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When Institutionalized Discourses Become Familial:
Mexican Immigrant Families Interpreting and Enacting
High Stakes Educational Reform

By

Sera Jean Hernandez

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of

the requirements for the degree of

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University of California, Berkeley

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Professor Patricia Baquedano-López, Education, Chair

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Professor William F. Hanks, Anthropology

Fall 2013

When Institutionalized Discourses Become Familial:
Mexican Immigrant Families Interpreting and Enacting
High Stakes Educational Reform

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by Sera Jean Hernandez

Abstract

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Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Patricia Baquedano-López, Chair

With a blend of case study and Language Socialization research, this 2-year ethnographic study explores the ways in which four Mexican immigrant families with a child in middle school navigated the U.S. public school system during a time of increased educational reform. With a combination of participant and direct observation within homes and schools, video-recordings of dinnertime talk, audio-recordings of parent narratives, semi-structured interviews with focal families and school officials, and text-based artifact analysis, this study traces the educational discourses that enter family talk to reveal the ways in which focal parents and students use educationally-based language to demonstrate their understanding of the school system, educational practices, and their roles in the business of doing school.

Dedicated to Savannah and Samuel,
Mommy loves you.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Since the turn of the 21st century, federal education reform policies have strongly shaped the essence of schooling in the U.S. Hard-wired into the educational imagination are pervasive discourses of “accountability,” “high standards,” and “home-school partnerships,” where teaching to a test or narrowing a school’s curriculum are the modus operandi for public school survival, particularly in linguistically and culturally diverse schools. Undoubtedly, the accountability provisions of *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* have shed light on the educational plight of non-dominant¹ students, but those same provisions have resulted in the over-testing of English Learners (Zacher Pandya, 2011), a narrowing of school curriculum and teaching-to-the-test practices (Menken, 2006), and parent involvement initiatives that target non-dominant communities (Baquedano-López, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013). Educational reform plays a role in what does and does not happen in schools and which classrooms receive federal monies, as national and state policies shape the academic content, pedagogy, and curricular materials utilized with children in the pre-K-12 setting.

Educational policy under an era of reform influences practices and processes outside of schools, including how families and schools interact. A positive home-school relationship is a critical condition of academic success for all students, but paramount for Latino immigrant youth (Delgado Gaitan, 2004; Nevarez & Rico, 2007). Federal and state education and language policies are authoritative forces in shaping the conditions around U.S. public education, and consequently, the home-school relationship. Part and parcel of these policies are an educational discourse that shapes the ways in which social actors organize their daily routines in schools, influencing their interpretation and enactment, and the resultant educational programs and practices. This study is concerned with educational discourse at both the institutional and familial level—how educators who work with the study’s four focal Mexican immigrant² families draw on educational policy to discuss matters pertinent to these families and their children’s education, and the ways in which policy talk gets taken up by the focal families in either their language or action in both private and public spaces. The research questions that guide this study are as follows.

- 1) Who do Mexican immigrant families turn to in order to learn about the U.S. schooling process? How do parents and students come to understand school or classroom practices?
- 2) Do institutional discourses affect how parents and students see their roles and legitimate activities inside school and subsequently view themselves as social actors in the business of doing school?

¹ I use the term non-dominant in place of minority, to include families of color and low-socioeconomic backgrounds. The term non-dominant also reflects the power dynamics at play when comparing the educational experiences and outcomes between ethnic and social class groups in the U.S.

² This study focuses on Mexican families, the largest Latino group in the U.S. Occasionally the term Latino will be used to refer to individuals of Mexican, Central or South American descent when reviewing the literature. I use the term immigrant to refer to 1st and 2nd generation individuals in the United States. As foreign-born individuals, the parents in the study are 1st generation and their children are 2nd generation.

- 3) How are parent involvement roles mediated across the two focal school districts? Do institutional conditions, differing between two school districts, affect parent participation and student experience in schools?

This dissertation uses a blend of case study and Language Socialization research to tell the stories of four Mexican immigrant families and their experiences with middle school education. There is a school-focused layer of the study that contextualizes the families' reported experiences and perspectives. Slices of their stories unfold in the highlighting of critical moments that impact the learning process of being a parent or student in one of two school districts in California. Foregrounded is the daily sense-making and negotiating of educational policy and practices involved in being a parent of an *English Learner*, and the agentive roles the focal parents play in their children's education under high-stakes educational reform.

Educational studies tend to focus on how structures and organizations play a role in policy implementation at the school and classroom level and the impact such practice has on student academic achievement (Coburn, 2004; Honig, 2006). Educators' responses to federal provisions that promote high-stakes accountability saturate the media and national conversation on education, yet little is known on how Latino immigrant families interpret, discuss, or even enact such government policies. The ramifications of policies that ensue from the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, and later iterations of federal reforms efforts (i.e., *NCLB*, *Race to the Top*) must be studied beyond the walls and institution of the school to consider and document how such initiatives trickle down to discursive spaces within families' homes and private lives, influencing families' worldviews and students' academic identities. This 24-month Language Socialization study (Garrett & Baquedano-López, 2002; Shieffelin & Ochs, 1986;) largely examines how federal and state language and educational policies³ are made sense of and get taken up by four Mexican immigrant families, both parents and their children, and the ways in which they make sense of educational opportunities and inequities in light of such educational policy implementation and practice. The focal families participated in the study as they navigated a public middle school in a northern or southern California school district,⁴ chosen because middle school is a critical transition—a time of increased academic vulnerability in which educational gaps tend to become more salient for Spanish-speaking students (Thomas & Collier, 2003). Yet, research on home-school interactions⁵ tends to focus on the preschool or elementary level (Durand, 2010; Sandell, 1998) despite the critical role parental expectations and involvement play in the academic opportunities of middle school students (Dauber, Alexander, & Entwisle, 1996).

³ A review of language and educational policy is reviewed in the subsequent chapters as they are relevant to the analyses of focal participants' talk. Provisions under Title I and Title III of NCLB are covered in depth in Chapters 4 and 5. Language policies such as anti-bilingual education initiatives and the language learning classification process for bilingual students are reviewed in Chapter 6.

⁴ Two of the focal families had a child in Marina Unified School District located in northern California and two families had a child at Valley Unified School District located in southern California. Pseudonyms are used for all people and places named in this dissertation.

⁵ The home-school relationship and home-school interactions are used interchangeably in this study. Both terms recognize that a relationship between the home and school contexts exist and is based on both interactions that can be observed and measured, and interactions that are not necessarily observable such as through text-based communication, or phone calls.

Studying educational processes based on the experiences of Latino immigrant families with children in middle school is timely. The education of linguistic minority students has been a highly contentious area of concern, embedded within larger political debates on immigration and integration. However, the tendency to reduce diverse populations by social, economic, or political categories or labels continues to be commonplace in both social policy and practice. And while the inherent heterogeneity in any family can be assumed, the lived experiences of traditionally marginalized groups are often sensationalized, leaving reductive descriptions of individuals and families defined by their immigration status, ethnicity, gender, language, class, or native language (see discussion of the label *English Learner* in Chapter 6). This study interrogates these essentializing practices (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003) by sharing four case studies of immigrant families—diverse in their legal and work status, geographical locations, and experiences with the U.S. public school system—to articulate the complexities of living as an immigrant family during an era of educational reform, economic recession, and increased immigrant surveillance.

In their everyday discursive interactions, family members index their educational ideologies—how they understand and negotiate their knowledge of the school system and structures, parental roles in schools, and educational opportunities and inequities. Attention to the nuances in language use allows for this dissertation to document the socialization of focal parents into particular school roles, the linguistic and academic identities of focal students, and the complications around marginalized and empowered identities as parents and students within schools operating under a national education reform regime, during an economic downturn, and when anti-immigrant sentiments are high. Understanding these social and political conditions by focusing on the discourse from educational policy and practice allow us to trace how they shape everyday talk. These findings have direct implications for policy-making and implementing in U.S. schools that are serving linguistically and culturally diverse students.

Latino Immigrant Families in U.S. Public Schools

Roughly 11 million Latino students attend a public school in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010) and Mexican-origin students make up approximately 43% of school-aged children in California (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009 American Community Survey). Among the 14 million language minority students in the U.S. (August & Shanahan, 2006), first- and second-generation students from Mexico comprise the vast majority (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Historically underserved by formal educational institutions (Valdés, 1996, Valenzuela, 1999), they experience the lowest academic attainment than any other ethnic-minority group in the United States (Gándara, 1995; Yosso & Solórzano, 2006) even though Mexican parents hold high aspirations for their children's educational attainment (Delgado Gaitan, 1992; Solórzano, 1992).

Aside from their educational achievement, we know little about the ways in which citizenship status plays a role in daily educational and familial routines for Latino immigrants (Mangual Figueroa, 2011). The 14th Amendment guarantees birthright citizenship, and close to 79% of the roughly 5 million children of foreign-born parents were born in this country (Passel & Taylor, 2010). Still, protective policies for children born outside of the U.S. are enforced at the federal level, such as the 1982 ruling of the Supreme Court case, *Plyler vs. Doe* which declared that students born outside of the United States had a legal right to a public school education and schools should avoid enforcing immigration laws. The case determined that immigration status is

a legal characteristic that children have little control over, and by enacting the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment, *Plyler vs. Doe* helped schools avoid a violation of students' civil rights (*Plyler v. Doe*, 457 U.S. 202 [1982]). National child and family policies are affected by the changing demographics and structure of the family unit—including the variation in legal status of its members. The four focal families in this study are of mixed-status—where at least one parent is a noncitizen and at least one child is a citizen (Fix & Zimmerman, 1999). Roughly 4% of the U.S. population is comprised of adult immigrants without legal authorization (Passel & Taylor, 2010) and nearly 1 in 10 U.S. families with children is a mixed-status family (Fix & Zimmerman, 1999). Empirical investigations of this subset of the population are needed to broaden traditional linear theories of immigration and capture the dynamic processes of immigration and integration for mixed-status families.

The focal families in this study have undergone distinct im(migration) processes, including how, why, and when they have entered the United States. All of the families in the study were hoping for better opportunities for themselves or families and crossed the international border within the last two decades. Two of the families in the study are led by single mothers without legal immigration status, playing a significant role in one family's access to secure housing and continuous employment. One family has reliable employment as both parents entered the U.S. with work visas and have permanent residence status in the U.S. Another family is financially supported by the father's work as the owner of a construction company, despite his and his wife's undocumented status. This family moved from Mexico after starting their family—the only family in the study to have children with and without legal status. These lived conditions illustrate how immigration is a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by geopolitical and economic processes. Social scientists examine immigration from a variety of perspectives, including group level characteristics of immigrant groups, large-scale immigration patterns, the second generation, and the process of integration on individual identity development (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, Walters, & Holdaway, 2008; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). These large-scale studies tend to focus on patterns and processes, often searching for causal relationships between variables. Recognizing that immigration theories need to account for the broad range of participation in society (Chavez, 2008), the micro-level analyses provided in this dissertation serve to complicate such theories by offering a nuanced description of the day-to-day for the focal participants, including how family involvement in the institution of school processes is a pivotal example of that participation.

The increased surveillance of (Latino) immigrant families has been occurring alongside a national economic downturn⁶. Inextricably linked to educational outcomes (Bracey, 2009; Rothstein, 2010), poverty played a significant role in the focal participants' lives. Data collection occurred immediately following the onset of the *Great Recession* or Economic Downturn of 2008, and the *Occupy Movement*⁷ occurred during the final stages of data collection. This is a unique time in history to examine social inequalities and the institutionalized divide between the rich and the poor (West & Smiley, 2012), as there was a sharp increase in systemic poverty, unemployment, and home foreclosures during the time period. In 2009, 9.4 million families had at least one unemployed member, with black and Latino families having the highest

⁶ The ways in which the intersection of immigration and poverty mediated this particular family's educational experiences is highlighted in chapter four, including the national context of immigration debates.

⁷ Communities near the focal communities in this study staged occupations to demonstrate their alliance with the *Occupy Wall Street* movement to bring attention to social and economic inequality, where the top 1% of income earners in the United States continue to increase in wealth while the middle class continues to decrease in size.

percentages (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010). According to the National Poverty Center (2010), households headed by single women of color are disproportionately more likely to live below the poverty line, and foreign-born, non-citizens are even more likely to live in poverty (27%). More than 27% of Latina women were living below the poverty line in 2009 and 35% of Latino children are part of the poor population in the U.S., roughly three times more than white children (National Poverty Center, 2010).

Overview of the Dissertation

Key theme issues regarding Latino education in the U.S. spanned the study's findings: bilingualism and language program models, immigrant parent involvement, and high-stakes educational reform. Previous research has explored these issues in relation to the educational attainment of Latino students (e.g., Delgado Gaitan, 2004; Escamilla, Mahon, Riley-Bernal, & Rutledge, 2003; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1995; Menken, 2008; Valdés, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999), but this study foregrounds the experiences and voices of mixed-status Mexican families, both parents and children, as they navigate an educational space that is significantly influenced by federal policies that simultaneously render students both (hyper) visible and invisible (Mangual Figueroa, 2011) dependent on their immigration status, race, class, and language. The resultant discourses of these federal education and language policies are pervasive—often times uplifting and empowering for the families, and other times suffocating and stressful.

Chapter 2, *Latino Families and the Home School Relationship* surveys sociological and anthropological literature on Latinos and other non-dominant groups in education, highlighting seminal pieces that examine the continuities and discontinuities between the home and school contexts, educational policies that target Latino families, and theoretical orientations and empirical research that influence pedagogical practices for this population. This chapter also includes a review of the theoretical tenets of the field of Language Socialization (Shieffelin & Ochs, 1986) utilized in this study to analyze language across contexts.

Chapter 3, *Home as Locus of Inquiry: Educational Policy Analysis in Family Talk*, includes an introduction to the home as a site of inquiry, the ethnographic and case study methods utilized, the ethnographic context, an introduction to the four focal families that participated in the study, and the data collected in district and schools to supplement the home level findings.

The parent involvement trajectories of the two focal mothers in Marina Unified are depicted in Chapter 4, *Latina Mothers and the English Learner Advisory Committee: The Process of Withdrawing in Marina Unified*. Through analysis of audio-and video-recorded transcripts of narratives told by the mothers, this chapter examines how the focal mothers in the northern California school district were socialized into parent leaders but experienced a plateau in their parent involvement journey once their daughters entered middle school.

Notions of bilingualism, choice, and equity in a middle school in Marina Unified with a dual language immersion program are explored in chapter 5, *The Politics of Becoming Bilingual in America: Are they all Just Language Learners at Cooper Academy?* Analysis of interview data and video-recorded interactions within the Garcia home highlights the policy and instructional dilemmas surrounding language acquisition as the Garcia mother makes sense of high-stakes language policies that directly affect her 7th grade daughter.

Chapter 6, *High Expectations and Accountability in a Title I School: Supplemental Education Services and Parent Involvement in Valley Unified*, explores how one Title I middle school responds to high-stakes accountability, detailing school policies and practices that are in place as a response to educational reform, and how Latino students and their parents come to understand the school's focus on test scores, high expectations, and academic achievement.

The concluding chapter, *Mexican Immigrant Families Doing School During an Era of Educational Reform*, reviews the study's findings across four main themes, and pushes educators to imagine home-school relations that are not bound by policy. Though it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to provide an in-depth analysis of educational policy, the findings chapters (4-6) include summaries of key language and educational policies that get directly spoken about or taken up by a focal participant in one of the four cases.

CHAPTER TWO

Latino Families and the Home School Relationship

A positive home-school relationship is a critical condition of academic success for all students, but paramount for Latino immigrant youth (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Nevarez & Rico, 2007; Zarate, 2007). Latino students are now the majority in California (Kane, 2010), with more than 3.2 million attending a California public school (Ramanathan, 2010). The vast majority of Latino students in California are of Mexican descent, and they continue to experience the lowest academic attainment than any other ethnic-minority group in the United States (Gándara, 1995; Yosso & Solórzano, 2006). The national dropout rate for Latino youth is more than twice the national average (Chapman, Laird, & Kewal Ramani, 2010) and when compared to all ethnic groups, Latinos have the lowest college attendance rates in the United States (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). The phenomenon surrounding these somber statistics is commonly referred to as *The Latino Education Crisis* (Gándara & Contreras, 2009), and there is a surplus of theoretical and empirical research pinpointing a culprit for this educational state of affairs.⁸

Middle school is a critical transition for Latino students—a time of increased academic vulnerability in which educational gaps tend to become more salient for Spanish-speakers (Thomas & Collier, 2003). Yet, research on home-school interactions tends to focus on the preschool or elementary level (Durand, 2010; Sandell, 1998) despite the critical role parental expectations and involvement play in the academic opportunities of middle school students (Dauber, Alexander, & Entwisle, 1996). Middle school is a unique site of investigation because 1) parent involvement interventions generally target parents of preschool and elementary school aged children, and 2) the middle and high school years do not have lots of research on what constitutes parental involvement (Zarate, 2007). The home-school connection⁹ during the middle school years can help us better understand which initiatives and programs are shaping how diverse schools and homes interact.

Home-School Relationships

As an ongoing discursive process, the home-school relationship is negotiated and organized by ideologies and practices that reproduce or transform interactions among a variety of stakeholders in the U.S. public education system. As an artifact from the social world, this relationship is constituted by and inseparable from the processes of talk and text (Heyman, 1984, p. 12), and the sociohistorical conditions in which it is embedded (Bourdieu, 1977). The relationship between home and school has been at the forefront of educational debates on the education of non-dominant students in general, and Latino children specifically. Concerned with whether students are prepared to transition to the K-12 setting, and searching for explanations as to why Latino students are not faring as well as their peers, educational researchers have heavily

⁸ Such issues include language of instruction, educational tracking, segregation, teacher quality, school funding, parent involvement, access for preschool, lack of health care, housing insecurity, etc.

⁹ In this study, the home-school relationship, home-school connection, and ‘interactions between the home and school’ will be used interchangeably to refer to roughly the same phenomenon.

studied the continuities and discontinuities in language and literacy practices between the home and school contexts (González, 2001; Pease-Alvarez & Vásquez, 1994; Philips, 1972; Reese & Gallimore, 2000; Valdés, 1996; Vásquez, Pease-Alvarez, & Shannon, 1994; Zentella, 1997), bringing attention to a cultural dissonance between the domains (Moll et al., 1992; Ogbu, 1987; Valdés, 1996).

Much of this research was influenced by the seminal work of Shirley Brice Heath (1983) who was one of the first ethnographers to enter homes to help document and explain the language and literacy home-school mismatch for non-dominant communities. Heath's longitudinal study of Black and White working-class families in the Piedmont Carolinas in the 1970s highlighted the unique ways culturally diverse families socialized their children towards school and literacy in their homes and communities. Her ethnography of communication (Hymes, 1964) investigated the ways in which the communities used talk surrounding a piece of writing (known as literacy events). Heath concluded that based on cultural norms, children have distinct ways of taking meaning from their environment. Challenging notions that there are particular ways to interact with oral and literate communications, Heath argued that 'ways with words' and books are just as much learned through child and caregiver interactions, as are other ways of being in the world (e.g., eating, praying, loving). Heath proposed a framework that examined the broader social and cultural context when studying educational practices within homes and schools that are deemed "natural" such as bedtime stories or conversations around books. The implications of this research on the situated nature of language and literacy socialization spawned later generations of work that recognized the political nature of language and literacy practices (Garrett & Baquedano-López, 2002). While Heath's contribution to educational research, language socialization, and ethnographic studies is insurmountable, the ways in which scholars take up her work varies. Some strive to document the rich and subtle ways diverse families use language and literacy within their homes and communities while others tend to perpetuate the great divide between homes and schools by contrasting the *differences* between diverse and dominant families and privileging those aligned with the school.

Guadalupe Valdés' (1996) ethnographic work with ten Mexican immigrant families in El Paso, Texas also highlights the home-school disconnect for ethnically and linguistically diverse families. Like Heath, she foregrounds the home context but focuses on the attitudes and beliefs of the study participants to make sense of the differences between the home and school context in views of education specifically and living in general. Her analysis, stemming from a large corpus of interview data, identified erroneous assumptions held by schools that regarded Mexican families as apathetic towards their children's education. Valdés highlights social and cultural values around commitment to family (*familism*), respect (*respeto*), and education (*educación*), to argue that rather than apathy, the Mexican families in the study understood schooling and living in different ways than the U.S. norm based on a White, middle-class experience. The notion of *educación*, for example, encompasses much more than the formal processes of schooling, to include respect, responsibility, and sociality (Valenzuela, 1999), as well as manners and other moral values (Valdés, 1996). This difference in understanding education provides useful insight into how Mexican-youth and their families in the U.S. may experience schooling.

Vásquez, Pease-Alvarez, and Shannon (1994) were among the first to carry out studies on the linguistic practices of Latino children with their synthesis of three ethnographic studies conducted in a Mexican immigrant community in northern California. By examining the language socialization practices of Mexican students and their families within the home, school,

and community contexts, they identified potential linguistic bridges between the home and school with the ways in which the children derived meaning from language and literacy-based interactions with the family. The adults' use of "contingent queries" or questions, for example, solicited more explicit information in response to children's comments and statements. This form of scaffolding created linguistic contexts for children to then clarify and elaborate on adults' queries, similar to the linguistic practices that were valued in schooling activities. Vasquez, Pease-Alvarez, and Shannon (1994) also detailed how students translated and interpreted for their families, a socially and cognitively complex practice that when recognized by educators, can shift deficit understandings of ethnically diverse students.

Also yielding rich and nuanced understandings of bilingual children's cognitive capabilities is the work of Marjorie Orellana and colleagues (Orellana, Reynolds, Dorner, & Meza, 2003; Orellana, 2009) who in their case studies with Mexican-origin families documented the multiple social, linguistic, and cognitive tools children acquired when called upon to translate for their families. By translating and interpreting texts and conversations for family members to access resources across contexts, children were also learning a similar school-sanctioned skill, the practice of paraphrasing. Similar work (Martinez, Orellana, Pacheco, & Carbone, 2008) highlights the relatedness of students' out-of-school translating skills and school-based academic skills, such as writing for multiple audiences. When the language and literacy practices and skills across home and school contexts are examined, recognized, and leveraged, students from non-dominant backgrounds are more likely to have more productive and positive academic experiences.

Zentella's (1997) ethnographic work with New York Puerto Rican children and their families demonstrated how rich bilingual and multi-dialectical competencies, including strategic code-switching, were utilized within the community to socialize bilingualism and manage interactional exchanges with different members of their community. Through findings stemming from extended participant observation and video- and audio-recordings of participants of *el bloque* (the block), Zentella presents a strong case for building on and expanding the linguistic repertoires of emergent bilinguals in schools and the need for educators to have a nuanced understanding of the linguistic skills in which many children bring to school.

González's (2001) three-year ethnography of education employed a language socialization perspective along with critical feminist theory to examine the linguistic practices of Mexican-origin mothers and their children. Through interviews, sustained ethnographic observations, and audio recordings of naturally occurring speech in these families' homes in Arizona, González observed complex and conflictive processes of identity development among bilingual and bicultural children in a public environment that reinforced a "one nation-one language" approach. Unfortunately, as González and Zentella reported, the cultural and linguistic skills of children and their families, including their bilingualism, often remained untapped in schools as resources in student learning. The aforementioned ethnographic work brings to light the importance of recognizing and leveraging the cultural and linguistic strengths and resources of Latino students and their families (Zentella, 2005).

The *funds of knowledge* (FOK) paradigm (González et al., 1995; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992) helped shape the strengths-based approach to education that many of the previously reviewed studies push for. The original FOK framework had two goals: 1) to conduct qualitative study of working-class Latino households by teachers as researchers to document the *historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being* (Moll et al., 1992, p. 133), and 2) to utilize

these funds of knowledge students bring with them to the classroom to help bridge the gap between school and community for working-class Latino families. This method helps foster *confianza* between families and schools (González et al., 1995) and theoretically and methodologically supports the notion that schools should and can alter their curriculum content and pedagogic approach to better embrace local practices (Luke, 2004). That is, the educational process can be greatly enhanced when teachers learn about their students' everyday lives (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005, p. 6).

It is through a dynamic understanding of students' and families' culture, coupled with the sociopolitical, historical and economic context of households, that allows for recognition of the accumulated social and intellectual knowledge present in homes as viable resources to be leveraged in the classroom (Moll et al., 1992). This shift in perspective counters the dominant goal of quickly assimilating families into the mainstream structure and culture of schools while simultaneously stifling student social development and academic success (Valenzuela, 1999).

Similarly, the family home must be regarded as a privileged context for learning so that the *pedagogies of the home* (Delgado Bernal, 2001) can influence and inform school-based understandings of non-dominant groups beyond the perceived *risk factors* associated with students of color living in low-income communities. This household knowledge can also be leveraged as strategies of resistance against dominant deficit stereotypes of Latino family homes, language, and culture that should be supplanted with a respect for bilingualism and biculturalism.

Moving Beyond a Risks and Resources Framing for Latino Youth

Because of the ways educational studies (such as the ones reviewed above) get read and interpreted, it remains inconclusive as to whether identifying the discontinuities between the diverse home and school has been a contributing impetus for social and educational change, or has simply perpetuated the assumptions behind deficit-models of education. These deficit models theorize that significant numbers of minority students do not fare well academically because of deficiencies within families and their culture (Valencia, 1997), their culture of poverty (Lewis, 1966), or the differences brought to school by the children themselves (Valdés, 1996), such as race, language, socioeconomic level, and childhood socialization experiences (as documented in the home-school mismatch). The “differences” students bring with them to the classroom are often included in checklists used to identify students at-risk of academic underachievement or dropping out of school (Druian & Butler, 1987). These personal characteristics and environmental conditions, also known as risk factors, are often used as a screening device to “red flag” students for special interventions (Wells, 1990). Poverty is usually at the top of the risk factor list, while low birth rate, single parenthood, lack of high-quality day care, and lack of contact with English as the primary language (Hodgkinson, 2003), all contribute to “the dropout problem” (Fine, 1993b). Because the average socioeconomic status of Spanish-dominant linguistic minorities is significantly below the national average (Rumberger, 1997), especially for Mexican-origin populations (Crosnoe, 2006; Suárez Orozco & Páez, 2002), this population is especially vulnerable to being labeled “at-risk”.

Schooling orientations and practices that dovetail with this risk discourse are often quite restrictive and deleterious for non-dominant communities. Because U.S. immigrants and their languages are seen by some as a threat to American identity and culture (Huntington, 2004), and where Spanish can be blamed as the root cause of underachievement for Spanish-speaking students (Escamilla, 2006; Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Asato, 2000), subtractive schooling

(Valenzuela, 1999) is commonplace practice in the nation's public schools. Based in assimilationist policies and practices, subtractive schooling is the process of stripping the wide array of cultural and social resources ethnic minority students bring to school, attempting to acculturate students to white middle class values and practices (Moll & Ruiz, 2002) the moment they cross the school house border (Olsen, 1988). Potent illustrations of subtractive schooling are English-only policies and practices as mandated through The No Child Left Behind legislation and the passing of state propositions that have dismantled bilingual education programs¹⁰. Recent mandates in Arizona¹¹ are also lucid examples of how the macro-level context, that is the sociopolitical climate, can significantly impact micro-level interactions, or the language and/or content of instruction (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Asato, 2000). This deterioration of students' social capital (Bourdieu, 1982) leaves them especially vulnerable to academic failure and this practice of subtractive schooling carries over to some parent program models that are reviewed below. We must move passed the discursive binary of describing non-dominant students and populations in terms of the risks or resources they bring to bear on the business of doing school.

Latino Families and Education Policy

Many educational policy initiatives strive to mitigate the divide between diverse homes and schools. Head Start and the Early Reading First programs are examples that focus on early childhood education and socialization as formative periods for learning and development that impact children throughout their entire educational career (Fuller, 2007). One of the most pervasive approaches to engaging the Latino family in U.S. schooling is through the implementation of family literacy programs, written into federal education policy such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the Workforce Investment Act, and the Head Start Act (Casper, 2003). Family literacy programs are very popular top-down initiatives designed to address the home-school connection for districts and schools with culturally and linguistically diverse populations in order to mediate the incongruence between home and school literacies (Rodríguez-Brown, 2009). Most of the family literacy models target home literacy practices, such as intergenerational literacy programs (Gadsden, 1994) where parents are encouraged to teach their children to read, read to their children, or listen to their children read (Sénéchal, 2006).

In many cases, deficit assumptions about non-dominant families and their cultural practices tend to drive the purpose, design, and practices of these family literacy interventions (Valdés, 1996; Whitehouse & Colvin, 2001). Overall, there appear to be two dominant views of literacy that influence these models: the decontextualized perspective that families need help in gaining the necessary tools to assist their children with school and the contextualized perspective that recognizes home and community knowledge and experiences (Gadsden, 1994). The first perspective subscribes to the notion that parents' literacy practices are directly correlated with

¹⁰ Propositions were passed in California (1998), Arizona (2000), and Massachusetts (2002), that dismantled most of the bilingual programs offered to language minority students in these states, leaving pivotal decisions about their educational needs and futures at the hands of voters (Moran, 2010).

¹¹ The recent mandates in the state of Arizona—the policing of immigration status in Immigration law SB 1070, the banning of Ethnic Studies in HB 2281, the segregation of Latino English Language Learners in what has been termed Mexican rooms (Gándara & Orfield, 2010)— are examples of misguided, xenophobic initiatives.

children's motivation around literacy use, and therefore programs should work towards educating families about best school literacy practices. The second viewpoint acknowledges the power of literacy to liberate and empower children and their parents (Delgado Gaitan, 1990; Freire, 1973), which aligns with authentic, strength-building models of family literacy. This viewpoint considers parents as bearers of knowledge, but the extent to which that knowledge is used in literacy activities or in equalizing power relations in schools is not always clear.

With the federal push for programs that address family literacy, an abundance of program models have emerged over the last couple of decades, particularly ones targeting Latino families. *The Family Literacy: Aprendiendo, Mejorando, Educando (FLAME) Program* is a Chicago-based comprehensive family literacy program that targets Latino families through a sociocultural framework and is grounded in an "enrichment" model (Rodríguez-Brown, 2009). There are two components to the model: 1) *Parents as Teachers*, which focuses on respect for parents' knowledge and language and is used as steppingstones to new literacy learning activities and an expanded parental repertoire of literacy activities, and 2) *Parents as Learners*, which addresses English as a Second Language, General Educational Development, and basic skills.

Another influential family literacy program is the *Proyecto de Literatura Infantil* (Children's Literature Project) (Flor Ada, 1988), which is based on the notion that reading is an interactive process for the purpose of human growth (Freire, 1970). Targeting Spanish-speaking families in Northern California, the program involved monthly evening meetings in which strategically chosen children books were used to prompt dialogue and engagement among families. Documented through ethnographic and participatory research (Flor Ada & Zubizarreta, 2001), the premise behind the model is that parents have a wealth of knowledge and family stories to share with their children and are a valuable resource for their children's emotional and social development. Validating families' authentic stories and ideas helps strengthen the home-school connection.

Another noteworthy Latino family literacy model is Delgado Gaitan's (1990) empowerment model documenting the organization and mobilization of COPLA (Comite de Padres Latinos), a Latino parent organization. Examining parent participation through school and family literacy practices, including formal, informal, and homework activities in the California community of Portillo, Delgado Gaitan ethnographically documented how a community (schools and families included) became empowered through their collective work towards improving the educational opportunities of Mexican children in the school and home. Still, most family literacy programs inherently operate as interventionist, making it difficult to move passed a deficit approach. Auerbach (1995) notes that some family literacy program models claim they are strength-based in theory or principle, but operate from deficit understandings when implemented—what she terms a neodeficit approach.

In the past 5 years, I think a second generation of family literacy programs has emerged, one in which virtually all of the proponents of family literacy claim to oppose deficit perspectives and to embrace family strengths. In fact, adopting an antideficit stance has come to be seen as a *sine qua non* for gaining legitimacy within the field. The discourse of family literacy is permeated with calls for cultural sensitivity, celebration of diversity, and empowerment of parents. Quite simply, the rhetoric of deficit has been replaced with a rhetoric of "strengths" (author's quotes)...the antideficit rhetoric has become so pervasive that it masks fundamental underlying differences in values, goals, ideological orientations, and pedagogical approaches...a significant tendency within the current generation of family literacy approaches may, in fact, represent a neodeficit ideology and that the discourse of strengths may, wittingly or unwittingly, serve the function of legitimating that ideology. An important task as family literacy gains ascendancy within the

educational reform movement is to deconstruct this discourse and to get beyond surface dichotomies (p. 643-644).

In distinguishing among the family literacy program types Auerbach (1995) identifies three models that shape most programs operating in the U.S., stating how each approach identifies a problem and a solution. The Intervention-Prevention approach, for example, identifies the problem as faulty home literacy practices and the solution as changing the ways in which families interact around reading. This model type is largely critiqued for its interventionist nature (Baquedano-López, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013; Valdés, 1996), though many family literacy programs operate from this perspective. Another similar critique stems from the need for family literacy to go beyond pushing parents to provide homework help, which often adds stress to the home and ignores families' funds of knowledge (Torres & Hurtado-Vivas, 2011); knowledge not usually reflected in the homework tasks.

The Multiple-Literacies perspective situates the problem as the mismatch between the home and school literacy practices and the solution as discovering and validating the language and literacy practices diverse children bring to the classroom (similar to the funds of knowledge framework). Similarly, Valdés (1996) advises that family intervention models be based on an understanding, appreciation, and respect for the beliefs and values of those served. The Social Change family literacy models encompass the Multiple-Literacies approach, but goes beyond to locate the problem as a complex interaction of social political, social, and economic factors in the broader society rather than in family inadequacies or differences between home and school cultures (p. 654). That is, the institutional structures in place that mediate access to certain literacy types are impeding families' reading and writing development. Rather than changing individuals, Auerbach posits, the focus should be on change within institutions and the naming and confronting of the social conditions that disenfranchise certain groups of people. Most importantly, with a Social Change model, participating families decide how the family literacy program will work for them. In addition to targeting Latino families through literacy programs, parent involvement initiatives are implemented nationwide to engage parents with low-income backgrounds and parents of English Learners.

Parent Involvement as a Component of the Home-School Relationship

The phrase home/school relation refers to the actual and theoretical pattern of prescribed interactions and communication between families and schools, with an emphasis on optimizing children's development and achievement. Parent involvement, in the home and in the school, is defined as a set of behaviors that results from parents' and schools' understanding of the home/school relation.

---Kainz & Aikens (2007)

A large facet of the home-school relationship is the process of parent involvement. Parent involvement initiatives build on the work of Joyce Epstein (1992, 1995) who suggests that a positive and healthy family-school relationship should be a "partnership" that involves mutual respect and support. Educational policy relies heavily on her research and guidelines in building partnerships, particularly her theory of overlapping spheres of influence and typology of school-family-community involvement. The overlapping spheres of influence centers the student among three major contexts—the family, the school, and the community, in which the three operate optimally when the three have overlapping or shared goals, missions, and responsibilities

(Epstein, 1995). Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement (1992) provides a variety of "practices of partnership" to include: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with community (Epstein, 1995). Many initiatives that target Latino parent involvement focus on Epstein's (1995) "learning at home" component of her parent involvement typology, such as family literacy programs—the intervention program reported to contribute most to student achievement.

Epstein's work is not without critique. Scholars have suggested that her parent involvement typologies are school-centric (Warren, Hong, Rubin, & Uy, 2009). Rodríguez-Brown (2009, p. 22) argues:

In Epstein's learning-at-home component, parents are not encouraged to participate in their children's learning, *per se*, but in helping them develop good study habits, in supervising their homework, and ensuring regular bedtimes and school attendance. There is no recognition that parents are the children's first teachers, nor that parents have a wealth of knowledge that they can share with their children at home in cultural ways that might be different from school but still contribute to learning and possibly school achievement.

Others critique her typologies for not recognizing parent involvement as a social practice that must be seen as dynamic and complex rather than a set of activities (Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis, & George, 2004). To be sure, many scholars prefer the term parent engagement (instead of involvement) to underscore a more agentive parental role (Ferland & Hammond, 2009; Olivos, 2006) in the educational process. Specifically, Barton and colleagues (2004) push for an ecology of parent engagement that defines engagement as a set of relationships and actions that cut across individuals, circumstances, and events that are produced and bounded by the context in which that engagement takes place (p. 6), that is, parent engagement is not an object or outcome. As Delgado Gaitan (2012, p. 306) notes, at the heart of family-school partnerships is a power relationship determined by knowledge about the educational system that families have and vice versa—what schools know about families.

The recognition of power dynamics in the home-school relationship is particularly important as families are sometimes blamed for their perceived lack of parent involvement, particularly low-income families of color. This blame has resulted in prescribed parental roles in policy initiatives (Mapp, 2012) where the family has become an object of educational policy and parent involvement has been formalized into a federal mandate (de Carvalho, 2001). Educational policies targeting low-income, families of color have been critiqued as narrow and interventionist, often limiting parental involvement roles and practices for non-dominant communities (Baquedano-López, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013), such as family literacy and early childhood programs. Moreover, the discourse around parent involvement overlooks historical and present social conditions that play a role in how or why parents are involved in schools (Casanova, 1996). Nakagawa (2000, p. 456) notes:

Parents are placed in a protector/problem bind, making it unclear how they should best help their children in relation to school: Should they assert their rights as parents to protect their child's interests, or should they follow the directions of the school system? Parents are told that they are a valuable tool but are also told that they are the cause of why schools are not doing better. Parents can turn the schools around, but first they must take time off work and learn what they are supposed to do. In either case, parents must act in ways validated by the school system, or their participation is not recognized or may be resented. The good parent is constructed as one who takes the lead of the school, who is involved but not too involved, and who supports but does not challenge.

Moreover, numerous studies document how the space for parent involvement is not equitable (Carreon, Drake, & Barton, 2005). The cultures and languages of non-dominant parents are often ignored, criticized, or treated superficially (De Gaetano, 2007) and some approaches that counter deficit-based parent involvement policies and practices, still locate the “*power to empower*” within schools rather than parents (Baquedano-López, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013; Delgado Gaitan, 1991). As public school culture is grounded in white, middle-class values (Lareau, 1989), others have noted how parents are ‘tracked’ into involvement roles within schools—largely depending on parents’ race and/or class level (Gartrell, 1995). Research has also identified the myriad ways in which culturally and linguistically diverse parents are involved in their children’s education (Delgado Gaitan, 1990; Valdés, 1996). Yet, little is known on how educational policies that target Latino families shape quotidian interactions between the home and school and ultimately, school-sanctioned parental involvement. Considering we know much on how government policies address Latino families in the early years of their children’s education (Casper, 2003; Fuller, 2007), the questions remains—what programs or policy initiatives are influencing the home-school relationship for Latino families with children in middle school?

Theoretical Framework: Analyzing Language Use Across Contexts

Communicative practices are developed and shaped across multiple domains within an individual’s milieu. This study is concerned with how first-generation mixed-status families come to understand the educational system in the U.S. as shaped by their interactions within and across home, school, and community contexts and revealed through quotidian talk. The ways in which family members understand and negotiate their knowledge of the school system and structures, parental roles in schools, educational opportunities and inequities, and their educational ideologies in general, can be reflected in their everyday discursive interactions. Attention to the nuances in language use allows for this dissertation to document the socialization of focal parents into particular school roles, linguistic and academic identities of focal students, and the complications around marginalized and empowered identities as parents and students within schools under an education reform regime. This study utilizes the theoretical and methodological tools from the field of Language Socialization¹² (Shieffelin & Ochs, 1986) to document and examine familial and school-based talk while exploring this nexus of the micro and macro in the context of immigrant family homes and communities (Baquedano-López & Kattan, 2007). Focus on both linguistic form and sociocultural context allows Language Socialization researchers to explore micro and macro level inquiries of language use (Garrett & Baquedano-López, 2002), in which a comprehensive view of the dynamic relationship between the individual and society (Bourdieu, 1977; Giddens, 1979) can be engaged alongside the analysis of linguistic forms. More specifically, Language Socialization theory and research adheres to a perspective of individuals in society as agents that are influenced by societal structures but ultimately take up and reproduce or negotiate and transform social relations and identities. Educational institutions are one such structure that plays a key role in sociocultural reproduction and transformation. It is with this understanding that the goal of this study is to highlight the focal families’ knowledge, beliefs, and feelings about U.S. schooling that are encoded in their everyday talk and interactions.

¹² Adopting Baquedano-López and Kattan’s (2007) distinction, I will refer to the field of LS as *Language Socialization* (initial letters capitalized) and its use as a topic or description of interactions as *language socialization*.

The Theoretical Antecedents of Language Socialization Research

As an interdisciplinary approach to learning Language Socialization (LS) blends core tenets of anthropology, sociolinguistics, and developmental psychology to study the lifelong process of acquiring language and culture simultaneously. LS branches out of linguistic anthropology, a field that has proven to be generative in its theoretical insights and empirical contributions to our understanding of language in use (Duranti, 1997). Concerned with how we make meaning in everyday communicative practices (Hanks, 1996) linguistic anthropologists study the role language plays in culturally patterned behavior, and show empirically how the cultural contexts of language use intertwine with language's structural properties (Wortham, 2001). Systematic attention to language form has significance for linguistic anthropologists, but only when utterances are contextualized in practice (Hanks, 1996; Silverstein, 1995; Wortham, 2008) are we able to interpret meaningful action behind linguistic signs.

Hymes's (1972) ethnography of speaking—the study of communicative events—has also greatly influenced Language Socialization researchers who conduct micro-level examinations of particular speech communities (i.e., a group of people who share a particular variety of a language and its specific rules and structures) (Gumperz, 2001 [1968]), across speech events (Hymes, 1974) to document whether particular language forms are acquired or not within membership groups (Kulick & Schieffelin, 2004). LS deviates from the psycholinguistic field of Language Acquisition in that it recognizes that language learning is a sociocultural process that extends beyond a simple binary of the mind and linguistic code. Language Socialization research builds on sociocultural perspectives of learning (Vygotsky, 1986; Rogoff, 1991) that have demonstrated how individual consciousness is built through relations with others, and more specifically, how language is developed through the social environment. LS theorizes that we are socialized through language and to language (Garrett & Baquedano-López, 2002; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986); concerned with not only the product of interactions (i.e., language development and cultural ways of being) but also the process in which that learning occurs. More specifically, it is not just the acquisition of language and culture simultaneously, but the ways in which this learning is manifested in context and with whom this learning takes place.

With this in mind, LS researchers recognize that novices bring background knowledge and forms of competence that get taken up during social interactions and linguistic activities (Garrett & Baquedano-López, 2002; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). These interactions and activities constitute a bidirectional process that leads to intersubjective understandings of phenomena, roles, or *ways of being* coupled with unique language forms to express that understanding. This is accomplished through the active co-construction and participation by novices and experts around culturally meaningful goals. While it is also understood that individuals become indoctrinated into a way of life through their childhood language socialization experiences (that may involve one or more languages), language socialization also occurs as people become members of new communities and learn new languages or varieties throughout the lifespan.

Communities of Practice

Language Socialization research examines socialization both in and out of school settings (Baquedano-López, 1997; Rymes, 2001), recognizing that individuals participate and belong to a range of (sometimes overlapping) communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). As Lave and

Wenger (1991) posit, communities of practice are identified by the participation of individuals in culturally defined groups so that membership and particular ways of understanding are formed and describable. LS researchers foreground the language use of group members to better understand the process involved in becoming a member of that group and how identities are constructed along the way, that is, a focus on how participation in practice is not only part of what we do, but a part of who we are (Wenger, 1998).

This notion of communities of practice is a helpful heuristic in understanding the socialization process that occurs between novices and more expert others, where language acquisition is not the only goal. Within an LS framework, language competence is understood as much more than the knowledge of linguistic forms, but the ways in which an individual is able to function and be regarded as a competent member of social groups (Garrett & Baquedano-López, 2002; Hymes, 1974; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). Language (communicative) competence requires the ability to link linguistic forms to stances and acts, and to activities and identities (Ochs, 2002). Thus, socialization is in part a process of assigning situational meanings—indexical meanings—to particular forms. Indexical knowledge—awareness of the cues that help individuals understand their sociocultural contexts—is central to the linguistic and cultural competence at the heart of LS research (Ochs, 1996). This study highlights how group memberships and identities are constructed, shifted, and indexed across settings for focal participants. By attending to the way the home-school relationship occurs in real time through situated everyday interactions with the understanding that those interactions are bounded by a historical trajectory (Baquedano-López, 2004), this study provides insight into how social actors negotiate their role in complex social contexts such as the U.S. educational system.

Second Language Socialization

This study was conducted in two languages—Spanish and English.¹³ Language use depended on the speakers and location of the focal participants at any particular time of data collection. As demonstrated in Language Socialization studies, multilingual contexts provide a more complex and multilayered perspective of the *to and through* process of LS. The second generation of LS work entails a broader picture of the language socialization process by exploring interactions in bilingual and multilingual settings (Baquedano-López, 1997; Garrett, 2005). More recently, studies have conducted ethnographic research in settings where individuals were being socialized to a second language (Duff, 2007; Rymes, 1997), introducing a subfield of LS—*Second Language socialization*. Duff (2007:310) explains:

Second language socialization shares many of the same principles and objectives as first-language (L1) socialization but with the added complexity of dealing with children or adults who already possess a repertoire of linguistic, discursive, and cultural traditions and community affiliations when encountering new ones.

As multilingual individuals, even young children, may be in a position to renegotiate, challenge, or transcend the existing social categories that are constituted and indexed by the codes and communicative practices at their disposal (Garrett & Baquedano-López, 2002, p. 350), the documentation of rich linguistic interactions among focal families were recorded and/or documented. The notion of bilingualism is explored in the cases of the focal students who all speak English and Spanish though their linguistic experiences and literacy practices within their

¹³ There were instances of code-switching and the use of Spanglish by the participants and researcher as a viable option of communication for bilingual individuals.

homes and schools were quite distinct. The next chapter reviews the methodological tools of Language Socialization research and provides the overall study design.

CHAPTER THREE

Home as Locus of Inquiry: Educational Discourse in Family Talk

This study builds on the work of Heath (1983) and Valdés (1996) reviewed in the previous chapter by turning the ethnographic eye to the home context and foregrounding the sense making that occurs in four Mexican immigrant family homes under a time period of high-stakes educational reform and accountability, and a national economic crisis. Specifically, this study investigated discursive and text-based interactions between focal family homes and schools¹⁴ to document educational discourse, and through sustained observations in family homes examined familial talk¹⁵ and narratives for educational discourse that was used to explain the educational process or their experiences with public schooling. Descriptive in nature, this study first documents the educational discourse prevalent in the two focal California school districts, documenting the language used by school educators and written in official school/district documents on the topic of Latino students and families specifically, and educational practices more broadly. Careful documentation of the focal families' talk was then analyzed for traces of the discourse initially documented at the school level.

Household as Investigate Site

Educational research privileges institutional spaces, namely schools, as sites to conduct a wide array of empirical studies and as a source for a multitude of theoretical arguments pertaining to diverse populations. Qualitative and mixed-methods studies have documented the complex and intricate ways in which immigrants and their children negotiate daily life within schools and beyond as the importance of the home and community spheres of life are becoming increasingly investigated. Research has considered the family as a useful site for political mobilization (Bloemraad & Trost, 2008), and routine interactions within the home have also been identified as productive sites for investigating language socialization practices (Ochs & Taylor, 1992b; Wingard, 2007). Still, the home context is often beyond the scope of educational research surrounding the educational reform movement, despite the rhetoric of the importance of the home context in preparing children for the academic setting. Much of the microanalysis and findings presented in this dissertation are drawn from video- and audio recordings of discursive interactions among the focal families as they completed their daily home routines.

All families, parents and children alike, interact at many levels within the institution of school and with the social actors within the school setting. Turning an investigative lens towards dinnertime (Ochs & Taylor, 1996, 1992a, 1992b) and the homework completion routine (Mangual Figueroa, 2011; Wingard, 2007) has emerged over the turn of the century as these quotidian events can serve as productive sites for analyzing daily meaning making. It is through discursive and text-based interactions between the home and school and the conversations between family members that parents made sense of their roles in the educational process and of their children's academic futures. These interactions form the foundation of the emic perspective of the middle school experience for the focal Mexican immigrant families in this study as it was

¹⁴ Discursive interactions include daily face-to-face interactions between students and teachers, teachers and parents, and students and parents. Text-based interactions include anything with the written word such as flyers, emails, or hand-written notes.

¹⁵ Any talk between or among members of a family within the home or other spaces considered private.

also through these interactions that children were socialized to ways of understanding the schooling process and their academic identities.

Methodological Standards and Tools

Language Socialization research uses linguistic anthropological theories and methods to examine socialization across settings. Language socialization studies often follow a small sample of focal participants across multiple sites. This can provide us with detailed descriptions and interpretations on the subtleties of the language socialization process in ways that a large-scale study could not achieve (Baquedano-López & Hernandez, 2011). The methodological principles of LS require that studies are ethnographic and longitudinal by design and demonstrate the acquisition (or not) of particular linguistic and cultural practices over time and across contexts (Kulick & Schieffelin, 2004). This is achieved through the collection, transcription, and analysis of a substantial corpus of naturalistic audio or audio-video data (Garrett, 2006). LS studies view utterances—talk in interaction—as methodic actions that are situated within specific contexts (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). LS researchers utilized the methodologies of Conversation Analysis to study language as an object of analysis. Hutchby and Wooffitt (2001) propose the following four principals as the methodological basis for conversation analysis: 1) talk-in-interaction is systematically organized and deeply ordered, 2) the production of talk-in-interaction is methodic, 3) the analysis of talk-in-interaction should be based on naturally occurring data, and 4) should not be constrained by prior theoretical assumptions (p. 23).

The combination of ethnographic methods and attention to social theory (Bourdieu, 1977; Giddens, 1979) allows the LS researcher to document the reproduction and/or the transformation in language and culture in a given context (Garrett & Baquedano-López, 2002). Social theorists remind us that while individuals are inculcated to ways of being through a set of dispositions that are socially and politically situated through everyday practices (Bourdieu, 1977), it is through the symbiotic relationship of a society's structural system and the role of agency individuals possess that determine our constructed realities (Giddens, 1979). Yet it is through ethnographic investigation of how language(s) and literacies are socialized across the life cycle that we are provided with a lens through which to view broader cultural processes, which play a role in shaping the reproduction of persons, languages, and communities (Fader, 2001:1). Ethnographic work done in classrooms, homes, and communities shed light on the nuanced ways individuals negotiate the political constraints of language use (Philips, 1972) and the ways in which communities use the verbal and written word impacts their experiences and overall success in the school setting (Heath, 1983).

Detailed Ethnographic Case Studies

Qualitative inquiry assumes that ideas, people, and events cannot be fully understood if isolated from the circumstances in which and through which they naturally occur (Schram, 2006: 9). The research method of ethnography has been used to provide a thick description (Geertz, 1973) of cultural groups, events, or processes, including the local enactment of education policy (Stritikus & Wiese, 2006). Hornberger and Johnson (2007) propose the ethnography of language policy as a method for studying the multiple layers of language planning and policy (LPP) to illuminate local interpretation, implantation, and appropriation. Similarly, this dissertation relies on ethnography to tell the stories of four Mexican immigrant families and their experiences with

middle school education during the high-stakes educational reform movement. In this dissertation, slices of their stories unfold in the highlighting of critical moments that impact the learning process of being a parent or student in one of two school districts in California. These districts are unique in the ways in which they serve their diverse student populations while operating under the same language and educational policies. Seeking to understand and provide long-term descriptions of everyday practices of the focal families and the meaning they attach to such practices, sustained participant observation by the researcher was essential.

There are benefits to combining case study research with an ethnographic Language Socialization study. For one, this study relies on multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2009) to enhance the data collected and provide a layered description of the sociocultural and political context of the study. While the micro-level analyses of audio- and video-recorded familial talk and interviews are privileged in this study, field notes, documentation, archival records, and educator interview transcripts supported a robust description of documented phenomena. Detailed in Table 3.1 below are the evidence sources with a brief description. Though the focus of the study is on familial talk, these multiple sources of evidence contribute to the validity of the findings and conclusions offered in the study. On their own, these data sources contain weaknesses that can hinder the study findings, but the analysis of multiple sources allowed for the triangulation of findings and study validity.

Table 3.1 Methods and Evidence Sources

Evidence Source	Description
<i>Artifact Documentation</i>	Letters, flyers, e-mail correspondence, meeting minutes and agendas, news clippings, online articles, op-editorials, (many of these textual artifacts were saved and given to me by the focal mothers in the study)
<i>Archival Records</i>	U.S. Census data, California Department of Education statistical data
<i>Interviews, Audio-Recordings, Transcriptions</i>	Semi-structured in-depth interviews, informal conversations, continuous check-ins, audio recordings and transcriptions of formal interviews
<i>Participant Observation, Direct Observation, Field Notes, and Photographs</i>	Participant observation in family homes was the focal data collection method of the study. Direct observation was conducted in focal student classrooms to provide a description of the school context. In-depth field notes were written after every observation in the homes and classrooms. Photographs were taken to supplement the field notes. More information on the process of participant and direct observation are detailed below.
<i>Video and Audio Recordings of Family Talk</i>	Video and audio recordings of familial interactions were made in the Garcia and Romero family homes. Audio recordings of familial interactions were used in the Fuentes and Baez homes.
<i>Transcripts of Audio- and Video-recordings</i>	All audio clips were transcribed. Segments of the video recordings were transcribed. More details on the transcription process is provided below.

Participant Observation

I observed families as they took on multiple roles, that of parent, student, volunteer, worker, and friend across multiple contexts and during routine familial and educational routines. As a participant observer I also assumed a variety of roles across these contexts. There were times when I casually observed the family get ready for dinner and other times when I played a role in setting the table or helping with mealtime in some way. While out in the community I sometimes walked with the families to their destination (e.g., local library, grocery store, to the school) and accompanied them to additional locations beyond the school (e.g., Catholic mass, Zumba dance class). Some days I casually observed, other days (after the first 6 months) I recorded interactions with a video-camera or audio-recorder. Sometimes I was asked to assist in some way (e.g., help Mariano Garcia fill out his paperwork to renew his work visa, locate a

notary public that would assist the Baez family in filling out paperwork to save their mortgage loan, explain report card information). I attended a *Pathway to Citizenship* meeting at the local high school with Concha Baez and was even bit by a dog that belonged to the Fuentes family's neighbor on my way to an observation.

Undoubtedly, the families' knowledge of my interest in their experiences with school and my role as an educator influenced what came up during dinnertime talk and in informal conversations with them. However, my physical presence in their homes became routine, and these families spent much of the time talking about topics outside the parameters of school, teachers, and homework. The focal families still made sense of their relationship with the school by talking to each other and not necessarily directing their talk to me. They shared their observations, their feelings, their surprises, their disappointments, and many other emotions that all families experience when dealing with their children's education.

Transcriptions

Recordings of talk and interactions allow us access to many of the practices of social life—although they are never a comprehensive record of events occurring in real time. Transcripts are by their very nature *translations*—partial and selective textual representations (Rapley, 2007, p. 50). Twenty-five (25) hours of discursive interactions were recorded across the four family homes (11 hours of video, 14 hours of audio). Video and audio-recordings were viewed or listened to in their entirety several times and the recordings were logged and time-stamped approximately every five minutes (using the *InqScribe* software). Each five-minute clip was given a descriptive name, a technical name and the time stamp. A brief description of each segment was logged and the field notes that were written after that visit are included in the log. All of the audio-recordings were transcribed into Spanish and translated into English. After multiple viewings, chunks of the video-recordings were identified as focal events that needed a closer analysis and were transcribed into Spanish. They were only translated into English when needed (i.e., they were included in the writing of this dissertation or data were presented at conferences or research group meetings). Through funding provided by UC ACCORD,¹⁶ I paid for transcription services for the 14 administrator and teacher interviews I conducted. I then re-transcribed¹⁷ as I listened to the audio several times to check for inaccuracies and to add any missing utterances that may have appeared inconsequential to the transcriber. I transcribed the interviews of focal family members myself using a foot-pedal and transcriber software called *InqScribe*.

Another view of the evidence sources is provided below in Table 3.2 alongside the relevant research questions they inform. Some of the sources inform more than one research question. More information on the number of observations and interviews are provided, including the types of school events observed.

¹⁶ The University of California's *All Campus Consortium On Research for Diversity* is a research center that offers dissertation and post-doctoral funding for research committed to equity for students at the pre-K-post-12 educational trajectory.

¹⁷ Transcripts are living, evolving, documents and are always susceptible to change and alterations (Rapley, 2007, 58).

Table 3.2 Data Collection: Evidence Sources Tied to Research Questions

<i>Research Questions</i>	<i>Evidence Sources</i>
<p>1. Who do Mexican immigrant families turn to in order to learn about the U.S. schooling process? How do parents and students come to understand school or classroom practices?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field Notes of Home Observations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 10 per family (40 in all) ○ 2-3 hours each • Video-Recordings of Home Interactions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 3 of Garcia Family (5 hours total) ○ 3 of Romero Family (6 hours total) • Audio-Recordings of Informal Conversations with Researcher <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 4 with Justa Garcia (5 hours total) ○ 3 with Sofia Romero (3.5 hours total) ○ 3 with Rebecca Fuentes (2.45 hours total) ○ 3 with Concha Baez (3 hours total) • Field Notes from Direct and Participant Observations at School Events <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Back-to-School Night ○ Open House ○ Music Recitals ○ Graduation • Parent Interviews <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ n=4 ○ 1-2 hours ○ semi-structured • Student Interviews <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ n=4 ○ 1 hour each ○ semi-structured • Collection of Artifact & Archival Material <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mission Statements ○ Parent-Teacher Compacts ○ School Flyers / Notices ○ Homework ○ Online Material
<p>2. Do institutional discourses affect how parents and students see their roles and legitimate activities inside school and subsequently view themselves as social actors in the business of doing school?</p>	<p>Same as above, but also:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher & Administrator Interviews <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ n=14 ○ 1-2 hours each ○ semi-structured • Field Notes from Direct Classroom Observations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 2-3 hours each ○ 4 per focal student

<p>3. How are parent involvement roles mediated across the two focal school districts? Do institutional conditions, differing between two school districts, affect parent participation and student experience in schools?</p>	<p>All of the above</p>
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Eight school officials from Marina Unified and six from Valley Unified (n=14) were interviewed to document institutionalized discourse around Latinos in schools and to gather data on the focal students. There were more interviews conducted in Marina than Valley because the two focal students in Marina attended a different middle school and the two students in Valley attended the same school. Table 3.3 below provides information about the educators interviewed—their general demographics and the positions they held at the time of the study.

Table 3.3 Demographics and Roles of School Officials Interviewed

<p>School Officials Interviewed</p>	
<p>Positions Held in Marina Unified</p>	<p>Demographics</p>
Principal of Garfield Elementary	Middle-age African-American female
Manager of the Office of Family and Community Partnerships	Middle-age Latina female
Vice-Principal of Cooper Academy	Middle-age Latino male
Bilingual Social Studies/Language Arts Teacher at Cooper Academy	Middle-age Caucasian female
Math Teacher at Cooper Academy	Middle-age Caucasian male
Principal of Jefferson Middle	Middle-age Caucasian male
Math/Science Teacher at Jefferson Middle	Young adult Caucasian male
English/History Teacher at Jefferson Middle	Middle-age Caucasian female
<p>Positions Held in Valley Unified</p>	<p>Demographics</p>
Principal of South West Middle	Middle-age Caucasian female
Vice-Principal of South West Middle	Young adult Asian female
Vice-Principal of South West Middle	Middle-age Latino male
Language Arts Teacher at South West Middle	Young adult Asian female
Science Teacher at South West Middle	Middle-age Latino male
Community-based English Tutoring Teacher	Middle-age Latina female

Coding

Because I used a multiple-case design, the ability to compare across the cases to identify similarities and differences among them allowed for the narrowing of themes during the coding process (Saldaña, 2009). For systematized interpretation I utilized the features of the *atlas.ti*

software to code field notes, video logs, transcriptions, artifacts, and archival data for repeated topics and themes. Before determining themes, I identified categories (e.g., types of discourse) and a description for each category, created codes and sub-codes for each category (e.g., risks/resources, educational reform, parent involvement, language policy, double binds), and grouped data examples of each category/code. For example, the category *double binds* referred to a predicament where an individual or family is confronted with two competing demands or has a choice between two undesirable options. Examples of this code include budget cuts or federal policy at odds with practice. I used different coding methods depending on the purpose of coding. For example, to compile data around the ethnographic context I used *Descriptive* coding but utilized *In Vivo* coding when I was looking to honor participant voice (Saldaña, 2009). After this process, I was able to develop themes (e.g., parental agency, institutional policy discourse) and utilized Conversation Analysis transcription methods to conduct a micro-analysis of excerpts of video/audio. It was then that I returned to the audio or video to capture interactional features of video-recordings. Memo writing was done after the development of themes and through continuous rounds of coding.

The Families and School Districts: An Ethnographic Portrayal

This dissertation study involved four spheres of research: the nuclear families being studied, the school and districts where the focal middle school students attended, the school and district-level artifacts and documents, and online language and educational policy documents. The focal participants include the four families described below, and district and school level administrators and teachers. This section introduces the two school districts and the members of each of the families being served by the districts, as well as provides a description of their homes as the focal locations of the study. The subsequent chapters explore the educational experiences of the study participants—both the parents and the students—and will provide important ethnographic background information as pertinent to the analysis and discussion. The two school districts share some similarities, including the fact that both operate under the legislative policies and requirements as public-serving institutions in the state of California. The districts vary by their economic and demographic make-up, the ways in which they approach “diversity,” and the avenues they use to engage parents into schools and the schooling process of their children. Table 3.4 below provides a comparison of the two focal districts. It is not, however, within the scope of this study to systematically compare the districts in their ability to serve the focal families or the broader Latino community.

Table 3.4 Districts at a Glance

Marina Unified	Valley Unified
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voluntary Integration • 22% Latino • 41% Free/Reduced Lunch • Bilingual Ed Option • <u>López</u> & Romero Families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethnic Segregation • 80% Latino • 73% Free/Reduced Lunch • English-Only Context • Baez & Fuentes Families

Participant Selection

Gaining access is usually a hurdle when it comes to participant-observation (Yin, 2009), especially when trying to enter family homes. To collect rich interactional data, I kept the study sample small and recruited four families that were open to be observed over a long period of time in both public and private spaces. The focal parents in the study are all 1st generation immigrants from Mexico with mixed-status¹⁸ families that include a child that attends a middle school in northern California (Marina Unified) or in southern California (Valley Unified). My connection to Marina Unified and the families within this district began in the summer of 2009 when I was asked to facilitate a literacy program for Latino families at one of the elementary schools. Funding for the program was provided through a community-based grant applied for by the Parent Teachers Association with the intended goal of better engaging Latino parents within their school. Though I developed close relationships with the 10 families that participated in the family literacy program, purposive sampling (Patton, 1990) was utilized to recruit families¹⁹ that met the following criteria:

- 1) Parents were born in Mexico
- 2) At least one child in the family was to transition into middle school or attend middle school during first year of study within Marina or Valley Unified
- 3) At least one parent attended a parent education program sponsored within one of the focal districts

Choosing parents that self-selected into a parent education program served a couple of purposes. First, it served as a proxy for some level of participation at the school site and might be considered an intervention to increase home-school interactions—a component of the study's unit of analysis. Secondly, it was a way to access families without knocking on neighborhood doors. Since I had an established relationship with the two families in Marina Unified that qualified to participate in the study via the family literacy program, to address selection bias I recruited two more families to participate from another district in California (Valley Unified) where I did not hold a professional position but had a professional relationship with an administrator in the adult education program.²⁰ In Spanish, I presented background information about the study at Community-Based English Tutoring (CBET)²¹ classes and left a sign-up sheet that indicated I would call them to discuss if they met the study's criteria. I presented in three different CBET classes for roughly 5 minutes with a recruitment script that received human subjects approval. In my presentation I explained that I was a doctoral student at UC Berkeley, 2) I was interested in the experiences of middle school students and their families with the educational system, 3) was looking for families to participate that met the criteria, and 4) was

¹⁸ Nearly 1 in 10 U.S. families with children is a mixed-status family—a family in which one or more parents is a noncitizen and one or more children is a citizen (Fix & Zimmerman, 1991, p. 1).

¹⁹ There was roughly six months between the time of recruitment and the time I facilitated the family literacy program.

²⁰ This administrator and I were colleagues at another school in a different district seven years before this study began. She held a position within Valley Unified for a few years when I contacted her about recruiting families for my study.

²¹ The Community-Based English Tutoring (CBET) program is a provision of California's Proposition 227 that dismantled many of the state's bilingual education programs at public schools. The provision provides funds to local educational agencies (LEAs) to provide free or subsidized English instruction to parents and other community members with the expectation that these individuals would pledge to provide English language tutoring to English learners (Parrish et al., 1996).

hoping the results of my study could assist educators in better serving Spanish-speaking populations. I then stayed to answer questions and left the sign-in sheet that I picked up from the teacher later that week. From the list of parents' names and numbers²² I called to verify that they qualified to be in the study. One family didn't qualify because the middle school student was served by a neighboring school district. A couple of families didn't qualify because their children were to graduate from middle school or wouldn't begin attending a middle school by the time the first phase of the study commenced. Only one family I contacted met the study criteria and was still interested in participating. This parent (Rebecca Fuentes) recommended a friend²³ that was also in the CBET class (Concha Baez) who met the criteria but did not sign up because she indicated she wanted more information about what the study would entail. I was able to answer her questions by phone so she could decide whether to participate.

Informal meetings with participants were held to gain informed consent at a location of their choice. I shared recruitment letters in English and Spanish with the families and explained how it was voluntary to be involved in the study and they had the option of not participating at any point during the investigation. School administrators and teachers were recruited after the families had given consent to participate in the study. For teachers to participate in the study, they had to be an instructor for one of the four focal students. Recruitment letters and scripts were used for recruitment of all school officials.

Marina Unified

Marina Unified is an ethnically and economically diverse school district in northern California. With a population of roughly 100,000 people, the city of Marina is 67% White, 22% Asian, 12% Latino, and 11% African American (U.S. Census, 2010). In a progressive attempt to maintain diverse schools, Marina Unified enforces a desegregation plan that was adopted decades ago to fully integrate students across racial, economic, and parental education levels. As determined by close readings of mission statements, goals, and theories of action available online, the district promotes an educational ideology of inclusion, high-level instruction for all students, increased student engagement, partnerships with families and the community, cultural and linguistic relevant instruction, and equitable resources for programs and services. Additionally, Marina Unified has adopted the *California Seal of Biliteracy*, which was signed by Governor Jerry Brown in 2011 and acknowledges high school seniors that are proficient in English and one or more languages. As the first state to celebrate an individual's speaking and writing ability in two languages, high seniors receive a medal and a seal on their diploma for this distinction. In addition, Marina Unified offers a variety of bilingual education program options for both Spanish and English native speakers.

The focal students in Marina Unified each attended one of two middle schools. Guadalupe Garcia attended Cooper Academy, a school located in a quiet residential neighborhood that houses the middle school dual language bilingual program. The school has top of the line facilities, including a gymnasium, auditorium, library, and technology lab. The school

²² Of the roughly 45 parents that were present to hear my study recruitment presentation across the three CBET classes, 7 parents signed up to be contacted. This recruitment process gave the participants the opportunity to 1) determine if they qualified to be in the study based on what was presented, and 2) self-select into the study if interested.

²³ A type of purposive sampling, snowball sampling (Ritchie, Lewis & Elam, 2003) was used to bring on board the fourth family by having another study participant recommend other families that might qualify.

offers programs such as gardening, music, and a variety of sports. Through a federally funded program, students are provided breakfast every morning in their classrooms. Of the 500 6th-8th graders, roughly 35% are Latino, 30% are African-American, 20% are Caucasian, 5% are Asian, and almost 10% are of mixed-race. The school is considered to be a Program Improvement school, a designation by the California Department of Education that identifies when a school has not met their Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as determined by their individualized goals for students' test scores on standardized achievement tests. Chapter 6 further details the federal sanctions surrounding Program Improvement status.

Focal student Aracely Romero attended Jefferson Middle, a middle school option for students in the district that are not enrolled in a bilingual program.²⁴ The school is located at the corner of a residential and busy city street, directly across the street from a café, hotel, and other small shops. The main entrance of the school is located on the residential side of the street, where a mural covers a large portion of the school wall. Adjacent to the school is a big city park with many trees, a large grassy area, and a small playground with sand. Students at Jefferson Middle have opportunities to participate in project-based learning, dance, foreign language, and cooking and nutrition classes. The campus is much larger than Cooper Academy and has 30 classrooms, multiple science and computer labs, a library, outdoor amphitheater, and garden. There are about 550 6th - 8th grade students served at Jefferson Middle. African-American, Caucasian, and Latino student make up 25% of the student population each. About 10% of the students are from an Asian background and 10% identify as mixed-race. Jefferson is also identified as a school in Program Improvement.

The Families in Marina Unified

The Garcia and Romero mothers were close friends during the time of the study as their daughters both graduated from Garfield Elementary school right before the study began. Justa Garcia and Sofia Romero attended the family literacy program offered at Garfield, but because their daughters attended different middle schools in Marina, they did not see each other as often as they had before the study began. There were a couple of occasions during the study where I attended community events and shared a meal with both families together, but 90% of my observations were conducted with each family on their own.

The Garcia Family

The Garcia family consists of the following family members: the mother Justa, the father Mariano, and their only daughter Guadalupe. Justa and Mariano were born in a small village outside of Jalisco, Mexico called San Juan Cosala and met each other while living in this small town. Mariano left to the U.S. with a work visa and Justa was able to join him a short time later. They had Guadalupe after 10 years of marriage and while they were living in the U. S. The family lives in a two-bedroom house in a low-income neighborhood about 10 miles outside of the city of Marina. Their home is directly across the street from a huge city park that has a playground and large field for soccer and football games. At the end of the street is the side of a local high school, the street is lined with single-family homes, and there are apartments further

²⁴ There are students attending Cooper Academy that are not enrolled in the dual language bilingual program. However, most of the Latino students at the school are enrolled in the program. To balance the racial make-up of the district's middle schools, Latino students enrolled in the English Immersion program model at the elementary level were usually assigned to one of the two other middle schools in Marina.

down the block. The Garcia home has a black metal fence around the small concrete area in front of the house that has room for Mariano's work truck and a walkway for the family to enter the home through the front door. There is a white metal awning that is attached to the garage and covers the truck. Along the left side of the gate are some cacti and three white stone angel sculptures. A statue of the Virgin Mary is hung by the front door. The doorbell sounds like a buzzer every time I rang it, but the family usually doesn't hear my knocks when I come for an observation. Through the front entrance, a stairwell is directly to the left which leads to two bedrooms and a bathroom. Several yards from the front door is the living room with two couches, a 32-inch television and a bookcase on the far left of the room with photo albums, framed pictures of Guadalupe with her padrinos (godparents), a family portrait taken at a studio, and some small figurines. On the far right of the room is a large dining room table with four chairs. The small kitchen is adjacent to this part of the room, with a door leading to the garage. Mariano's brother and his family (wife, two kids) live in the garage. Mariano works in construction and gardening all day and Justa works at Garfield Elementary where she is an after school aid. She was able to obtain a work visa like her husband. After school each day, Guadalupe walks a few main street blocks to her old elementary school to help out her mom and wait for her dad to pick them up at around 6pm. Because of their late schedule, Mariano's brother and his family prepare and eat dinner before the Garcia family gets home from work. Much of my time spent in the Garcia home was sitting in the living room on one of the couches, at the dinner table with them, and occasionally in Guadalupe's room observing her do homework or talking with her about school.

The Romero Family

Sofia Romero is a single mother of middle school student Aracely. They live in a one-bedroom apartment in an urban city right outside of Marina. At the time of the study, Sofia had been living in the U.S. for 14 years, after leaving a town in Jalisco, Mexico called Mascota. She was born there and has a brother and sister that still live there. She has a sister that lives in Marina, and they use her address in communications with the school district so Aracely can attend Marina schools. Sofia had Aracely when she was 28, but divorced Aracely's father when she was very young. Sofia does not have legal immigration status and makes a living cleaning the homes of families that live in the city's hills. She is dominant in the Spanish language, but speaks a little English. She has taken ESL courses in the past and shared how she would like to start taking classes again so she can communicate better with the families she works with, especially the children in the homes.

Sofia and Aracely live in an apartment in the back of a fourplex. To enter their home for observations, I walked through a small chain link fence and down a walkway between her apartment building and the duplex next door. There were always children's toys in this area—a play kitchen with an oven and refrigerator, and a big wheel. The neighbor had a small chihuahua that always barked as I made my way to the outdoor stairs leading up to Sofia and Aracely's apartment. There is a small patio area in front of the front door with just enough room for a couple of patio chairs, a small table, and a small bbq grill. Glass and metal decorative butterflies adorned the door and butterfly chimes hung from the small metal awning over the doorway. Sofia always had the kitchen window open and could hear me walk up the steps. Before I ever knocked on the door, I would hear Sofia say in a loud animated voice, "H-O-L-A S-E-R-A!" and Aracely would open the door for me. Sofia was usually in the kitchen making dinner when I arrived for observations. The front door opens up to the living room, which includes a couch,

love seat, and coffee table with bright colored vases. Across from the front door is a 32-inch television and to the right of the T.V. is a small desk with a desktop computer and printer. The living room leads to the kitchen and small hallway that leads to the one-bedroom and bathroom. The rectangular-shaped kitchen table is made of glass and is pushed against the bright lime green color accent wall. This makes room for only four people to sit rather than the six that the table can fit. On the wall shared with the living room is a large white refrigerator and white oven and stove top. The front freezer door is covered with pictures of Sofia's family—some living in Mexico and some in the U.S. On the side of the refrigerator are pictures of Aracely throughout her childhood. Along the top row is every single school picture Aracely has taken from preschool to sixth grade. There is an 8X10 photo of Sofia and Aracely dressed up in old western attire with liquor bottles on a table in front.

In the bedroom that Sofia and Aracely share is Aracely's twin bed, located in the far right corner of the room and Sofia's full-size bed that has a large wooden frame, located in the left corner of the room. There is one window with a brown taffeta curtain in the room that faces the entrance to the apartment. Sofia's bed takes up most of the space in the room and there is about a yard between the two beds—just enough space to walk. A wooden drawer is located in front of Aracely's bed facing the door, and a 24-inch television and direct TV cable box sat on another smaller wooden drawer that faced the beds. The room included a walk-in sized closet. There were framed pictures of Aracely all around the room—on the dressers, on the walls both outside and inside the closet. There was a large framed picture of Our Lady of Guadalupe²⁵ that practically covered most of the wall behind Sofia's queen size bed. It read *Reyna de Mexico Protégenos* (Queen of Mexico Protect Us). See Image 3.1 for a similar portrait.

Image 3.1 Our Lady of Guadalupe



Valley Unified

Located in the southern region of the state, Valley Unified is one of the largest suburban school districts in California. The district serves more than 25,000 pre-k-12 students across five cities, has a large adult education program, and 31 neighborhood schools. The focal families lived in Palms, a predominantly residential city spanning a little over 3 square miles, with small sections of commercial and industrial land. Roughly 40,000 people live in the Palms community, with 90% identifying as Hispanic/Latino (US Census, 2010). With a large Spanish-speaking

²⁵ Also known as the Virgin of Guadalupe, it is a symbol of Catholicism and very much an icon for the Mexican culture.

population, many names of the retail (especially grocery) stores, billboards, and bus stop advertisements are all in Spanish.

Valley Unified serves predominately Latino and Asian populations, with railroad tracks largely dividing the schools so that students are segregated by race and class. The two families in Valley Unified live on the low-income Latino side of the tracks and attended South West Middle School, which had a 98% Latino student population. The other side of the tracks serves a largely upper-middle class community of Asian descent. The Palms community is a mix of recent immigrants mostly from Mexico and Latino families that have lived there for generations. South West Middle serves almost 600 7th and 8th grade students that live in Palms. During an interview South West's principal shared that she has taught some of the students' parents. Like Marina Unified, Valley also adopted the *California Seal of Biliteracy* though it doesn't offer bilingual education programs to most of its students. The only bilingual program offered is on the Asian side of the tracks despite the large presence of Spanish-dominant speakers on the Palms side.²⁶

The Families in Valley Unified

The Fuentes and Baez mothers were neighbors in Palms, living a block away from each other for more than a year of the study. They were close friends who both had a child at South West Middle, attended the CBET program together, and spent time together taking Zumba classes or walking around the neighborhood. Most of my observations of the families were conducted separately within their homes. There were occasions, however, where I joined both of them on a neighborhood outing or to a school or community event.

The Fuentes Family

The Fuentes family is led by single-mother Rebecca who has three daughters—16-year-old Amaya, 12-year-old Victoria, and 10-year-old Olivia. Rebecca is a heavy-set woman in her late 40s. She speaks very quickly and with a raspy voice. Victoria is the focal student of the study as she attended South West Middle School. It took several visits before I realized that Rebecca and her husband Felipe were divorced. She would refer to him as her daughters' dad and speak about him, but I never saw him at their home. She would tell me he was at work though I never asked about him directly. After a couple of months she began to open up to me about their relationship. They are both from Mexico and do not have legal status. They met while they both worked at a chocolate factory in California and moved to Georgia where Rebecca's brother was living. They purchased a home and the girls were all born in Georgia. They attended public schools there until Rebecca decided to leave Felipe when they lost their home. She shared that he was verbally abusive and it took her a while to leave him because she thought he would get better at managing his anger. She took the girls to Arizona and he moved back to California. Amaya, Victoria, and Olivia attended public schools in Arizona for two years. They then moved to California after Victoria completed 5th grade so the girls could be closer to their father who lives with his brother about 30 miles from their current home. Felipe stopped by and visited the girls a couple of times when I was visiting and he attended Victoria's middle school graduation.

²⁶ Bilingual program models, especially "immersion" types are popping up rapidly in higher-income areas, though low-income Spanish-speaking families are not always offered these types of program unless there is a need for them to make up half the population so the models can function for the dominant families being served.

Rebecca is a “frutera” at the local Chase bank on the weekends, selling fruit to the bank customers. She watches her cousin’s two-year-old daughter during the day, and works as a housekeeper on Thursdays. She receives federal assistance for her three daughters and is able to provide them with food and the basics. To my knowledge, Rebecca’s ex-husband does not provide her with financial support for the girls. Most of the home observations were conducted when the family lived across the street from South West Middle. Their living space consisted of one cordoned off room in someone’s house. Rebecca paid \$600 a month in rent. To enter their living space, I needed to open a tall and black wrought iron gate on the side of the house to get to the backyard. The house was being shared by three families though two families entered their parts of the home from the back, the Fuentes family included. Rebecca and her girls made the most of their one bedroom and one bathroom section of the house, as they did not have access to the other parts of the home. The room had enough space for one full bed that the three sisters slept on, a small sofa that Rebecca slept on, and a small camping stove and microwave in the far left corner of the room where Rebecca cooked. The girls’ academic and attendance awards from school adorned the wall next to the bed. The family washed their dishes in the bathroom sink and shared the one closet in the room. Outside of the room was a small patio table and four chairs—the location where they ate their meals, completed homework, and hung out. This is where the majority of my observations were held though I have been inside their one-bedroom living space. Directly outside the room is a refrigerator where they kept their food though it wasn’t working all the time. There is a lime tree in the backyard and Rebecca would always send me home with a few. I did not video-record any of the home interactions at the Fuentes home, but I used audio-recordings to supplement my field notes and audio-recorded the interviews with Rebecca and Victoria. When I was present, Victoria and her sisters spoke to their mother in Spanish, but to each other in English. Rebecca shared how she doesn’t understand when the girls are speaking in English to each other.

Near the end of the study, Rebecca was able to get section 8 housing²⁷ after being on the waitlist for years. This allowed her to move her girls to a three-bedroom apartment a couple of miles away. She was ecstatic about this move and decided to sleep in the living room because she wanted Amaya, Victoria, and Olivia to have their own rooms. She explained how she would be able to see them when they walked down the hall to the bathroom or kitchen, something she wouldn’t be able to do if she were staying in one of the bedrooms. This new living space was located in a gated apartment complex so Rebecca has to walk outside to the gate and open it for me with her remote every time I came over or had to leave. During one of my observations in the Fuentes family’s new home, I met Rebecca’s grown daughter who lives in Mexico. Rebecca gave birth to this daughter when she was a teenager and left her with her parents to raise when she moved to the U.S. Her eldest daughter stayed over for a two-week visit during the study.

The Baez Family

The Baez family had been living in Palms for 13 years at the time of the study. Concha Baez, the mother of the family is a homemaker and takes care of her 2-year old granddaughter. Gilberto Baez has a work visa and is in the construction field. During the study he remodeled the family’s kitchen. Concha and Gilberto are undocumented immigrants from Guadalajara, Mexico—where they met and got married. They had their son Omar in Mexico before they moved to the U.S. Their sons Christian and Diego were born in the California. Diego was the

²⁷ Section 8 of the Housing Act of 1937 is a federally-run program that provides rental housing assistance to support over three million low-income families in the U.S.

focal student who attended South West Middle during the first year of the study and transitioned to the local high school the second year. Omar was in his mid-20s, married, and had a daughter who Concha watches during the day while Omar and his wife work. He met his wife while they were serving in the military together. Christian was 21 and was beginning a teacher-training program. Diego was 13 when the study began and was in 7th grade.

I spent most of my time with the Baez family, particularly Concha, in the neighborhood attending meetings, observing the CBET class she attended, attending Mass, and school or community-based meetings. I also conducted the interview with Concha in the living room and the interview with Diego at the kitchen table. The home observations were always conducted in the main living space so I never saw the bedrooms or bathrooms. They lived in a single-family home one block from South West Middle. Usually a utility truck, an older white van, and a newer SUV were parked in the driveway. A small 4-door car sedan was often parked in the front of the house, too and I saw Christian driving it on a couple of occasions. There was a metal screen door and a wooden door that I would knock on when I arrived for my visits. Usually the television or radio was on when I arrived. Concha often had the television turned on to a channel where the rosary²⁸ was being prayed and an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe displayed on the screen. The television was attached to the wall in the wide living room and a couch and love seat were positioned around it. A 24 X 36 inch framed picture of the family was on the wall facing the T.V. The picture was taken when Diego was five-years old. A hallway entrance that led to the bedrooms and bathrooms was on the right side of the television. On the far right side of the room there was a section that led to a glass sliding door where their large black terrier would come in and out of the room. A large tarp hung from the ceiling in the room that the glass doors opened up to which made it appear like a storage room. To the right of the doors was a small section adjacent to the kitchen where a large oak dining room table and six chairs were positioned. I sometimes sat at the table while Concha cooked dinner so we could chat.

I accommodated all of the families and only visited when they felt comfortable. I never stayed during dinnertime in the Baez home because Concha always asked me to do visits between the hours of 3 and 6pm. Therefore, I was able to observe the homework completion routine and interactions between the brothers. Gilberto was always in and out of the house during the observations and was usually in his construction uniform. Diego told me that his dad checks his homework after dinner, especially his math homework. Concha would also talk with me while she was preparing dinner and we often took walks around the neighborhood.

During the study the Baez family was at risk of losing their house. During the mortgage crisis, the home value dropped significantly, and the family was unable to make payments. On a Friday in the middle of Diego's 7th grade year, the bank put the house up for sale. People interested in purchasing it came by to see it but Concha and Gilbert told them they were not selling. They were in the middle of filling out paperwork for a loan modification program to save their home, but they had a problem when they couldn't find a notary public that would confirm Concha's signature because she did not have a U.S. identification card. Eventually, they found someone who would notarize their documents and were able to get a loan modification and stay in their home.

²⁸ The rosary is a Catholic prayer sequence that commemorates the life of Jesus Christ and involves the use of a string of prayer beads.

Researcher Positionality

The ethnographer, as a positioned subject, grasps certain human phenomenon better than others. He or she occupies a position or structural location and observes with a particular angle of vision.

---Rosaldo, 1986, p. 19

The systematic observing, recording, and analyzing of human behavior involved in conducting ethnographic research is a complex and sensitive empirical endeavor. Study findings are one slice of the “truth” of these families’ stories. They have been interpreted based on multiple factors, including my positionality as a researcher, that is, how my experiences and identities had an influence on the entire research process. My positionality as a researcher is influenced by my theoretical assumptions entering the field, my social identity (both perceived and lived), and professional roles. There were very explicit theoretical assumptions I held entering the field and throughout the data collection process based on previous academic studies, research, and my experiences working with Latino and Spanish-speaking families for over 10 years as an educator. A mix of sociocultural and cognitive theories on language and literacy processes and practices shaped my understanding of what I observed. Heath, Street, and Mills (2008) caution that the perspective of what is not occurring (e.g., academic talk, pre-literacy experiences) tends to frame much of the empirical research coming out of working class Latino homes, and as ethnographers, we must focus on what is occurring. Additionally, an in-depth exploration and close reading of literature on Spanish-speaking families and students, English Learners, and immigration phenomena also influenced my pro-additive education perspective that believes students and their families have rich and complex ways of using language and literacy in their lives that are not always validated within traditional schooling yet have the potential to be leveraged and built upon. From the onset of the study, I regarded the families as caring, capable, and agentive.

These theoretical assumptions played a role in the data collection and analysis process and undoubtedly influenced my interactions with the participants. Likewise, my role as an educator and advocate for these families influenced our relationships. Before entering the field I had worked in schools as a teacher, counselor, and after school program coordinator. Before entering academia, I taught for seven years at the elementary level where I repeatedly experienced internal tensions based on my observations of the ways in which the student body and their families—mostly African-American and recent Latino migrant communities—were regarded in terms of deficits or risk-factors. I noted how the maintenance of Spanish in the Latino community was under threat in an increasingly English-only context and reading and writing were taught under reductive notions of literacy via top-down scripted curricula in Language Arts and test prep boot camps. I observed how the students experienced the hyper-regulation of their physical behavior and mental contributions in and out of the classroom. I witnessed how tracking at the elementary level impacted students’ long-term educational opportunities, and experienced in my own classroom how a rigorous and balanced curriculum can get displaced in the name of standardization and high stakes accountability. These experiences clearly shaped my perspectives in the field.

Being transparent with my subject position helps clarify my role in the research process as an ethnographer. My position as a family literacy instructor in Marina Unified facilitated my access to parents and students and school events, and this advocate role trickled into the research

process. If there were opportunities to assist the families in any way, particularly after the study concluded, I did everything I could to reciprocate their time and openness to the study. For example, the Zuniga Family in Valley Unified experienced severe poverty during the time of the study. Immediately following the study, Rebecca Zuniga (mother), qualified for housing assistance and was able to move herself and three daughters from the one cordoned off room in someone's house to a three bedroom apartment. The family had no money for furniture, and I was able to provide them with used furniture with the help of my large nuclear and extended family. There were instances during the study as well where I tried to assist the families in regard to their socioeconomic and immigration status in any way I could.

I viewed my fieldwork as an opportunity to reflect on my own ways of worldmaking (Goodman, 1978) and recognized my background and identity as a valuable component of my research. To be as reflexive as possible during this investigative process, I systematically explored and reflected on my positionality through the writing of *identity memos* (Maxwell, 2005) before, during, and after data collection of the inquiry process as well as during the writing of the dissertation. This analytical writing process reminded me of the importance of acknowledging that my background and professional experiences had an influence on what I observed and that what I observed had an influence on me. Memo topics included a reflection on my educational experience as a student and teacher, my experience with heritage language loss, my ability (and inability) to be vulnerable around the focal families, my transition into motherhood during the study, and the relationships formed with the focal mothers. As Maxwell (2005) notes, these memos served as significant source of insights and validity checks and supported the theme building and coding process during the data analysis phase of the study.

Embracing Vulnerability in the Researcher-Participant Relationship

Crucial to any empirical investigation (and especially the sensitive participant observation process) is the recognition and safeguarding of the vulnerability of study participants. The focal families were considered particularly vulnerable because of the minors involved (middle school students) and societal factors that impacted the families—they were considered educationally and economically disadvantaged, and the parents did not have legal status (mixed status families). As an insider-outsider (Baca Zinn, 2001), I shared the focal participants' gender and ethnic identity as a mixed-Latina, but did not share the social class, educational level, and immigration status of the participants. These factors mediated the processes of gaining access, building rapport, establishing trust, and solidifying relationships between the researcher and participants.

Similar to Hong's (2011) notion of *layered ethnography* in which she highlights her evolving relationships with focal parents in her study, this study was grounded in the relationships formed between researcher and participants (particularly the focal mothers) over a 2-year period. Hong acknowledges the multiple layers of analysis and inquiry involved in a layered ethnography—an enterprise she locates at the crossroads of relationship, theory, and methodology. Likewise, the strong relationships that ensued during my fieldwork deepened my insight and helped capture the complexity of the home-school relationship. Through the writing of analytic memos (including identity memos) during and after data collection, the reflexive practice of sharing oneself as researcher reoccurred throughout the study to some degree with all four of the participating families. While participants allowed me into their home and shared details of their daily lives, I exposed a few of the areas in which I felt vulnerable (e.g., becoming a mother during the study, learning the language of the study [Spanish] as a second language)

and disclosed information about my personal life when appropriate throughout the process. This shared narrative space undoubtedly influenced what I observed, yet this back and forth sharing allowed for a deeper and more meaningful exchange of ideas and beliefs that related to the study focus of education but also centered on themes of loving and living more generally. Aligned with humanistic anthropology that acknowledges observer vulnerability (Behar, 1996), this process became a methodological tool of *embracing researcher vulnerability*. Building on Lincoln's (1995) notion of reciprocity and intense sharing where all lives involved in the inquiry process are open to examination, this exchange can help establish reciprocal relationships of mutual respect and appreciation of the human condition (Paris, 2011). This method recognizes researcher positionality as a privileged space, though this back and forth process of sharing can help mitigate the power imbalance to strengthen both the inquiry process and study findings, rebutting the need for a detached observer often promoted in qualitative inquiry. Embracing the researcher's vulnerability became an integral part of the ethnographic process in this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

Latina Mothers and the English Learner Advisory Committee: The Process of Withdrawing in Marina Unified

This chapter reports on the ethnographic data collected in Marina Unified, foregrounding the parent involvement journey of two first-generation immigrant mothers from Mexico with daughters in Marina Unified (Justa Garcia and Sofia Romero²⁹). It begins with an exploration of the official policies around parent involvement and the discourse and ideologies that surround the district families, followed by a description of the ways in which the focal mothers, Justa and Sofia, became indoctrinated into the policies and practices of U.S. public schools within the context of Marina Unified and eventually take on leadership positions within the school and district. The analysis investigates how these leadership roles are pivotal in the mothers' ongoing opportunities and day-to-day decision-making to be involved in school-sanctioned ways, and the journey involved in which they experience both empowerment and disempowerment along their parent involvement trajectory. Immigrant parents, and non-dominant parents in general, are involved in their children's educational lives in many rich and powerful ways, inside schools, their homes, and communities. This chapter targets school involvement as one domain of their participation in their daughters' education. Therefore this chapter examines educators' ideologies around school-level parent involvement of first-generation Latino families and the ways they support and encourage Latino parents to be involved on school grounds, followed by an analysis of Justa and Sofia's involvement opportunities within the schools to highlight 1) the ways in which they became known as "involved parents," 2) the daily decision-making process on how and when to be involved, and 3) how their parental involvement journeys were disrupted when their daughters entered middle school. The focus of the analysis is on Justa's development as a parent leader at Guadalupe's school, including the ways in which she fostered Sofia's involvement in school-sanctioned activities.

Naming and Labeling Parents in Marina Unified

Marina Unified is located in an ethnically and economically diverse town in northern California that voluntarily desegregates students by race and class and makes explicit efforts to engage parents as equal partners in the educational process. Through an examination of official district documents and interview transcripts with focal administrators and teachers, there is evidence that parents go explicitly and implicitly named depending on their race, class, and immigration status. There is also indication that diverse parents go unnamed in official documents that delineate district parent involvement policy, but explicitly named once the policy gets put into practice. This is apparent in parent involvement policies and initiatives in Marina Unified which houses a department dedicated to home and school relations—the *Office of Family and Community Partnerships*. In the district's Parent-Student Handbook that is sent to all families, a description of the department's goals and duties are included (see image 4.1 below).

²⁹ Pseudonyms are used for all names of people and places in this study.

Image 4.1

1.14. Office of Family and Community Partnerships

Research has consistently shown that when schools and families work together to support learning, everyone benefits: students do better in school and in life, parents become empowered, schools get better, communities grow stronger. To that effect, the Office of Family and Community Partnerships aims to build school, home and community partnerships to establish more inclusive and culturally informed support networks for parents, encourage parent advocacy and promote parental involvement in their children's education.

The Office of Family and Community Partnerships focuses on coordinating and facilitating parenting classes, educational workshops and leadership trainings to equip parents with necessary information, skills, and ability to effectively navigate the school system, support their children's success in school and engage them in school leadership opportunities. Staff also provides direct support to parents and caregivers in need of resources or information to address concerns about their children and conduct district-wide parent outreach efforts for events and programs.

The handbook utilizes research to reinforce the mainstream, now common sense notion that when schools and families partner up, students, schools, and communities benefit (Epstein, 1992). The focus on “culturally informed support networks” identifies non-dominant families as a target of these “partnerships,” though culturally and linguistically diverse families go unnamed in the description. This provides the sense that family and parent outreach efforts are intended for all families within the district. The notion that “parents become empowered” when schools and families work together to support learning supports the notion that when parents participate in school-sanctioned activities (i.e., PTA membership, Parent-Teacher conferences, homework monitoring, school fundraising) they will then have the confidence and agency to engage in their children's educational experiences. This thinking suggests that parents need schools in order to feel a sense of power, and this power is generated within the institution of schools and the social actors within them. Because race, class, and linguistic backgrounds are not mentioned in this description of the *Office of Family and Community Partnerships*, it is also assumed that these ideological notions of school and family will carry over into the implementation of the parenting classes, educational workshops, and leadership trainings, so that they are offered to all parents. By not naming the target group, the belief communicated is that all parents are “in need of such interventions.

However, in an interview with Lupe, the manager of the *Office of Family and Community Partnerships*, it appears that not all district families are targeted in their efforts. When asked about her role as the manager of the department, the middle-aged Latina, echoing the mission statement above, stated that she and her colleagues reach out to Latino Spanish-speaking and African-American parents specifically to “*inform them, educate them, and empower them, and provide advocacy tools so they can help their kids*” (Interview Transcript_Lupe_032411). In contrast to the official document above, she explicitly names the parents on the receiving end of the *Office of Family and Community Partnerships* outreach efforts. Investigation of district-level official documents, including fliers of classes and workshops and calendars of monthly events, revealed that the target audience was explicitly listed. Half of the workshops listed Spanish-speaking parents (e.g., *FLNE-Familias Latinas por Nuestros Estudiantes*) or English Learner Advisory Committee (ELAC)³⁰ members (i.e., parents of English Learners) as those that should attend. As described by Principal Carlson at Sofia's daughter's middle school, the FLNE

³⁰ The *English Learner Advisory Committee* is a group of parents, staff, and community members specifically designated to advise school officials on English Learner program services as mandated by the U.S. Department of Education.

program is “a six-week parent education course that generally helps parents who are newer to the system. Many of our families didn’t go through the system here in the United States for their education, and so they’re not as familiar with quarters versus semesters and finals and report cards and all those sort of things that someone who’s gone through the system would take for granted. And so FLNE helps educate families in those areas. But it also then starts to talk about building the bridge to college and to vocations and what not. And so there’s a six-week course that parents go through. And at the end of completing the course they do get a certificate” (Interview Transcript_Carlson_071111). There are also programs that do not target Spanish-speaking immigrant parents directly, with the target audience stated as the community at large or all parents. About 30% of these programs are offered to the general population, but those same fliers included race in the title of the workshop (e.g., *African-American Family Forums*, *Critical Points for Black Adolescents*). A couple of the workshops appeared to be race-neutral (e.g., *Family Engagement and Empowerment Institute*, *Parent Leadership Workshop*), though it is inherent in the district’s marketing of these workshops and trainings that the families are targeted by their culture and language, potentially encouraging more home-school interactions, but running the risk of segregating families as they get involved in track-based parent education programs and committees (Gartrell, 1995).

Another example of discursive parental distinctions was made in an interview with Mrs. Stevenson, a 6th grade teacher in the dual language bilingual program at Cooper Academy where Guadalupe (Justa’s daughter) attends middle school. Mrs. Stevenson is a White middle-aged woman whose own children went through the dual language program at Cooper. When asked about student demographics in the bilingual program Mrs. Stevenson responded with³¹:

Most of the Spanish-speaking kids are first generation citizens. So most of their parents I think have immigrated here and were not born here. And most of the kids were born here. And there are exceptions on either end. But it’s rare for us so far to have parents who were born here. But it’s not super rare to have undocumented kids or newly immigrated Spanish-speaking kids.

Mrs. Stevenson begins by referring to the Spanish-speaking students in terms of their immigration status—first-generation citizens—indexing the citizenship status of both the students and their parents. While not stating explicitly the immigration status of the parents—that they are in the U.S. without legal documentation to reside here—she is very much referring to them as well with that initial statement about the students. She continues by making it clear that these parents were not born in the U.S. (another indication that they do not have birthright citizenship), so they may not have legal status. The parents’ country of origin is not mentioned, nor their race or ethnicity in general. The Latino immigrant parents spoken about represent roughly 50% of the participating families in the program and are initially regarded in terms of their immigration status and the dominant language they speak. She continues by referring to the other 50% of students.

The other half tends to be pretty highly educated families of English speakers choosing to immerse their kids in a Spanish bilingual program. So there is just an inherent kind of education gap that we start out with. Because the English speakers who are kind of

³¹ Direct quotes from interview and other audio-recorded transcripts are italicized and in bold throughout the text. When the quote is in Spanish, the English translation is provided directly below the quote (italicized but not in bold).

brave enough and willing to go for it, I think already have a lot of confidence that they can support their kid in a second language. Either they feel that either they already know some Spanish or they feel confident academically themselves. And the demographics show definitely that their parents are mostly all college educated.

In this interview excerpt above, Mrs. Stevenson fails to mention that the parents of the English-dominant students are from largely White middle- to upper-class families, and instead shifts the framing of parents with her use of descriptors. No longer referring to nationality, she speaks of these parents in terms of their education level. It is unclear, however, if their “choice” to enroll their children in a Spanish-English bilingual program is related to their high levels of education, or their “bravery,” “willingness,” and “confidence”—all descriptors not used when describing the choice of Spanish-speaking parents (e.g., to enroll their children in a bilingual program despite larger political debates around language use or even to immigrate to the U.S. despite the personal and social risks involved). Mrs. Stevenson then shifts back to the Spanish-speaking parents framing their personhood in terms of economics.

If a kid is [from] a family of a parent who wasn't born here—a Spanish-speaking parent—they usually qualify for free and reduced lunch. So most of our Spanish-speaking kids are from families that are struggling economically.

Demonstrating her awareness that a family’s qualification to receive a subsidized lunch is indicative of low socioeconomic status, she returns to defining the Spanish-speaking parents in terms of social characteristics, while completely avoiding doing the same for the English-speaking parents. While education level could serve as a proxy for class, her focus for the dominant parents in the program relate to virtues, rather than social characteristics. Though Mrs. Stevenson was asked to speak about the demographics of the students in the bilingual program, she utilized very distinct descriptors depending on which group of students she was referring to—the Spanish or the English-speakers. The table below (4.1) illustrates how she used labels of social status to largely describe the demographics of the Latino families, but only used descriptors of virtues when describing the White families in the program.

Table 4.1

Type of Description	Spanish-Speaking Families	English-Speaking Families
<i>Labels of Social Status</i>	Immigration Status Socioeconomic Class	College-Educated Socioeconomic Class
<i>Descriptors of Virtues and Agency</i>	X	Brave Willing Confident Choose to be in program

Another example where parents and children are implicitly named is illustrated in an interview with Ms. Spencer, the African-American principal at Garfield Elementary, where both Justa’s and Sofia’s daughters attended for elementary school. The week before this interview was conducted, I attended the school’s Back to School night because Justa was assisting with the child care provided by the school so that parents could visit their children’s classrooms and meet their teachers. Before the classroom visits, all of the parents attended a brief assembly in the

auditorium to hear the principal speak and for her to introduce the teachers before they headed to their classrooms to wait for the parents. The principal's presentation is important to note as it provides a context for some of her comments on accountability in an interview with me that will get taken up below.

After Principal Spencer introduces the teachers at the beginning of Back to School night, she shifts her presentation towards accountability and data. She tells the parents how she met with students and asked them about the CST (CA state test) and was shocked to hear that they didn't know what that was even though they had been taking the test for a few years. She said that last year they had worked with a consultant from the district and made it a point to talk about data and test scores. The plan was to continue with monitoring like last year, and that all students had data books and calendars because they needed to plan. There were systems in place so that students could monitor themselves. She stated that the students should be able to answer questions like "do I come prepared?" and "do I have the materials that I need?" She said the goal was for students to be at least "proficient" by the time they got to middle school and to be prepared to take the CAHSEE (California High School Exit Examination) and pass it by the 10th grade. She shared how this year their Academic Performance Index (API) went up 45 points to 783 and that the goal is for them to pass the 800 mark right away. Many parents clapped as she spoke and seemed to approve of all of this talk on accountability and data. The literacy coach then took the microphone to translate this portion of Principal Spencer's presentation into Spanish. She laughed and before switching over to Spanish, stated, "We are learning to love data!"

This talk about data is a symptom of the accountability movement present in current educational reform, starting with President Bush's *No Child Left Behind* legislation and continuing with President Obama's *Race to the Top* initiative. Ms. Spencer shares the school's Academic Performance Index (API) with the parents because the school has increased their score from the previous year. The California Department of Education (2013) refers to the API as 'the cornerstone of California's Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999 that measures the academic performance and growth of schools on a variety of academic measures.' Schools that are designated as in Program Improvement (PI status) are especially concerned with their API scores, and Garfield was in PI status at the time of this dissertation study. As dictated by the U.S. Department of Education's *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)*, it is only the Title I funded schools³² that are at risk of being labeled as in need of improvement. Schools that receive Title I funding are regulated by NCLB to continue to receive funding. Schools must make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as determined by their individualized goals for students' test scores on standardized achievement tests which depends on student demographics and a school's student subgroups (U.S. Department of Education). Principal Spencer recalls a conversation with a parent that specifically asked her about her speech about the school's API at the Back to School Night event.

Yeah, what I want is, and I have to clarify this for parents, because one parent came to me today and said, I know the API and testing, but I just really want my child to have a good education. And when I talk about what our children need in diversity, well, your

³² Title I: *Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged*, is a provision of the ESEA of 1965, to allocate funding to schools and districts with at least 35% of the student population deemed "disadvantaged" as determined by low-income indicators (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

child may be doing fine. Your child's gonna graduate from high school. I have some children who may not. That's who I'm talking about.

Garfield Elementary is a diverse school across both race and class lines, but this reported conversation between parent and principal never explicitly mentions race and class as issues in the broader “API and testing” debates inherent in the current educational reform movement. Still, it is apparent that race and class play a large role in the reported conversation. The parent in question speaks English (as Principal Spencer is a monolingual English speaker), is not considered diverse, and understands the politics of education reform and the limits of standardized testing for a “good education.” Principal Spencer makes it clear, it is not his/her child that she is concerned with as s/he will graduate from high school. It is the “children in diversity” she is concerned with, and echoes the federal government’s push for the educational focus to be on the schools’ subgroups that are not *proficient* on annual state exams. “In diversity” is used here to index race, class, and potentially the home language of non-dominant groups. The next section of this chapter explores how Latino family engagement is addressed and spoken about by educators at the elementary school in Marina Unified where Justa and Sofia’s parent involvement journey began as parents of English Learners³³.

Parents of English Learners: Justa and Sofia Get Involved

Garfield is one of eleven elementary schools located in Marina Unified. The school was relatively diverse at the time of the study—with roughly 25% of the school’s population comprised of Latino students, a large majority learning English as a second language. Garfield offers both traditional English-only classes with English Language Development support and a Dual Language Immersion Bilingual Program for Spanish-speaking students. Ms. Spencer, the African-American school principal, has worked hard in engaging Latino families in the schooling process, and when asked in an interview about the Latino families in the school, she stated that she has mostly been in contact with the ones who have children in the bilingual program. When referring to Latino parent involvement in the school, Ms. Spencer speaks of the English Learner Advisory Committee (ELAC)—a group of parents, staff, and community members specifically designated to advise school officials on English Learner program services as mandated by the U.S. Department of Education.

I would say at least for the past four years we've had a high participation of Latino parents, and again, predominantly based on the participation in the English Learner Advisory Committee.

Justa, one of the focal mothers of the study, met Principal Spencer through ELAC. Justa is a Spanish dominant speaker, and was not familiar with the structures of the school system in the U.S. when she began her parent involvement journey at Garfield, but conditions and timing were auspicious for Justa. Her husband Mariano worked full time, but Justa’s workload cleaning homes was a part time gig. Spanish was seen as a language asset at Garfield and one of the two target languages of the bilingual program. Her daughter’s first grade teacher, Celia Vargas,

³³ *English Learners* are students who have been identified as being limited in their English proficiency as determined by a political process that involves standardized language testing and tracking of students into specialized English classes.

welcomed and encouraged parents to volunteer in her bilingual classroom, and with the flexibility in her work schedule, Justa was immediately able to participate in classroom activities, reading books in Spanish to students, and providing small group and individual support to students. She was happy to spend her free time in her daughter's bilingual classroom. Principal Spencer mentions Celia early on in our interview when asked about Latino parents.

We also had a strong participation because we had a teacher, Celia Vargas, in first grade, who before I came, started the celebration of Latino culture by having the dance performances. And so I think maybe even the year I came aboard we bought all the costumes...and so since Celia had gotten that community together for that performance... So that was a piece of getting families involved and doing outreach in a way they could connect with.

Celia worked closely with the school's Latino community, encouraging Justa and other Spanish-speaking parents with children in the bilingual program to be involved at the school level. Because of her bilingual language abilities and Latina background, she served as one of the school's cultural brokers, facilitating the process of Latino family participation³⁴ via a Latino cultural dance performance that involved 'costumes.' Perhaps this is one way to conduct Latino parent outreach, that is, to begin with cultural connections the way Principal Spencer describes. Previous parent involvement studies have examined the ways in which Latino families' language and culture are the focus of parent outreach or engagement efforts such as through cultural performance through dance or translation (Galindo & Medina, 2009), the use of *dichos* (proverbs or saying) as a pedagogical strategy for cultural connections (Sánchez, Plata, Grosso, & Leird, 2010), or culturally responsive family literacy programs that utilize bilingual literature focused on themes of *familia*, immigration, and Latin American holidays (see for example *The Latino Family Literacy Project*, 2012).

During the same time period that Celia was getting parents involved through cultural dance performances, the English Learner Advisory Committee was almost non-existent. Principal Spencer shared how during her first year as principal, they had a small number of parents attending meetings.

My first year we probably had maybe four parents who were involved, and one parent who had spearheaded it. She was quasi-involved. She had two sons that were here and they've since graduated at least four years ago.

It is an education code requirement that parents of English Learners make up at least the same percentage of ELAC membership as English Learners in the school (California Department of Education). During the time of this interview, Garfield had an enrollment of 318 students in grades K-5 and 104 of these students were considered English Learners (76% of the English Learners were Spanish-speaking). Therefore, according to the provisions of California Education Code³⁵ the ELAC committee at Garfield was required to have parents of English Learners make up at least 33% of the parent membership in ELAC. Principal Spencer does not bring this fact up during the interview, but she does note a change in the number of parents participating in ELAC

³⁴ Sofia's daughter was in the English-only program and was not part of this initial group of parents.

³⁵ *California Education Code*, sections 35147 (c), 52176 (b), and (c), 62002.5, and 64001 (a).

after her first year—attributing the jump to both the Latino cultural dance performances that served as a springboard in getting parents involved in ELAC and Justa’s leadership skills.

We grew when Justa came onboard. And we started looking at the funds, and we started thinking about – and she recruited people—we started thinking about how can we use the money, and we used our money to provide mathematics workshops for the families. And we did that two years in a row. So they were well attended. We really tailored the funds based on what the families thought that they needed. And Justa was probably the president of ELAC, probably up until maybe Guadalupe’s fifth grade year...so through the performance and through parent leadership, and then parent leadership having a say in how we spend the money, how they can support the children with homework, again, the workshops. I think that there is a sense of ownership and connection to the school. Our ELAC, as I told you before, we celebrated the birth of children. We celebrated birthdays. It wasn’t – it was, again, like a student-centered classroom, this is a parent-centered committee.

Principal Spencer also reports in this excerpt how as a collective, the ELAC committee decided how to use the funding allocated from the federal government for the education of English Learners. She indicates that decisions were made based on what the parents “thought that they needed.” There was a sense of ownership and connection to the school that was evident to her and appeared to be the case in my observations of Justa and Sofia at Garfield. Spencer compared ELAC to a student-centered classroom, referring to a philosophy of education where students are encouraged to participate in the learning process at all times and the teacher plays the role of facilitator, guiding and directing students’ learning (Jone, 2007). ELAC parents at Garfield played a role in decision-making that directly involved their experiences with the school, as well as their children’s experiences. Sofia was a member of ELAC and Justa played a significant role as the leader of this group of Latino parents.³⁶ Oscar Morales, a Latino 5th grade bilingual teacher who was the ELAC teacher representative for a couple of years, shared with me in an interview how he and Justa worked to plan agendas for the monthly meetings and facilitate discussions on how to best serve the English Learners in the school. Justa’s knowledge base about English Learner parents’ rights and duties as part of ELAC was facilitated by district-level trainings she attended as the ELAC President. This sense of leadership, however, did not carry over into more traditional parent involvement spaces within the walls of Garfield Elementary.

Latino Parents and Garfield’s PTA

Explored in the previous chapter, Epstein and colleagues (2002), propose a parent involvement model that includes 6 facets of involvement. One of the facets includes ‘decision-making’ which includes the quintessential parent involvement practice of attending Parent Teacher Association meetings. The National PTA (with the motto “*everychild.onevoice.*”) outlines the role of local PTAs at the elementary and middle school:

PTAs serve as a type of forum where parents, teachers, administrators, and other concerned adults discuss ways to promote quality education, strive to expand the arts, encourage community involvement, and work for a healthy environment and safe neighborhoods.

³⁶ The ELAC at Garfield was comprised of all Spanish-speaking parents though there were some English Learner parents at the school that were not Latino.

Yet traditional Parent Involvement Structures (TPIS), such as Back-to-School Night and the Parent Teacher Association meetings, have been criticized as insufficient ways to engage families of color (S. Auerbach, 2009). Previous research has recognized the PTA as a space dominated by middle- and upper- class English-speakers in diverse schools³⁷, often where linguistic minority parents are not provided translators (Jasis, & Ordonez-Jasis, 2004-2005), or African-American parents are tracked into parent involvement spaces that do not include the PTA (Gartrell, 1995). There was a small effort at Garfield by some of the dominant parents in the PTA to recruit Latino parents to join, noticing an absence of this ethnic group despite the large number of Latino students in the school. Sofia and Justa, however, reported not feeling comfortable at the meetings once they attended—sitting in a corner with a translator and not expected to participate during their first attempt to engage. Justa and Sofia’s experience with the school’s PTA mirrored similar instances of Spanish-speaking parents reporting that they felt like second-class parents at PTA meetings (Carreon, Drake, & Barton, 2005). There were seven other Latino parents that attended a couple of the meetings this year, but they also decided to stop making an effort to attend PTA meetings. When I asked the school principal if she saw Latino parents at the PTA meetings she responded with:

No, and you know, personally, it’s so interesting that people seem to think that everybody should be part of the PTA because you have to say, okay, if I go to the PTA meeting, why am I going? What’s my goal? And most of our PTA has been about fundraising. Which our ELAC committee, you know, I’m gonna be able to speak the first language. I’m gonna have my say. I am gonna be heard. What I say is gonna be validated by my peers. It’s really hard. Because there’s a dominant group, and people want to be a part of something they’re real connected to...I go to PTA I’m an outlier.

Principal Spencer confirmed that the Latino parents were not attending the PTA meetings, but they were not necessarily expected to attend. Much of the focus of the PTA has been around fundraising—a way for upper class parents to subsidize their children’s public school education instead of sending them to private school. Fundraising is a parent involvement practice stratified by social status and Principal Spencer implies that Latino parents would not be interested in (or perhaps not capable of) participating in this form of school participation. She acknowledges the outsider/outlier experience parents may feel at PTA meetings and suggests that Latino parents have a sense of belonging when they are active in ELAC. Not surprisingly the ELAC became known as the Latino PTA at Garfield, reducing the ELAC members to involved “Latino” parents, while the PTA members go unmarked.

Justa’s Story: The Process of Becoming a Leader

Justa shared a lengthy narrative with me about her experience as an involved parent in the district, despite not being involved in the PTA, and specifically details her participation with the English Learner Advisory Committee. Told to me on a fall afternoon in October of 2011, Justa’s narrative highlights many years of her parent involvement trajectory. I met her at Garfield where she worked as a teacher’s aide and after school care provider. We had planned a home observation but Justa forgot that she volunteered to help set up a display in the main wing for Día

³⁷ In some low-income segregated schools like Southwest Middle in Valley Unified, the PTA does not exist.

de los Muertos³⁸ at Cooper Academy. We walked to Cooper from Garfield instead of heading to her home. We arrived at the middle school as the sun was setting. No one was around as it was after 6pm, except for an African-American male wearing a blue custodian uniform. He stood outside of the front gate as though he was waiting for us. He said hello, recognized Justa, and brought us through the gate and into the hallway where the front office is located. I noticed black fabric draped over books in a display case in the hallway with the beginning of an arch made of bright colored paper flowers. Justa explained how she and Guadalupe and another student with her father helped the day before to get the Día de los Muertos altar started. We entered a large storage room across from the unfinished altar that had boxes spread throughout, with a rectangular-shaped table in the center of the room and a refrigerator in the corner. The room seemed like a make shift work or break room. Justa headed towards a large box with “FRAGILE” written on it. She read it in Spanish (pronouncing “g” with an English “h” sound—*frágil*) and explained to me that there were breakable items in the box. We took out candles, glass figures, wax skulls, and materials to make paper flowers to add to an altar in the hallway display case. During back to school night held earlier the previous month, Justa brought me to the same display case to show me a model of Egyptian Pyramids that Guadalupe turned in for a school project that was being showcased with other projects on Egypt from students in Mrs. Stevenson’s 6th grade bilingual World History Class. She was very proud that Guadalupe’s work was one of the chosen projects on display in the hall for everyone to see. She explained how she and Mariano helped Guadalupe with the project and it was a family effort. The front office door is adjacent to the display case, which is located in a prominent location in the school so students, staff, and parents see what is on display as they walk by each day.

Justa and I sat down at the table in the center of the storage room and she explained to me how to make the paper flowers so we could finish the floral arch. We used bright-colored tissue paper, ribbon, and scissors to make a dozen more flowers. As we worked together on the flowers, she began telling me about her experiences with the English Learner Advisory Committee at the middle school level. I asked her if I could audio-record our conversation with my phone. She agreed. I didn’t do much talking during this interaction as Justa was passionate and fluid with her story. I chimed in occasionally with a reiteration to make sure I was clear or a paraphrase to demonstrate that I was listening. Much of what she said today I had heard before throughout the last year, but she framed it into a way that really explained her parent involvement journey and socialization into a parent leader at Garfield through her relationships with key school officials and becoming involved in ELAC.

Much of Justa’s narrative goes back and forth in time, explaining her involvement as a parent of an English Learner with many flashbacks to her time as the ELAC President at Garfield. Justa began her narrative by telling me about the first ELAC meeting she attended at the middle school (Cooper Academy). Lupe, the newly hired Manager of Family and Community Partnerships at the district level, led the meeting and asked the group of parents if they knew what ELAC was about. Most people didn’t know, but Justa and one other mother raised their hands. Justa explained to me that she didn’t want to talk in front of everyone because

³⁸ Día de los Muertos is a national holiday in Mexico (and celebrated all over the world) that coincides with two Catholic days of observance—All Souls’ Day and All Saints’ Day. During the holiday, people gather together to celebrate and remember the lives of those that have died by praying for them and decorating altars or graves with *ofrendas* (offerings). The holiday recognizes the connection the living have with their loved ones that have passed, honoring the continuity of life.

she was embarrassed. She didn't have a personal relationship with any of the parents present at the meeting like she did at Garfield. She said she finally got up the nerve to tell the group of middle school parents what ELAC was and about some of its functions. She explained how she later told Lupe that she was trained at the district level five years ago with this American woman—Cynthia—who was now retired, that gave them a lot of advice and helped them tremendously (with ELAC). The training adhered to the following requirements set forth by the California Department of Education:

The district shall provide for all ELAC members:

- 1. Appropriate training and materials to assist each member carry out his or her legally required advisory responsibilities.*
- 2. Training planned in full consultation with ELAC members.*
- 3. Economic Impact Aid-Limited English Proficient and/or district funds may be used to cover costs of training and attendance of ELAC members. This may include costs for child care, translation services, meals, transportation, training cost, and other reasonable expenses.*

In the transcript excerpt below, Justa describes the support and training Cynthia provided during the district-level workshops and some of the information Justa learned in the process of being trained as a mother of an English Learner.

Ella era buenísima. Ella te daba todo lo que tenías que hacer—cuanto tenía dinero tu escuela, cuanto perdió y como podíamos ayudar a nuestra escuela. Y ya ves, que hay Título, uno Título no sé que, que no me he podido aprender. Pero unos sí. Entonces decía, “hablen con sus padres de familia y díganles los Títulos que les benefician porque hay dinero en la escuela que se guarda, y hay dinero que se tiene que gastar. Si no, no se regresa. Y hay dinero que pueden usarlo ustedes, como ELACs. Cada niño por ejemplo, cada niño que esta aprendiendo inglés recibe un dinero. Ustedes como padres tienen que ver como lo van a utilizar.” Todo aprendimos.

She was excellent. She gave you everything you need—how much money your school had, how much it lost and how we can help our school. And you see, there is a Title, I don't know what Title, that I haven't been able to learn. But some yes. Then she was saying, “talk with your parents and tell them the Titles that benefit them. Because there is money in the school that you save, and there is money that you have to spend. If not, they do not return it. And there is money that you can use, as ELACs. Each child for example, each child that is learning English receives some money. You as parents have to see how they are going to use it.” All of this we learned.

Cynthia trained the ELAC leaders from each school within the district and they were expected to disseminate that information to the parent members of ELAC at their individual school sites. Justa was very influenced by Cynthia's training as the ELAC President of Garfield Elementary. She references federal guidelines she learned—“a Title”—most likely referring to Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act which provides supplemental funding to school districts to implement instructional programs that target English language development and proficiency for English Learners so they can meet the state's academic standards (California Department of Education). ELAC members are to advise the *School Site Council* (SSC), principal, and staff on the development of the *Single Plan for Student Achievement* (SPSA), advise the principal and staff on the school's program for ELs, receive training materials and training to carry out legal responsibilities, and elect a District English Learner Advisory

Committee (DELAC) Representative (California Department of Education). That is, there are federal guidelines in place that the district and schools must follow to continue receiving monies for English Learners. Cynthia's work at the district was evidence that Marina Unified was in compliance in terms of the operation of ELACs at least at the district level. Justa took her role as President of Garfield's ELAC very seriously, and was able and willing to uphold her end of the bargain—she returned to her school and shared this information with other ELAC members. During this part of the narrative, Justa spoke with confidence and with a sense of accomplishment. She learned important information that affected Guadalupe's education, as well as the education of other children learning English. Her role as a leader at this point in her parent involvement trajectory was further formalized, increasing her cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) as she navigated the U.S. public school system. She continued to speak highly of Cynthia's efforts to prepare the ELAC parents.

Me encantaba ella porque había mucha comunicación con nosotros. Ella nos daba papeles para que se los daremos a nuestro comité. “Muéstrenselos y explíqueles sobre el examen CELDT. Que platicáramos con ellos, y la importancia que tiene ese examen en el futuro porque muchas mamas no saben que les perjudican como en la high school”...nos decía que era mejor que lo pasen y nos explicaba muchas cosas. Cuando yo estaba en ELAC llegaba a mi comité y les enseñaba y les decía.

I loved her because she had a great deal of communication with us. She gave us papers that we will give to our committee. “Show them the papers and explain to them the CELDT test.” That we will talk with them, and the importance that this exam has on the future because a lot of moms don't know that the tests can harm them like in high school...She was telling us it was better to pass it and she explained to us a lot of things. When I was in ELAC I came to my committee and taught and told them.

Justa shared how she was very fond of Cynthia because she had a lot of communication with the ELAC parents, provided them with handouts to bring back to their schools and give to their committees, and advised them to show the handouts to parents. She urged them to explain the CELDT test, and the importance of passing the CELDT test before they get to high school, as it will hurt them academically if they do not. The CELDT³⁹ is the annual assessment administered to students designated as English Learners (also known as Limited English Proficient through NCLB) which are defined as individuals: 1) aged 3 to 21 who are enrolled or preparing to enroll in an elementary school or secondary school, 2) who were not born in the United States or whose native language is a language other than English, 3) who come from an environment where a language other than English has had a significant impact on the individual's level of English language proficiency, and 4) whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language may be sufficient to deny the individual the ability to meet the state's proficiency level of achievement, the ability to successfully achieve in the classroom where the language of instruction is English, or the opportunity to participate fully in society (P.L. 107–110 9101(25)).

³⁹ The CELDT serves three purposes: to identify new students who are English Learners in kindergarten through grade twelve, monitor EL students' progress in learning English, and to help decide when EL students can be re-classified as fluent English proficient (FEP) (Xiong & Zhou, 2006).

Justa also foregrounded the positive experiences she had with ELAC to set up a huge shift in her narrative as a parent leader—recalling what would later be known as the decline of the ELACs—providing me as the researcher with an understanding of the events and micro intricacies of her decision making as an “involved” parent once her daughter transitioned to middle school.

Cuando Padres Se Retiran: Justa’s Withdrawal

Justa chronicled her experience with ELAC across multiple years, highlighting focal illustrations of her development as a parent leader, her role and contributions to ELAC as the parent of an English Learner, and her feelings of dissonance along the way. She suggested that the tensions that arise throughout are also reflective of the experience and sentiments of many Latino parents in the district. There are times in her narrative where she explains what other parents were feeling and uses a mix of direct speech—when someone’s speech is framed as dialogue in another’s voice (Tannen, 1989) and reported speech—paraphrased speech of another person. Though the context and her choice of words may have changed, Justa uses direct and indirect speech to echo what other Latino parents have said directly to her or in her presence as they chose to become less involved in ELAC. She begins this shift in the narrative by explaining how Cynthia, a focal school official, left the district.

Ya que Cynthia se fue todo se fue para abajo todos los ELACs...No había la misma confianza con otra persona porque esta persona era muy fuerte de caracter. Entonces se fueron retirando muchos padres. Yo me quede porque a mi me interesa mi hija como le puedo ayudar y ayudar a otros papas. Como, tengo muchos papas que conozco. Y decían, “ni va a servir tengo que saber.” Eramos como tres o cuatro ya. A todos no les gustaba la actitud que tenia ella, “deje de involucrarme en los ELACs.”

Cynthia left and all of the ELACs went downhill...there was not the same trust with the other person because the other person was very strong in character. So then a lot of the parents were withdrawing. I stayed because to me it interests me how I can help my daughter and help other parents. Like, I have a lot of parents that I know. And they say, “I have to know it’s not going to work out.” We were like three or four at that time. Everyone did not like the attitude that she had, “I am done getting involved in the ELACs.”

Justa begins this shift by explaining how when Cynthia retired, the ELACs went downhill. The district hired another person to take her place, but the parents did not trust her. She had a strong character and according to Justa, many of the parents didn’t like her attitude. It is in this excerpt that she first mentions that a lot of the parents were withdrawing from ELAC—for many of them, the only school-sanctioned way of participating in their children’s education. The Spanish verb *retirarse* means “to move oneself away from” or “remove oneself from” when referring to a place (in this case, the school). When referring to an activity (e.g., the practice of parent involvement), *retirarse* means “to retire oneself from.” The ELAC parents committed to school-sanctioned ways of being involved in their children’s education, but after feeling empowered with decision-making that impacted their children’s education, they withdrew from participating in this way. Justa noted the sudden drop in parents coming to the ELAC meetings at her school site and she believes it was due to the new woman at the district with the strong character.

Throughout Justa’s anecdote, she speaks on behalf of parents, includes herself within the group of parents, and at times, distances herself from the parents. In the excerpt above, she notes that she decided to stay involved (though others were retreating) because she was interested in how to help her daughter and other parents—*tengo muchos papas que conozco*. Justa doesn’t simply mean that she knows a lot of parents personally, but rather feels a sense of duty to help these parents as someone that benefited from the official district-level training she received on the education of their children as English Learners. She speaks for the other parents when she says, *Ni va a servir tengo que saber (I have to know it’s not going to work out)* and *Deje de involucrarme en los ELACs (I am done getting involved in the ELACs)*. Justa explains how she continued to be involved in ELAC despite the occurrence of parents withdrawing. Still, Justa was cautious with her involvement in ELAC, particularly as her daughter transitioned to the middle school, Cooper Academy. She foregrounded her first interaction at Cooper Academy’s first ELAC meeting at the beginning of her narrative, but returns to her experience with the middle school by sharing her thought process during her daughter’s sixth grade year.

A ver que pasa ahora. Aquí los ELACs trabajan con sus reglas pero no se llaman ELACs, se llama Familias Latinas Unidas. Me esperé. Quiero ver como trabajan.

Let’s see what happens now. Here the ELACs function with their rules but they don’t call them ELACs, they are called United Latino Families. I waited. I wanted to see how they function.

Justa recalls her perspective at the beginning of her daughter’s 6th grade year as an expert of ELAC. She notes that the ELAC has a different name—which according to the Latino Vice-Principal was an attempt to form a collective that includes more Latino families than the ones with students designated as English Learners as most become reclassified⁴⁰ before they reach middle school. The school used the format of ELAC as a mechanism to engage Latino families in general, and Justa was interested in seeing how it would function. Her comment, “I waited,” illustrates not only her patience in the process, but also her hesitation. She did not have the same relationship with the administrators at Cooper as she did with Ms. Spencer at Garfield and it is not as common for parents to have as much presence on middle school campuses as they might have had in elementary schools. Middle school parent involvement is also a murky area, as most parent involvement studies focus on pre-school and elementary school level participation. Justa didn’t volunteer in the classrooms at Cooper like she did at Garfield, though she attended all parent events (e.g., Back to School Night, Parent-Teacher Conferences) and volunteered when there were opportunities (e.g., to decorate for Día de los Muertos, work at the Cinco de Mayo event). Justa was waiting to see what her role would be in this new version of ELAC and how the committee would function overall.

Justa’s first impression was that the ELAC at Cooper wasn’t functioning by the rules of ELAC and that last year the parents didn’t even know what days the students were taking the exams. She explains how the bilingual Vice Principal—Señor Sánchez—provides the parents with a lot of information about the school and his priority is the students. On numerous occasions

⁴⁰ Explored in depth in the next chapter, the reclassification process occurs when *English Learners* are deemed proficient in the English language as determined by state standardized test scores, a language proficiency exam, and teacher recommendation.

she has shared with me that he is “buena gente”, making remarks on how he tries his best to work with the Latino families. Nevertheless, she states that “él no quiere estar involucrado sobre las reglas de ELAC,” and since he leads the *United Latino Families* committee, Justa has a problem.

No están trabajando como ELAC debe de ser. Lo sé por que tengo la experiencia por muchos años y sé que no lo están haciendo como debe de ser. Y bajo las reglas de ELAC—la información que tenemos que tener como padres y de decir hay tanto dinero por los niños porque es dinero de nuestros hijos. Porque el gobierno da por cada niño de ingreso una cantidad. Entonces no sé en que realmente lo estén utilizando o como. Por eso la junta que tuvimos yo dije eso—que no sabemos. Yo fui la única que dije porque las demás no saben realmente como trabaja eso y no lo dan. Yo creo que eso serviría mucho si lo dijeran porque bien explicado. Porque ELAC y las funciones de cada persona si eres del comité—los representantes, la función que tienen las áreas, que tiene la persona cuando eres presidente. Pienso que nos ayudaría.

They weren't functioning like ELAC should be. I know it because I have the experience for many years and I know that they weren't doing it like it should be. By the rules of ELAC—the information that we have to have as parents and saying there is so much money for the children because it's our children's money. Because the government gives a funded amount for each child. So I really don't know what they are using it for or how. Because of this, at the meeting we had I said this—that we don't know. I was the only one who said because the rest don't really know how this works and they don't give it [the information]. I believe that it would work out if they explained it very well. Because ELAC and each person's functions if you are the committee—the representatives, the function of the areas they have, that they have the person when I was president. I think it would help us.

Justa continues, sharing that other parents should get the district-level training that she received for ELAC and that it should not be the same people getting the training, as those parents already know how the committee functions (like herself). She reminds me of how at the first meeting, only two people raised their hands when asked if anyone knew about ELAC. She then shares what she thinks should happen:

Para mí, se me hace justo como otras que no saben, se vayan a las juntas, para que se den cuenta como es que trabaja todo esto. Verdad que sí? A mí se me hace es justo, como entrenar a otras personas. A mí, el distrito ya pago por mi entrenamiento hace cuatro años y consecutivos, entonces es justo que otras personas lo tomen así como yo lo tome. Es muy interesante y así se pueden dar cuenta que es lo que pasa, para que vean sus derechos como padres.

For me, I find it fair that others that don't know, that come to the meetings, in order to realize how it is that all of this works. Isn't that true? To me, I find it is fair, like to train other people. To me, the district already paid for my training for four consecutive years, then it is fair that other parents take it this way like I did. It is very interesting and this way they can realize that this is what happens, so that they see their rights as parents.

Justa believes that other parents of English Learners should receive the ELAC training that she did with Cynthia at the district. Inherent in the name English Learner Advisory

Committee is the notion that members would advise those that make the decisions surrounding English Learner (EL) education. In the New Oxford American Dictionary, *advisory* is an adjective that means “having or consisting in the power to make recommendations but not to take action enforcing them”. Parents are unable to make recommendations if they do not understand that they should be. Justa mentions three times that it is fair⁴¹ for other parents to know how ELAC functions (i.e., another way of saying it is unjust that they do not have access to this information). Not only should parents know how ELAC functions and their rights as parents of ELs, it is a federal mandate that they do. Justa felt strongly about this as a parent leader, but continued to experience how that was not happening at Cooper Academy.

Yo vine a dos juntas y me di cuenta que no vi mucho interés en mi o que no estaba la información. Estábamos enfocados en otras cosas que quizás yo como madre no me interesaban. Porque yo quería saber como, Guadalupe es Aprendiz de Inglés, yo necesitaba escuchar en algo que le ayudará a mi hija. Y yo no estaba escuchando eso. Yo estaba escuchando que vamos a hacer para en Cinco de Mayo, que vamos a hacer cuando los niños se gradúen. Entonces yo como madre de una hija de Aprendiz de Inglés, para mi, no era algo interesante estar escuchando eso. Yo quería que me dijeran que o miran los niños que no pasaron el examen, les vamos a ayudar con tutoría o vamos a ver en que es lo que salieron mal para poderles reforzar. Eso es lo que quería escuchar.

I came to two meetings and I realized that I didn't see much of interest to me or that there wasn't the information. We were focused on other things that maybe as a mother didn't interest me. Because I wanted to know how, Guadalupe is an English Learner, I needed to hear something that would help my daughter. I was not hearing that. I was hearing about what we were going to do for Cinco de Mayo, what we will do when the children graduate. Then as a mother of a daughter that is an English Learner, for me, it wasn't interesting to be listening to that. I wanted for them to tell me or look at the children that didn't pass the exam, we are going to help them with tutoring or let's see in what they did poorly for them to reinforce. That is what I wanted to hear.

Justa stresses that her daughter is an English Learner,⁴² which impacts her educational opportunities and experiences in school. Guadalupe still carries the label English Learner because she has not passed the exam in which Justa refers to in her narrative—the California English Language Development Test (CELDT). The CELDT is one measure that teachers use in combination with other school information to make decisions about such classifications. ELs are reclassified as “fluent” when they have sufficient English skills to learn in a regular classroom without extra assistance and perform in academic subjects at approximately “grade level” (Hill, 2006). Specifically, “fluent” is partially defined when a student receives a score of *Early*

⁴¹ Justa chose her own pseudonym, which in Spanish, is an adjective for “just, fair, or right.” Ironically, she talks about what is *just* or *right* very often when referring to issues around schooling of English Learners.

⁴² In official documents, the school district translates the label *English Learners* into Spanish as *Los Estudiantes Aprendiendo Inglés*. Justa, however, refers to this label as *Aprendices de Inglés*. *Aprendices* is a derivative of the Spanish noun *aprendiz*, which literally means “an apprentice or learner.” The district’s translation can be glossed as *Students Learning English*, whereas Justa’s can be glossed as *Learners of English* (or *English Learners*), which is perhaps a more direct translation. Justa’s translation with the term “learner” signifies a more active role on the part of the individual in acquiring another language when compared to “students” as the district uses.

Advanced or *Advanced* overall on the CELDT and at least a score of *Intermediate* on all language domain components (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Guadalupe has not passed the CELDT to be deemed “fluent” in English because her reading and writing scores have not yet reached the *Intermediate* level. Therefore, there is much at stake for the Garcia Family and Justa expresses it in her narrative. Instead of hearing about how the school can support these students to do better on the test, the focus of the meetings were on general school related issues or on Latino cultural celebrations. This wasn’t the purpose of ELAC and Justa knew it. She then shared her feelings about the whole predicament.

Me fui decepcionada el año pasado—triste—y le dije a mi esposo, yo ya no voy. Yo salgo cansada porque estoy interesada en ayudar a mi hija. Todo eso me decepciona. No quiero ir. Entonces yo le comenté a alguien que trabaja en el distrito—“yo sé que el Señor Sánchez, es bueno y que quiere ayudarnos pero a veces las otras personas se enfocan en otras cosas y no es lo que yo quiero escuchar.” Y yo pienso que muchos papas también, por eso se están retirando, “Este ELAC no me gusta.”

I left disappointed last year—sad—and I told my husband, I’m done going. I leave tired because I am interested in helping my daughter. All of this disappoints me. I don’t want to go. So then I told someone that works in the district—“I know that Mr. Sánchez is good and he wants to help us but at times other people focus on other things and that is not what I want to hear.” And I think that a lot of parents too, for this they are withdrawing, “I don’t like this ELAC.”

By rendering the voices of other Latino parents (*I don’t like this ELAC*) she highlights the process of withdrawing that for some parents is abrupt, but for Justa is gradual. She is overwhelmed but shared with me that she told her husband:

Empezando el año escolar me voy a enfocar porque yo creo que hay muchas mamás como yo que nuestros hijos están así, y uno quiere escuchar ayuda. Vemos que no lo hay y nos retiramos. Van a seguir allí nuestros hijos mientras no hagamos nosotros algo.

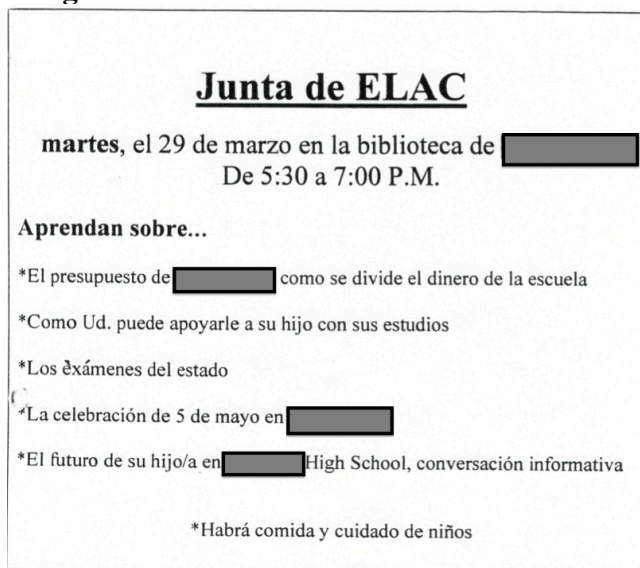
Starting the school year I am going to focus because I believe that there are mothers like me that our children are this way, and one wants to hear help. We see that there is no help and we withdraw. Our children are going to continue this way while we don’t do anything.

Justa senses the urgency with the matter, worried that their children are going to stay classified as ELs if they don’t do something. Yet, despite this urgency there is a sense of defeat—they are not hearing what they want to hear and so they withdraw. As an ELAC expert she was discontent, and sometimes angry when the ELAC meetings did not concern themselves with the rules of ELAC (that is follow the Title III mandates and federal guidelines), and tended to focus on parties and other concerns related to middle school which she believed was outside of the ELAC domain. At this point in her parent involvement trajectory, Justa feels defeated. She knew too much about the policies and practices of this committee, yet she didn’t feel empowered enough to speak up and make a change about how ELACs were run. She did, however, decide to speak up the following year, and shared her concerns with Lupe (the Manager of Family and Community Partnerships) who attended one of the initial ELAC meetings at Cooper. Justa told

her that she didn't like that Cooper's ELAC members don't know the school's budget or how it is being invested, as well as the money that is given specifically for the English Learners (*nuestros niños*). She wanted to know how the money is being used and how it is helping them, as well as if other parents would get trained in ELAC. Lupe told her that she will look into the budget, that they will provide ELAC trainings for other parents, and at the next meeting there will be an election because last year there were no elections. According to Justa, the woman that was the President last year just selected some random person to take her place.

The text below (Image 4.2) is from a flier given to parents to recruit them for an ELAC meeting at Cooper later in the year, this time not calling it a Familias Latinas Unidas meeting like last year.

Image 4.2



After providing details of the time and location, it reads:

Learn about...

- *The school's budget and how they allocate the money**
- *How you can support your child with his/her studies**
- *The state exams**
- *The 5 de Mayo celebration at the school**
- *An informal conversation about your child's future at the local high school**

Justa showed me the flier (and other handouts given to parents at this time) during one of the home observations, though at the time I did not know about her conversation with Lupe or her frustration with Cooper's ELAC. It appeared that Cooper's ELAC was moving towards functioning within the regulations of the state and federal policies, though cultural celebration planning was still an expected task of the Latino families.

Sofia's Parent Involvement Story: The Role of Parent Friendships

Sofia's daughter Aracely was in the English-only program at Garfield Elementary, but she met Justa when their daughters were in the first grade. They quickly became close friends through their volunteer work at Garfield Elementary. In school event observations at Garfield, I noted how Sofia and Justa were always together though they interacted with many other Latina mothers as well. Sofia is the more outgoing of the two, always laughing and joking with everyone. Justa spoke softly and though she has a friendly personality, she was more reserved at times. Like Justa, Sofia cleaned houses for a living and had a relatively flexible schedule. As a single mother, she worked more hours than Justa, cleaning at least one house a day, but she still found the time to be involved on Garfield's campus as much as she could. Sofia's relationship with Justa helped facilitate her role as a parent leader on campus, and even though Aracely was not an English Learner, Sophia started becoming involved in ELAC. Justa explained that in addition to being Garfield's ELAC President, she would attend the general District English Learner Advisory Committee (DELAC)⁴³ meetings because each school in the district needed a representative. She explains how she got Sofia involved.

Entonces mande a Sofia. Porque Sofia era la representante de los ELACs, ella iba a las juntas de los ELACs, y ella nos reportaba en la escuela que era lo que pasaba. Por dos años fue Sofia. Yo ya estaba cansada de ir a los dos lados y así decidimos. Yo iba porque las otras personas que decían que iban a ir no iban. Entonces como presidente tienes que cubrir el lugar. Pero ya estaba cansada y le dije a Sofia "ayúdame" como es mi mejor amiga. Y ella no quería. Y nos ayudo y sin saber ella que su hija ya estaba clasificada para aprender inglés. Te imaginas es una buena ayuda, aprendió algo sin querer. Porque investigó que su hija estaba clasificada y ella no lo sabía... Fíjate, le sirvió de algo. Aprendió algo. Se aprende muchísimo.

Then I sent Sofia. Because Sofia was the ELAC representative [at the district], she would go to the ELAC meetings, and she would report to us in the school what it was that happened. Sofia went for two years. I was already tired of going to two places and this way we decided. I went because the other people that were saying they were going to go didn't go. So then as the president you have to cover. But I was tired and I told Sofia "help me" as she is my best friend. And she didn't want to. And she helped us and without knowing that her daughter was classified as an English Learner. You can imagine it is a great help, she learned something without wanting. Because she investigated that her daughter was classified and she didn't know it.

According to the California Department of Education, "each school's English Learner Advisory Committee (ELAC) must have the opportunity to elect at least one of its members to be a site representative in the DELAC." The individuals that were elected or volunteered to be Garfield's representatives did not make it to the district meetings, so Justa asked her best friend Sofia to be the DELAC representative. Sofia was the DELAC representative at the beginning of the study, but the details of how she took on this role wasn't revealed until this narrative and in informal conversations with Sofia afterwards. As Justa indicated, Sofia hesitantly agreed to

⁴³ According the California Department of Education website, parents or guardians of English learners must comprise 51 percent or more of DELAC membership. Parents must not be employed by the district and their main responsibility is to advise the district's local governing board on programs and services for English learners (California Department of Education, 2013c).

commit to the volunteer role, having no idea about the English Learner classification process nor that her daughter, Aracely, was actually labeled an English Learner during her first few years at Garfield. Also receiving the federal and state mandated ELAC training⁴⁴ that Justa spoke passionately about, Sofia discovered in the process that her own bilingual daughter was labeled an English Learner in kindergarten, and was redesignated as *Fluent English Proficient* in the third grade and before she took on this leadership post. As Justa explained:

En la junta de ELAC empezó a investigar. Porque en las juntas de ELAC te hablan mucho de los niños que están clasificados. Y entonces ella empezó a preguntar. Investigó como en el quinto grado que su hija, creo que su niña desde el tercer grado lo fue, y ella no lo sabía. Fíjate, le sirvió de algo. Aprendió algo. Se aprende muchísimo.

In the ELAC meeting she began to investigate. Because in the ELAC meetings they speak a lot to you about the kids that are classified [as English Learners]. And then she began to question. She researched how when her daughter was in the 5th grade, I believe that her child since third grade it happened, and she didn't know it. Look, it benefited her. She learned something. She learned a whole lot.

As Sofia's best friend, Justa recalled the process Sofia went through to understand the language policies related to her own daughter's educational process. She was empowered as a knowledgeable parent who was able to disseminate information to the ELAC committee at Garfield, assist other parents with their rights as parents of English Learners (though she was no longer one of those parents), and have a safe place to communicate in Spanish while conducting school business.

Sofia's Withdrawal

As an empowered parent, Sofia planned to be involved in Aracely's middle school education as much as she could as a single, working mother. Over the course of the study Sofia managed to continue to be greatly involved in her daughter's education. She limited her parent involvement to efforts within the home and community, however, withdrawing when her daughter transitioned to middle school. The excerpt below from a transcript of a video-recording during dinner time at the Romero house helps provide some clarity to Sofia's decision. After Aracely excused herself from the dinner table to work on her homework, Sofia shared:

En la primaria, me sentía mas comfortable con la escuela. Porque si era de que, se preocupaba mucho por los hispanos, por los padres hispanos, para que llegara la información bien a las casa. Y si no entendías inglés te la traducirán al español para que tu siempre estuvieras enterado y estuvieras—pues siempre participando, no? Pero como aquí Sera, aquí en Jefferson, pues no hay ni comité de padres hispanos. Son poquitos porque no es una escuela bilingüe, pero debería de tener en cuenta que sí hay padres hispanos. Nada mas la secretaria habla español. Entonces no entiendo a veces porque no mandan también información en español. Pero no sé, a lo mejor es eso porque no es una escuela bilingüe. Y no pienso que también eso afecta mucho si acá en Garfield, fíjate Sera, se les hablaban en español. La reunión eran en español y todo eso. ¿Te imaginas en la reuniones no se hablan nada de español?

⁴⁴ The district shall provide to all DELAC members appropriate training and materials to assist each member carry out his or her legally required advisory responsibilities (California Department of Education, 2013c).

At the elementary, I felt more comfortable with the school. Because if it was that, [the school] worried a lot about the Hispanics, about the Hispanic parents, so that the information would get to you at home. And if you didn't understand English they would translate it to Spanish so that you were always well-informed and were—well always participating, no? But like here Sera, here at Jefferson, well there is not a Hispanic parent committee. They are a little bit because it is not a bilingual school, but they should take into account that yes there are Hispanic parents. Only the secretary speaks Spanish. So I don't understand sometimes because they don't send information in Spanish, too. But I don't know, perhaps it's because it is not a bilingual school. And I don't think that this also affects a lot if there in Garfield, look Sera, they talk to you in Spanish. The meetings are in Spanish and all of this. Can you imagine at the meetings they don't speak any Spanish?

Sofia senses that the school does not care much about the Latino parents since they do not communicate to the parents in Spanish. Organizational structures vary across schools, which impacts how well schools can serve their communities. There is no Latino committee on Jefferson's campus and Sofia cannot help but compare her experiences at Garfield with those of Jefferson. The principal at Jefferson Middle, Mr. Carlson a White, heavy-set man in his fifties, echoed Sofia's language concerns in an interview.

I think that if you talk to my staff here (long pause) the biggest issue is not enough of us speak Spanish. And it's frustrating. And I'm as guilty of it as anybody else. And so it's hard when you want to talk to parents or when parents want to talk to you, and we have a handful of staff members who speak Spanish. And it's just – there's a whole culture, not even culture, there's a whole thing around when you're talking – you and I are making eye contact. If I were talking to someone who's gonna translate to you, I'd more often than not see the person speaking to the translator than to the parent.

While Principal Carlson recognizes the lack of bilingual educators and staff on campus as a problem, he highlights the cultural and interpersonal complications that may arise when translation occurs. When a linguistic mediator plays a role in a conversation that is inherently for two people (e.g., parent-teacher), there are obvious and subtle breakdowns in communication that may occur such as to whom and when eye contact is being made. Sofia, as a Spanish-dominant speaker, expresses her frustration with the school's inability to communicate with their Spanish-speaking families and subsequently, begins her process of parent involvement withdrawal.

In the interview, Principal Carlson also shared that there are about 72 Latino families with children at Jefferson. There are roughly 600 students that attend the school, and the demographics of Latino students when compared to other racial and ethnic backgrounds indicate that Latino students are about 20% of the school population at Jefferson and 30% at Cooper. A 10% difference is big, but perhaps the larger disparity is between the presence of Latino families on campus (Carreón, Drake, & Barton, 2005) between the two middle school campuses. Principal Carlson shared that 15 or 16 families attend their parent education nights, whereas many of Cooper's Latino parents show up to school events. This was something noted in observational fieldnotes and confirmed by Sofia during a school observation. In the Fall of 2011, I attended Back to School Night (B2SN) events at both Guadalupe and Aracely's middle schools since the schools were only a few miles apart and Jefferson Middle (Aracely's school) hosted

their event an hour earlier than Cooper (Guadalupe's school). After we attended Jefferson's B2SN, Sofia decided to accompany me to Cooper's B2SN so she could visit with Justa and her family. She couldn't help making comparisons between the two schools and their family population. Sounding a little glum when she got there, she told me in Spanish, "See I told you there were more *Hispanos* here" and "They served dinner here but at Jefferson they only had snacks."

Sofia was also unable to maintain relationships with Latino families from Garfield the way Justa was able to since most of the Latino students in the bilingual program transferred to Cooper Academy, and Aracely attended Jefferson Middle since she was in the English-only program at Garfield. Except for a time she chaperoned a field trip, Sofia has not had much experience being involved in her daughter's education on campus. Sofia withdrew because the familiarity was gone—she no longer was able to interact with her friends, middle school was not a space for her to make new friends, especially as there were not many Latino spaces to facilitate entry into the school-sanctioned parent involvement path⁴⁵.

Conclusion

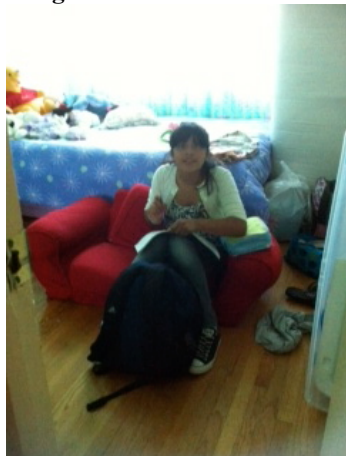
Sofia and Justa had similar, yet different parent involvement trajectories; they each decided to withdraw from the type of parent involvement they were accustomed to once their daughters transitioned to middle school. Though they took up leadership roles, an uncommon practice for recently immigrated parents unfamiliar with the U.S. public school system, they never felt comfortable at school PTA meetings and gradually began to withdraw from the institution of the school. Thus, at Garfield Elementary, the ELAC became known as the Latino PTA, operating at the periphery, with Latino immigrant parents making decisions that only impacted the education of English Learners. And the PTA continued to have power in making decisions that affect all children and their education without consulting all groups of parents with children in the school. Ultimately, Justa and Sofia's decision-making at the ELAC level, while critical and empowering, did not influence the overall structures and programs of the school (e.g., no Spanish translations at Jefferson, ELAC structure at Cooper) and was where their parent involvement journey plateaued. While Justa worked towards becoming more vocal with the ELAC at Cooper, Sofia stopped attending even parent-teacher conferences, feeling disconnected from her daughter's school and the educators working within it.

⁴⁵ Sofia remained actively involved in her daughter's education in other ways—she regulated her daughter's use of social media, checked in about homework, asked her about her day at school, and always knew when report cards and progress reports would be mailed.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Politics of Becoming Bilingual in America: Are They all Just Language Learners at Cooper Academy?

Image 5.1



*I think it's unfair because we
have to take three [tests] while
the other kids just take one...*

-Guadalupe Garcia
7th Grader and District
Classified *Long-Term English
Learner*

This chapter explores the case of one of the study's focal families in Marina Unified to document and analyze how the sociopolitical context shaped the language learning experience for Guadalupe Garcia and how her family made sense of the educational and language policies that are part and parcel to the process. The chapter begins with a review of policies, programs, and practices that shape the context of becoming bilingual in the United States, followed by a micro-level analysis of a test-taking narrative shared over the dinner table in the Garcia home to demonstrate the daily sense-making involved for one Latino immigrant family.

Language and Learning in the U.S.

In 1974, a class action suit was filed on behalf of almost 3,000 Chinese-speaking students, claiming that the San Francisco school district failed to provide these students access to a meaningful curriculum or the English language acquisition support needed to be academically successful. Not receiving the educational accommodations needed to have access to the core curriculum became known as a civil rights issue for students with limited English proficiency. The Supreme Court ruling of *Lau v. Nichols* deemed: *There is no equality of treatment merely by providing students with the same facilities, textbook, teachers and curriculum, for students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education (Lau v. Nichols, 1974)*. A violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, these exclusionary practices based on language were made visible, and school officials were now held accountable for the resulting discriminatory practices (even when not intended) of an English-only curriculum (Moran, 2005). This unprecedented decision made clear that the *same* educational treatment was not necessarily *equal*, ultimately designating language learners as a protected group (Hakuta, 2011). As Moran (2005) explains, language is used as a proxy for race in such cases, and the ruling formed the legal basis for educational models that support students learning English, including bilingual education (Olsen, 2009). The *Lau remedies* required schools to provide support such as English as a Second Language classes, English tutoring, or some form of

bilingual education. Though bilingual programs were not a required programmatic remedy by the *Lau v. Nichols* decision (Wong-Fillmore, 2000), various types continued to be offered by schools, even after the Reagan administration withdrew the *Lau remedies* in 1981 and left politicians to make their own language policies (Baker, 2006) shifting the struggle to the state level (Olsen, 2009).

Currently, there are 5.3 million English Language Learners in the U.S. (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2011) and across the country, only about half of this population receives any kind of specialized instruction to meet its linguistic needs—the vast majority of the specialized instruction is in English (i.e., ESL) and less than 5% of the instruction is in their native language (Rumberger & Tran, 2010). These statistics look starkly different in states with concentrations of ethnic and linguistic enclaves such as in California where more than 50 languages are spoken (Parrish, Linqanti, & Merickel, 2002) and ELs make up 25% of the student population—roughly 99% of these ELs receive some form of specialized instruction (23% receiving some form of primary language support) (California Department of Education, 2013d).

In a congress-mandated study, Ramírez (1992) followed over 2,000 elementary school students over a period of 4 years to investigate program models for language minority students to gauge effectiveness in helping students “catch up” to native-English-speaking counterparts. Ramírez found that by middle school, emergent bilingual students tended to improve academically in English if they received a significant amount of primary language instruction when compared to similar students in English-only contexts that often fell behind their English-dominant peers. Still, bilingual education programs have been publicly criticized for not being effective, though not all program models are the same and there is variation even within the same program model types in terms of implementation, largely depending on factors such as teacher preparation, resources, and fidelity to the model (August & Hakuta, 1997). Transitional bilingual education (TBE) is the most common of the bilingual program models (Baker, 2006), though strong critiques find these models segregated and remedial (Ovando, Collier, & Combs, 2003), and the language ideologies behind this model-type have been criticized since the goal of the program is to transition students out of their primary language into English as rapidly as possible. Another critique suggests that these programs are in place to help students overcome their “bilingualism problem” and to become monolingual English speakers (Palmer, 2011).

However, due to controversial state and national educational language policy changes within the last couple of decades, English-only programs are more popular and heavily funded (Lapayese, 2005; Parrish, Linqanti, & Merickel, 2002; Wright, 2005). Proposition 227, one of, if not the most important language policy decision of the past century (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Asato, 2000) was passed by California voters in 1998, dismantling many of the bilingual education programs available for linguistic minority students in public schools. Proponents of 227 blame bilingual education as a leading cause for the low academic achievement of many Spanish-speaking linguistic minorities, suggesting that such programs keep students from mastering the English language as quickly as possible, and potentially foreclosing them from social mobility and civic participation. States such as Arizona and Massachusetts followed suit, passing even more restrictive language policies that banned the use of children’s primary language in the classroom (Wiley & Wright, 2004).

Around the same time that Proposition 227 was passed and implemented in California, the field of education in the United States was moving towards massive accountability and high stakes testing, largely impacting all school-aged children and public school educators. This

movement was further solidified when the Bush Administration introduced the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act⁴⁶. Since its transition from an education reform bill in 2001 to law in 2002, NCLB and standardized testing have become the norm among public school educators and students in district and schools nation-wide. NCLB has placed additional focus on English Learners (ELs), in which all schools and districts across the country are responsible for helping limited English proficient children meet the same challenging state academic and content student academic achievement standards as all students are expected to meet (U.S. Department of Education, 2011; NCLB, Part A, Subpart 1). Menken's (2006) research in ten New York City high schools demonstrates how NCLB as educational policy (i.e., high-stakes test) translates to English-only language policy in practice (i.e., teaching to the test in English-only), further limiting the use of the home language in instruction regardless of the sound empirical evidence that supports it (Cummins, 1981). Her finding of high-stakes testing as de facto language policy, illustrates how anti-bilingual education work can operate in both overt (passing propositions) and covert (regulating high-stakes test in English) ways.

Though these English-only movements are pervasive, the language of classroom instruction is still a highly contested topic across the country, one in which politics often play a larger role than pedagogy (Cummins, 1989; Spolsky, 2004), and where assimilationist or pluralist ideologies can determine one's stance on a highly emotional bilingual education debate (Schmidt, 2000). When nativist perspectives regard U.S. immigrants and their languages as a threat to American identity and culture (Huntington, 2004), issues like anti-bilingual education initiatives become symbolic attacks on already marginalized bilingual communities. These assaults can lead advocates of bilingual education to focus on more than just matters of access, but also language, cultural rights, and recognition (Olsen, 2009). Some argue that attacks on bilingual education serve as a smoke screen to divert attention away from "mainstream" educational programs that fail to accommodate language-minority educational needs (Wiley & Wright, 2004; 162). Despite such debates, some bilingual education programs persist in the U.S., most providing support to the 75% of English Learners that speak Spanish (Gándara & Hopkins, 2010) as they transition into English.

Linguistic Segregation and Isolation

School segregation in the United States is thought to be an issue of the past, a phenomenon of the pre-*Brown vs. Board of Education* era, when Black and White children attended separate schools. The 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision ended legal segregation in public schools and deemed separate educational facilities as inherently unequal, thus overturning the 1896 Supreme Court Case *Plessy v. Ferguson* (Yudof, Levin, Moran, Ryan & Bowman, 2011). Today Latino⁴⁷ students are more likely to attend segregated schools than African-American students (Gándara, 2010; Orfield & Lee, 2006), as many attend impoverished schools concentrated with linguistic and ethnic minority students. Though the U.S. has experienced an influx of Latino populations in recent decades, the trend is not a recent phenomenon, as Latino students have been some of the nation's most segregated students in the

⁴⁶ A deeper analysis of NCLB and the education of culturally and linguistically diverse students is presented in the following chapter.

⁴⁷ Mexican-origin families comprise 70% of the Latinos in the United States (Ramírez & de la Cruz, 2003).

country throughout the last century both in their neighborhoods and schools (both pre- and post-Brown vs. Board).

Large federal and state court cases have addressed practices that threatened the equity of Latino children's educational rights. Latino students have long been framed as *language learners* and segregation (by race or language) is a common theme in many of these cases. Latino immigrant parents have organized and advocated for their children directly in groundbreaking desegregation and educational equity court cases that have had noteworthy impact on the educational access of their children and future generations. In 1930, when the Lemon Grove school board in San Diego County decided to build a separate school for the 75 Mexican children being served, the children's parents organized a boycott of the school to later win the Alvarez v. Owen case (1931). The California court ruled that the district's plan to operate a separate Americanization school "where such children can be given instruction more suitable to their capabilities" and "where such children can be brought up to normal" went against state laws (Ferg-Cadima, 2004, p. 39). Huge disparities between the education of White and Latino students were also documented in neighboring Orange County in 1946 where Mexican students were sent to the "Mexican school" (with its accompanying low-level curriculum and discarded materials). A couple of parents organized a boycott and petitioned for the schools to desegregate, eventually filing the Méndez v. Westminster case on behalf of their children who were being denied due process and equal protection under the laws with a focus on the equality of the school facilities, which would later be themes of the *Brown v. Board of Education* case (Ferg-Cadima, 2004).

Qualitative studies have highlighted segregationist practices for Spanish-speaking communities all over the country. In her ethnographic case study of the Santa Paula community in California, Menchaca (1995) examines interethnic relations between Mexican-origin and Anglo Americans over the last century, documenting a phenomenon she calls "social apartness". Even after de jure segregation ended, these two groups continued to be socially segregated in schools and neighborhoods. Currently, California leads the nation in its segregation of Latinos in schools, with 90% attending *majority minority* schools, and with almost half of the population of Latinos attending *intensely segregated* minority schools (90-100% minority) in California (Orfield & Lee, 2006). As indicated in Orfield & Lee's (2006, p. 26) study of segregation,

Latinos had moved from schools that had, on average, high levels of integration in 1970 to schools that were among the nation's most segregated by the 1990s. This is probably a result of the facts that the numbers of Latinos soared, segregated Latino residential areas expanded greatly, and most of the limited number of desegregation orders were dissolved by the late 1990s ... There is no evidence that the long struggle of civil rights groups to end school segregation was only motivated by a desire to have minority children sit next to white children; there was a strong belief that predominantly white schools offered better opportunities on many levels—more competition, higher graduation and college going rates, more demanding courses, better facilities and equipment, etc. and that the "separate but equal" principle enunciated by the Supreme Court in its 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision had never been honored. More than that, the Supreme Court concluded in 1954 that in America's racially polarized society, separate schools were "inherently unequal".

Latino students are more likely to attend schools with dilapidated facilities, insufficient materials, fewer honor and college-preparatory courses and less qualified teachers than their counterparts in affluent neighborhoods (Gándara, 2010). Many teachers report feeling insufficiently prepared to work with English Learners effectively and communicating with parents because of their inability to speak Spanish (Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly & Driscoll, 2005), and there are few Latino or bilingual teachers present in our public schools (Hopkins, 2013).

Another type of segregative practice is also based on language. Valdés (2001) documents a practice she terms linguistic isolation, where Spanish-speaking students are segregated from

their native English-speaking peers, sometimes for long periods of the school day. With the increase in high-stakes educational reform, an increasing numbers of Spanish-speaking students are being held in separate classrooms for a 4-hour English Language Development block, mandated by the state of Arizona (Gándara & Orfield, 2010). The authors compare this contemporary segregationist practice to the *Mexican Rooms* over 50 years ago where Mexican students were isolated from their white, English-speaking counterparts. Gándara (2010) also notes the common phenomenon of *triple segregation* in U.S. schools where students are segregated by race, socioeconomic status, and language *across* schools and often by language *within* schools as documented by Valdés (2001).

Rather than to describe the segregative condition in schools, the term linguistic isolation has been used elsewhere to describe linguistically diverse families in a pejorative manner. For example, the U.S. Census requires that individuals report their English language proficiency to determine if households are linguistically isolated, that is, that no one in the home over the age of 13 speaks either English only or both a non-English language and English “very well”. Graham & Zentella (2010) find that the notion of being “linguistically isolated” is problematic in that it suggests that linguistic and social diversity are negative attributes in today’s society and immigrants are not fully capable of participating in society because of their lack of English. It further demonstrates the hegemony of English monolingualism and ignores individuals’ bilingual skills.

Dual Language as an Equitable Bilingual Program

The common issues of segregation and language program models are of concern in schools all over the country serving culturally and linguistically diverse students. Cooper Academy is structured to address these contentious issues through two major efforts—one at the district and one at the school level. First, Marina Unified has a strategic desegregation approach to schooling that ensures that students within the district are in classes with a diverse set of peers as students are integrated by race, class, and parent educational level.⁴⁸ Second, Cooper Academy houses the successful dual language (DL) education bilingual program model that integrates culturally and linguistically diverse students—addressing the linguistic segregation many Spanish-speaking students face in traditional language programs such as English Language Development (ELD) and Sheltered English Immersion. Other bilingual models such as Transitional Bilingual also segregate students so that they are in classes with dominant Spanish-Speakers only throughout the day (Ovando, 2003).

In terms of the model, dual language is unique in that students are integrated linguistically and ethnically, and in some cases, economically. This is because monolingual English speakers and monolingual speakers of another language, usually Spanish, are integrated in a classroom that uses both languages at strategic times of the day. In the popular 90/10 version of the dual language model, 90% of the instruction in kindergarten is in the minority language (usually Spanish) and 10% of the instruction is in English. English instruction is then increased each year until each language is utilized 50% of the time. In the 50/50 version of the model, the two target languages are utilized 50% of the time each starting in kindergarten and maintained throughout the program (Howard, Sugarman, & Christian, 2003). The dual language model is distinct from other bilingual programs that utilize the home language as a vehicle to transition

⁴⁸ The desegregation model is further explained in Chapter 5.

students into English as soon as possible. The primary goal of dual language is for bilingualism and biliteracy for all students in the program (Baker, 2006)—an additive program model (Ruiz, 1984) that views bilingualism as a cognitive asset rather than an intellectual handicap (Hakuta & Gould, 1987). Dual language education may reduce the stigmatization that English Learners may experience as the underlying assumptions of the DL model suggest that minority and majority students share equal social status since both languages and cultures are to be valued equally (Genesee & Gándara, 1999). As Gándara and Orfield (2010) posit,

The very nature of dual language programs tends to produce, if not always equal status, at least greater ethnic and linguistic integration than English Language Development (ELD), English as Second Language (ESL), or SEI programs that group students for instruction according to their language deficits as opposed to their language assets (p. 19).

DL programs are also recognized as models that address academic achievement more effectively than any other language model. National studies such as the work of Collier and Thomas (2002, 2004) suggest that language minority students in such programs perform just as well and often exceed their peers in English-only settings on academic achievements tests by the time they reach middle school. A meta-analysis of thirteen studies of dual language programs (Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006) also found that better academic outcomes were typical in these programs when compared to English only or transitional bilingual educational programs.

In his meta-analysis of program models offered linguistically diverse students, Krashen (2004) suggests that there is not sufficient evidence that one program model (such as dual language) is extremely more effective than others at helping English Learners acquire academic English. Nevertheless, dual language bilingual education is no longer a remedial program for low-income immigrant children, as these models are known as enrichment programs for all student populations. Language minority students are able to maintain their heritage languages while learning English and English-dominant students are provided an enrichment experience not common in U.S. public schools—the opportunity to learn a foreign⁴⁹ language at a time more suitable for second language acquisition (when compared to the traditional high school foreign language model). Many English dominant parents in the Marina Unified community prefer a dual language education for their English-dominant children as an alternative to the traditional foreign language high school model, recognizing the importance of multilingualism in a global society.

Dual language programs are common at the elementary level, but rarely continue throughout middle school (Palmer, 2009). If they do exist, the program model typically includes one or two classes taught in the non-dominant language, usually language arts and one content area, all depending on the availability of a qualified bilingual teacher and classroom materials in the non-dominant language (Montone & Loeb, 2000). Cooper Academy, a middle school in Marina Unified, is the only school in the district that houses a dual language bilingual program at the middle school level, supporting students in their bilingual and biliterate educational trajectory until they transition into high school. If students attend one of the three elementary schools that offer dual language education within Marina Unified, they transition to Cooper once they graduate from fifth grade. At the time of the study, Guadalupe Garcia attended the 7th grade at Cooper Academy, completing her 8th year in the dual language program (including

⁴⁹ There are an estimated 35.5 million people over the age of 5 in the United States that speak Spanish as a primary language (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). This statistic does not account for individuals that speak Spanish as an additional language, making the categorization of Spanish as a foreign language in government and language departments across the country a misnomer.

kindergarten). It appears that the educators at Cooper Academy are on board with dual language as the bilingual education program model par excellence. When I asked about the dual language program, Vice-Principal Sánchez suggested that because all students in the program are language learners, the Latino students fare better.

It's working because I think two things. One it's creating a safe space for Latino students to learn. And I say safe more in the kind of them feeling a part of the classroom where they could one, speak the language that they speak better than, for example, their white peers, in the dual immersion program. So they feel a little bit more comfortable engaging in the material given that they know the Spanish so they use it, and it puts them at I would say in one way looking at a level playing field when the white student who doesn't know quite the language but yet has possibly a little bit higher academic background. So I think kids are comfortable and that means they participate more, they engage more. And two, their grades are significantly better than the students that aren't in the program.

This sense of a level playing field suggests that the Latino English Learners are provided with a setting and the benefits they will need to be academically successful. Similarly, the sixth grade dual language teacher describes the program in terms of equity. “*There's like an anti-racism to just the nature of this program and the results because you're the – the dominant, the people from the dominant race are valuing and choosing to learn the non-dominant language. And there's just inherently right there, an equality in the classroom.*” These two sentiments suggest that the DL model inherently functions as a welfare program, providing Latino English Learners with advantages they might not have received in a traditional English immersion classroom.

Educational Matters over Dinnertime Talk

Educational scholars have examined the ways in which participation in family dinnertime conversations can leverage children's cognitive and linguistic development (Snow & Beals, 2006). Linguistic anthropologists regard the dinner table as a site of inquiry, not only to recognize the ways in which sociocognitive and sociolinguistic skills are cultivated, but to examine the ideological dynamics, family politics, and socialization power of dinnertime talk (i.e., through collaborative storytelling). Such ethnographic work suggests that dinnertime is an *opportunity space*—a temporal, spatial, and social moment which provides for the possibility of joint activity among family members (Ochs, Smith, & Taylor, 1989, p. 238-239). Specifically, dinnertime can be a time and space for family members to share the particulars of daily life (Ochs & Taylor, 1992a, 1992b) through the interaction-based practice of storytelling (Goodwin, 1984), where ‘dramatic enactments’ of troubling events from the past and present may emerge (Ochs & Capps, 1996).

Through the lifetime, narratives are used as a way of making sense of daily living, often used to order and reorder daily lives (Ochs, Smith, & Taylor, 1989). In an investigation of English-speaking, white middle-class families' dinnertime narratives, Ochs & Taylor (1992a, 1996) highlight the distribution between narrative roles across families' communication patterns and political dynamics, as well as the function of collaborative narration—the socialization power that comes from the process and product of co-narration between children and other interlocutors. This socialization process can include ways of problem solving, commitment to

family values, and ways of understanding the world (Ochs, Smith, & Taylor, 1989). Family dinnertime narratives also yield intellectual skills such as perspective-taking and critical thinking, where co-narrators work through narratives to create, negotiate, and rework theories of quotidian events (Ochs, Taylor, Rudolph, & Smith, 1992). These linguistic anthropological tools are utilized in the following analysis that presents data from a video-recorded narrative that occurred over the dinner table within the Garcia home in the fall of 2011.

Dinner and Test Talk

At about 8:30 PM on an October evening during Guadalupe's 7th grade year, the Garcia family sat down to have dinner. They usually ate dinner between 8:00 and 9:00 PM, waiting until Justa's brother and his family that lived with them finished using the kitchen to cook and eat. This worked out well for the Garcia family as they stayed up later than her brother, his wife, and their three children and were accustomed to eating dinner around 8 or 9 pm. This evening, Mariano picked up food from a local taquería on his way home from the grocery store. The meal included a sopa (soup) with tortillas and rice. I set up the camera next to the couch facing the dinner table while Guadalupe and Justa set the table. I started recording and Mariano sat down and began preparing his sopa, adding diced white onions, chopped cilantro, and squeezing a lime into the broth as the rest of us sat down. Guadalupe sat across from the camera facing it directly, while her parents, Mariano and Justa, sat adjacent to her on the opposite end of each other. I took the seat directly across from Guadalupe (already designated for me), with Justa to my right, Mariano to my left, and with my back to the video camera. The rectangular shaped dining room table where we were seated was large, with room for another four people if needed. As soon as we were all seated, items were passed around the table—the side of rice, tortillas, onions, cilantro, and napkins—as we engaged in small talk about how to eat the soup. Justa explained how her mother used to put the rice next to the soup, and would add a little bit of rice at a time to the soup. Mariano mentioned that he likes to put the rice in a tortilla and eat it, as he takes a bite of the rice taco he just made. Almost four minutes into the dinner, Justa casually shifted the conversation from the topic of food to a reflection on her day. In Image 5.2, seconds before Justa alters the focus of the table talk with line 1, we are all looking at our food, including Justa, or in the general direction of the table.

Image 5.2



Justa then keys the change in topic from food to testing (transcription methods are located at the end of the chapter in Table 5.1).

- 1 Justa: **Por el todo el día estuve pensando en el examen**
For the all day I've been thinking of the exam
- 2 M, G, S: ((look up at Justa))

Justa then mentioned that she was thinking about the exam all day today (Line 1). At that moment, Mariano, Guadalupe, and I quickly looked up at Justa. Image 5.3 shows our gaze immediately after her statement, “Por el, todo el día estuve pensando en el examen,” as we looked to her almost in unison. While it is common to look in the direction of an interlocutor when he or she is speaking, we turned to Justa in the same second, perhaps demonstrating our surprise with her comment. *Why would she be thinking about a test all day, especially one in which she was not taking?*

Image 5.3



Todo el día is an adverb in Spanish that translates to “all day” or “daylong” Justa’s false start, *por el*, immediately shifts when she adds *todo*, an adjective that translates into “all, whole, or entire” indicating that she wasn’t just thinking about the test during the day, but all day. At that moment, she didn’t mention what test she was referring to or what she was thinking about in terms of the test at that moment, but that she was simply thinking of “the test” throughout the entire day. Mariano and I immediately looked down at our food again as Guadalupe maintained a gaze towards her mother. Mariano then quickly interjected.

- 3 Mariano: **Quién (2) tú?**
Who you
- 4 Justa: **Yo (2) de ella.**
Me about her.

Mariano responded with “Who?” then pauses for a few seconds, but before Justa could respond he said, “You?” (Line 3). This clarifying question and Mariano’s tone of uncertainty indicates that though Justa said “estuve” which translates to “I was”, Mariano was still confused as to why she would be thinking about the test all day when it was their daughter actually taking the test. He was looking for her to expand on why she was thinking about the test all day with the question, “who, you?” Justa responded to Mariano’s question with “Me, about her” (Line 4) referring to Guadalupe though she doesn’t look at her daughter. Through this discursive interaction, Justa clarifies that she is not simply thinking about the test, but is thinking about her daughter, and more specifically her daughter taking the test. Guadalupe didn’t take her eyes off of her mother during this interaction, taking a couple of drinks of her juice while waiting for her mother to expand on what she was thinking about in terms of the test she was taking.

- 5 Justa: **En este momento >no es que, te dije en la mañana=**
In this moment no it’s that, I told you in the morning
- 6 **lo está haciendo el examen<**

- 7 she is taking the exam
Ay (2) y está muy nerviosa
Ay and she was very nervous
- 8 Guadalupe: ((smiles and looks at Justa))
- 9 Mariano: **Huh** ((smiles))

Justa continued by telling her husband that she told him this morning that “she” (Guadalupe) is taking the test and after a short pause, adding that Guadalupe was very nervous (Lines 5-7). Guadalupe then smiled nervously towards her mother and then turned away to look at her food to prepare another bite (Line 8). Mariano responds with a “huh” and smiles, confirming this to be true (Line 9). “The test” (el examen) Justa refers to in this dinnertime revelation is the California English Language Development Test (CELDT), the annual assessment administered as a direct result of the increased attention NCLB places on the academic achievement of students learning English as an additional language. English language learners, identified as Limited English Proficient (LEP) students in NCLB, are defined as individuals: 1) aged 3 to 21 who are enrolled or preparing to enroll in an elementary school or secondary school, 2) who were not born in the United States or whose native language is a language other than English, 3) who come from an environment where a language other than English has had a significant impact on the individual’s level of English language proficiency, and 4) whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language may be sufficient to deny the individual the ability to meet the state’s proficiency level of achievement, the ability to successfully achieve in the classroom where the language of instruction is English, or the opportunity to participate fully in society (P.L. 107–110 9101(25)). The CELDT serves three purposes: to identify new students who are English Learners in kindergarten through grade twelve, monitor EL students’ progress in learning English, and to help decide when EL students can be re-classified as fluent English proficient (FEP) (Xiong & Zhou, 2006). The CELDT is one measure that teachers use in combination with other school information to make decisions about such classifications. ELs are reclassified as “fluent” when they have sufficient English skills to learn in a regular classroom without extra assistance and perform in academic subjects at approximately “grade level” (Hill, 2006).

Marina Unified has reported that English Learners in the dual language programs are twice as likely to be reclassified as fluent English speakers than English Learners in the English only program (Parent Group Meeting Minutes 12/12). This is not the case for Guadalupe, however, as she has not passed the CELDT which plays a large role in determining whether she can relinquish the English Learner label that threatens to follow her into high school; thus, the whole family is concerned.⁵⁰ Because her classification as an English Learner has continued into middle school, Guadalupe is now considered a *Long-Term English Learner* (LTEL), a category describing students who after 7 or more years in American public schools, have not met the criteria described above to be reclassified as fluent in English (Olsen, 2010). Previous research has demonstrated that when students carry that label into high school, they are more likely to have limited access to college preparatory classes, such as higher-level math and science classes (Callahan, Wilkinson, & Muller, 2010), often tracked into ESL or sheltered classes that would not count towards college preparation (Dabach, 2009).

⁵⁰ As explained in the previous chapter, Justa was the President of the English Language Advisory Committee of her daughter’s elementary school and was well aware of the politics involved in language learning in U.S. public schools due to extensive training she received by district and school-level workshops on English Learner policies.

After clarifying that she was thinking about her daughter taking this high-stakes test, Justa goes on to give an example of how others noticed she was very preoccupied.

- 10 Justa: **Me dijo una maestro(1)**
A teacher told me,
11 **Me dijo, Justa por qué estás pensativa?**
She told me, Justa why are you pensive?
12 **Estoy pensando en mi hija que está haciendo un examen! ((laughs)) ahorita**
I am thinking of my daughter who is taking a test right now
13 Sera: **Hmmm ((nods head))**
14 Justa: **Dijo(1) a:::y: Justa le va ir bien no te preocupes**
She said, ay, Justa, she will be fine, don't worry

In Lines 10 and 11, Justa shared how a teacher at her daughter's elementary school where Justa now works as a paraprofessional (see previous chapter for discussion of her role) asked her why she was so pensive. This indicates that her facial expression or body language communicated to the teacher that she was deep in thought about something; that is, her demeanor signaled to others her state of mind. In Line 12, Justa admitted that she is indeed deep in thought. She confided in the teacher, explaining that she was thinking about her daughter that is taking a test at that moment. The teacher responded with a reassurance, and told Justa that her daughter will be fine and not to worry (Line 14). It is common to try to put someone at ease by telling them not to worry. Yet Justa knew this test was no simple test. It had the capacity to change the educational and life course of her daughter. Had Justa not served as the President of the English Learner Advisory Committee (ELAC), she might not have had the insight of how the political procedure of naming and renaming language learners in the system was such a high stakes process and had implications for future educational (mis)opportunities.

Justa used a variety of strategies in her narrative to recount her psychological state of mind and to demonstrate her care and concern for her daughter and her academic future. The discursive interaction between Justa and a teacher at the school operates in the past, but functions in the present tense as a linguistic tool to move the deictic locus of the story from the there and then to the here and now (Ochs & Capps, 1996, p. 25). Justa begins retelling the focal event of her day in the past tense—*All day I was thinking of the exam...A teacher told me, she told me...* and then shifts into the present tense to recreate the interaction for us at the table—*Justa why are you so pensive?* She takes her interlocutors into the 'historical present' with her shift from the past to the present, a common tool to replay a past event. The strategy also makes the topic of the narrative, in this case, the test, much more dramatic and high-stakes for everyone at the table (particularly Guadalupe). Justa responds with *I am thinking of my daughter who is taking a test right now*. This continued shift into the present tense is the rhetorical strategy of *transposition*, that is, the use of the present tense to relate past events—in her reported speech. This relays how the event she is sharing at the dinnertable is continuing to occupy her present state of mind, divulging her concern about her and her family's present and future lives, and therefore, not only a discursive event of the past (Ochs & Capps, 1996).

Dinnertime talk can yield multiple outcomes (Ochs & Taylor, 1992a, 1992b), as illustrated with this short excerpt from dinner in the Garcia family home. Justa's *test anxiety* narrative over dinner served many linguistic and social functions. Firstly, Justa's initiating events provided a space for the rest of the family to chime in and build understanding, subjectivity, and strengthen family solidarity. Secondly, it illustrated the kind of *care* Justa has for her daughter

that goes beyond being an actively involved parent within the schools walls, to include the psychological aspect of her preoccupation with her daughter’s performance on a test and thus her academic future. This makes the direct connection between affect and the test-taking process; tests are something to be concerned and possibly stressed about before, during, and after the testing event. Thirdly, the co-construction of narratives over dinner can function as teachable moments, such that children and other interlocutors get socialized into ways of understanding the world. In this example, Guadalupe was socialized around the importance of the CELDT exam and to become aware of the consequences of such exams. Yet, she played a crucial role in this socialization—contributing to the *test anxiety* narrative.

Co-narrators play a role in making sense of the significance of the narrated events at hand by providing crucial details (Ochs & Taylor, 1992a). The above excerpt from Justa’s narrative was followed by a few seconds of silence, and then Mariano and Guadalupe both attempted to say something. Mariano began to ask about a glass of water, while Guadalupe began telling a story about what happened while she was taking the test. Mariano didn’t finish as he let Guadalupe continue talking—something typical of their familial relationship. Guadalupe was noted as a “daddy’s girl” in my observational fieldnotes numerous times, as this was something joked about within the family many times in my presence. We all listened to Guadalupe respond to her mother’s story by explaining how the vice principal of her middle school came into the testing room while she and her fellow Latino language learners completed the CELDT, providing additional background information for the *test anxiety* narrative.

- 15 Guadalupe: **En el primer periodo vino Mr. Sánchez,**
 In first period Mr. Sánchez came in,
 16 **y dijo, pob- dejan ir en break, pobrecitos?**
 and said po- let them go to break poor things
 17 **Aquí los tienen encerrados ((chuckles))**
 Here they are locked up

Guadalupe’s sharing of this incident after her mother admitted to being nervous about the test is telling. She could have shared that she was also feeling very nervous, or perhaps that she felt she did very well on the test. Instead she chose to highlight an incident through the use of reported speech to convey how she and other Latino students in her predicament were in a classroom taking the test. Repeating what the Spanish-speaking vice-principal said⁵¹ served as a mechanism to reiterate her mother’s concern that taking this test took a toll on the students or was something to be concerned with or nervous about. Her response served as an affirmation that yes, the testing conditions were not pleasant. The use of *pobrecitos*—a sympathy-marked deictic (third-person plural pronoun)—refers to Guadalupe and her fellow English Learners taking the CELDT. *Pobrecitos* is a term of endearment in Spanish that translates to “poor little things”. The diminutive “-ito(s)” is a morphological form—an emphatic affix—that functions as an ‘affect intensifier’ to gloss “little”, further extending the compassion triggered in the use of the ‘affect specifier’ *pobre* or “poor thing” (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1989). Guadalupe’s rising intonation at the end of that line, works concurrently to mark the sympathy or pity affect desired (Och & Schieffelin, 1989). The word “encerrados” is used as an adjective typically to describe prisoners or individuals without agency. In this case, it conjures up an image of the Latino students locked

⁵¹ It is unclear if the Spanish-speaking vice-principal spoke to the test proctor in Spanish, or if Guadalupe was translating because the conversation at the dinnertable was in Spanish.

up like prisoners in this test-taking dungeon. Also, interesting is that as an authority figure, Vice-Principal Sánchez's speech is directed at the adult administering the test in the classroom, yet he speaks loud enough for students to hear. This could be a strategic move to index his sympathy for them and the testing conditions they must endure. As Guadalupe explained in an audio-recorded conversation with me and her mother before dinner (the opening quote: *I think it's unfair because we have to take three [tests] while the other kids just take one*), the testing practices are inequitable. Guadalupe's use of "we" indexes the Latino English Learners, and "the other kids" indexes the white English-dominant students. The three tests she is referring to are the CELDT, the California Standards Test (CST), and the Standards-based Test in Spanish (STS). The "others" are only required to take the CST.

Justa also acknowledged the social, linguistic, and academic distance between the integrated Latino and White students in the dual immersion program in an audio-recorded interaction in her home. Mariano was not home from work yet, and Guadalupe was in the room sitting with us on the living room couch. The excerpt below from the transcript of this interaction illustrates Justa's understanding of the racial and class differences between "language learners" within the context of high-stakes testing, as the white students are not subjected to the same rigid language practices that the Latino children must endure to prove they are "ready" for untracked classes.

¿Por qué a los niños que están en inmersión y hablan inglés—los Americanos—no le hacen el test en español? Nada más se los hacen a los Latinos? ¿Por qué si están en el mismo programa todos, y están luchando para aprender ese idioma, por qué a todos no les hacen el mismo examen? ¡Y ellos pobrecitos ahí en la librería⁵² todos! Y los demás que estaban en el mismo grupo...jugando. Entonces pues es así.

Why are the children that are in immersion and speak English—the Americans—don't take the test in Spanish? They only make the Latinos. Because if everyone is in the same program, and they are fighting to learn this language, why doesn't everyone take the same exam? And those poor kids there in the library all of them! And the rest of them from the same group...playing. Well, that's the way it is.

Justa's explanation illustrates her understanding of the multiple layers of race and class politics in the U.S. through the sharing of this unfair testing practice in her daughter's school (a practice occurring in every public school in the state with English Learners but heightened here in the context of an integrated classroom with language learners). To begin her objection to the inequitable testing practices, Justa specifies that she is referring to the students in the "immersion" program, that is, to both the Spanish- and English-dominant students in the dual language program. Most of the students at the school, Latino included, are in the mainstream English-only program, and she is not referring to them. While the Spanish-speaking students in the mainstream program stand a chance of going through the language classification process, the English-only students clearly are not at risk of being tested in their English proficiency skills. The *Spanish Learners* also never take home the language survey to start the classification process that the *English Learners* are mandated to do. She distinguishes between the students in terms of nationality—the Latinos like her daughter who make up half of the student population

⁵² *Librería* is the Spanish word for bookstore, but Justa and other Latina parents at the school use it to refer to the school library. This linguistic practice is documented in other ethnographic work, where Latino bilingual students have replaced the Spanish word for library (*biblioteca*) with *librería* in their lexicon. (Zentella, 2003).

in the dual language program, and the Americans—the White, middle-class students that make up the other half. Guadalupe was born in the United States and is an American, but in this context, she is less American than her White classmates. Though her parents are from Mexico, Guadalupe does not have Mexican citizenship. Yet when she (and her Latino classmates that are also still classified as English Learners) are juxtaposed with her native English-speaking peers, she becomes less American. Though Guadalupe is a proficient English-speaker and has the communicative competence (Hymes, 2001) needed to successfully navigate multiple contexts in her world, she is not recognized as a fluent English speaker in this unstable identification and reclassification process (Hakuta, 2011), and her mother regards the White students in the program as the “English speakers.” Additionally, Justa’s comment that “they only *make* the Latinos” indicates her understanding that this testing practice is required.

As made clear in chapter four, Justa is very up-to-date on the language policies in place during the current educational reform movement. She is aware of the government mandates in place that affect her daughter and her educational trajectory. The language classification process does not programmatically or politically apply to students learning Spanish as a second language, and as evidenced here, the Latino students (and their parents) simply do not have the option to not take the CELDT. Yet the racial/national segregation through this testing practice is transparent—the American students are playing while the Latino students are working. Though they are in the same group the program expectations are different. The nervousness that Justa and her daughter felt over the CELDT exam is an experience that the white families are not subjected to, as the English-dominant students will never undergo the political process of becoming and being language learners in the everyday business of public school education in the U.S. There are no comparable high-stakes repercussions for the English-dominant students if they fail to become fluent in the speaking, listening, reading and writing of the Spanish language. The high-stakes of exiting out of the language learner status is something the Latino students will be faced with and as exhibited with the case of the Garcia family, can be emotionally, physically, and psychologically draining on both students and parents alike.

Despite Justa’s clear understanding of the injustices related to her daughter’s education she expresses either her inability to do anything about it or her assessment of the status quo. Her use of “pues es así” is a boundary marker used to terminate her gripe with a particular somber tone that demonstrates the tensions she experiences as a Latina immigrant mother of a child dealing with these rigid language policies that, while it is not something that is fair, it is something that she feels she has little control over. As an “involved” parent for 8 years, she has learned her advocacy work for her daughter (and other people’s children) is limited.

Educational Labels, Tests, and Academic Identities

In the business of doing school, students are socialized to particular academic identities (Wortham, 2006) that influence their daily academic lives. For decades, schools have been preoccupied with identifying children in terms of categories (Varenne & McDermott, 1998), an institutionalized practice that pathologizes students and reduces them to diagnostic labels that foreground a particular educational or linguistic need. This is prominently the case with students who are deemed *special needs* or *language learners*. Spanish-speaking students (often synonymous with the label *English Learners*) have long been evaluated in U.S. public schools based on their English proficiency. Coupled with the educational reform movement, the rigid English Learner classification process and educational labeling practice is dependent on tests,

where results from these tests often pigeonholes students into categories that justify their placement into marginalized schooling tracks. These categorical labels are intertwined with the practice of testing, and thus the business of psychometrics plays a key role in a student’s academic trajectory. Students have limited access to the core content of schooling if they enter high school with the label English Learner (Callahan, 2005) and if they fail to become “reclassified” or “redesignated” as fluent English proficient before they enter middle school, are often reduced to any one of a variety of labels based on this classification process (see Image 5.4), a growing phenomenon particularly with students born in the U.S. (Olsen, 2010). Olsen & Jaramillo (1999) developed English Learner typologies to identify the specific and differing needs of secondary level English Learners and to assist educators in resisting the practice of grouping English Learners into one massive group. They distinguish between well-educated, underschooled, and Long Term ELs, as well as identify students who have been redesignated as *fluent* but still needed extra support to perform at grade level. They define Long Term ELs (LTELs) as English Learners who have been in United States schools 7+ years, are orally fluent in English but reading and writing below grade level, and have low literacy in the home language, if any.

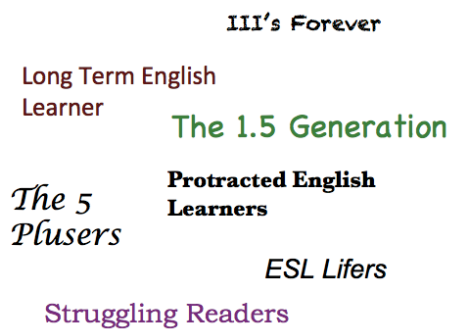


Image 5.4: This visual was taken from a presentation Olsen (2010) gives as an educational professional development training on the plight of Long Term English Learners. Here she includes additional labels used in public schools to refer to students that have carried the English Learner label for a considerable amount of time. The labels stem from the original Limited English Proficient / English Learner label, though not all are sanctioned through educational language policy.

These labels get taken up and negotiated by educators and linguistically diverse students. Talmy’s (2004, 2008) work in a diverse high school in Hawai’i demonstrates how two competing cultural productions of the ESL student—the school-sanctioned or official ESL label and an oppositional student-produced ESL identity—can have affects on students’ identities, daily lives, and educational trajectories. For Guadalupe, she did not fit the exact description of a Long Term English Learner (LTEL), especially as she had strong literacy in her home language. Nevertheless, because she has not been able to pass the CELDT, her English Learner become more defined, and potentially rigid, with the LTEL designation. In addition to the above labels, Cooper Academy refers to the “Long-Term ELs” as “Entrenched English Learners”. In an interview, Guadalupe’s dual language immersion teacher, Mrs. Stevenson used the label “Entrenched English Learners” when explaining how students are more often redesignated as *Fluent English Proficient* when in the dual language program as compared to students in mainstream programs in the district.

I don’t know if I remember the numbers, but it was something like 85 sort of what we’re calling like the Entrenched English Learners or the Long Term English learners who just never seem to redesignate, there were – I only knew six. Like I’d only ever taught six of them.

Entrenched is an unfortunate choice of words to describe learners involved in acquiring a second language, especially as research suggests it can take anywhere from 4-10 years to fully learn another language, especially the academic language needed in school and more importantly, is dependent on a number of factors (Collier, 1989). *Entrenched* is defined by the Webster dictionary as “to establish (an attitude, habit, or belief) so firmly that change is very difficult or unlikely”. Linguistic and academic ideologies are embedded in institutional labels such as this one, where students are reduced to a label that often conjures monolithic understandings of diverse students (Talmy, 2008) and influences the ways educators interact and perceive emergent bilinguals—and in this case, educators may have already given up on students that are “very difficult or unlikely” to change. During this interview, the teacher failed to mention that Guadalupe was considered an *Entrenched English Learner*, one of the few still taking retaking the CELDT each year despite being born in the U.S. and having been in the system for 7 years (at the time of the interview), so that she could be considered *fluent*. Even when she is eventually reclassified with the label *Redesignated as Fluent English Proficient* (RFEP), the label does not recognize her fluency in Spanish, the extent of her vast linguistic repertoire (Orellana, Martínez, Lee, & Montaña, 2012), the arduous work of linguistic and cultural identity work sustained while simultaneously learning English and taking tests. The RFEP label serves to designate a status that deems ELs the same as (though not equal to) their native English-speaking counterparts—fluent in English. The label carries traces of the political and social dynamics of the language classification process for students—a subtractive process that has implications for status access. Since there are no label counterparts on the additive side for ELs (e.g., *balanced bilingual*, *Fluent Spanish Proficient*) that would recognize the extra burdens and challenges faced in the process of learning and being/becoming bilingual, the result is simply the recognition of students passing an exam—demonstrating the immutable interdependence between testing and labeling, and undoubtedly affecting Latino immigrant students’ sense of academic identity and educational possibility.

Are They All Just Language Learners?

The school, as an ideological state apparatus (Althusser, 1971), reproduces the dominant ideologies of a society by legitimating the knowledge that is selected, organized, and made available to students (and in what language that knowledge is acquired). In Bourdieu’s (1991) discussion of the market value of languages, that is how some languages can be deemed linguistically legitimate while others are stigmatized, the hegemony of English in the U.S. and globally goes undisputed; it is often the lingua franca and the official language among many of the U.S. states. Even in a school context that strives to value two languages, English is still the legitimate language and one group enters the school with an automatic *legitimate competence* (Bourdieu, 1991) because of the language they speak. The native Spanish-speaking students are regularly over-tested in their second language and designated incompetent when unable to perform at a level the native English-speaking students are not expected to in Spanish.

At Cooper Academy, the ideology “they’re all language learners” indexes a belief that Latino immigrant and White middle-class students experience equal opportunity, because the White families that “choose” for their students to be bilingual helps level the playing field. The act of choosing to learn the non-dominant language, as one Cooper teacher put it, is not leveling the playing field but giving dominant folks the power to choose enrichment for their children. This language ideology fails to acknowledge the deep divide between the process of subtractive

schooling involved in learning English (a legitimate language) and the process of “choosing” to learn Spanish (a low-status language in the context of urban America). The processes surrounding language learning in the U.S. are hyper-politicized as it is not a neutral act to “choose” to learn a language and to be a legitimate “language learner”, one must be deemed one by educational policies and practices, not just in theory. The policy label *English Learner* codifies the process by which non-dominant students learn the language of power as determined by the de-facto English-only educational policies of high-stakes tests (Menken, 2008), subverting the notion that all students working towards bilingualism are language learners.

This is not the first critique of dual language program models. Educational researchers have questioned the benefits of including middle-class English-dominant students in bilingual programs in the U.S.—the question of whose needs get served and the politics of offering enrichment foreign-language immersion to middle- and upper-class white children (Valdés, 1997), and how English-dominant children can impede the process of creating a safe space for bilingual students to assert themselves and claim academically oriented identities (Palmer, 2009, p. 180). This case captured the tensions related to the overtesting of ELs that are inherent in all public schools in which English Learners attend alongside native English-speaking students, but heightened in a dual language program where students are integrated as *all language learners*.

Double Bind of Dual Language Education

At Cooper Academy, the English Learners in the dual language bilingual program are experiencing something distinct from English Learners within the nation, state, district, and even their own school if they are not enrolled in a bilingual program with native English- speakers. The nature of dual language bilingual programs are in sharp contrast to the *Mexican Rooms* of the nation, where Spanish-speaking students, mostly Mexican, are isolated from their peers. Though the Spanish-dominant Latino students in the dual language program at Cooper Academy are integrated with English-dominant White students, they still experience the de facto segregation or “social apartness” described by Menchaca (1995) through the practice of overtesting. Previous research has suggested that overtesting is a detrimental phenomenon that English Learners experience that does not improve teaching and learning (Wiley & Wright, 2004) but rather subjects students and teachers to unnecessary pressure and stress (Zacher Pandya, 2011). This study, however, provides a more comprehensive look at the affects of overtesting to include the dynamics and sense-making of testing practices at the family level.

Within this context, language is used to segregate students into a strict binary (English Only vs. English Learner), where tests operate as mechanisms of control and surveillance and where Latino language learners are given the *opportunity* to prove they can be trusted and branded as true English-speakers. There are expectations of limited language with the label *English Learner*. Rosa’s (2010) study of language ideologies surrounding Latino students in Chicago demonstrates how school officials inevitably reduce their bilingual linguistic practices and skills to a deficiency in English (rather than proficiency in two languages). He refers to this ideological interpretation as a notion of “languagelessness” that reduces students to “linguistic subhumanness” (153-154). These ideological understandings play a role in shaping the dispositions educators have towards their students, and where often the label *language learner* is not a language learner as a person in general, but a particular type of person in the context of U.S. education—preserved for students with brown skin and English accented speech. The notion that some people are unable to speak any language properly (Rosa, 2010, p. 158), and

those people fit a particular mold, informs the creation and implementation of language policy in schools and ignores important issues around race, class, and immigration status explored in the previous chapters.

Test Socialization at Home

Examining micro-interactions at the dinner table has the investigative potential to identify when macro-level structures enter everyday talk about school. As a complex social, linguistic, and cognitive activity (Ochs & Taylor, 1992b), dinnertime talk was a productive space for the Garcia family in exploring tensions related to educational practices. The significance of “the test” cannot be ignored in the Garcia family home. It penetrated talk at the dinner table and on many other occasions at home and in school spaces. Through her mother’s narrative and storytelling of other adults in her life (teachers), Guadalupe comes to understand that this particular test is high-stakes, that it will affect her schoolwork, opportunities, and ultimately her future in and beyond school.

The narrative excerpt shared contained an overt moralizing message where the intergenerational transmission of test stress occurred. Guadalupe has come to understand that within her role as an English Learner, she is also a taker of tests—which is ultimately a remedial status; a marked and marginal locality preserved for non-dominant students. However, narratives or dinnertime talk can allow for a space that can serve as a tipping point leading to resistance, integration, or transformation of the current educational reform regime. In the case of the *test anxiety* narrative, Justa, Guadalupe, and Mariano further processed and named the social inequities present at Cooper to eventually begin the agentive process in bringing about change at their local school.

Table 6.1 Transcription Conventions

Bold	Actual Speech
.	Falling tone (not necessarily the end of a sentence)
,	Slight rising inflection
?	Rising intonation (not necessarily a question)
!	Animated tone
:	Sound elongations; more colons, the longer the stretch
[]	Overlapped speech
Under	Speaker emphasis
()	Unintelligible speech
(word)	Best guess at what was said
(1)	Length of pause in seconds
><	Fast talk
<>	Slow talk
-	Cut off in flow of talk
=	Latched speech
↑	Rise in tone
↓	Fall in tone
(())	Transcriber’s description of events

See Atkinson, J.M., & Heritage, J. (1984). *Structures of Social Action: Studies in Conversational Analysis*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Chapter Six

High Expectations and Accountability in a Title I School: Supplemental Education Services and Parent Involvement in Valley Unified⁵³

Government officials, policymakers, educators, and families strive to obtain academic access and equity for all students, yet how we achieve such a lofty goal is highly debated. The current educational reform movement, initiated with the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) of 2001 pushes for an accountability approach to education.⁵⁴ Studies have questioned whether standards-based accountability alone can address educational inequities in schools and promote more effective schooling practices (Fuller, Wright, Gesicki, & Kang, 2007). Some argue that with NCLB's focus on testing, the students that are in most need of educational access and attainment are often the ones most vulnerable to unintended negative consequences of the federal law (Darling-Hammond, 2004). In fact, schools are not held accountable in the same way through NCLB. For example, schools receiving Title I, Part A funding because they serve low-income students are bound by educational penalties, such as the sanction of *Program Improvement*.⁵⁵

This chapter explores how one Title I middle school responds to high-stakes accountability, detailing school policies and practices that are in place as a response to educational reform, and how Latino students and their parents come to understand the school's focus on test scores, high expectations, and academic achievement. The chapter begins with an analysis of the school's Back to School Night (B2SN) event held at the beginning of the school year to share how focal parent Rebecca Fuentes makes sense of the night's main event—the school principal's presentation to parents. A compilation of excerpts from interviews with focal parents, students, educators, and administrators are woven throughout the chapter to take up some of the key issues addressed in the principal's presentation. Document analysis and field notes are also used to chronicle the educational decision-making and schooling practices at SWMS. The chapter ends with an analysis of narratives shared by the two focal mothers in Valley Unified to document their use of language around educational reform as they spoke about their roles recruiting families to participate in federally mandated tutoring programs.

The Case of South West Middle School

Located in the hypersegregated⁵⁶ southern California community, South West Middle School (SWMS) has made some significant structural and academic changes while in Program Improvement. The district, Valley Unified, is largely Latino (80%), and the 12% Asian student

⁵³ Pseudonyms are used for all people and places named in this study.

⁵⁴ A reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, NCLB was signed into law in 2002 and focuses on four main tenets to improve U.S. public education: 1) stronger accountability to accelerate educational results, 2) greater flexibility in the use of federal funds for states, local educational agencies, and schools, 3) more choices for parents of children in poverty, and 4) use of teaching methods that are deemed scientific by the federal government (Yell & Drasgow, 2005).

⁵⁵ A school is determined to be in need of improvement when its students fail to demonstrate progress on standardized achievement tests two years in a row (Yell & Drasgow, 2005) and is labeled with Program Improvement (PI) status. This federal sanction will be detailed later in the chapter.

⁵⁶ Experience of extreme segregation on many dimensions experienced by a racial or ethnic group (Massey & Denton, 1989).

population is served by schools on one side of a railroad track that divides the communities both racially and socioeconomically. SWMS is located on the Latino side of the tracks in the city of Palms, a low-income Latino ethnic enclave that has a regular flow of mostly Mexican immigrants moving to the city.

Back to School Night at South West Middl

I attended South West's Back to School Night (B2SN) with the Fuentes family at the beginning of Victoria's 8th grade year⁵⁷. At the time, the Fuentes family lived on the same street as the school, just a couple of blocks west. I met up with the family at their house fifteen minutes before the event started so we could walk to the school together. Many families were walking inside the school as we approached the red brick building. As a neighborhood school, there was not an issue with parking as many of the families walked to and from the school. Victoria ran off with one of her friends who also attended the school as Rebecca and I made our way to the gated entrance. A large white banner was draped in the middle of the building with the school's current *Academic Performance Index* (API) score and the school's goal API score (see Image 6.1). Academic Performance Index is the cornerstone of California's Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999 that measures the academic performance and growth of schools on a variety of academic measures⁵⁸ (California Department of Education, 2013a). A school's API is based on a numeric scale ranging from 200 to 1000.



Image 6.1: South West Middle students are reminded of the importance of test scores every time they enter the school. A large white banner is hung above the entrance of the cafeteria that states the school's current API score and the goal API score.

Students in black South West t-shirts were handing out maps of the school. A female student from SWMS walked up to me and Rebecca, handed us a map of the school, and explained to us in Spanish how to use the map when it was time to visit the classrooms. Another student explained to us (also in Spanish) that the event was starting with a presentation in the cafeteria. Image 6.2 is a photo of Victoria Fuentes wearing the black t-shirts the middle school students were wearing at Back to School Night at SWMS. On the front of the shirt in small black font is the school's current API score with the goal API score on the back.

⁵⁷ The other focal student from Valley Unified, Diego Baez, had graduated from South West and was a freshman at Palms High School at this time. I planned on attending Back to School Night at the high school with his family, but they decided to not attend at the last minute.

⁵⁸ States use standardized assessments to measure students' knowledge in English-Language Arts and Math in grades second through eight and once between grades ten and twelve. Student progress must be tracked through a disaggregation of assessment data across student subgroups determined by—socioeconomic status, gender, race, ethnicity, disabilities, and levels of English proficiency (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

Image 6.2: Academic Performance Index—Actual and Goal Score



Rebecca and I walked into the packed cafeteria as the presentation was just beginning. In the back of the room was a rectangular-shaped table with a sign-in sheet. Rebecca quickly signed-in and then made her way around people standing in the back of the cafeteria. She proceeded to make her way to one of the cafeteria tables that had just enough room for us to squeeze in and sit. Roughly 150 adults, some with small children, were sitting at one of the cafeteria tables or standing in the back of the classroom listening to the school officials speak. Though race and ethnicity couldn't be determined from this school event observation, it appeared that most of the parents/guardians were of Latino descent. Most of the middle school students that came to the event with their families were outside in the quad area where Jamba Juice smoothies and snacks were being sold as a school fundraiser.

Principal Adams, a Caucasian woman in her late thirties, stood in front of the stage with a projector screen behind her. The title slide projected on the screen read, "Annual Title I Meeting for Parents" in large font with "Required By: No Child Left Behind" directly below in a smaller font size. There are quotations around "No Child Left Behind" (see Image 6.3 below). Rebecca turned to me and asked me, "What is *No Child Left Behind*" as she slowly read it off the screen. I briefly explained to her in Spanish that it was a government policy in education. I told her that schools are required to meet the educational needs of all students as determined by their standardized test scores because of the policy.

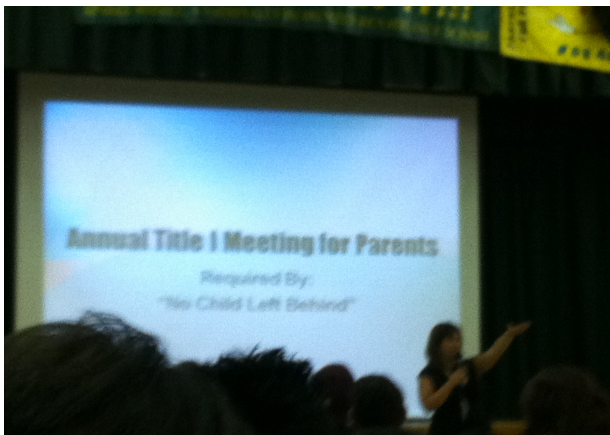


Image 6.3: Accountability at South West Middle Principal Adams executes a two-for-one parent meeting by combining a Back to School Night event with an annual Title I meeting required by NCLB. The presentation was given in English though the auditorium was filled with Spanish-speaking families. Rebecca asked me to translate for her during the meeting as she did not understand what the principal was sharing.

Principal Adams spoke in English and the families sat quietly giving her their undivided attention. It was not clear if the families understood her or not, but Rebecca asked me to translate for her throughout. Principal Adams began her Back to School Night (B2SN) event with a presentation on an educational provision of *No Child Left Behind*—Title I, Part A—*Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged*. Title I, Part A, was an original provision of the ESEA of 1965, to allocate funding to schools and districts with at least 35% of the student population deemed “disadvantaged” as determined by low-income indicators (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). The purpose of Title I, Part A is two fold—to provide extra funding to schools that serve high-poverty communities and keep states, districts, and schools accountable for student academic achievement and standards-based instruction. Though Title I funding must target low-income students, all students at a Title I school are eligible to benefit from such monies.⁵⁹

Since South West Middle receives Title I funding, they are required to provide this information to parents and meet additional requirements noted in the provision.⁶⁰ Schools receiving Title I funds are also required to hold an annual meeting to inform parents of their school’s participation in the development of the parent involvement policy and explain to parents their rights in the development and approving of the policy (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). This was not something covered by Principal Adams in her presentation, but she did cover other requirements of the provision. She explained what Title I entails, who qualifies, whether Title I programs need to show results, and the school’s responsibilities as a school receiving Title I funds. She talked through a powerpoint slide on parent responsibilities under Title I that included the following bulleted list:

- Attend meetings (parent-teacher conferences)
- Reinforce the school expectations
- Call the school or find out what is going on
- Set goals with their children to help them achieve their goals
- Attend all school events

She included a slide with a list of options for parents to consider when getting involved but not much explanation of what each entailed.

- School Site Council
- English Learner Advisory Committee
- Parent Booster
- Family Fiesta
- After School Education and Safety program (ASES)

⁵⁹ Schools may use Title I funds, as well as other federal, state, and local funds, to operate a "schoolwide program" to improve the instructional program for all students within the school. Title I schools with less than the 40 percent schoolwide threshold or that choose not to operate a schoolwide program offer a "targeted assistance program" in which the school identifies students who are failing, or most at risk of failing, to meet the state's challenging academic achievement standards. Targeted assistance schools design, in consultation educational stakeholders, an instructional program to meet the needs of those students. Both schoolwide and targeted assistance programs must use instructional strategies based on scientifically based research and implement parental involvement activities (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

⁶⁰ See Henderson (2002), for the six key leverage points for parent involvement in NCLB Section 1118 through which schools and districts receiving Title I funds must abide.

The Parent Booster was the cooking class the parents have every Friday, the Family Fiesta was a one day event where students play kickball against teachers in a local park while the administrators barbecue for the families, and ASES is an after school program that is sponsored with federal money that provides, after school care, homework assistance, and enrichment activities such as sports. All three of the administrators (the principal, vice-principal from school year 2010-2011 and vice-principal from 2011-2012) reported in interviews that the cooking class (Parent Booster) was the way in which parents were involved on campus. Parents take turns cooking meals, others come to learn and take the recipe. At lunch, the teachers buy the meals and some of the money is used as a fundraiser for the students.

It is noteworthy that Principal Adams shared a Title I presentation during an event where many parents were present (i.e., B2SN). To be in compliance with the federal provision, a certain number of parents must be present at the annual Title I meeting. Choosing to hold the meeting during an event where many parents attend so they can meet their children’s teachers and visit their classrooms was strategic. The move could have served as a maneuver for the administration to check the annual Title I parent meeting off their list. Another possible explanation could be that the administration wanted as many parents to hear about the Title I provision so they could be informed on their rights and responsibilities as a parent of a child in a Title I middle school, knowing there is usually a larger turnout for events like B2SN.

After sharing the Title I slides, Principal Adams segued into a discussion about Academic Performance Index ranks. She began with the school’s API score and ranking by explaining that she had been at the school for 11 years and the API was 484 when she started as the vice-principal. Two school years ago South West’s API score was 807 and last year it was 829. She lauded the teachers for their tireless efforts in working with the students. Principal Adams then detailed how compared to similar schools, that is, schools with similar student demographics and teacher education levels to that of South West, they have scored a 10. She does not expand on the demographics in which she is referring though. In addition to API scores, schools are also ranked on a scale from 10 (highest) to 1 (lowest). A school’s statewide API rank compares its API to the APIs of all other schools statewide of the same type. A school’s similar schools rank compares its API to the APIs of 100 other schools of the same type that have similar educational opportunities and challenges (California Department of Education, 2013a). Image 6.4 is taken from the California Department of Education’s website which illustrates the difference between statewide API ranks and what is called similar schools rank.

Image 6.4 API Ranks from California Department of Education

Statewide Ranks	Similar Schools Ranks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Calculated separately by school type (elementary, middle, or high school) ■ School's API compared to all other schools in the state of the same type 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Calculated separately by school type (elementary, middle, or high school) ■ School's API compared to 100 other schools of the same type that have similar educational opportunities and challenges

Schools must make *Adequate Yearly Progress* (AYP) as determined by their individualized goals for students’ scores on standardized achievement tests which depends on

student demographics and a school's student subgroups (California Department of Education, 2013b). Specifically, to meet AYP, schools must meet four requirements: (1) student participation rate on statewide tests; (2) percentage of students scoring at the proficient level or above in English-language arts and Mathematics on statewide tests; (3) Growth API; and (4) graduation rate (if grade twelve students are enrolled). When a Title I school fails to make *Adequate Yearly Progress* (AYP), it is placed in *Program Improvement* (PI). Schools are eligible to exit PI if they make AYP for two years in a row. By federal law, it is only the Title I funded schools that are at risk of being labeled as in need of improvement, and when AYP is not met, these schools may go through restructuring and/or a reduction in funding (Yell & Drasgow, 2005).

Students' Academic Pathways and Double Dosing

Principal Adams continued with her B2SN presentation on student academic achievement. She briefly mentioned that the school offers study hall for students that are below grade level. She explained that this is determined by the state and district tests, and students' classroom grades. I later conducted audio-recorded, semi-structured interviews with three different South West administrators individually who shared information on the system the school uses to provide extra support to the students below grade level in English-Language Arts or Math. When I asked Principal Adams about study hall and specifically about the honors and remedial grouping one of the teachers mentioned to me⁶¹, she shared the following:

I would say it's about 50/50, although the honors class we put into one group of kids. So like one group of 40 kids out of 220 is the honors. But we have the AVID groups, kids that are proficient and advanced. The honors class is just advanced, advanced kids.

Here Principal Adams explained how the school groups students according to their academic proficiency, utilizing the state's achievement levels (below basic, basic, proficient, advanced). In addition to honors, the school has a group of students who receive AVID services. Advancement via Individual Determination⁶² is an academic intervention program that targets students with average achievement levels (i.e., proficient) to get them on the college-going track where teachers act as advisors and student advocates (Swanson, 1989). Research has been mixed about its viability in assisting students "in the middle" to enter and persist at the college level (Mendiola, Watt, & Huerta, 2010) but it is utilized in schools across the nation. Her statement about 50/50 speaks to the one half (50%) of the student population that is grouped in the honors or proficient pathway.

Principal Adams then continued by referring to the students that are not eligible for the Honors or AVID groups:

⁶¹ One of the focal student's teachers at South West (Ms. Lim) shared the school's focus ability grouping practice. An excerpt from the interview with this teacher is shared below in this section.

⁶² According to the organization's website, AVID is a college readiness system for elementary through higher education that is designed to increase schoolwide learning and performance. The AVID College Readiness System (ACRS) accelerates student learning, uses research based methods of effective instruction, provides meaningful and motivational professional learning, and acts as a catalyst for systemic reform and change (www.avid.org).

But we put them in pathways. But pathways are also flexible, so kids can move in and out of them. Some kids are really good at Math and not Language Arts. So some of the kids are in doubles for Language Arts and Math. Some are just in double for Math. Some are just in double for Language Arts. So we try to meet their needs specifically, because what I found in elementary school, when you mix everyone you end up regrouping them all the time.

From this description, it is unclear if *Pathways* is how students are grouped in general or if this is just for the students on the remedial path—the ones receiving double courses of Language Arts or Math, for example. The new Latino Vice Principal, Mr. Martinez, who came on board to SWMS during the 2nd year of the study, further elaborated this concept of pathways in an interview with me, a practice he also referred to as “parallel classes.”

So there are RSP kids and EL kids and they are kind of put on a certain, like a pathway. So some of them will have like a Math support class as their elective and then they will have a Language Arts support class as their elective. Some kids who maybe just struggle in Math will have the support class for the Math and then they get to pick an elective like Band or something like that for another elective. The kids here have two electives. So we are able to provide support to those kids that need it in Math and Language Arts. So it's two periods every day. That's another benefit to supporting those kids that need it. The kids that are doing well can get two electives.

Interestingly, Principal Adams and VP Martinez never refer to *Pathways* at South West as the educational practice of tracking. However, Victoria's English-Language Arts teacher Ms. Lim, an Asian woman in her twenties, addresses the issue of tracking in her response to my first interview question (*Tell me about your students this year.*).

This year, it depends on what class, because this school does track the students, and so there's different groups. Like you have the honors kids, the AVID kids. You have the kids who have double either Math or double Language Arts or even both, double Math and Language Arts. And then I also have one group that's RSP⁶³ setting, which is the Special Ed kids, and so it's different. Every class is extremely unique.

In this excerpt from our interview, Ms. Lim foregrounds South West's Pathways because it played a big role in determining the “type” of students in any of her courses. As a reflection of society, school are hierarchical and stratified in nature, though educational research has long promoted the ideal of giving students equal access to knowledge (Goodlad & Oakes, 1988). A contentious practice, ability grouping and implementation of a differentiated curriculum has a long history in U.S. schools. Specifically, tracking has been documented as an educational practice that reproduces school-based inequities by not providing access to core knowledge, experiences, and material that students need to be successful along their educational trajectory (Oakes, 1987). Because of that, many schools try to avoid such differentiated structures when they strive to serve all students, regardless of their previous experiences and abilities, though de-

⁶³ RSP is an acronym for Resource Specialist Program. As a regulation of the U.S. Department of Education's *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA), students with special needs are required to receive Special Education services through Special Education classes or in the mainstream classroom with extra support from a Resource Specialist as determined by their Individualized Education Plans (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

tracking as a goal is not always realized in schools (Gamoran & Weinstein, 1998). Students of color and students from low socioeconomic statuses are the most negatively affected by tracking and ability grouping (Apple, 2001).

The practice of scheduling courses based on standardized tests disproportionately affects schools receiving Title I funding, like SWMS, that must make their adequate yearly progress. Thus, schools serving low-income students are most at risk of narrowing their curriculum and course offerings as a response to federal educational policies that punish schools based on their students' standardized test scores. Trying to minimize grouping or tracking has been found to be more difficult for middle and high schools (Gamoran & Weinstein, 1998). Gamoran and Weinstein (1998) found that some teachers were able to provide high quality instruction regardless of whether the structure of the school involved de-tracking or tracking students. They posited that particular conditions were more important than school structure—intellectual rigor, commitment to equity, and the use of differentiation in a way that does not contradict equity (p. 410), all played significant roles in providing highly effective classroom instruction to students across academic levels and experiences. In fact, at SWMS it appears that the teachers and administrators are on board with the educational practice of putting students on particular tracks—to provide them with the extra support they need to do well in Language Arts and Math. In our interview, Principal Adams also articulated how *pathways*, is different than traditional ability grouping though she never explicitly states this.

So the way we've done it is to try and work them really hard I guess is the best way to say it and then get them out of it. I mean, our goal is to move them out of the doubles. Our goal is to get them in the AVID⁶⁴ pathway, which is a proficient pathway. That's what I tell parents. That's what we want kids to be in. Do we want them to be in honors? Absolutely. But our goal is get them to be proficient or advanced and to get them in an AVID college preparedness. Because everything we do in the doubles is grade level, too. We don't put them in a pathway and then dumb down the curriculum and then say, oh you can't do it. Let me give you multiplication instead of quadratic formula. So there are really high standards. They have more time in a double to access it and then more time for help and support and a little bit more time to do different types of activities that might support their learning. But every year it's fewer and fewer kids who need it. When we first started we were like all the kids – we were like 70% of our kids need extra support. And now we're down to about 40, depending, Language Arts or Math 30 or 40. I mean, Math 70% of our kids were proficient last year. That means only 30% were below grade level.

The research on the negative correlation with tracking practices and students' educational achievement may also contribute to educators' avoidance of labeling educational practices as tracking. Principal Adams tries her best to defend their school wide strategy of grouping by addressing how it is different than tracking: 1) the groupings are flexible, 2) the curriculum is at grade-level, and 3) the goal is for students to transition out of the doubles pathway as soon as possible. Students at South West are transitioned to the AVID track once they are considered *proficient* or *advanced*, whereas students placed on remedial educational tracks do not often transition out (Oakes, 1987). At South West, Principal Adams reports that this occurs

⁶⁴ Explained on the school's website, AVID is offered as an elective at SWM where students take field trips to local colleges and must maintain a 2.0 grade point average. Students may apply to take AVID as an elective and are accepted based on grades, teacher recommendations, an interview and effort toward achievement.

relatively frequently and the overall percentage of students that are considered “doubles” or “double-doubles” has dropped significantly over the last few years. Another huge difference with the tracking occurring at South West Middle is that the courses being offered twice (through doubles) are considered the core curriculum that students need access to in order to do well in other areas. The courses are not remedial in the sense that they lower the expectations or water (dumb) down the curriculum.

The federal practice of using students’ Language Arts and Math scores on standardized tests to drive educational accountability may be connected to the school’s decision to schedule doubles for these courses rather than Science or Social Studies, though these courses are also considered the core curriculum.⁶⁵ Victoria’s Language Arts teacher, Ms. Lim, explained the focus on tests and remedial course offerings à la “doubles” as a positive aspect of the school, one in which the teachers are committed to because they care about the students and the students respond well to the focus on academic culture.

I think that the school does a really good job of kind of acting as kind of that home – not home environment, but it definitely we’re like that strict, rigid routine where the kids know what’s expected. And they know that we’re not gonna ever change from that because we want them to do well. And so I feel like this school does a really good job in terms of allowing the kids to, you know, at least see what path they want to go on. And it’s really crazy because the kids that are in the doubles or the intervention classes because they need help on Language Arts or Math, they know that they’re in there because they need to like improve on their test scores. They need to improve in certain areas. And they want to – a lot of them are like “well I wanted to, but next year I don’t want to have a double. Next year I want to have an elective.” And so that’s their goal.

In addition to expressing her commitment and support for South West’s tough approach to academics, Ms. Lim shares her belief that the students are able to choose which academic pathway they will be on by setting goals and working hard on the California State Tests. This type of ideology supports the very essence of NCLB’s meritocratic focus—when teachers have high expectations for all students and students work hard they can advance in their achievement. In the case of South West, the dual effort by teachers and students to focus strictly on academics has contributed to a climate of positive change (on test scores).

The V.P. during the first year of the study, Ms. Smith, explained in her interview how students were rewarded for their performance on the CSTs in the beginning of the school year.

We celebrate a lot of the testing times, so when we first started with the school year, the first month that we started we did a medal ceremony, and we gave students who are proficient or advanced in any of their testing a medal for either language arts or math. So they could have two medals. Then we give certificates for kids who place, you know, who advance 10 points or advanced 30 points. So that could mean proficient to advanced, but that could also mean basic to proficient or below basic to basic. Just so that we can award a lot more students.

⁶⁵ Only the California Standards Tests (CST) scores for English-Language Arts and Math are counted towards a school’s *Adequate Yearly Progress*. English-Language Arts, Math, History-Social Science, and Science are used in *Academic Performance Index* scores.

Students are explicitly rewarded if they improve on test scores; similar to the way Title I schools are rewarded vis-à-vis the federal accountability system. Another teacher (not in the study), quoted in an educational magazine (see Image 6.5) shared his belief that standardized test scores may not be the best way to evaluate schools, but the school has nevertheless, experienced some positive changes due in the last several years—a time period when they were in Program Improvement.

“It went from being *that* school — where nobody wanted to be — to the school where everybody wants to be, and is now considered a hidden treasure,” says ██████ “We may not buy into the argument that test scores are the way in which schools should be judged, but the school’s scores are now stellar (in the 800s). Teachers have earned the right to do it their way.”

Image 6.5: SWMS Educator Quote

In an educational magazine article, a teacher at South West alludes to the positive changes at South West that made them a “hidden treasure” in the district.

Educational research suggests that low-income and ethnically and linguistically diverse students are more likely to have lowered expectations for their academic achievement (Darling-Hammond, 1995; Olneck, 1995). The climate at South West Middle appears to be the opposite—a collective ideology of high expectations for all students, with academic structures and supports in place for those who need it. Course offerings, however, are driven by state standardized tests, as a result of high-stakes policies (i.e., Title I, Part A) that placed South West in Program Improvement (PI).⁶⁶ Doubles in Language Arts and Math—the courses that impact AYP and API scores—were not an educational remedy at South West before the school went into PI status. This schoolwide educational intervention may play a role in students performing better on the state tests. The question remains whether students on the remedial tracks are negatively affected in the short or long-term. Teacher expectations play a significant role in students’ educational outcomes (Levine & Lezotte, 1995), where children at a very young age are able to determine which students are considered smart depending on how the teacher interacts with them (Weinstein, Marshall, Sharp, & Botkin, 1987), and which groups or classes they are assigned (e.g., the remedial class, the low reading group, or “doubles” as in the case of South West).

Take the cases of focal students Victoria Fuentes and Diego Baez. In my interviews with the school officials—both administrators and teachers—Victoria was a nice, quiet student and Diego was loud and sometimes disruptive. Each was on a different *pathway* at South West as well. During her seventh grade year, Victoria received a double dose of Language Arts. According to her Language Arts teacher that year, Ms. Lim, Victoria shouldn’t be on the “doubles” track. Ms. Lim stated in an interview:

With that student I feel very confident that she’s like totally on the right track. I’ve told her before, too, I was saying that hopefully next year that she won’t have a double Language Arts. Because she’s in a double Language Arts but a single Math because she’s proficient in Math. And from the beginning of the year I’m like, you shouldn’t be in a double. So she’s done really well. So hopefully next year she can test out a bit. So

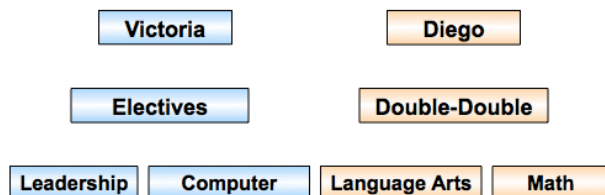
⁶⁶ NCLB requires that all students are proficient in Language Arts and Math by the 2013-2014 school year though some states applied for flexibility with this provision. California was not one of those states.

it will depend on how well she does on the CST. Hopefully she won't have to be in that double, because I don't think she really needs it.

Confirming that the CST drives the placement and scheduling decisions at SWMS, Ms. Lim also overtly acknowledged doubles as the remedial track in which students need to test out. According to focal student Diego Baez in a recorded interview I conducted at his home, the “CELDT students like him”⁶⁷ receive an extra English class. Diego mentioned that he also needs extra help in Math so he has two Math classes. During the study, Diego transitioned to high school but he never had the opportunity to transition out of the doubles track.

The graphic below (Image 6.6) juxtaposes the educational track the focal students were on during their 8th grade year⁶⁸. It illustrates that because Diego did not perform well on state standardized tests in Math or Language Arts, he was placed on a “double-double” track that prevented him from taking electives. That is, Diego never tested out of the doubles track. Victoria, on the other hand, was able to take two electives her last semester at SWMS—a leadership class and a computer class. Both courses are arguably preparing her for the college track—she was able to build skills needed to do well in preparing for and graduating from college. These “resume-building” classes were not offered to Diego because his school day consisted largely of Language Arts and Math, with the exception of Science and History periods. Students have other options for electives (e.g., robotics, AVID, band). The larger issue is the time on task, that is on Math and/or Language Arts, takes away from students’ opportunities to take courses that will provide them with experiences that will help place them on the college-going track.

Image 6.6: Focal Students’ Pathways



Victoria is on the college bound pathway.

Limited Parental Roles at South West Middle

During the time of the study, South West students experienced an increased focus on academics and testing due to the federal government’s intervention à la Title I and the Program Improvement sanction. SWMS parents also came into contact with the educational provisions of NCLB, which influenced their roles within and outside of the school. This finding—that parental involvement roles were limited and expanded through NCLB provisions—is illustrated through a

⁶⁷ Instead of using the school-sanctioned label of *English Learner* to refer to students that have not been redesignated as fluent in the English language, a category that he belongs to, Diego uses the names of the test that *English Learners* are required to take each year to refer to that group—the CELDT, or California English Language Development Test.

⁶⁸ Victoria was a year behind Diego but because the study spanned a 2-year period, I was able to document their course load during their last year at South West.

mix of data, including transcripts from an interview with Principal Adams and one focal mother, field notes from observations conducted on the SWMS campus, and a transcript of an audio-recorded narrative from another focal parent.

Parent presence on South West's campus appeared to be limited though there were exceptions I observed. Every time I was on campus before the school day started, a group of several Latina mothers would stand near the front gates of the school adjacent to the front office, and greet the students as they walked in—*Buenos días. ¡Que tengas buen día!* The parents would engage in conversation with each other and sometimes take notes on a pad of paper. I later found out from V.P. Lim in our interview that the parents were called upon to assist with the school's administrative duties.

Every morning we have a lot of parents wait out here and kind of like watch the kids go in and help us with writing tardy slips and stuff.

Greeting and watching students was one way parents made their presence on campus known. In our interview I asked Principal Adams to share how the school engaged parents in their children's education. She responded with a somber perspective of parent involvement based on the educational policies they were working under.

I feel like we're always talking down to them [the parents]. Especially like in school site council, we need parents to get involved. But our whole school site council agenda is always teaching the parents this, teaching the parents that. You know, at some point as a parent you want to be involved. You don't want to learn about the budget then learn about this and that and all those types of things that, legally they're important, but for a parent, you know, they want to participate and feel like they're giving back to the school and not just always getting trained on something and being told. You know, cause every meeting we have is, I have to give you this information. We have to have an annual Title I meeting, which I have to stand up there and go through all the federal Title I guidelines. Here's what you get. We have to have an annual ELL meeting. Here's the guidelines for English language learner money and here's the money that we get and that's the meeting we have to have. School site council we have to have a minimum of five meetings. Every meeting has an agenda that we have to explain to parents. And so we're asking them to come to just sit and listen to us. And that's not really getting parents involved.

I followed up by asking Principal Adams to share more about the content of the meetings with parents and if policy influenced what was covered. In her response she confirmed that policy was playing a role in the parent meeting agendas.

Yeah, they're all, yeah, legal, you know, you have to have an annual Title I meeting or you don't get Title I money. You have to have an annual ELL meeting or you don't get ELL money. You have to explain to parents why you get it and what you do with it and what your plan is for it, and things like that. It's not that parents don't care, but some of the legal stuff that we talk about is really not vital to them. You know, some of the optional things are much more vital, like if we can get the sheriff in here to talk about internet crime – you know, cause all their kids are on Facebook and things like that. And they worry about that. That's much more valuable to them. And when we have meetings and we're talking about – it's not they don't care about what's happening in the classroom, but I think that overall they have faith that the teachers are teaching

what they should be teaching. So sometimes it's hard when you're saying, well there's what they're teaching, and we're gonna explain to you how they teach it. I don't think that's vital for parent involvement. The parents care about how the school looks. They care about how safe it is. Those are the issues that they want to bring up and talk about that's outside of all the required parent involvement activities that we have.

Principal Adams expressed that she felt her hands were tied because of parent involvement policy that dictated how the school was to interact with parents. Title I and Title III provisions of NCLB prescribe the ways in which schools need to interact with parents of low-income students and English Learners (see chapter 4 for more information on Title III of NCLB). In fact, parent involvement is one of the critical program elements that Title I schools are required to address to ideally influence the provision's overall goal to have all students reach proficiency on state academic achievement standards and assessments.⁶⁹ Parent involvement provisions of Title I require that schools share information with parents on school programs, academic standards, and assessments, in order for parents to be more “knowledgeable partners” (Epstein & Hollifield, 1996). However, some of the unintended consequences of NCLB and Title I may be the ways in which parents and schools in low-income schools interact within schools. Principal Adams explained how she believes parents wanted to be involved and shared topics she anticipated parents would like covered at school meetings. South West's focus on academics via high-stakes testing preparation leaves it difficult to address other areas of schooling that are, in many ways, vitally as important. She ended the interview with a thought on parent involvement.

I think our expectations of involvement maybe need to change more than saying parents need to be at school. We don't need them to be at school just to staple papers. We want them to, you know, know what's going on with their child and be a part of their lives, not necessarily do busy work for me.

Principal Adams' explanations illustrate how the implementation of NCLB policy may simultaneously facilitate and impede home-school partnerships. The next section of this chapter explores how some SWMS parents were able to play a role in implementing the educational provisions of Title I through work they did in their communities; work that Principal Adams and the other school officials were unaware of.

Supplemental Education Services

NCLB authorizes the use of federal funds to pay for specialized tutoring programs for students attending Title I schools that are in years 2-5 of Program Improvement because they failed to make *Adequate Yearly Progress* (AYP) for a third year in row (U.S. Department of Education, 2012) [P.L. 107-110, Sec. 1116(e)(12)(C)]. These *Supplemental Education Services* (SES) are usually provided after school or on the weekends in Reading, Language Arts, or Math (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). There are over 100 for-profit, non-profit, or religious organizations approved by the state department of education that have been deemed of “high

⁶⁹ Parents are mentioned over 300 times throughout the NCLB act, though Section 1118, Title I of the Act is the only component committed entirely to parent involvement (Public Education Network and National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education, 2004).

quality, research based, and specifically designed to increase student academic achievement” as mandated by NCLB (California Department of Education, 2013e).

The California Department of Education must hold SES providers accountable by evaluating the quality of the services, the alignment of the services with the state curriculum, and the improvement of the academic achievement of students receiving the services through their own developed assessments of the state standardized tests, but some studies have indicated that there has been little to no accountability in how supplemental educational services are being implemented (Sunderman & Kim, 2004) and the effects of SES on student achievement is difficult to evaluate (Ascher, 2006). There is also an issue with how students are recruited to participate in SES. In having the responsibility to provide parents with their options, Valley Unified and South West Middle hold an annual “free tutoring” fair where approved providers share information on their approach to educational tutoring. These private tutoring providers, however, are all vying for federal money under NCLB and are in direct competition with each other.

The ways in which these tutoring providers recruit students outside of the annual district tutoring fair was brought to my attention through audio-recorded conversations and semi-structured interviews at the homes of the focal parents in Valley Unified—Rebecca Fuentes and Concha Baez. Rebecca shared how some companies wait outside school events to enroll students. She also shared how for the two previous years, she and Concha walked around their neighborhood wearing bright yellow-colored T-shirts with the name Brain Hurricane (see Image 6.7 below). One of the 50-60 providers approved by the state that the district utilized, the Brain Hurricane company paid cash to Spanish-speaking parents to recruit students in the Latino-dominant community for their programs. Rebecca and Concha knocked on neighbors’ doors, speaking from a script provided by the company to convince other parents to enroll their children. As first-generation immigrants from Mexico without legal status, they get paid under the table to recruit other students.

Image 6.7 Brain Hurricane’s Logo on Focal Parents’ T-shirts



Latina Mothers, the Workforce, and Out of School Programs

The focal mothers in Valley Unified shared their experiences working for Brain Hurricane several months into the study. Rebecca extensively shared her experiences with Brain Hurricane with me during the summer of 2011. Her three daughters were not at home as they were visiting with their uncle in Atlanta for a month while Rebecca searched for a better living situation for them. The four of them slept in one room that had a bathroom. On this June

evening, we sat outside talking about how the summer was going. When she began talking about school related topics, I asked her if I could audio-record our conversation. Rebecca told her experiences with SES as indicated below in interview transcript. She began with telling how she was first introduced to the company by a woman wearing a Brain Hurricane shirt.

Yo iba caminando y una muchacha de que trae la blusa de Brain Huracán. Me habló y me dijo, “¿Le gustaría inscribir a sus hijos en un programa para que les ayuden en matemáticas y lectura?” Pero ella no me especificó elementary o middle school. Pero yo la inscribí. Y ya me inscribió. Y pero nunca me llamaron.

I was walking and a girl with a Brain Hurricane T-shirt talked to me and said: “Would you like to sign your children up for a program that can help them with Math and Reading?” But she didn’t say if it was for elementary or middle school. But I signed them up, and I also signed myself up. And they never called me.

In this excerpt of her narrative, Rebecca shared her first exposure to the Brain Hurricane Supplemental Education Services provider. When naming the company, she translated hurricane to Spanish (*Huracán*) but left “brain” in its English form. The name of the company in English is peculiar, so the literal translation of *Huracán del Cerebro* does not flow like Brain Huracán. Rebecca then explained that she later received a call from the company to see if she would like to work for them. When she agreed, they gave her information about what her job would entail—how she would work two hours in the morning when the children start school, and two hours in the afternoon after the school day was over. She attended a training located in a city about 15 miles away from the school.

In the excerpt below, she explains how she was told in the training how to communicate with the parents she was trying to recruit for the company’s services. The text below is in quotation marks as she is repeating what a Brain Hurricane representative told her to say when she talks with parents.

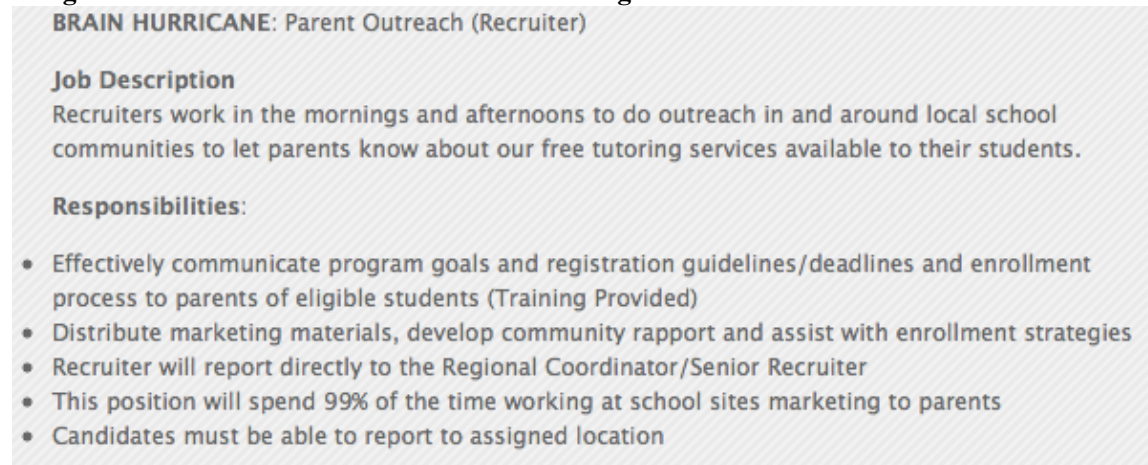
“Vas a decirle a los padres—no te vas a dirigir con los niños, solamente con los padre—‘buenos días señora, estamos ofreciendo un programa de break huracán para los exámenes estatales y todo esto es gratuito. Usted no tiene que pagar nada. Solamente lo tienes que inscribir y nosotros le ayudamos. Haber un tutor para menos de seis niños y va ver un tutor para que les enseñe matemáticas o lectura, en lo que el niño ande atrasado. O tiene que ser una cosa—la matemática o la lectura—donde el niño lo necesitarán. Ya no tienes que pagar nada. Y va a hacer después de la escuela, son dos horas nada mas, y van a hacer cuarenta horas lo que se hagan cuarenta horas en dos días por semana. “Y ya hay—la vemos no se preocupe que el niño no comió le vamos a dar su snack. Y ya, para recompensar lo que estuvo ahí pues va a recibir un pizza party y usted puede venir. Para ver los adelantos que el tuvo.’ Y ya.”

“You are going to tell the parents – don’t tell the kids, just the parents – ‘good morning, ma’am, we are offering a program called Brain Hurricane for the state tests, and everything is free. You don’t have to pay anything. You just have to sign them up, and we’ll help you. There will be a tutor for every six children, and you will see a tutor that can teach you Math and Reading, the area where your child is behind. It needs to be one thing- either math or Reading- whatever your child needs. Now you don’t have to pay anything. And (your child) will be going there after school, just for two hours, and they are going to do 40 hours, in meetings twice a week. And that’s it. Don’t worry if your

child hasn't eaten; we'll make sure he gets his snack. And now, to compensate the kids for being here, they will receive a pizza party and you can come. So that you can see the gains your child made.' And that's it."

As illustrated in this segment of Rebecca's narration, the company has a script they provide to parents recruiting. On a Latino-based website, a job posting for this position⁷⁰ was listed which detailed the job description, responsibilities, required skills and compensation. Image 6.8 shows the company's official documentation of the job, mirroring much of what Rebecca explained in her narrative (e.g., job description, training provided). A huge difference, however, was the job posting states that 99% of the job entails being on school grounds marketing to parents. This was not the case for Rebecca and Concha who walked around their neighborhood to recruit parents to enroll their children in the tutoring program, both never spending any time on campus to do this work.

Image 6.8 Brain Hurricane Recruiter Job Posting



When I asked Rebecca why the schools have these tutoring programs⁷¹ she responded with an answer that invokes academic levels and Academic Performance Index scores summarized earlier in this chapter.

Pues por que, están viendo que los niños están debajo rendimiento. Por ejemplo, las escuelas que no lo necesitaban no íbamos. Por ejemplo, vamos a poner que la academia esta si lo necesitaba, South West donde está mi hija; no lo necesita. Por que esta e el nivel alto. Come el porcentaje alto. Por ejemplo, si el porcentaje esta ocho punto cinco, o ellos están muy bien, no lo necesitan. Pero acá el porcentaje de la academia esta bajo de ocho, de ocho cientos lo que dice el score que debe de tener, no lo tenia. Entonces por eso se enfocan en las escuelas que si lo necesitan. Por ejemplo, aquí tenemos [lists names of local schools] que es todas las que están aquí cerquitas. A esas son a las que íbamos a si a decirle que había un programa para que los niños no—este programa que ningún niño se quede atrás, este programa.

⁷⁰ Job listings for Brain Hurricane are posted on various websites for this recruitment position, and others, including tutors and Parent Outreach Representatives.

⁷¹ At the time of this conversation with Rebecca, I was unaware of Supplemental Education Services.

So because they are seeing students with low achievement. For example, we didn't go to the schools that didn't need it. For example, let's say there's a school that does need it, but my daughter's school doesn't need it, because it's scoring at a high level. For example, if the score is 8.5, or they are OK, then they don't need it. But here the percentage in the school is below 8, from 800 they tell you what the score should be, but the school doesn't have it. Then you focus on the schools that need the program. For example, here we have [lists names of local schools] that are all close by. These are the ones we went to see tell them that there was this program for kids. This program that the children no—no child is left behind, this program.

Rebecca's narrative explains her understanding of the educational discourse surrounding schools in Program Improvement (PI). Since South West was in their final year of PI status, Rebecca explains how the school did not need these tutoring services—though many schools in the area (she listed 5) qualified for Supplemental Education Services. She began by speaking to a score on a 10 point scale (8.5) and then shifts to 800—the current format of Academic Performance Index (API) scores though the state also gives schools a score on a scale of 1-10 to compare their academic performance on standardized tests with other public schools in general and those that have similar racial and socioeconomic demographics. Interestingly, Rebecca explains how these services are offered through the NO Child Left Behind program (*este programa que ningún niño se quede atrás*, though a few months later at the Back to School Night event, she asked me what No Child Left Behind means while reading it from Principal Adams' powerpoint slide. It appeared that Rebecca understood the surface meaning of the law—that no child should be left behind in their academic progress, but didn't make the connection to the official name of this piece of legislation.

Concha Baez referenced NCLB when she explained the various programs her son participated in outside of school during an interview held at her home. She specifically named Brain Hurricane and told me she worked for them to get more families involved.

¿Se recuerda de que el gobernador hizo que ningún niño se quede atrás—para los tests del estado? Pues es para esas tutorías para esas escuelas que están mas bajo el nivel académico. Allí las ofrece uno. Como la [she names schools in the district]. Para las escuelas donde el nivel académico esta bajo. Se ofrecen las tutorías. Que sean de bajos recursos.

Do you remember that the governor created that no child is left behind—for the state tests? Well it's for these tutorials for the schools that are at the lowest academic levels. There they offer one. Like [names schools in the district]. For the schools where the academic level is low. They offer the tutoring programs. Those that are low-income.

In this short interview excerpt, Concha explained her understanding of Supplemental Education Services through her experience as a Brain Hurricane recruiter. Her understanding is that it is a tutoring program provided to students through NCLB (*no child is left behind*) at Title I schools (*low-income*) in Program Improvement (*lowest academic levels*). Many parents (among other educational stakeholders) use schools' Academic Performance Index scores and rankings to determine their quality. Rebecca and Concha were no different—they understood that South West was no longer a school with students performing at the lowest academic level; therefore they are now unable to receive Brain Hurricane services. Most striking though, is these Latina

mothers engaged in underground parent involvement practices unnoticed by school officials. Concha and Rebecca demonstrated their agency by being involved in what they determined to be school-sanctioned business, though getting paid under the table is a potentially risky practice for these undocumented women in the present hyper-politicized climate surrounding immigration issues.

This is a unique place of parent involvement, and not without complications or contradictions. Rebecca and Concha's education-based work in their communities went beyond the prescribed parental involvement roles inherent in Title I, Part A provisions (Henderson, 2002). In their roles as both "parents" and "agents of the state," they implemented NCLB policies by enrolling students into tutoring services to prepare for high-stakes standardized tests. Some might see them as being exploited by such policies and the company's business recruitment efforts. Yet, they offered Concha and Rebecca opportunities for parental engagement in education and the ability to make a small income. Concha's husband was able to pay the bills and support the Baez family with his construction job. For a single-mom without legal status though, Rebecca's work as a recruiter for Brain Hurricane aided in her ability to put food on the table, a way to be "involved" in school-related work that contributed to her and her daughters' economic survival.

Chapter Seven

Mexican Immigrant Families Doing School During an Era of Educational Reform

Revealed in this dissertation are the stories of four mixed-status Mexican immigrant families with a child in a California middle school. Though the families' experiences with the public school system are distinct, they are telling of the ways in which schooling, language learning, and parent involvement is permeated by educationally-based discourses that play a role in how they experience and make sense of education. Through the perspectives and experiences documented through the cases of the Garcia, Romero, Fuentes, and Baez families, the study reveals key themes and findings that center on being an immigrant parent and a student in a time of high-stakes educational reform. These themes and findings are reviewed below.

Key Study Findings and Themes

Institutionalized policy discourses are pervasive in the business of doing school for educators and families. Institutionalized policy discourse is defined here as language used in either oral or text-based form that targets Latino students and/or families as either subjects or objects (Fine, 1993a) of federal, state, district, or school level policy, as well as the language that surrounds programs or practices that are a result of or directly connected to such policies of urban educational reform. Institutionalized policy discourse is written for a variety of social actors, including school officials, students, and their families and overtly or covertly targets Latino or non-dominant students and families in some way. School officials take up this discourse as they make educational decisions. Because schools are key institutions that shape daily living, it is inevitable that traces of this policy discourse can be found in daily familial discursive interactions.

This dissertation provided poignant examples of how focal parents and their children referenced federal legislation, policy initiatives, and educational-based labels as they made sense of educational practices and their own educational experiences through narratives and conversations within their homes. Chapter four provided examples of Justa's appropriation of institutionalized policy discourse surrounding her role as the President of the English Learner Advisory Committee at Garfield School. She referenced NCLB's Title III provisions (*los Títulos*) when explaining the rights and responsibilities of parents of English Learners and the schools that serve them. She also used the educational label of *English Learners* (*Aprendices de Inglés*) throughout her audio-recorded narratives describing her participation in her daughter's school. In chapter five the Garcia family utilized the discourse of language policy to explain how Guadalupe experienced the process of maintaining and expanding her bilingualism. The Garcia family spent time speaking about Guadalupe's standardized tests—namely how she prepared for and performed on the California English Language Development Test (CELDT). Chapter six included examples of focal parents Concha and Rebecca's use of institutionalized policy discourse in their roles as recruiters for *Supplemental Education Services* in their community-based parent involvement that operated under the school's radar. They spoke about the provisions and implications of No Child Left Behind (*ningún niño se quede atrás*), the California State Tests (*los tests del estado*), Program Improvement and Academic Performance Index scores and rankings (*mas bajo el nivel académico*). Focal student Diego Baez referenced California's high-stakes language proficiency test for English Learners when he referred to

“CELDT students like him” when talking about his class schedule. Overall, it appeared that when focal parents and students were asked to talk about school or education they often ventriloquized educational policy in some form or way.

Parents are socialized into particular educational roles within and across the home and school contexts by a variety of social actors, including school officials, peers, and their own children. This socialization process is bidirectional, complex, and mediated by school structures, policies, and practices in some way. The socialization processes that Justa and Sofia experienced (documented in chapter four) as they became involved in their children’s education in school-sanctioned and non-sanctioned ways is a clear example. Through a bidirectional process that involved socialization and explicit teaching by more “expert” others (e.g., Principal Spencer, district personnel), the mothers were socialized into distinct roles as “involved parents” through dynamic and discursive social interactions. This socialization over the course of years led to Justa’s development of linguistic faculty in using the institutionalized language that is part and parcel to these roles. However, there was a limit to the leadership roles Latino immigrant parents were able to play in Marina Unified. Justa and Sofia became involved in their children’s education in school-sanctioned ways, yet their status as an immigrant other reduced them to *immigrant parents involved*, empowered to make decisions that only apply to children like their own (as is the case with ELAC) or participate in a way that gets taken up as a cultural commodity (planning and preparing for the school Cinco de Mayo Celebration). Eventually they began the process of “withdrawing” that Justa details in chapter four (*cuando padres se retiran*). Previous research has identified the ways in which parents are tracked into parent involvement pathways that are racialized and class-based (Gartrell, 1995). This stratification process impedes non-dominant parents from fully participating in the school structure and making positive changes within the system.

The friendships developed between Justa and Sofia in Marina Unified and Rebecca and Concha in Valley Unified also played a significant role in facilitating their participation in the school system, whether or not they were participatory roles sanctioned by the school. These relationships were based on mutual respect and collegiality, and provided a safe space outside of the realm of school to talk about the business of doing school. The relationships prompted further parent involvement such as the case of Sofia becoming the District English Learner Advisory Committee representative, or Concha joining Rebecca’s recruitment efforts so that students in the Palms community could receive additional academic tutoring.

The interpretation and implementation of educational policies by school officials affect school climates and the discourses specifically surrounding parent involvement and home-school relations. Schools receiving Title I funding have the immense task of implementing federally prescribed parent involvement policies that may foster parental engagement but also inadvertently limit parental roles and home-school interactions. The parents of English Learners are afforded distinct educational opportunities in the process of doing school that are influenced largely by educational policies (particularly Title III provisions of NCLB) and language policies. These policies and the resulting practices have the potential to facilitate or undermine positive interactions between linguistically diverse homes and schools. Research has shown that schools underestimate and underutilize language minority parents’ willingness and ability to assist in their children’s academic success (August & Shanahan, 2006). Moreover,

Latino families are often portrayed as homogenous (Zentella, 2005) or passive recipients of social and educational policies (Fine, 1993a).

Still, parents exhibit tremendous agency in the business of doing school with or without the support of school structures. As was seen across all cases, Latino parents create their own participatory spaces in and around U.S. schools within diverse, sometimes alienating educational policy environments. Legal citizenship or middle class status is not a prerequisite for parents to play leadership roles in the schooling system and illustrating one's agency as a non-dominant parent can be covert or overt and school-sanctioned or not. Justa had a very positive experience with educational reform efforts when her daughter was in elementary school as detailed in her parent involvement narrative analyzed in chapter four. Her recollection of her training with Cynthia from the school district highlighted a process where she felt empowered as a parent knowledgeable of federal and state policies that dictated her and her daughter's educational rights. The accountability inherent in ELAC transferred into a sense of empowerment for Justa and many other parents in Marina Unified.

This was not the case at Valley Unified where the accountability process involved in parent involvement practices at South West Middle School was largely for compliance and auditing purposes. In chapter six, Principal Adams at South West Middle School lamented the types of parent involvement expectations the school had based on federal policy that prescribed the ways in which Title I schools interact with parents. Despite such narrow roles and opportunities for involvement within the walls of South West Middle, Concha and Rebecca carved out another way to be involved in the educational process, an involvement that school officials were unaware of. As prescribed by Title I, Part A provisions, schools must designate companies to offer Supplemental Education Services (e.g., Brain Hurricane) to students when they are in Program Improvement. This type of educational prescription, however, directly and sometimes inadvertently, shapes how homes and schools interact—helping define, prescribe, and create parental roles and duties within schools, families, and communities (Baquedano-López, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013). Concha and Rebecca's recruitment of other families for these supplemental services highlights the importance of how parents can and do use their abilities to author new places in schooling practices to position themselves strategically so that they can influence life in schools in nontraditional ways (Barton et al., 2004). Regardless of whether those practices occur within or outside school walls, and whether they are commissioned by school officials or operate under the radar, these practices are occurring, they are shaping the way individual families and their networks come to understand the process of education, and are ultimately part of the fabric of U.S. schools.

High-stakes educational tests and related accountability practices impact the daily experiences of low-income students and their parents. No Child Left Behind tackles issues of school and student failure, and takes up a moral narrative that promotes high expectations for all students regardless of their social status. Through these grounding principles, NCLB has created a climate of accountability via high-stakes testing among public school educators and students in districts and schools nation-wide, where a centralized approach to education is governed by federal rewards and sanctions (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Hunter & Bartee, 2003). Increased centralization of government in local educational decision-making inevitably impacts parents and their students. Based on standardized test scores, students at South West were placed on academic paths that dictated the academic courses offered to them, playing a role in shaping the educational identities students construct and their long-term educational opportunities. There is

strong consensus that effective schools hold high expectations for educational achievement for all students with a clear vision of what educational achievement entails, regardless of program models (Gandara, 1995; Marzano, 2003). More so than ever, high stakes standardized test performance influences schools' goals and visions of education and may be their prime educational achievement standards. When a discourse of high expectations, and the educational practices that ensue, translate to the narrowing of school curriculum and teaching-to-the-test practices, no one loses more than our students.

Home-School Relationships Should Not Be Bound by Policy

Educators and families construct meaning and make decisions related to schooling that are shaped by sociocultural and political factors that influence quotidian interactions between the home and school (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Heath, 1983; Lightfoot, 1978; Valdés, 1996). The focus of this dissertation was to provide intricate and detailed stories of the four Mexican immigrant families whose lives were and will continue to be greatly impacted by the implementation of educational policies and practices that are written for and about them. It is in light of this, that the perspectives and experiences shared in this dissertation serve to speak back to policymakers that so often define the parameters of the home-school relationship while overlooking the lived realities of Spanish-speaking immigrant families that are directly affected.

Federal policies that promote parents as educational partners through parental involvement initiatives are prevalent. This shift attempts to put accountability on schools to better serve non-dominant families, but narrow approaches in response to such initiatives can impede meaningful interactions between the home and school. For example, parent involvement provisions of Title I require that schools share information with parents on school programs, academic standards, and assessments, in order for parents to be more “knowledgeable partners” (Epstein & Hollifield, 1996). Yet this explicit stance that parents with children in schools that receive Title I funding (low-income) are ill-informed, places them at the receiving end of a so-called partnership. Additionally the federally-mandated use of School-Family Compacts for Title I schools that outline how families, school staff, and students are required to share responsibility for improved student academic achievement, relegates parent responsibility to marginal spaces that include monitoring attendance, homework completion, and TV watching, limiting a parent's role to one of surveillance, or “compliance officer or watchdog of the school system” (Mapp, 2011, p. 11). This notion of partnerships still constructs a perceived lack of parent involvement as a problem (in Title I schools only) and jeopardizes meaningful and authentic partnerships between the home and school in low-income areas.

Parent involvement policy and research targets ways to engage non-dominant parents with the hopes of building and sustaining partnerships between homes and schools. We can and should heed the government's goal to shift from viewing parents as participants to informed and empowered decision-makers in their children's education (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 2002). This must include the perspective of families that are at times, the most vulnerable to policy and educational decision-making. It is critical to distinguish between the practice of being in compliance with parent involvement legislature (i.e., parent involvement as an intervention) and creating local plans to build authentic partnerships with school communities that are family-led is critical.

As illustrated here, parent involvement is a journey, not an object or outcome (Barton et al., 2004). Becoming and being an involved parent is not static and it is never a finished journey.

It is also done according to one's own terms or parameters despite parent involvement initiatives that strive to expedite and evaluate this process. Parents exercise their agency in the parent involvement process in response to their own personal beliefs and attitudes about parenting and the educational process, as well as local contextual factors: federal, state, district, and school level policies, school culture, the sociopolitical context of immigration and society, and economical privileges and constraints. Further research must examine how, when, and why non-dominant parents get involved in school-sanctioned ways, and if, when, and why they deliberately choose to withdraw from the school domain, running the risk of being known as an *uninvolved parent*. The role of educational policy is not to distance the diverse home from the school, but the consequences of school level practices informed by such policies place constraints on the ways in which non-dominant individuals experience their parent involvement journey. That is, through the process of becoming "involved" parents, immigrant parents may experience a "parent involvement double bind," where they are active in their children's schools, but operate along designated and peripheral school spaces, and may eventually choose to be *uninvolved* within school walls.

Stanton-Salazar (1997) stresses the role that institutional discourse plays in the social reproduction of inequality. His work focuses on foregrounding "structural and ideological constraints" surrounding youth's ability to access "critical institutional resources" (p. 10) while considering the individual and cultural agency exhibited amongst such constraints. This work can be extended to first generation immigrant parents as the key socialization agents in their children's lives, who also need access to critical institutional resources as they come to understand the structures of the U.S. public school system. It is clear that many concerned educational stakeholders are striving to improve the partnerships between the home and school, and ultimately, the opportunities afforded to our nation's immigrant children. As we know, educational policy trickles down to influence practice, and the language of policy often seeps into discursive spaces such as educator talk. Through such talk evolves action so that structures are put into place that provide opportunities for parents to be involved in particular ways—largely by targeting them as in need of remediation—a by-product of their social status. It is not just the race, culture, or class of students that shapes their educational outcomes, but largely how policymakers and educators use descriptors or demographics (i.e., low-income) to make decisions about what opportunities are afforded particular students and their families. Continued careful ethnographic research has the potential to directly address the gaps in such policy-making, foregrounding the agentive ways traditionally marginalized groups engage in daily decision-making, and by reiterating the fact that parent-led involvement initiatives and programs are the only way to have a true partnership between home and school.

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