioma (por ejemplo 50%).

Inglés \_\_\_\_\_ Español \_\_\_\_\_ Otro \_\_\_\_\_

3. Haga una lista de todos los idiomas que usted puede **hablar** con fluidez (puede participar en una conversación en ese idioma) y que puede hablar su esposo/a.

Madre \_\_\_\_\_ Padre \_\_\_\_\_

4. Origen. Escriba el nombre de la ciudad y el país de origen. Si nació usted o su esposo/a en Los Estados Unidos, añada el estado.

Madre \_\_\_\_\_ Padre \_\_\_\_\_

5. ¿Cuál es el grado más alto que usted cursó (Indique el grado o el título logrado)?

Madre \_\_\_\_\_ Padre \_\_\_\_\_

6. Profesión. Escriba la profesión de usted y su esposo.

Madre \_\_\_\_\_ Padre \_\_\_\_\_

### II. Participación en la Escuela

¿En qué maneras participa en la escuela de FPG? Marque todos que apliquen.

\_\_\_\_\_ Miembro de "PTA" (Asociación de Padres y Maestros)

- \_\_\_\_\_ Voluntario(a) en la escuela
- \_\_\_\_\_ Mando correos o llamo por teléfono al maestro de mi hijo
- \_\_\_\_\_ Visito el salón de mi hijo para hablar con su maestro
- \_\_\_\_\_ Participo en clases para padres
- \_\_\_\_\_ Asisto a actividades y a reuniones de padres en la escuela (por ejemplo la celebración de Latinos y “La Casa Abierta”)

### III.Participación en la Educación de Sus Hijos

¿En qué maneras participa en la educación de sus hijos? Marque todos que apliquen.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Los ayudo con la tarea.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Leo con ellos en español y/o inglés.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Viajamos a otros países.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Les doy oportunidades educativas durante los fines de semana y durante el verano.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Les inscribo en clases después del día escolar y/o antes del día escolar.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Les cuento sobre mis experiencias personales.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Les comparto información cultural sobre nuestra familia.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Les enseño nuestro idioma natal.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Los llevo a la biblioteca y a los museos.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Los llevo a la iglesia y/o clases religiosas.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Les enseño buenos modales.

### IV.Percepciones Sobre El Programa de Lenguaje Dual

Marque Cierto o Falso según sus opiniones.

- |  |              |             |
|--|--------------|-------------|
| 1. Estoy satisfecho/a con el programa de lenguaje dual.          | _____ Cierto | _____ Falso |
| 2. Estoy satisfecho/a con los maestros de la escuela.            | _____ Cierto | _____ Falso |
| 3. Tengo suficientes opciones para comunicarme con los maestros. | _____ Cierto | _____ Falso |
| 4. Tengo unas preocupaciones sobre la educación de mis hijos.    | _____ Cierto | _____ Falso |

Por favor escriba en qué áreas tienes preocupaciones, inquietudes, o áreas que le gustaría tocar durante nuestras conversaciones:

V. ¿Por qué se le(s) matriculó a su hijo/a(s) en el programa de educación de lenguaje dual? Clasifica estas opciones con un número 1-8, donde “1” significa la razón más importante y “8” significa la razón menos importante.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Quiero que mi hijo pueda hablar, leer y escribir en dos idiomas
- \_\_\_\_\_ Quiero que mi hijo pueda relacionarse con su cultura y patrimonio.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Quiero que mi hijo sea cómodo relacionándose con otras personas y culturas.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Es importante que mi hijo asista a una escuela con maestras que hablan nuestro idioma natal.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Quiero que mi hijo tenga éxito en una sociedad global que requiere más de un idioma/cultura.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Quiero que mi hijo tenga autoestima y que sea orgulloso de quien es.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Nos tocó esta escuela por dónde vivimos.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Otra razón: \_\_\_\_\_

#### VI. Relaciones en la Escuela

Marque su respuesta según sus opiniones.

- |  |                             |
|--|-----------------------------|
| 1. Los maestros están convencidos de que yo hago todo lo posible para apoyar a mis hijos en la escuela.  | _____ Ciento _____<br>Falso |
| 2. Los maestros son expertos en la enseñanza y no es mi papel entrometerme en las actividades del salón. | _____ Ciento _____<br>Falso |
| 3. El maestro y yo tenemos una comunicación abierta y continua.  | _____ Ciento _____<br>Falso |
| 4. El maestro entiende lo que necesita mi hijo.  | _____ Ciento _____<br>Falso |
| 5. La maestra sabe bien las cosas que yo hago para ayudar a mi hijo.                                     | _____ Ciento _____<br>Falso |
| 6. Todos los estudiantes son iguales ante los ojos del maestro.  | _____ Ciento _____<br>Falso |
| 7. La maestra incorpora nuestra cultura en el salón de clases.   | _____ Ciento _____<br>Falso |

8. Mi conocimiento y mis experiencias son valorados en el salón de clase. \_\_\_\_\_ Cierto \_\_\_\_\_  
Falso
9. Yo conozco a unos padres hispanohablantes en la escuela. \_\_\_\_\_ Cierto \_\_\_\_\_  
Falso
10. Yo conozco a unos padres anglohablantes en la escuela. \_\_\_\_\_ Cierto \_\_\_\_\_  
Falso
11. Cuando yo tengo una crítica, los maestros y los directores me hacen caso. \_\_\_\_\_ Cierto \_\_\_\_\_  
Falso
12. Quiero que mi hijo sea bilingüe para tener oportunidades de comunicarse con gente de varias culturas. \_\_\_\_\_ Cierto \_\_\_\_\_  
Falso
13. Es importante que mi hijo tenga amigos de otras culturas. \_\_\_\_\_ Cierto \_\_\_\_\_  
Falso
14. Escoge un número entre **1 y 10** para representar cómo se siente en cuanto de ser parte de una comunidad en la escuela. **1** representa "No soy parte de una comunidad aquí." Y **10** representa "Soy sumamente conectado/a con la comunidad aquí."



## **APPENDIX F: CLASSROOM OBSERVATION PROTOCOL**

1. What is the physical setting of the classroom? What is on the walls? How are the desks arranged? What is written on the board/ smart board?
2. Is there evidence of connections between classroom and homes?
3. Who is in the class? How many students? What are their ethnicities?
4. How are students grouped together? How does teacher promote intercultural relationships among students in the classroom? What is the evidence that it is (not) working?
5. Do students of different backgrounds and cultures elect to work with one another?
6. Does the teacher encourage mixed background pairing? How? Are students open to it?
7. What is going on? What is the teacher saying and doing, and what are the students doing and saying? In what languages are they speaking?
8. Does the teacher (or other adults) attend to social, cultural, ethnic, religious backgrounds of children? If so, in what ways? Is it positive, negative, or neutral? Or does the teacher miss or ignore opportunities to bring community interests into the classroom?
9. Do students talk to one another about their home languages, cultures, community? If so in what way?
10. Does the teacher mention parents in the classroom? If so, in what context? For what purpose?
11. Which behaviors are repetitive? What routines are occurring? How do the students interact with the teacher and vice versa?
12. What is the content chosen by the teacher? What aspect is the teacher focusing on?
13. What is the teacher teaching? What pedagogical strategies is she using? What activities are occurring?
14. How does the teacher communicate her purpose for the lesson or activity?
15. What feedback are the students providing in the activity/discussion/instruction? How are they providing it?
16. What is not happening that could—in reference to classroom structure, pedagogy, and activity?
17. How are the students responding to the teacher and to what she is teaching?
18. What resources are available?

## **APPENDIX G: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR TEACHERS**

Introduction: Thank you for agreeing to speak with me today. My goal of this interview is to learn more about your experience as a teacher in the Two Way immersion program in effort to find ways to better connect the school with its communities and families. Research has shown the importance and benefit of school-home connections on student achievement and feelings of well-being at school. The TWI program presents a unique setting in which the school seeks to connect with families from diverse backgrounds. Your participation in this interview is voluntary. All of your responses will be kept confidential and I will use a pseudonym to protect your identity. I am going to audio record the interview but at any moment if you feel uncomfortable with a question or with the audio-taping, please ask me to stop or skip to another question. Also, please feel at liberty to extend your answers as you would like. This will be more like a conversation. Do you have any questions before we begin?

### Introduction:

1. How is this year going? Are you satisfied (less satisfied?) with your job this year?
2. What do you like the most / least about your job?

### Dual Language:

1. Why do you continue to teach in the Two Way Immersion program? How long have you been teaching in TWI classroom? Tell me about your opinions around TWI education (including its positives and negatives).

### Classroom Make-up:

1. Describe the make-up of your classroom.
  - a. How many Spanish dominant children / English dominant children?
  - b. How many African American/ white/ Latino/a children?
  - c. How many students receive free or reduced lunch?
  - d. How many students are at grade level? Below? Above?
2. What are your general impressions of this group of students? Strengths? Weaknesses? How do they compare to other past groups?
3. How do you address or include backgrounds of your students in the classroom?

### Parent Connections:

1. Talk to me about the parents of your students or of the school. What is your opinion about your students' parents? In what ways are they or are they not involved in their children's education?
2. How do you attempt to communicate with them about the classroom and their son or daughter's progress? Newsletter, emails, phone calls, visits?

3. How do *parents* bring their concerns to you regarding their children? How would you prefer that they bring their concerns to your attention?
4. How would you describe an ideal parent of one of your students?
5. What do you do to encourage your students' parents to be involved in your classroom/ school? Do you want them to be involved in your classroom? Why or why not?
6. Do you feel that the parents of your students know one another? Do they interact with one another? If so, when? Are there opportunities in which they could potentially interact more with one another? And is it the role of the classroom teacher to encourage these relationships? Why or why not?
7. What could the school, PTA, university do to support you in your work to better connect with your children's parents?
8. Describe what steps you take to connect your classroom to the community and cultures of your students. (sing any traditional songs? Tell traditional stories? Celebrate day of the dead? Use books that include culture during storytime? Anything else?)

## **APPENDIX H: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR FACULTY AND PERSONNEL**

1. Tell me about your background.
  - a. Where are you from?
  - b. What is your education background?
  - c. How many years have you served as principal/ counselor/ literacy coach / media specialist/ student teacher?
2. How did you come to work so closely with two way immersion (TWI) education?
3. What do you see as the benefits and negatives of TWI education?
4. What have been the most influential factors in your development as a TWI proponent?
5. What is the school's role (and your role) in connecting to the community and to families?
6. What is the school's role (and your role) in helping parents to connect with one another?
7. What do you anticipate will be the biggest challenges of this year?
8. What are your greatest hopes for the school?
9. What messages do you pass on to other principals/ counselors / literacy coaches/ social workers looking for ways to connect families and the school?
10. What has been your greatest accomplishment at school? What are you most proud of from your work at school?

## **APPENDIX I: EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES OBSERVATION PROTOCOL**

1. What is the date?
2. What is the purpose of the extracurricular event?
3. Who is in attendance? (families, children, teachers, administrators, community members, others?) Who came late, left early?
4. How were people grouped in the event?
5. What is your general impression about the extracurricular event?
6. What is the physical setting of the space? What is on the walls?
7. What was the emotional atmosphere of the event?
8. What events or activities occurred during the event?
9. What was said during the event?
10. Did any significant events occur during the meeting time (ex: parent left, interruption, visitor etc.)?
11. Were there efforts to encourage parents to talk with one another? If so, describe.
12. What happened at the end of the designated event time?

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