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2006

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Second Language Learning as Empowerment: Adult Latino Immigrants as  
Students, Teachers, and Problem Solvers

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the  
degree of Doctor of Education

in

Teaching and Learning

by

Luz M. Chung

Committee in charge:

Ana Celia Zentella, Chair

Roberto Alvarez

Paula Levin

Hugh Mehan

2006



The dissertation of Luz M. Chung is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm:

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2006

## **Dedication**

*Para mis padres*

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## Acknowledgements

The culmination of this work would not have been possible without the support and *empuje* of many people. I am honored that Ana Celia Zentella served as my advisor. She is a terrific teacher and mentor, and a remarkable woman. As a strong, caring, and politically active Latina woman, she truly is as a role model for me. Ana Celia spent countless hours dialoguing with me about my research and my findings, while pushing my thinking, and enriching my knowledge about Latino immigrant families and their struggles in this country. With mucho *cariño*, she inspired me, energized me, and challenged me in order to produce a piece of writing that would respectfully represent the struggles, successes and aspirations of each of the participants of my study. Her passion for the subject was contagious, and her dedication to her students is exemplary. Ana Celia always made time to meet, talk, read and listen. She grounded me when I felt overwhelmed, reassured me when I felt confused about my work, and used her wonderful sense of humor to lift my spirits up.

I am also thankful to my talented and dedicated committee members. Paula Levin has known me for many years as a student and teacher. She helped me think through my pages and pages of data, in order to further my thinking about my findings and their implications for K-12 and adult education. Because of the quality of her teaching and her dedication to her students, she is also the reason why many of us have come back to the university as “older” adults, to pursue research in education at a doctoral level. Another wonderful teacher and committee member, Bud Mehan, patiently listened as I formulated my thoughts, and provided me with great insight into the sociological trends behind

classrooms and organizations. I also thank Bud for his unconditional support and guidance, and for his many challenging questions during our meetings, which proved useful in furthering my writing. Roberto Alvarez very graciously stepped in as a committee member representing a non-EDS (Education Studies) department. I am truly fortunate that someone with his life experiences and his impressive work with Latino communities served in my committee. Roberto helped me think outside the K-12 education box that I have been accustomed to because of my professional experiences, and to look at how Latino immigrants become players in mainstream society. I consider myself a lucky student for having had the support and the guidance of four terrific committee members, who never stopped motivating me and encouraging me through every step of this journey.

I also want to thank the CBET instructor for her generosity in opening up her classroom, motivating her students to participate in this study, and for believing in the importance of this research. I also want to thank the mothers of this study, who opened up their hearts and their homes, and for accommodating to my requests and schedule. These women are strong, intelligent and hardworking; they are truly inspirations to us all. Their *amor* for their children is evident in their words and actions, and their families are testaments to the sense of *superación* that immigrants seeking a better life bring to this country.

I knew that coming into this doctoral program meant learning to balance work, family and school. I must admit that achieving such balance has not always been easy. In particular, I must acknowledge my wonderful husband, Tarek El Rashidy, whose love, patience and energy have kept my engine going throughout this process. He has done so

much for me that it would take me another chapter just to summarize the important role he has played in the years of my doctoral studies. Tarek has responded with kindness to every single outburst of frustration, fatigue and anxiety that I have thrown at him. From running to Costco to get paper for the printer at the last minute, to fixing me the most wonderful cup of coffee when I was burning the midnight oil, he never stopped cheering me on. Therefore, this dissertation is also the result of his love, patience and support.

# Vita

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Develop appropriate new courses, curriculum, certificate programs, contracts and other professional development opportunities for educators.
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School administration, supervision and special programs coordination.
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 California Association for Bilingual Education (CABE) conference.
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 International Reading Association's "Technology, Reading and Learning Difficulties" conference.
- 1999 *Topic: Integrating literature across the curriculum*  
 California League of Middle Schools (CLMS) conference.

#### PUBLICATIONS:

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 Fluent in French (reading, speaking)

## **ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION**

Second Language Learning as Empowerment: Adult Latino Immigrants as Students,  
Teachers, and Problem Solvers

by

Luz M. Chung

Doctor of Education in Teaching and Learning

University of California, San Diego, 2006

Ana Celia Zentella, Chair

How do parents in an English as a Second Language class evaluate their learning experience, and what impact does learning English --and how they learn it-- have on their teaching practices with their children at home? The Mexican immigrants whose learning and use of English was analyzed from a critical pedagogy perspective attended a CBET (Community-Based English Tutoring) program in a large urban school district in Southern California. CBET is the product of Proposition 227, a controversial initiative that virtually eliminated bilingual education but provided for free adult ESL programs. In

exchange for free ESL classes, adult students must tutor young English learners in English. Consequently, parents in CBET classes receive training in pedagogical methods, family literacy, and parenting skills. This study examines how, in a program born of legislation that many viewed as anti-immigrant, Mexican immigrant parents take advantage of the knowledge and skills offered by CBET, and what, if anything, of their new knowledge and skills they apply to their children's learning development. Three research questions guide this work: (1) What do parents learn about teaching and learning and about parenting in their CBET program via classroom instruction and their training as tutors?, (2) Which teaching methods and philosophies, if any, do parents transfer to their home literacy practices, and, (3) What other teaching and learning practices beyond those related to literacy occur in the home? To answer these questions, three randomly selected Mexican immigrant mothers in a CBET class who have pre or school-aged children served as case studies. I observed 30 hours of classes and conducted interviews with the instructor, the parents, and their children, and observed learning events in each home. The mothers viewed CBET as a useful resource for learning English, but not as the primary source that guided their parenting, and teaching methods and philosophies. Findings from this study inform instructional practices for CBET teachers, adult ESL educators, and K-12 teachers, while providing insight into the teaching roles that Mexican immigrant mothers play at home, therefore challenging negative stereotypes of their parenting skills, and allowing for positive partnerships between families and schools.



## **Chapter 1: Immigrant parents as students and problem solvers**

Educational equity and adult language and literacy became a principal focus of my high school experience in my native Ecuador, and this dissertation is the culmination of that early commitment. During my senior year, I chose to write my thesis project on a nationwide effort towards reducing illiteracy rates. *Alfabetización*, as it is called in Spanish, was a significant governmental effort towards mass education in reading, writing and mathematics. The primary goal was to provide adults who had been marginalized economically, socially and ethnically (including indigenous people and low income blue collar workers), the opportunity to advance socio-economically. Completing the entire literacy program earned participants an elementary school diploma to help them secure better jobs. I co-taught Language Arts, Math and Social Studies to a group of about ten students. As I look back at my *Alfabetización* days, I cannot honestly say that I thought of myself as a critical teacher. Although I very much enjoyed the work, I never looked at it as more than a graduation requirement. Today, close to two decades later, after studying critical pedagogy and adult literacy issues, I view *Alfabetización* as a “liberating” activity. That early experience helped me understand the complex role of educators as facilitators of knowledge construction, and as advocates for social equality and quality education.

Now that I have “grown up,” gone to college, worked as a teacher, and gone back to graduate school, I find myself returning to the memories of my high school senior year. I now have the opportunity to research the field that pushed me into the world of

education. As a K-12 teacher, I worked closely with parents at an inner-city middle school in San Diego, California, for many years. I took part in the design and implementation of parent education programs to bridge the home and the school. Such activities were diverse in nature, from learning to do homework together, to students interviewing parents about their immigrant experiences, to doing hands-on math while preparing a meal. These programs also became venues for informing parents of the educational opportunities available to them and to their children. I realized that exploring the connection between parent and child learning experiences at home and at school could contribute to understanding how mainstream schooling favors or excludes certain groups. My interest in such a connection has led me to my current research focus on immigrant Spanish-speaking adult learners and their families. I investigated the language learning of immigrant parents attending English as a Second Language (ESL) classes at a local CBET (Community-Based English Tutoring) program, and what parents take from CBET to achieve their personal goals and to teach and help their children at home.

CBET is not just any ESL program, but the product of Proposition 227 (1998), a California statewide initiative that virtually eliminated “the use of bilingual education programs and services that use native languages to teach public-school students who have a limited knowledge of English”, and required English learners to be placed in English language immersion classrooms. It also provided for “subsidized English-language instruction programs,” such as CBET, “for parents or others who ‘pledge’ to tutor LEP [limited English proficient] students”

(<http://www.sen.ca.gov/sor/policy/education/prop227.htm>). It is ironic that a Proposition

that generated harsh criticism from educators of linguistic minority children and advocates of primary language education could potentially have empowering consequences for its adult ESL students. Despite its politically controversial origins, CBET may in fact be a program that enables transformative practices, in which, adult ESL educators can become “buffers between...students and often-hostile communities...” helping students attain the “American Dream” (Ferguson 1998, p. 4).

Because CBET also aims to teach adult students family literacy practices and parenting skills, I wanted to investigate what parents transfer from their ESL classroom to the home.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, my primary research questions were:

1. What do parents learn about teaching and learning and about parenting in their CBET program via classroom instruction and their training as tutors?
2. Which teaching methods and philosophies, if any, do parents transfer to their home literacy practices (e.g. reading to their children and doing homework with them)?
3. What other teaching and learning practices beyond those related to literacy occur in the home?

To answer these research questions, I observed a CBET class, conducted interviews with the CBET instructor, selected Spanish-speaking parents with pre or school-aged children as case studies, interviewed the case studies and visited their homes where I also interviewed their children (Please refer to the Research Design section for further details.)

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<sup>1</sup> I recognize that language learning is central to the adult students’ sense of accomplishment and will influence what parents may transfer. However, this study does not focus on their English language progress, but rather on what parents learn in addition to English in CBET classes.

## **Implications of this research**

Parents play an important role in the development of their children's academic skills, which is complicated when low income immigrant parents must also learn to address the challenges of a new educational system, a new language, and a new culture (Orellana et al., 1999; Orellana, 2003; Orellana et al., 2003). Though well meaning K-12 educators are aware of these challenges, their expectations of what home-school learning practices should look like may differ from those of immigrant families. This research was designed to help adult ESL educators understand which of the strategies for learning English that students learn were transferred to the students' lives, in their roles as teachers/tutors and problem solvers. Understanding the sociocultural and sociolinguistic dimensions of how and what immigrant parents' learn in ESL classes can inform ways in which parents and teachers can work together.

The relevant literature that informs and grounds my research questions and my research design and methodology is reviewed in the following section. My research was designed to fill some of the gaps that this literature has not fully addressed. Given my focus on the use of language and literacy teaching events in the CBET program and the homes of the adult students, I have specifically examined the literature on adult ESL and on the language and schooling socialization that take place in Latino homes. Because I also looked for evidence of transformative educational practices that lead to empowerment, I have also examined critical pedagogy literature. The following section presents a literature summary of these three areas of research, beginning with a brief overview of CBET and Proposition 227.

## **Literature review**

### **Learning English is “good for you:” The origins of CBET**

Proposition 227, promoted as the “English for the Children” initiative, was the brainchild of Ron Unz, a wealthy California businessman who bankrolled this special referendum. In 1998, 63% of California voters approved this initiative (but the majority of Hispanics voted against it), which was presented as a solution to help immigrant children learn English effectively and rapidly in order to access better educational opportunities. It was also designed as a way to end what was perceived as a dysfunctional bilingual education system. As a result, the legal rights to bilingual education of over 1,300,000 children in California were made more difficult to obtain (Santa Ana, 2002, p. 156), and nothing substantial was done to address institutional inequalities and inadequate educational services for marginalized linguistic minority students. Moreover, it forced children, who otherwise would have been placed in a bilingual program, to be placed in an English immersion program called “Sheltered English” which is not very different from a “sink or swim” model which drowns students in English only. In the Proposition 227 model, children are expected to build up “sufficient English to complete a curriculum designed for English speaking monolingual students” in one year, without the appropriate educational research nor the teacher training support needed to make this viable (Santa Ana, 2002, p. 199).

Because Proposition 227 provides free adult ESL programs (such as CBET), it appears to be compassionate and beneficial. CBET’s goals not only include improving adult students’ English conversation, writing and reading skills, it also aims at increasing

home literacy practices by teaching adult students parenting skills, how to read to their children, and how to help their children with school

(<http://www.sandiegocet.net/esl/cbet.php>).

To achieve CBET's home literacy learning goals, adult students are required to provide tutoring in English to local preschool or kindergarten English learners. Parents in CBET classes receive training in pedagogical methods that they may use to help their own children at home. As a result, while some may view CBET as a sincere vehicle for helping non-English speaking communities become part of the educational and workforce mainstream, others view it as a masked attempt to appease bilingual education and immigrant rights' supporters by providing a "service" to immigrant adults. Therefore, this research asks how adult students, within the complexities of CBET's political context, make sense of their learning and what home learning behavior changes can be documented as a result of their participation in this program.

Providing immigrants with opportunities to learn the dominant language may seem laudable or benign. One cannot doubt the dedication of ESL teachers and coordinators who want to help nonnative speakers with language development and skills to improve their lives. But, one must also question if ESL programs such as CBET reproduce assumptions about the superiority of the English language over the language spoken by the immigrant and his/her family. In other words, despite ESL programs' efforts to teach students a second language, it is important to evaluate the social and institutional contexts that frame immigrants' needs to acquire the dominant language, particular those of low socioeconomic status. Pierre Bourdieu (1991) points out that "all linguistic practices are

measured against the legitimate practices, i.e. the practices of those who are dominant” (p. 53). Thus, language is a market commodity that serves as a venue to upper mobility and to membership in the dominant society. As Monica Heller (1997) explains, the standard language/dialect is “the privileged property of the dominant classes”, and “is central to the exercise of symbolic domination” (p. 87). A member of a linguistic minority must learn to accept the supremacy of the dominant language, and must aim to attain such linguistic and cultural capital in order to “fit in” and “do well.” This means that underprivileged immigrants are aware of their subordinated place in their new society because they experience discrimination and see negative ramifications attached to not knowing the language of power. As a result, unintentionally perhaps, ESL programs may reproduce inequalities by emphasizing the use and acquisition of Standard English, at the expense of the home language, as the only way out of one’s marginalized condition.

In Southern California, in particular, this marginalization has a long history in the Mexican immigrant and Mexican American communities. *Roberto Alvarez vs. the Board of Trustees of the Lemon Grove School District* (also known as The Lemon Grove Incident, 1931) was the nation’s first successful court-mandated school desegregation case, where the Mexican community of Lemon Grove, California, fought a legal battle to win equal educational rights for their children. Therefore, as Robert Alvarez’ (1986) documentation of the Lemon Grove Incident proves, parents and children themselves can be active participants, and are interested in defending their language rights and capable of organizing on behalf of fair and equal treatment in education. The story of a community’s

struggle and success in challenging discriminatory practices serves as an example to educators whose philosophies and actions do not promote the dominance of one language or culture over another. Therefore, socially and politically conscientious adult ESL educators can develop and teach a type of curriculum that influences change and promotes opportunities for marginalized immigrant communities to shape their destiny, and overcome barriers to social and political advancement.

### **Critical pedagogy**

How can learning English guarantee immigrants' social mobility? Does it in fact end or challenge discriminatory perceptions of immigrants as burdens to the mainstream society? How can adult ESL programs contribute to the empowerment of linguistic minority communities? Critical pedagogy attempts to answer these questions. Critical pedagogy is an educational theory that subscribes to the notion that education should be a transformative force which empowers students and teachers to question oppressive conditions of inequality, racism, sexism, classism, discrimination and other forms of marginalization which are perpetuated and reproduced within and outside schools by the dominant culture. As "a radical theory of education [that] has emerged in the last twenty years" and which has been "broadly defined as 'the new sociology of education' or a 'critical theory of education'" (McLaren, 1994, p. 167), critical pedagogy calls on teachers to "strive to develop a pedagogy equipped to provide both intellectual and moral resistance to oppression, one that extends the concept of pedagogy beyond the mere



transmission of knowledge and skills and the concept of morality beyond interpersonal relations” (McLaren, 1994, p. 30).

Paulo Freire (1985, 1993) is considered by most educators and scholars to be the leading architect of critical pedagogy. His seminal work in adult literacy and critical pedagogy started in his native Brazil in the early 1960s, where along with anthropologists, educators and students, Freire set out to conduct ethnographic research of poor peasant communities in order to gather data about their culture, their lives, and linguistic experiences. The results of this research provided Freire and his team with a strong knowledge base with which they designed and implemented adult literacy programs targeted for these communities. Freire’s team produced *generative* words such as “wages” and “government,” and themes related to students’ work and lives to build dialogue around relevant cultural, economic, linguistic, political and social issues (McLaren, 2002, p. 246). In this way, adult learners were given the opportunity to learn about the written word within a real and relevant context (Spener, 1993). Accordingly, critical pedagogy opposes the “banking education” model which perceives students as “empty vessels” (Freire, 1985, 1993).

Despite Freire’s success, some U.S. educational theoreticians and practitioners have questioned Freirean-based philosophies and teaching methods as impractical, unrealistic, and politically charged. Critics contend that even though most adult education programs in the U.S. (including literacy and ESL) serve marginalized communities, these students are not necessarily living in “oppressed” situations, nor are they seeking revolutionary regime or sociopolitical changes (Spener, 1993). These critics believe that critical

dialogue is less important than learning functional skills in order to be a productive member of society. They claim that there is a disconnect between a Freirean/critical approach to adult teaching and the realities of say, urban adult education in the U.S. However, Spener (1993) postulates that the notion of empowerment promoted by critical pedagogy within the U.S. context focuses on efforts to help marginalized populations attain social mobility, while promoting social change through education.

McLaren (1994) postulates that critical pedagogy research “can generally be divided into two categories: *theoretically based works*...and *critical ethnographies and case studies* of schools...which have begun to make the categories of gender, race, and class problematic” (p. 173). I have not yet encountered extensive ethnographic studies of critical pedagogy, but there is a vast amount of critical theory literature. Such readings have led me to realize that critical pedagogy is a fascinating field which is studied through a diversity of philosophical lenses that include Marxist and post-Marxist views on education, the study of multicultural issues in the classroom, the role of globalization as a perpetuator of social inequalities, and feminist theory in education. Regardless of which philosophical ideologies serve as foundations to their work, in general critical theorists have a common view of what education and the educational system should look like. They see teaching as an “act of love” (Darder, 2002) that advocates equal access to resources and the need to transform schools and societies into places where critical dialogue --oral and written classroom interactions generated through social relationships built on trust, respect, “reciprocity and communality” (Giroux, 1988, p. 39)-- is a focal point. The important works on critical pedagogy by Freire, Darder, McLaren, and Shor

(1992) share the integration of a sociopolitical position on education with a theoretical foundation for teaching and learning.

Though often highly ideological, critical theory issues are tangible and can be highly applicable to teaching and learning. For instance a science classroom that is based on critical pedagogy will not be filled with prescriptive experiments that arrive at the “right answer” required by a particular standard. On the contrary, this classroom will be filled with inquiry, dialogue, and will build on the students’ prior knowledge to promote learning that is meaningful to their lives. Alberto Rodriguez and Chad Berryman’s (2002) study illustrates the possibilities of critical pedagogy as a theoretical foundation for bringing social, cultural and political awareness of community realities into the lives of high school students. This study was conducted in a rural, low income high school where students had very little economic resources to learn science in a hands-on, minds-on approach. Using a sociotransformative approach to teaching science, teachers enabled students to construct knowledge about issues in water conservation and management through inquiries into their own assumptions, through dialogue with community members and experts in this field, and through their own reflections as to how this subject affected the health and the livelihoods of their families and communities. Students did learn science and scientific concepts related to water content, water pollution and chemicals. But more importantly, they took an active role in educating the community on the dangers of water contamination on the health and the life of their families and neighbors.

Because critical pedagogy is often associated with radical and revolutionary messages, this science classroom example might not explicitly address the political

aspects of a transformative classroom. But Shor (1992) explains that teaching in general is a political act, because it can be a powerful vehicle to move and influence a large community (students, parents, other teachers, administrators, etc.) towards a set of beliefs, values and practices around educational issues, or that on the flip side can promote a particular ideology that supports the status quo. Education not only encompasses curriculum and methodology, but also a set of ideas based on systemic, social and cultural beliefs of what is the “right idea” or the “right approach” to teach our students. Because a teacher touches the lives of many, teaching can be used as a tool to perpetuate racial, ethnic or cultural stereotypes, or a tool to teach about diversity and equity. Indeed Shor (1992) states that

No curriculum can be neutral. All forms of education are political because they can enable or inhibit the questioning habits of students, thus developing or disabling their critical relation to knowledge, schooling, and society. Education can socialize students into critical thought or into dependence on authority, that is, into autonomous habits of mind or into passive habits of following authorities, waiting to be told what to do and what things mean (p. 13).

Given this stance, critical pedagogy makes the goal of schooling the development of social consciousness through a curriculum that is authentic, relevant and dialogical. And, in this context, the role of language development is not to simply develop basic skills to decode words, but to connect language with social realities. Indeed, Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo (1987) point out that “language and reality are dynamically interconnected” and consequently, an approach to critical language teaching “implies perceiving the relationship between text and context” (p. 29). This means that education

is not about teaching isolated facts, but about making curriculum meaningful by connecting content with the students' lives and their personal experiences.

### **Adult ESL: An overview**

In 2000, about 10% of the population five years and over in the United States spoke Spanish at home. Of this population, almost half (49%) reported speaking English "less than very well" (<http://www.census.gov/population/cen2000/phc-t20/tab04.pdf>). In California, close to a quarter (26%) of the population five years and over spoke Spanish at home, 46.9% of whom reported speaking English "very well." Therefore, over half of California's Spanish speakers (53%) spoke English less than very well (<http://www.census.gov/population/cen2000/phc-t37/tab06a.pdf>). The 2000 Census also reported that poverty is high among the Spanish-speaking population. In 1996, the median household income for foreign born immigrants from Latin America (\$24,100) was the lowest of all immigrant groups, 72% of their occupations were in service, manual and farm labor in 1997, and only one quarter of them had more than a high school diploma in 1997 (<http://www.census.gov/prod/2000pubs/cenbr002.pdf>).

These figures do not directly connect English language level to household income, level of education, or occupation, but clearly there is a need for more English language development especially for those linguistic minority immigrants who do not speak English well. Lucia Buttarò (2004) studied the cultural, educational and linguistic experiences of eight adult Latinas (ages 29-39) in ESL programs in New York, and how they applied such experiences to their new lives as immigrants in the U.S. The

participants in this study were mothers of children in elementary school and came from Central America and the Caribbean. The women's educational background ranged from some elementary schooling to having completed high school or its equivalency, to a college education. Their occupations were also diverse, including a housewife, a student, a waitress and a housekeeper. For over a year and a half, Buttaro gathered data through questionnaires, academic records and classroom and home observations. She also interviewed the women about their attitudes and experiences related to their academic performance, and asked them to narrate their experiences as immigrant women in New York in an essay format (they were given the option to write in Spanish or English).

This study found that although adult immigrants do want to learn English, they are impeded by personal and social constraints such as cost, time, and responsibilities. Their desire to learn is also influenced by "psychological barriers," defined by Buttaro as "individually held beliefs, values, attitudes or perceptions that inhibit participation in organized learning activities" (p. 22). Nonetheless, her findings also indicate that the participants' desire to learn English was grounded in the belief "that learning English would open doors due to the demand for bilingual workers in New York City," and that it would help them pursue an associate's degree, leave public assistance, and enable them to better help their children with homework and be more involved in their education (p. 30).

Buttaro's focal ESL programs served low income students who needed "survival skills" in order to help them acquire enough English language skills to "join the workforce" (p. 24). Nonetheless, Buttaro's study found that participants' own initiative

and drive to improve their skills led them to display various learning strategies, such as going to the library with their children to get books related to their school work, having conversations with native speakers, reading English language newspapers and books, and using English in social settings such as at the hospital or at the store. She also found that participants' learning strategies and habits were closely linked to their own cultural belief systems, so their needs for learning English were contextualized by their formal education and their personal experiences. Therefore, Buttaro's study concludes that adult ESL programs cannot be taught solely within the parameters of basic skills assessments. Rather, educators should be cognizant of the broader issues surrounding adult immigrants' lives, such as their family literacy needs, their personal and professional aspirations, their cultural beliefs and traditions of learning and teaching, and their access to resources (p. 37).

Similarly, Joel Hardman (1999) conducted a five year study of a Philadelphia adult ESL classroom of low income students from Cambodia. Some of the adult students in this study were enrolled in the ESL program to fulfill a welfare mandate, but others chose to learn English to help their children with homework and to get a job (p. 152). Their levels of education varied, though the majority only had a few years of elementary schooling as children in their native Cambodia. This ethnography examined "the ways in which the [adult] students, their [English dominant] children, and the teacher utilize their...biliteracy competencies to help each other complete classroom literacy activities" (p. 145). Hardman's study calls for educators not to essentialize immigrant populations and not to draw uninformed conclusions about their home literacy practices. Because

Hardman was one of the instructors in this program, drawing on Luis Moll and James Greenberg's (1990) "funds of knowledge" work, he designed a classroom that enabled a community of learners, where all participants were able to play different roles. Some students could be "knowledge holders" by sharing content knowledge information such as answers to grammar exercises. Adult learners also became "facilitators" by translating for others, or explaining a concept in Khmer to a fellow classmate. Because of this community concept, Hardman was able to bring the adult students' children to the classroom once or twice per week. The children not only served as knowledge holders, but also as "English resources" and "Evaluators," hence, providing translation services, as well as correcting their parents' mistakes.

There seems to be a core set of reasons why immigrant adult learners enroll in ESL courses, corroborated by JoAnn Crandall and Joy Kreeft Peyton's (1993) survey of different approaches to adult ESL literacy instruction. They found that adults participate in ESL programs as a way to attain employment, upgrade their work status, increase their own education level, increase communication with their English dominant children, and to help their children with school and share their cultural traditions with them. Moreover, Crandall (1993) reports that adult ESL students believe that learning English can ultimately "improve their general situation" and help them "obtain some control or power over their lives" (p. 3).

The literature also shows that adult ESL programs do not generally focus on "form (letters, spelling, or grammar)", but rather on providing "comprehensible and meaningful input" (Crandall, 1993, p. 6) to make the curriculum relevant to the students' lives. Adult



ESL instruction does not follow a “one size fits all” method but is dependent on program philosophy and educational mission, program curriculum, and the nature of interactions between students and instructors. Approaches to teaching adult ESL include: “competency-based instruction, whole language, language experience, writing and publishing, and Freirean or participatory approaches.” And, even though each approach may be unique, most adult ESL programs tend to integrate elements of several methods in their classroom instruction and design (Crandall, 1993, p. 8). Regardless of the variety of approaches, Sophie Degener (2001) advocates a balanced approach that does not only teach the “basics” (decoding, making meaning, interpreting charts and graphics, and writing). She emphasizes that adult education programs should also be instrumental in empowering students to see learning as a path towards understanding the rationale behind power relations, as well as a vehicle to acquire the necessary tools to improve their marginalized condition (<http://www.ncsall.net/?id=562>).

### **Critical pedagogy-based adult education**

According to Brian Street (1995), a critical approach to literacy instruction can be implemented regardless of the students’ reading and writing levels. Street argues that critical teachers “have a social obligation” to engage students in transformative experiences from the very beginning of a program (p. 141). The work of adult education researchers Victoria Purcell-Gates and Robin Waterman (2000) and Elsa Auerbach (1996) exemplify how Freirean-based adult education programs may be implemented. Purcell-Gates and Waterman’s (2000) ethnographic study of an adult literacy program

which they designed and taught in a marginalized *campesino* (farm worker) community in El Salvador emphasizes the importance of providing “literacy development in ways that incorporate cognitive, linguistic, and social perspectives along with, or within, Freirean critical perspectives” (p. ix). This program trained *alfabetizadoras* (literacy teachers) in the Freirean-way of teaching adult literacy, which enabled participants to develop their reading and writing skills, and to participate in a transformative experience. Using the civil war in El Salvador as a historical background, the authors talk about why this political event became an important catalyst in the generation of themes, and in the teaching of literacy. Theirs was a balanced literacy model, where social meaning was discussed as linguistic aspects of reading and writing were being taught. Students learned to spell in “standard Spanish,” but their personal spellings of words, which were connected to the way they pronounced words, were also acknowledged. The program did not assess adult learners’ skills prior to infusing critical methods, instead, the program empowered adults to “read the word and the world” at every stage of their learning process. The Freirean lens was used to understand the nature of the participants’ oppression and “ways to act to achieve liberation and social justice” (p. x). And, although this study takes place in a foreign country, the authors do discuss implications for adult education programs in the United States throughout their book, such as the need to use authentic materials and the need to tap into students’ prior knowledge, experiences, and linguistic dialects. In addition, this study proposes a balanced-literacy model, where critical pedagogy is integrated with a linguistic approach to teaching literacy, rather than teaching both aspects separately. Purcell-Gates and Waterman (2000) in fact state that

Many researchers and most practitioners who struggle to understand effective ways to teach children and adults to read and write in the classroom have little familiarity with and/or depth of understanding of Freire's philosophy and pedagogy. At the same time, many critical theorists who advocate such radical educational change have little knowledge of the basic cognitive and linguistic aspects of learning to read and write (p. 15).

The students featured in this study questioned oppression and injustice, and became educated about their rights to equal access to resources including education and healthcare.

In a more local context, Elsa Auerbach's work (1996; also see Auerbach et al., 1998) on the design and evaluation of adult ESL programs in Boston also describes a critical pedagogy model of teaching adult ESL. Her research produced a guidebook that describes a model of teaching adult ESL that builds on the strengths of immigrants with strong educational backgrounds, but who cannot participate in society due to their low level English skills. The guidebook features three adult ESL centers: a) Harborside Community Center which served Central American immigrants; b) Haitian Multi-Service Center which served Haitian immigrants and refugees; and c) Jackson-Mann Community School which served immigrants of over 26 different nationalities and languages. These students were trained to help, mentor and teach other immigrants with minimal educational backgrounds. She calls this approach "from the community to the community" (p. xi). Using a Freirean and a participatory approach to teaching, this model of adult ESL and literacy education had components that promoted: a) leadership development by training immigrants and refugees to teach ESL and literacy (as interns); b) a participatory approach to education where students set goals, created activities,

analyzed academic progress, and worked on the development of teacher training modules; c) native language literacy instruction to help students transition to ESL; and d) collaboration between community-based organizations and the university. Auerbach's program emphasized "that the context of instruction should be linked to meaningful authentic language and literacy use (rather than focusing on abstract, decontextualized decoding skills or generic topics)" (p. 11). Moreover, by using a Freirean approach to teaching and learning, the program was able to integrate the social context surrounding the students' experiences with an ESL curriculum that focused on theme investigation and identification, dialogue and problem solving, application of learning (action) and evaluating and reflecting on the learning process (p. 12). And, though students found certain barriers to being successful in these programs, such as not having an English native speaker teach their classes, being constantly worried about unemployment and their immigrant status, and having to discuss difficult topics such as their civil wars in their native countries or culturally-based taboo issues, the programs in general attempted to address such concerns by promoting problem-posing with students and engaging them in dialogue, reflection and critique of the programs.

Despite all the different challenges that accompanied this project, Auerbach's (1996) work successfully integrated critical pedagogy with more "traditional" methods of teaching language and language acquisition. It also provides an important framework for understanding adult education programs that serve the purpose of not just "educating," that is simply building skills, but also of providing opportunities for transformative teaching and learning.

Another local effort in the United States is illustrated in Pamela Ferguson's (1998) work. Ferguson describes her own experiences teaching adult ESL at a community college in the state of Washington where, using a Freirean problem-posing approach to teaching, she used her adult students' prior knowledge, linguistic and educational background, and personal aspirations as the curricular foundation for her classes. For example, one of her lessons dealt with tackling the growing crime rate that affected the students' neighborhood. This concern led the instructor and the students to take action by writing to the city's police chief and inviting him to speak to their class. Adult students were not only learning English skills, but also engaging the appropriate authorities in dialogue about gang-related crimes' prevention, community organization, and safety. Because Ferguson's classes were highly participatory, they became communities of learners, where adult students took responsibility for their own learning. Ferguson encouraged them to use new skills to get involved in projects that were beneficial to them and to their communities. Because students believed that this program had given them a voice, they even took ownership of the program and its challenges. When facing threatened ESL program funding cuts, students worked with Ferguson to lobby at the State level for the program's survival. Students wrote letters to legislators and the newspaper editor, and some even attended a meeting with the State's governor. As a result, funding was secured. This was a transformative event for students and instructors, but also overall, Ferguson's program had an empowering impact on the lives of her students. As one student expressed at graduation, "we do not need you [Ferguson] to speak for us anymore. We have learned to speak for ourselves" (p. 9). This led Ferguson

to point out that critical educators in the adult ESL field are more than language instructors, they are many times the only advocates for their students, which implies that they must “work not only inside those [classroom] walls, but beyond them as well” (p. 13).

One final effort to teaching adult ESL using a Freirean approach is David Spener’s (1993) work. Spener describes his work teaching ESL to Spanish-speaking Central American refugees in Washington, DC as dialogic and problem posing (p. 89). Serving refugee families with little or no English or Spanish literacy skills through the *Inglés en su Casa* (English at Home) program brought Spener closer to the realities of implementing a Freirean-based adult education program in the United States. Because this program taught refugees English in their homes, part of the challenge in teaching in this program was that the students “had not invited teachers into their homes to discuss these issues –they had invited them to teach them English as quickly and as painlessly as possible” (p. 89). Also, students viewed Spanish as the language to communicate personal or relevant issues, whereas English became the language to communicate with the “outside” world on a daily basis. This led Spener to incorporate dialogue and problem posing in his teaching by asking students to talk about a “success and one difficulty they had experienced outside class during the week” (p. 90). Students were free to talk about apprehensions they had about the curriculum, or questions they had about what they were learning, and they were given the opportunity to evaluate the lessons and reflect on their own performance. This strategy allowed the adult ESL teachers to modify their curriculum and find alternative teaching resources to help students learn the content.

More importantly, this brought teachers “additional means to gain insights into the lives and culture of students” (p. 91).

In general, these adult ESL efforts emphasized teaching content that was meaningful to the students’ lives and experiences, and the use of instructional strategies that promoted dialogue, a sense of community, and the students’ active involvement in the curriculum design decisions.

### **Socializing children into language and learning at home**

Walt Wolfram et al. (1999) remind us that “Certain language patterns are preferred over others, according to social norms (which may vary as well).” They also point out that these language patterns “are often referred to in terms of the correct use of English, but [that] correctness involves decisions based on social, not linguistic, acceptability” (p. 8). It is possible then, that no matter how fluent in English they become, immigrants’ use of language will always be stigmatized regardless of how well they can communicate their thoughts. Judgments can be based on minor linguistic technicalities of dialect use such as pronunciation and intonation, which can color immigrant’s social status. Such judgments are usually made by those who hold the cultural, economic, political and social capital, such as the teacher in a classroom, or the supervisor in the workplace. As a result, those in power may use an immigrant’s use of the English language as a way to classify him/her in different categories and to make decisions about where this person “fits.” For instance, teachers may misinterpret a student’s use of non-Standard English as a sign of academic deficit. In the workplace, employers may use an adult immigrant’s

accented English as a justification not to hire or promote this employee despite his/her work ethic and record (Wolfram et al., 1999, p. 16). By advocating the norm, gatekeepers of progress are emphasizing which language is more “powerful” which according to John Baugh (1999) “can be perceived as a rejection of the native minority culture” (p. 68).

Such errors in judgment can misinform schools’ views of a child’s home life. If a parent does not speak English, and if his/her child is having difficulty learning English at school, educators might view this parent as deficient, and might blame the parent’s lack of English language skills for the child’s lack of achievement. Such conclusions focus on the home as the problem. They also reproduce oppressive situations where institutional powers expect and force immigrant parents and their children to behave according to the Anglo-English norm, without exploring ways to work with them in positive, culturally responsive ways. This perpetuates the notion of a home-school mismatch, with schools as the sole owners of educational capital, without taking into account that linguistic minority families have an existing wealth of knowledge, linguistic resources and educational practices (Moll et al. 1992).

Such wealth should not be ignored or dismissed because it does not look like the Anglo mainstream norm. Shirley Brice Heath’s (1996) study of language socialization patterns in three very different socio-economic, sociolinguistic and racial communities in the Piedmont Carolinas illustrates ways to address the home-school mismatch. Teachers involved in Heath’s research incorporated the ways of teaching and learning of their students’ community and family into their classrooms with great success. More importantly, teachers learned to understand and respect how language socialization



practices occur in their students' homes, and how such practices can help develop students' potential at school, as well as their own pedagogical strengths.

Language socialization is one of the lenses used to study immigrant families and their school-aged children. Through this lens, one can examine language as “the vehicle via which the group’s ways of being and doing are learned” since “children learn to use the linguistic code(s) of their community in culturally specific ways” (Zentella, 1997, p. 216). Studies that examine language socialization issues help educators understand how immigrant, non-English speaking parents support the academic, linguistic and literacy development of their children. Language socialization examines the factors that determine how language, oral and written, is learned, used and distributed. This research is crucial in order to break a philosophy of blame that promotes deficit views of these students and their families. Moreover, this type of research presents the challenges of acquiring a second language, and the need to redefine one’s linguistic and cultural identity due to changing factors such as, parent educational attainment, policies generated by a certain political climate (such as Proposition 227), school requirements (such as high stakes testing), children’s roles as language brokers and peer views on language choices and use (Heath 1996; Orellana et al., 1999; Orellana, 2003; Orellana et al., 2003; Schechter & Bayley, 2002; Valdés, 1996; Zentella, 2005).

Scholars like Guadalupe Valdés have done extensive work on language minority education and the repercussions of mainstream school ideologies on the educational outcomes and perceptions of language minority parents and their children. In particular Valdés’ (1996) ethnography of ten Mexican-American families in a border town in Texas

provides us with a “real life” picture of the gaps between schools and homes, and the need to bring a critical, social justice perspective to the schooling of these children. Valdés (1996) criticizes parent involvement programs and philosophies that attach immigrant parents to a “deficit model,” because by using “the middle-class family as a standard, teachers will generally assume that all parents who are ‘committed to their children’s education’ will engage in the same kinds of activities and behaviors.” Because of this perspective, schools and teachers “will often surmise quite erroneously that parents who do not do so are unsupportive of their children’s academic performance” (p. 39). Valdés found that this incongruity between the home and the school created preconceived notions of linguistic minority families, without affecting any changes in how teachers could possibly do a better job at bridging such a cultural and linguistic gap. Valdés found that teachers only used traditional Anglo-mainstream methods of reaching out to parents, and “gave up” if those methods did not work on the parents in her study.

Valdés’ work helped her understand that “Mexican working-class parents bring to the United States goals, life plans, and experiences that do not help them make sense of what schools expect of their children.” She adds that schools fail students when they demand that newly arrived immigrant families quickly adjust to the Anglo-mainstream mold of parenting, living and educating, which are “based on particular notions of achievement” (p. 5). Though the parents of her study, with the exception of two cases, had very little formal schooling, parents viewed education as a positive asset. Nonetheless, education to them did not necessarily correlate with having read many books, and having pursued many degrees. Rather, they saw education as an opportunity,

and did not associate “academic success with exceptional abilities or talents” (p. 133). Therefore, Valdés cautions educators not to reduce parent involvement programs to focusing solely on the academic performance of linguistic minority children. She encourages educators to create programs that counter “existing mythologies about the power of school to right all social wrongs,” because in her view, rather than building bridges, they are widening the gaps that already exist between homes and schools (p. 195).

Similarly, in her ethnographic study of language socialization of Mexican-origin children in Tucson, Norma González (2001) examined the relationship between home and school as mediated by language use. This three year study focused on eight families that came from a diversity of socioeconomic backgrounds; some were barrio families, and some were non-barrio families. The families differed in level of education, English language proficiency and language use as well. These families’ stories showed that language and home learning were rooted in the parents’ goals, aspirations, belief systems, and formal education backgrounds. For example, in studying the use of language during homework sessions, González found that mothers tended to shift their language to a more domineering, authoritative language in order to reproduce the language use of schools. She points out that “Mothers, fiercely attempting to ensure success for their children, often resort to the discursive practices sanctioned by the voice of the school and reproduce the forms, modes of thinking, style, and meaning legitimated through their own institutional experience” (p. 154). School modes and habits were seen as possibly the best way to work with children when it comes to school-related assignments.

González also emphasizes that educators must question the reproduction of inequalities and of negative stereotypes about linguistic minority and immigrant-origin students. They must learn to embrace and understand the richness that children bring to the classroom because they are able to navigate between two different languages. She refers to her work on the “funds of knowledge” (1992) where she argued that one must tap into children’s experiences and use those experiences for developing curriculum that is relevant to children’s lives. González cautions educators and policy makers not to push for hegemonic linguistic or educational practices that are incongruent with the ideologies and practices of linguistic minority students and their families. By doing so, they are in danger of not only disrespecting people’s identities, but also of underestimating the richness of the home language, home culture and home literacy experiences, which can be used as bridges between schools and homes.

Sandra Schecter and Robert Bayley’s (2002) ethnographic study of Spanish-speaking families from California and Texas presents compelling research on language socialization in families from different socioeconomic backgrounds, and with different levels of Spanish and English proficiency. Because this work examines the relationship between home language cultural practices and the development of bilingualism and biliteracy, it is an important study that can help educators understand how Spanish-speaking communities’ linguistic and cultural practices play out in children’s daily lives at school. The authors dispute arguments that classify language minority children in deficit terms. As a result, the study is framed by language socialization occurring as a result of home literacy practices, parent-children relationships (and relationships with

other family members), socioeconomic status, parent education and perspectives of language and language fluency, language use and loss, bilingualism and biliteracy development, perspectives of school and from school, and communities surrounding the families. From 20 families in California and 20 families in Texas who participated in this study, eight case families were selected (four in San Francisco and four in San Antonio). Participants came from various socioeconomic backgrounds including working class, rural working class, middle class, and families on welfare. Family interactions were recorded through observations during the school year before and after school, at bedtime, and during the evening before bedtime.

The study also framed language socialization research within the historical perspective of the political struggles of Latinos in California and Texas, and their efforts towards equality in education, and for primary language maintenance and recognition. In addition, through detailed narratives about the families, the study looks at how ideologies about language use and beliefs are formed within each family. The findings show the diversity among the families, making us understand that, contrary to popular belief, not all Latinos look alike, think alike, and live alike. These stories describe the ways in which different families view and value Spanish. These views are primarily based on the families' socioeconomic and educational backgrounds, as well as their political beliefs associated with language, e.g. "allegiance to their Mexican heritage," and "ethnic identity" (p. 78). This ethnography also examined the role of academic literacy, and what it meant in the home context. The families employed different types of school practices at home, where parents were able to develop "creative strategies..." to develop such

academic literacy (p. 161). These strategies ranged from tutoring their children and their children's friends to read and write in Spanish, to helping with homework and school projects (regardless of academic English and academic core subject knowledge), and learning English with their children, among others.

In the same fashion, the research of Claude Goldenberg and Ronald Gallimore's (1995), and Leslie Reese et al. (1995) of Mexican and Central American immigrant families of kindergarten and first grade children, presents a case for not stigmatizing linguistic minority children and their families based on preconceived notions about their culture or language. Most of the children in this study were born in the United States, and were attending public schools in Southern California. The purpose of this large study was to ask the families about their "beliefs about the role of schooling" and what "factors they considered important for academic success" (p. 189). In addition, Goldenberg and Gallimore wanted to examine parental roles as well as teacher roles, and whether there was a common bond between such roles. Through interviews and home visits, the researchers found that parents viewed education as "a means to economic security, the attainment of professional status, or both" (p. 191). They also saw education as tightly connected to socioeconomic advancement and progress. The parents also narrated their own personal experiences growing up and going to school, and how their own parents' views on education, and various circumstances, such as finances, geographic location, and access to schools played a role in whether they were able to go to school or not. More importantly, this research shows that the home culture does not always match the culture of institutions such as mainstream public schools. For example, parents in this study felt

that local schools were not as strict as they could be with their children, since after all, they viewed teachers as the second parents to a child, and able to discipline their children just like they would at home (p. 203).

Goldenberg and Gallimore also found that Anglo-mainstream home literacy characteristics are not necessarily reflected in Latino homes. Latino homes in the study did not have many children's books, and their parents did not play the classic Anglo-middle-class roles of taking their children to the library, nor teaching them specific skills such as the alphabet. Nevertheless, "literacy activities and materials are certainly not absent;" rather, parents took advantage of their existing resources such as reading and writing letters with their children, or assigning them to write a letter to a relative, as well as reading magazines or Bible passages with their children (p. 208, 211). Because these early literacy practices are different from Anglo-mainstream practices, many children "do not come to school with many critical understandings about the nature of print and how it functions" and thus, can potentially be at a disadvantage when faced with the local school curriculum (p. 210). But this finding does not imply that Latino parents do not care about their children's education. The study found that parents do help their children with schoolwork and, in fact, "several parents reported that they had waited to teach their child certain skills until the child went to school" (p. 216). They also found that parents wanted to be involved in the academic learning experiences of their children, and hence, were pleased when teachers would send activities that could be done at home with the child. Indeed, "the more teachers attempted to involve parents in children's learning, the higher were children's end-of-year literacy scores" (p. 217). Therefore the authors suggest that

in order for schools and families to help their children be successful, there needs to be sufficient dialogue about how to best learn from each other's experiences and expectations of what the child needs to achieve academic and social goals.

Marjorie Faulstich Orellana's work is also important in helping us understand the bridges that can be built between schools and homes by carefully examining language minority students' home culture, and their academic and linguistic practices. Using interviews and observations, Orellana (2003) surveyed first to fourth generation Mexican immigrants, mostly from "farming communities" from Mexico, in order to investigate children's contributions at home. Such contributions ranged from translating (Orellana calls it "para-phrasing" p. 27) and helping with *quehaceres* (household chores). Orellana found that 64% of respondents helped with *quehaceres*, whereas 83% helped as translators (p. 29). Orellana uses vignettes to illustrate how these contributions take place. For instance, some children reported translating for their grandmothers and doing mostly gender-based chores such as girls learning to cook with their mother in order to alleviate the mother's work load. Orellana challenges many developmental researchers' assumptions "that children's speaking for adults constitutes a form of role reversal that can undermine parental authority" (p. 35). Indeed, Orellana found that parents' views of these contributions are part of their philosophies for positive child upbringing or *educación* (p. 35). Educators and others who are not aware of the importance of such roles for children in immigrant communities might assume parents are not concerned about doing academic-like home activities with their children (Orellana, Ek, & Hernández, 1999; Orellana et al., 2003). But Goldenberg and Gallimore (1995) found that



Mexican parents inculcate such responsibilities in their children so that they become “well-educated,” that is, “respectful, dutiful, well mannered” citizens (p. 197).

Similarly in 1999, Orellana, Ek, and Hernández conducted two ethnographic studies about the perceptions of language, and language learning, among parents and children after the passage of Proposition 227. They observed, interviewed and conducted focus groups in a Latino community in Los Angeles. With the passage of Proposition 227 in the background, the researchers wanted to find out how language is measured as a “social process” (p. 116), by examining how children in this study find themselves racialized in school and in the community in general. In addition, the study also looked at how children’s responses were connected to issues of language, social, ethnic, economic and racial differentiation and prejudice.

The study found that parents saw language (particularly English) as a way to measure academic advancement, so they blamed some bilingual programs for the lack of effectiveness in teaching English to their children. Parents of children who were fluent in English showed great pride in the fact that their children spoke English, and non-English speaking parents were self-conscious about not being able to speak English. However, even if parental views placed great weight on learning English, they also placed great value on maintaining Spanish. They believed that Spanish maintenance is important not just for upholding family and cultural ties, but also to develop bilingualism, which they believed can lead to a better economic future for their children (p. 123). Children on the other hand viewed language as closely related to identity. Speaking English or being in a non-bilingual class led to feeling “American” and therefore, could help them escape their

essentialization as the “non-native,” or the “Other.” As a result, “children, like parents, seem to see English as a solution to inequity” (p. 126).

The importance of examining and understanding the learning practices of the homes of language minority children is echoed in Robert Heath, Paula Levin and Katherine Tibbetts’ (1993) study of Hawaiian families with preschool aged children. The researchers documented a wide variety of tools and resources used by native Hawaiian families to teach and promote literacy with their children. This research found a mismatch between the mainstream schooling practices of preschools and the ways in which culturally, socially and linguistically, native Hawaiian children learned at home. The researchers suggest that “reproducing traditional or formal features of a school environment in the home is not the most effective way of influencing the achievement level of a preschool child,” and that the more familial, less school-like activities such as “jokes or riddles” were more beneficial in developing children’s academic and cognitive skills, and in promoting parental engagement (p. 129). This study calls for educators to respect and value the children’s homes as places of learning, as well as places of “security, love, self-esteem, cultural heritage, and family identity” (p. 130). The study supports the position that educators and schools should build on the strengths that the home environment provides a child, in order to develop meaningful and effective ways of teaching and integrating the families’ teachings into the school’s learning experiences.

In general, researchers of the schooling practices of linguistic minority families warn classroom teachers against reproducing the home or community “ways of learning” as a simple series of activities to satisfy the needs of a multicultural classroom. They insist

that establishing real bridges between home and school demands that educators acknowledge, understand, and reflect on “the language and culture of power” (in Delpit, 1988, as cited by Heller, 1997, p. 90). Otherwise there exists the danger of disregarding the existence of institutionalized hegemony and “schooling’s contribution to social and cultural reproduction” (Heller, 1997, p. 90).

In sum the literature reviewed describes ethnographic research that uses the following methods relevant to my research: Classroom and family observations; parent, child and teacher interviews; and case studies. I used similar data collection and analysis strategies adapted to a limited time frame. I gathered data by interviewing adult students, their children and their ESL instructor; and observing adult students in their classrooms and at home. Because this research examines the impact of English language classes and tutoring on the roles that Latino immigrant parents play as students, parents and teachers, I hope that my findings will contribute to the research literature on adult immigrant second language acquisition, the socialization into language and learning that takes place at home, and critical pedagogy.

### **Research design**

This study of language learning and language use of immigrant parents who attended English as a Second Language (ESL) classes at a CBET (Community-Based English Tutoring) program in Southern California took place over fourteen-months (May 2005-July 2006). CBET’s main purpose is to teach English to adult English learners, but this study does not examine whether CBET does a “good job” of teaching English language

skills. Rather, because another CBET goal is to teach parenting techniques along with family literacy, this research focuses on adult learners who are parents of school-aged children and their home learning and literacy behaviors.

### **The CBET class**

A CBET classroom with all Spanish -speaking students was chosen at the beginning of the Fall 2005 semester (early September) as the focus classroom for the purpose of observations and for participant selection. The classroom was chosen with the guidance of CBET's Instructional Leader,<sup>2</sup> who was also the teacher of this class. The class was held at a local elementary school in a large urban school district in Southern California. Classes met twice a week for three hours, for eighteen weeks per semester. Data collected from a student survey for the 2004-2005 school year by the central administrative office of the focal CBET class showed that 94% of the students in this district's program were Latino/Mexican, 4% were Latino/Central and South American, and 97% of the students' primary language was Spanish. This survey also showed that half of the students reported more than six years of schooling but less than a high school education.<sup>3</sup> Because adult students come from various educational backgrounds and have different levels of English proficiency, CBET classes are multilevel. CBET funding allows this program to be offered at no cost to the student and also provides free childcare. In return, CBET students are required to provide tutoring in English language arts to local K-12 English learners. The program generally places its tutors in preschool or kindergarten classes at

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<sup>2</sup> The CBET Instructional Leader had administrative duties and also trained new instructors.

<sup>3</sup> The data for 2005-2006 were not available as of May, 2006, but it is unlikely that the student profile has changed significantly.

the school site, and depending on the tutor's English level, tutoring activities range from playing letter recognition games, to reading a book to a child.

CBET instructors use different approaches to tutor training. Some focus an entire lesson on "how to tutor," but others provide individualized training, which may include strategies to working with individual children as well as activities and games. For the most part, if the adult ESL class takes place during school hours and at a K-12 school location, adult students are asked to tutor a student during a portion of their own ESL class. Because of IRB constraints, I did not observe these tutoring sessions, but I asked parents about these experiences in my interviews. Consequently, data collection focused on parent and child interviews, instructor interviews, as well as classroom and home learning and literacy observations.

### **Case studies**

Native Spanish-speaking immigrant parents with pre or school-aged children were the primary research population. The focal classroom started out with all Spanish speakers, but five new students from Africa arrived in mid October. Given my research focus, the students from Africa were not part of the pool for the random selection of case studies. Most data were collected during the months of September 2005-January 2006, when the classes were in session. During the last week of September, CBET used a protocol called TOPS (Tracking of Programs and Students) to gather informational data on their students. TOPS is a scantron form that collects students' names, dates of birth, highest year of school completed, native language, attainable goal within program year,

personal financial status, labor force status and current CBET English level. CBET's Instructional Leader granted me access to this data, and allowed me to collect additional information from each student regarding their country of origin and whether they had children of pre or school-age. Once all this data was collected, I selected four Spanish-speaking adult students with pre or school-aged children as case studies.

I had over 38 participants' information stored in a database, but because CBET students represent a very mobile population with inconsistent attendance and retention rates, only about 20 to 25 students attended regularly and stayed through the program until the end of the semester. In order to select case study participants, I designed database queries to categorize adult students by education level (0-6 years and 7-12 years or education) and children's ages. I then selected four "main case studies" for my research: two parents (and their families) from each category, i.e. 0-6 years and 7-12 years of education.

### **Data collection methods and data analysis**

Once the classroom and the case study participants were selected, data collection focused on classroom observations, case study interviews, instructor interviews, and home visits.

#### Classroom observations

I observed over one quarter of the class sessions of a full CBET semester.<sup>4</sup> Classroom observations and notes focused on student participation and learning,

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<sup>4</sup> The CBET class met twice per week for three hours per session for eighteen weeks per semester.

instructional methods and content, student voice, teacher-student interactions, student-student interactions, relevance of content to students' lives, and power structures. To analyze the data collected, I coded my field notes into specific categories using HyperResearch (version 2.6.1), a qualitative analysis software tool that codes text, audio, graphic and video data. The categories I created to organize and analyze the classroom observation data are listed in Table 1. These categories emerged from my field notes, and helped me examine the lessons of the focal CBET classroom that were explicitly taught to the students, such as tutoring and family literacy and language skills, and implicitly taught, such as U.S. mainstream values and socialization. These categories also helped me examine the instructional delivery, the materials used, the student participation patterns, the curriculum, and the instructor's enactment of her teaching philosophies and goals for her students.

*Table 1. Classroom observation and analysis guide*

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
Classroom set up	What is the classroom's physical set up?
Critical pedagogy	How is power expressed in the classroom? Do students have a voice? How are curriculum decisions made? Is there non-regimented dialogue?
Emerging curriculum	What is not planned in the instructor's curriculum for the day? What new curriculum emerges (if at all) from the discussions or episodes that take place in the class?
Instructional delivery	What is the lesson of the day? How is it taught? What materials are used?
Inter student interactions	What goes on "behind the scenes" among students? How do students interact with each other?
Spanish used or other languages used	When and how is Spanish or any other language used?
Student participation	Regimented or non-regimented? What are student participation patterns? What is the student level of engagement in today's lesson?
Teacher interaction with students	How do students interact with the instructor and vice-versa?
Tutoring training and Family literacy	What is the context? What is the lesson? Who seems interested? What materials are used to teach these topics?

### Case study interviews

Before my formal research began, during the months of May and June of 2005, I conducted an exploratory study which consisted of interviews with five CBET adult Spanish-speaking students finishing their Spring semester. I used an "Exploratory Questionnaire" (see the Appendix) which I designed with the purpose of collecting participants' language background, family literacy practices and personal goals. I collected this information by conducting an individual semi-structured interview with each participant. Interviews took place after class for about fifteen to twenty minutes. The "Exploratory questionnaire" was meant to be a resource to guide future participant selection, interview protocols, and family observations.



During the course of the study from September 2005 to January 2006, I conducted three semi-structured interviews with the adult ESL students selected as case studies in order to elicit information about their learning experiences in CBET classes; their tutoring experiences (if applicable); their language use, distribution and socialization experiences; their sense of empowerment through language learning and language use; their personal aspirations; and their philosophies on language education and on the education of their children. Interviews took place either during CBET class time or after class and lasted between 30 to 35 minutes. Parent interviews were conducted in Spanish, were audio taped, and were transcribed using Dragon Naturally Speaking (Spanish, version 8). The parents were asked to talk about their personal backgrounds and their language learning experiences in CBET. I also asked them to describe their language use in different contexts such as work (if applicable), home, CBET classes, their children's school(s), community (e.g. church), daily routines (e.g. supermarket), etc. Moreover, I asked them to describe their teaching practices with their children at home, and to talk about what they had changed or incorporated (if at all) in their home literacy, teaching and learning events as a result of their participation in CBET. Also, since participants pledge to tutor younger students in English, I interviewed three parents who participated as tutors about their experiences tutoring a child; and how they viewed tutoring in relationship to their own language acquisition and language use, as well as to their family literacy practices. Using HyperResearch, I coded these interviews based on emerging patterns which resulted in the categories shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Case study interviews analysis guide

<b>Code</b>	<b>Code Explanation</b>
General parental goals	What are their personal goals? What are their goals for their children? What are these goals based on?
How do parents work with their children at home	What do parents teach their children? How parents teach their children? Why do they teach what they teach?
How is CBET used	What do parents want to learn? What do parents actively pursue in CBET? What do parents learn in CBET? How do parents transform/adapt their learning to serve their purposes?
<i>La educación</i> (education)	What are parents' philosophies on education ?
Linguistic and cultural identity	What do parents think of bilingual education? What are parents' perspectives on raising bilingual/bicultural children? How do parents socialize their children to language?
Parents' background	What is the level of education of the parent? How and why did the parent come to the U.S.? Who are their families?
Parents' views of CBET	What are the benefits of CBET? How would parents change CBET?
Tutoring	What are their experiences tutoring children in a classroom? What are their thoughts on this CBET requirement?
What is transferred from CBET?	What of the instruction, modeling and/or content that parents get from CBET transfers to their home and to their lives (if at all)?

This guide helped me analyze how parents made sense of their CBET learning experience, i.e., what they deemed applicable and useful to their lives from the CBET program, and how they used what they learned from CBET to benefit their children and to attain their personal goals. I also examined this data by looking at focal parents' language ideologies, language use, family teaching and learning practices, personal aspirations, educational philosophies, and personal stories of struggle and success.

### Instructor interviews

I conducted three semi-structured interviews with the CBET classroom instructor where I elicited information on her teaching philosophy; teaching adult ESL philosophy and theoretical frameworks; how she perceived language and culture socialization occurs in her classroom; her perceptions on immigrant adult learners and on student progress; her personal and professional goal as an adult ESL teacher; and her views on the role of critical pedagogy in the classroom. Each interview lasted about 30-35 minutes. (Please refer to the Appendix for a list of interview questions.) Using HyperResearch, I coded the interviews based on emerging categories shown in Table 3.

*Table 3. Instructor interviews analysis guide*

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Explanations</b>
Critical pedagogy	What are the instructor's views on critical pedagogy and its place in the adult ESL classroom? Does the instructor believe that she uses critical pedagogy in her teaching?
Family literacy and parent training	What are the instructor's opinions on teaching family literacy and parenting skills? How does she teach these skills in her practice?
Goals for students	What are the instructor's goals for her adult ESL students? How does she help (if at all) her students achieve those goals in her classroom?
Instructor background	What is the instructor's educational and personal background?
Teaching adult ESL philosophy	What guides the instructor's teaching? What are her ideologies about teaching adult ESL? What is her purpose for teaching adult ESL?
Teaching adult ESL theoretical framework	What informs the instructor's practice?
Teaching methodology	What does the instructor consider to be her pedagogical methods?
Views of CBET	What is the instructor's political point of view regarding CBET's origins? What are her thoughts on Proposition 227?
Why teach adult ESL	Why did the instructor choose to teach adult ESL?

These categories helped me examine how the instructor's teaching philosophies, personal and professional background were enacted in her practice, and how she connected the

program's goals with her perception of the students' aspirations and her overall views of adult ESL education.

### Home visits

During the three home visits with each of the case study families, I observed family learning events and interactions between siblings. These were also opportunities to interview the children. Those interviews were conducted in both Spanish and English because all the children used both languages at home, some more fluently than others. Observations at home examined the physical setting where literacy, teaching and learning events occurred and the nature of the activities; conversations and interactions among the participants; and what language, tools, and methods were used. These data were compared with the methods of the CBET class and the pedagogical tips given to parents in preparation for their tutoring obligation. Table 4 shows the categories that emerged from the home visits and interviews with the children at home.

Table 4. Home visits analysis guide

Code	Code Explanation
<i>Enseñanzas en el hogar</i> (the teachings at home)	What do parents teach? How do they teach it? Why do they teach it? How is their philosophy on <i>educación</i> enacted?
Language use and linguistic identity	What language is predominantly used? What do children think of English/Spanish?
The children	Who are they? How do they interact with their family members? What are their interests? What and how do they like learning?
The home	How does the home look like? Where do children play, do their homework, etc.?
What of CBET transfers (if at all)?	Teaching methods Content Specific lessons Philosophies American culture Raising children the American way Is there a mismatch between CBET teachings and parents' beliefs? What does not transfer?

I examined this data by focusing on the focal families' activities and interactions which presented evidence of home teaching, learning and literacy practices, as well as the children's language ideologies, socialization, and personal opinions about school and learning in general. The data analysis led me to the categories presented on Table 4 which were organized with the aid of HyperResearch.

#### Other data sources

To learn of the students' progress in the class, I collected the case study participants' pre and post results from the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) Reading test administered by CBET. The pre test was administered in September of 2005 and the post test in November of 2005. The test results were used to

analyze individual student's language growth, and how students overall view the role of testing in this program.

My data collection included a wide spectrum of sources, from classroom observation, to participant interviews, to home observations. Having all these data sources which varied from one another in kind, and in the way they were collected and analyzed, proved beneficial in giving me a broad picture of CBET and its objectives, as well as how, and how well it implemented those objectives. It also helped me examine how adult students took advantage of what CBET had to offer, and how they went about making sure that they were effective participants in their own education, and effective overseers of their children's education.

## Chapter 2: Explicit and implicit lessons taught and learned in

### CBET

I love it [CBET] because ... they [the students] all have similar goals. The majority of them are... mostly Hispanics. They have the same cultural background...most of them are young with children so in that sense it's a greater community feeling among them, I think because they are all there for the same reason... it's also exciting to gradually give them the self-confidence...to keep pursuing, to keep studying to realize that they can learn English and that they can have other goals... in the future... when you see them work with their children read stories to them that they never did before, you know that you're making a difference, because we all know how important reading to children is... so if they just take home a book to read ... immediately you see the application into literacy (Margaret Gensler,<sup>5</sup> CBET instructor, personal communication, October 4, 2005).

Ironically, CBET is the result of Proposition 227, which means that it offers English classes to the parents of children whose opportunity to study in their native language was thwarted by Proposition 227. Without this historical and political background, CBET might be viewed like any other adult ESL program geared towards parents, with the distinction that it offers free childcare to its participants. But childcare is not the only aspect that separates CBET from other adult ESL programs; the program integrates the teaching of English language skills with parenting and home literacy skills, and also includes a K-12 tutoring component that is required of all its students. As the opening quote reveals, it is the connection between learning English, and promoting good parenting and literacy at home that makes this program unique and even special in the eyes of its instructors. This chapter will address the explicit and implicit lessons that the CBET curriculum and methodology teaches --not English lessons, but about the process

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<sup>5</sup> Names of people, both adults and children, have been changed to maintain their anonymity.

of teaching and learning itself, and about literacy, pedagogy, and parenting.

### **The setting**

The CBET classroom I observed for four months is located at Lawrence Elementary,<sup>6</sup> a K-5 school located in one of the largest cities of Southern California, and in the largest local unified school district. It is in a community I will call Center City, which is a mixture of the suburban feel of 1950's California homes and the urban feel of apartment and condominium complexes, with many small businesses and restaurants lining its streets. Center City's diversity is reflected in the languages other than English spoken in the homes of its residents. About 28% of the community's population speaks a language other than English, primarily Spanish (20% of the population). Other languages include Vietnamese (1% of the population), various African languages (1% of the population) and Tagalog (less than 1% of the population) (Source: www.mla.org). The business landscape is also multicultural; it is not unusual to find a Vietnamese restaurant, a Lebanese restaurant and a Mexican restaurant all within a few blocks from each other. The diversity of the ethnic and racial make up of its residents is evident, as well as their socioeconomic diversity. Apartment complexes are inhabited by new immigrants from Mexico, Anglo blue collar workers, college students, and older Center City residents. There are also old and classic California style homes which cost over \$1,000,000.

Lawrence Elementary has a significant Hispanic student population consisting of 56.6% of the total school enrollment (n=500), most of which is low income (87% of its

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<sup>6</sup> Names of locations have been changed to maintain participants' anonymity.



students receive free or reduced lunch.) The CBET classroom is located in the school's large multipurpose room on the first floor; it serves as an auditorium, Physical Education room, meeting room and classroom. The centrally located multipurpose room serves as a hub which students, staff, parents, visitors and faculty walk through constantly to get from one side of the school to another. It has four doors, one at each corner, and on the wall closest to the front of the school, there is a side door to the main office (see Figure 1). Because CBET "borrowed" this space, Margaret Gensler, the CBET instructor, has to use her own portable whiteboard and overhead projector. The CBET classroom was arranged in a U-shape with two pairs of long tables placed in the middle perpendicular to the front of the classroom, which is also a stage; there were also a couple of long tables in the back parallel to the stage. Students usually sat with the same classmates at every class session. Some chose to sit together because they carpooled and arrived and left at the same time; others sat together because they had known each other prior to the program or had become friends during the program.

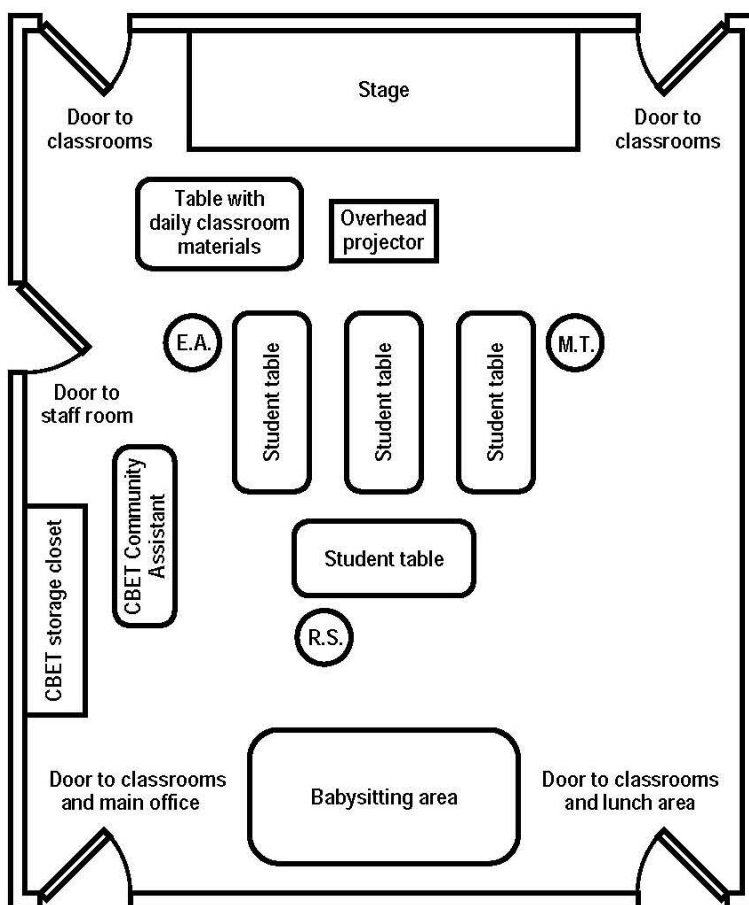


Figure 1. Diagram of the CBET classroom at Lawrence Elementary<sup>7</sup>

CBET is attractive to parents in part because it offers free childcare for children between one to three years of age. A CBET community aide supervised and helped the two childcare providers. She was also the interface with new students and prospective students. She registered newcomers, and she also “marketed” and “sold” the program to

<sup>7</sup> Focal parents are noted by their initials (pseudonyms).

interested parties. The CBET community aide was born and educated in Mexico, where she was trained and worked as a teacher. During the CBET sessions, she prepared art and educational materials for the various activities planned by the childcare providers. One of the childcare providers spoke Spanish and English, and had attended CBET in the past. The other childcare provider was a non native English speaker of Asian origin, who did not speak Spanish but was able to communicate with the parents about basic matters, such as asking a mother to change her child's diaper.

During childcare, children sang, worked on arts and crafts, and played. Originally Lawrence Elementary provided a classroom for childcare, but early in December, the program lost its childcare classroom because Lawrence had to add a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade class. During the remaining weeks of the semester, childcare took place in the back of the multipurpose room (see Figure 1), where the children were separated from their parents only by portable dividers and childproof gates.

In September of 2005, 49 students were enrolled in the first semester of Lawrence's CBET program. Because it is an open program, meaning that students can come --and leave-- at any time, students left for various reasons including pregnancy, work, illness, or because they moved, either to another neighborhood or city or back to their native countries. About 20-25 students attended class consistently. Even during Lawrence Elementary Winter intersession, eleven to eighteen of the "regular" students were in attendance, including some parents whose children were on Winter break. Margaret's students had been in the U.S. from two months to twelve years, and came from diverse socioeconomic and educational backgrounds. The majority of them were working class

Mexican immigrant women with pre or school-aged children who attended Lawrence Elementary. One Mexican father left the program because it conflicted with his job, and another Mexican male, a young man, left for unknown reasons. Five African students from Sudan, including three males, attended a few sessions but four left due to personal circumstances. For most of the classes that I observed there were mostly women present.<sup>8</sup>

The levels of education of the students ranged from two to 17 years of schooling, most of it in Mexico. One of the women, of Mexican background, was born in California and attended public schools in the state. She was in the program because she wanted to improve her English writing skills. Another woman, who was Colombian, was highly educated; she had a degree in Engineering and was in the U.S. because her husband had obtained a scholarship to study at a local private university for one year. The diversity in socioeconomic status was obvious because some of the students drove to class while others took public transportation, or walked. Also, some had fairly stable blue collar jobs, such as in the night shift cleaning crew for a downtown building, while others earned money by baby sitting or caring for the elderly. A few demonstrated entrepreneurial talents by marketing and selling their services, e.g., hairstyling, or their home made goods, e.g., chocolates, to their CBET classmates. As for their proficiency in English, despite varying years of formal and informal exposure to English, the majority of the students were at the Intermediate Low level of ESL.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> One of the Sudanese women came back about three quarters into the semester and remained in the program.

<sup>9</sup> Because of the program's multilevel nature, the instructor has the students interview each other with simple questions orally, while she goes around assessing their speaking levels. She also has the students self-identify their levels. This informal assessment constitutes the initial determination of English levels until a more formal tool, the CASAS test which is a reading assessment, is administered.

The CBET classroom was a welcoming environment for the adult students and their children because a sense of community was evident in the schedule, the presence of children, the food, the language, and the interactions between teacher and students and among the students. The class met on Tuesdays and Thursdays for three and a half hours per class session, which began at approximately 8:45 AM, but some students arrived as late as 9:30 AM. They dropped off their children in the childcare area, but during break time, around 10:45 AM, they brought the children to their seats, where they fed them while engaging in conversation with their fellow students. Spanish was the language spoken among the adults and with the children.<sup>10</sup> Most of the time, the students' snacks came from home or from the school's cafeteria. Coffee and tea were available at 25 cents per cup, and for most of the semester one of the women brought *tamales* on Thursdays to sell during the break. This was also the time when students would ask Margaret, in English, questions about homework assignments and tests. But they also had non-school related conversations with her, such as reporting on the status of one of the student's daughters who was in a coma. After the break, at around 11:00 AM, children returned to their childcare providers and class resumed. Parents picked up the children when the class ended at 12:15 PM.

The class was structured and had a daily agenda, but it was flexible enough for parents to get up and change their children's diapers, or to leave for any reason. Margaret believes that the sense of community is one of the most important aspects of CBET, perhaps even more important than the learning of language (personal interview, February

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<sup>10</sup> The Sudanese woman would talk to Margaret and sometimes would interact with other students.

9, 2006). The program's location and school staff also contribute to creating a sense of community and ensuring a welcoming atmosphere. This CBET program is centrally located with respect to the rest of the school, giving the program visibility. There was a constant flow of people walking across the multipurpose room, including the school principal, staff, other parents, teachers, students and visitors, who would sometimes pause to listen in or to look at the board. This helped establish and maintain good working relationships with the host school and its staff. As a result, the CBET program was very much integrated into the fabric of the school. The central location of the classroom facilitated the parents' easy access to the school's resources such as the library, their children's classrooms, and the main office. It also allowed for the children to visit with their parents during recess time or on their way to the library, bathroom or attendance office.

Margaret also credits the principal for supporting the program, welcoming parents and encouraging parent involvement, and persuading teachers to be participants in the program (personal interview, December 9, 2005). At Lawrence Elementary, after Margaret promoted the tutoring services offered by CBET, at least three kindergarten teachers requested tutors during the first semester. Margaret's instructional delivery, classroom set up, extensive adult ESL teaching experience (over 30 years) and professional credentials are also important factors in the creation of a communal and welcoming environment for the adult students. She spoke some Spanish and proudly shared with the students that her father immigrated to the United States from Mexico, and that she was therefore half Mexican. Margaret was instrumental in bringing CBET to her

community college district, and functioned as a trainer, peer coach and Instructional Leader for the district wide CBET program. She is also well respected by her peers and her coworkers who admire her pedagogical methods, and her focus on and commitment to student learning.

Margaret addressed the students informally by their first names, but she was always addressed by the Latino students as “Teacher” or “*Maestra*” (Teacher) and not by her first or last name. Though the Latino students seemed comfortable with Margaret, and felt free to ask questions or bring up issues, the traditional hierarchical teacher-student relationship was evident, on the part of the students. But Margaret’s classroom set up and instructional practices did not fit that traditional hierarchy. She did not have a teacher’s desk, and only stayed in front of the classroom near her overhead projector when she lectured, which was about 75% of the time. The students were not seated in rows behind each other, but in long tables facing each other. When Margaret assigned pair or group work, she walked around and tried to work with everyone. She used a soft tone of voice, treated everyone with respect, and constantly praised the students, especially during listening and speaking drills, by saying “Beautiful,” or “Excellent pronunciation,” for example. She also created a system where students were asked to volunteer for various roles, such as taking attendance, distributing handouts and other classroom materials, as well as for selling pencils and accounting for coffee and tea purchases (these funds were used for the end of the year celebration in June.)

Margaret and her students were aware of the precarious nature of the program. An ideal scenario would be to have a permanent CBET classroom and an appropriate room

within the school dedicated to childcare. Despite the level of teacher, student and administrative support that the CBET program at Lawrence Elementary enjoyed, it was vulnerable to the priorities that the school must attend to. This meant that school business took precedence over CBET when it came to scheduling events in the multipurpose room. On one occasion, the CBET class was moved to a small classroom appropriate for elementary school-sized children, not adult learners. The vulnerability is also reflected in the provision of childcare. When the program lost its childcare room in early December, childcare moved to the back of the multipurpose room. Though the room is large, it was impossible not to hear the children play, laugh, talk, and cry. This distracted many parents; especially when one of the children would “run away” from the childcare providers to visit his/her mom. The proximity to their mothers also caused the small children to call for their mothers constantly. To help reduce distractions and noise levels (at least partially), the childcare providers decided to take the children to the school’s playground for the first half of the class. This did not solve the problem during rainy days, or when the playground was being utilized by Lawrence Elementary students.

Regardless of some of these uncertain circumstances, the locale, the community feeling of the program, the instructor, the organization of the room, and the services that the program provides the parents, all created a positive atmosphere in which to teach ESL. There was flexibility for the students, who could move about, eat at their tables and leave the class early if needed. Special occasions such as birthdays were celebrated with a small cake and a card that was circulated for all to sign. Margaret was always available to talk to the students before and after class and during class breaks. Small babies who did



not qualify for childcare were allowed to sit by their mothers during class. The major commitment that the adult students, and in particular those who attended consistently, made to devoting time and effort to this program is also commendable and contributed to helping CBET achieve its goals. This was apparent in students' English language progress as evidenced in particular by the growth in their CASAS (Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System) pre and post scores, discussed in the next chapter.

### The focal parents

Originally, four parents were randomly selected at the beginning of the semester from among the Mexican immigrant mothers with pre and/or school-aged children. One left the CBET class in November.<sup>11</sup> Table 5 provides basic data on the three mothers whose experiences, practices, and beliefs are the focus of this study.

*Table 5.* The mothers and their children

Mothers	Age	Years of schooling	Where from	Children (age in years)
Estela Arriaga	31	12 (did not finish last year of high school)	Small town near Mexico City	Susana (6) Jacqueline (3) Richard (1 year 5 months)
Marcela Tapia	31	9	Large city in Western region of Mexico	Keith (10)
Rafaela Salvador	36	6	A rural village near Culiacán	Tony (10) Diego (8) Rafaelita (1)

<sup>11</sup> The mother was three months pregnant at the time. The CBET community aide presumed that she did not come back to the program due to her pregnancy.

On CBET's TOPS (Tracking of Programs and Students) form, Estela, Rafaela and Marcela reported that improving their English was their primary goal. Two mothers had children in childcare, and all three mothers had children at Lawrence. The three women were fairly consistent in attendance and found CBET to be a useful program.

### **Explicit lessons**

The CBET program focuses on teaching English conversation, writing and reading skills, home literacy and parenting skills, how to read to children, and how to help children with homework (<http://www.sandiegocet.net/esl/cbet.php>). There is no set curriculum, so it is up to each individual teacher to design lessons and to choose topics, textbooks and other class materials. Varied data sources (class observations, class materials, instructor interview and parent interviews), revealed the structured agenda of the class and explicit and implicit lessons about language, parenting, teaching and learning, and being a mainstream "American."

The classes for the most part followed a structured agenda that was written on the left side of the white board (see Figure 2). Between 8:45 and 9:00 AM, Margaret would work with individual students helping them with their homework assignments, or engage in small talk about topics such as the weather, someone's birthday, or someone's health. Margaret started teaching her day's lesson at around 9 AM to accommodate latecomers, although it might be 9:20 AM before the majority of the students arrived. Once the class got started, Margaret would usually review the material covered in the last class session. This was typically done via "fill in the blank" exercises on the white board, or a review of

the homework assignment, or a worksheet with related exercises (See Figure 3).

Generally, this was followed by grammar and conversation practice, new vocabulary, or a new lesson. After the fifteen to twenty minute break, there was frequently a dictation exercise (for spelling, reading and writing practice) or a test (see Figure 4).

<p>October 4, 2005</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Review verbs</li> <li>2) Grammar</li> <li>3) New words-weather</li> </ol> <p>Break</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4) Reading</li> <li>5) Writing</li> </ol>
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Figure 2. Sample CBET agenda as shown on whiteboard

<p>Review of the difference between “they” and “there”</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) ___ are 30 students in the class</li> <li>2) ___ are studying now</li> <li>3) ___ is a whiteboard next to the screen</li> <li>4) ___ like to watch TV</li> <li>5) ___ are 3 clocks on the walls</li> </ol>
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Figure 3. Sample “fill in the blank” exercise

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Dictation practice</u> <u>Her Life with her Family</u> (By Estela Arriaga<sup>12</sup>)</p> <p>Estela Arriaga is _____. She _____ three children, two _____ and one son. Susana is six _____ years old, Jacqueline is _____ years old, and Richard is one year and four _____. Susana _____ to Lawrence and Jackie goes _____ Head Start. She has a _____ and father and two _____. They _____ in Mexico...<sup>13</sup> She _____ her family _____ six months or every year.</p>
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Figure 4. Sample dictation practice

<sup>12</sup> Estela Arriaga was one of my case studies. Her name and her children’s names have been changed to protect their anonymity.

<sup>13</sup> Name of city of origin has been omitted to protect participants’ anonymity.

The class used two textbooks, Mollinsky and Bliss' (2000, 2001 and 2002) *Side by side* student workbooks and Mollinsky and Bliss' (1993) *Word by word picture dictionary*. Students did not need to purchase textbooks since they were available in the classroom. The class also relied on exercise worksheets or dictation exercises which were mostly created by the teacher. During the period of my observations, Lawrence's CBET program curriculum covered the following areas: English language skills; competency skills; culture; parenting skills, family literacy and tutoring, (see Table 6). I observed eleven different lessons, and Table 6 outlines the linguistic aspects of English that are covered in this class. The table is organized in topics by related linguistic skills, instructional materials and nature of student participation.

*Table 6.* Eleven Observed Lessons from October 2005-January 2006

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Language skill and/or competence addressed</b>	<b>Curriculum/instructional materials used</b>	<b>Participant structures</b>
1) Weather	L+S Pr Vb Comp Gr/Syn R+W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Textbook based</li> <li>▪ Scripted activities</li> </ul>	Class Individual Group
2) "My life with my family"	L+S Pr Vb Comp Gr/Syn R+W	Student generated story using teacher generated script	Class Individual Group
3) Reading a book to a child	L+S Pr Vb Comp Gr/Syn R+W PS FL	Children's book: <i>Fortunately</i> by Remy Charlip	Class Individual Group

Table 6 (continued). Eleven Observed Lessons from October 2005-January 2006

Topic	Language skill and/or competence addressed	Curriculum/instructional materials used	Participant structures
4) The living room	L+S Pr Vb Comp Gr/Syn R+W Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Textbook based</li> <li>▪ Scripted activities</li> <li>▪ Picture of teacher's living room</li> </ul>	Class Individual Group
5) A Mexican holiday: <i>Día de los muertos</i> (Day of the Dead)	L+S Pr Vb Comp Gr/Syn R+W Culture	Student generated story using teacher generated script	Class Individual Group
6) Housing problems	L+S Pr Vb Comp Gr/Syn R+W Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Textbook used to illustrate housing problems (e.g. leaky faucet, broken door knob etc.)</li> <li>▪ Student generated dictation story using teacher generated script</li> </ul>	Class Individual Group
7) Reporting an absence (calling the school)	L+S Pr Vb Comp Gr/Syn R+W Culture PS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Worksheet with illustrations and scripts for reporting absences</li> <li>▪ Teacher generated script</li> </ul>	Class Individual Group
8) The history of Thanksgiving	L+S Pr Vb Comp Gr/Syn R+W Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Overheads with illustrations and captions narrating the history behind the Thanksgiving holiday, with underlined keywords</li> </ul>	Class Individual Group
9) Parent-teacher conferences	L+S Pr Vb Comp Gr/Syn R+W Culture PS FL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Teacher generated scripts</li> </ul>	Class Individual Group

Table 6 (continued). Eleven Observed Lessons from October 2005-January 2006

Topic	Language skill and/or competence addressed	Curriculum/instructional materials used	Participant structures
10) Food and ordering at restaurants	L+S Pr Vb Comp Gr/Syn R+W Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Textbook lesson</li> </ul>	Class Individual Group
11) Money	L+S Pr Vb Comp Gr/Syn R+W Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Textbook lesson</li> <li>▪ Teacher generated scripts</li> </ul>	Individual Group Class

Codes

Listening and speaking.....	L+S
Pronunciation .....	Pr
Vocabulary building .....	Vb
Comprehension.....	Comp
Grammar and Syntax.....	Gr/Syn
Reading and writing .....	R+W
Culture.....	Culture
Parenting skills .....	PS
Family literacy and tutoring .....	FL
Individual student participation.....	Individual
Pair or small group work .....	Group
Class/choral response .....	Class

Table 6 illustrates that the CBET class placed great emphasis on listening and speaking, pronunciation, vocabulary, comprehension, grammar, syntax, and reading and writing. These were taught within the thematic context of a lesson. English was taught communicatively, meaning that it was not taught through rules and drills, but rather through activities that asked students to use what they had learned in order to communicate with others or to express a particular thought or idea. For example, the instructor used a rainy day as an opportunity to review the vocabulary from the weather

lesson, as well as to introduce the past tense of a few irregular verbs and to come up with questions for conversation. In this case, the word “umbrella” led the class to learn to ask “Did you bring an umbrella?”, to learn idiomatic expressions such as “I got a ride,” and to learn and use the present and past tense of the verbs “bring,” “ride” and “drive.” One student said: “No,...I brought my car and it’s not *necesario* to bring umbrella.” When the student integrated the Spanish word *necesario* (necessary) in the sentence, Margaret did not correct the student because the purpose of this activity was to encourage students to use specific verbs in sentences that showed an understanding of their definition and conjugation.

Because one of the Margaret’s main objectives was for students to be able to use their language skills in real situations (personal interviews, October 4, 2005, December 9, 2005 and February 9, 2006), she provided opportunities for students to practice conversation, comprehension, and pronunciation. Student participation was mostly scripted, that is, it was based on textbook, worksheet or teacher generated activities. For most of the conversations, students followed a particular script found either in their textbook, on the overhead, or on a worksheet provided by the teacher. The nature of the conversation exercises varied, but usually followed a traditional pattern (see Figure 5) of call, response, and evaluation similar to the one reported in Mehan’s (1985) study of the type of classroom discourse used by teachers to direct and manage their classrooms. Because this class was multilevel, the instructor would try to challenge more advanced students by asking them to answer with alternative words or by changing verb tenses. Conversation exercises usually culminated in students practicing with a partner while

Margaret walked around to listen, help, and if needed, correct the students' pronunciation and grammar.

<p><b>Practicing pronunciation</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Margaret reads a word or a phrase.</li> <li>2. Margaret asks students to repeat in choral form.</li> <li>3. Margaret asks individual students to repeat after her.</li> </ol> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Practicing listening, speaking and comprehension</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Margaret asks a question or asks students to ask her a question.</li> <li>2. Students respond in choral form or ask her a question in choral form.</li> <li>3. Margaret asks individual students a question or asks them to ask her a question.</li> <li>4. Individual students respond or ask her a question.</li> <li>5. Margaret asks a student to repeat the same exercise with another student across the room for everyone to hear.</li> <li>6. Margaret asks the students to practice the same exercise in pairs or in groups.</li> </ol>
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*Figure 5.* Student participation patterns

Figure 5 indicates that students experienced diverse participation structures, e.g., repeating after the instructor, choral response from the students, the instructor calling out on students to participate, and pair or group practice. The students were also provided with a template or a script, written in an easy to follow format. Six of the eleven observed topics used teacher generated or teacher and student co-generated scripts, a total of five topics were based on the textbook (two of which also used teacher generated, or teacher and student co-generated scripts), one topic was based on a children's book, and another used a short story of Thanksgiving.

A new student or visitor provided the opportunity to practice real-life communication. Margaret would prompt the students by asking "What do we say?" The students would say "Welcome" or "Nice to meet you," or "Where are you from?" in choral form depending on the situation. In addition, besides learning to pronounce isolated words or phrases, students would also learn how English is spoken "outside" the



CBET classroom. For example, Margaret explained that in class one learns to say “What...are...you...going...to...do...tomorrow?”, but “outside” a faster version would sound like this: “What’re you going to do tomorrow?”<sup>14</sup> --which made listening to English sometimes “difficult.” In addition, listening and speaking practice also included asking students to rewrite a story which was usually generated by a dictation exercise or a worksheet (see Figure 6). Margaret believed this method provided students with great opportunities for interaction, illustrative of a communicative method of teaching which offered the students “a lot of language experience” (personal interview, October 4, 2005).

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I live in apartment \_\_\_\_\_. There \_\_\_\_\_ several problems \_\_\_\_\_ building. There \_\_\_\_\_ a problem in \_\_\_\_\_ laundry room. The washing machine \_\_\_\_\_ stopped \_\_\_\_\_. It \_\_\_\_\_ been broken \_\_\_\_\_ three days. Another problem \_\_\_\_\_ the hot water heater. It \_\_\_\_\_ leaking. There \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ termites \_\_\_\_\_ kitchen, bedrooms, \_\_\_\_\_ bathrooms. When \_\_\_\_\_ you come \_\_\_\_\_ fix these problems? Please come \_\_\_\_\_ soon \_\_\_\_\_ possible. If you \_\_\_\_\_ fix these problems. I \_\_\_\_\_ move. Thank you.

*Figure 6.* Letter to apartment manager dictation/writing exercise

Besides listening and speaking, writing was also emphasized in every lesson, in various formats. Sometimes it took the form of “fill in the blank” type activities, such as filling in the missing letters, or filling in the missing word. It also took the form of dictation, or writing a short paragraph using a scripted template created by the teacher or by the students and the teacher, and then students would fill in key information. For example, during the Housing Problems lesson, the instructor modeled how to write a complaint letter to an apartment manager (see Figure 6). It was a co-participatory process

<sup>14</sup> Margaret did not use the more informal “gonna” in this sentence; she modeled formal English even when illustrating “real life” English use.

in which Margaret elicited students' input as to what should be included in such a letter. The letter was based on Estela Arriaga's apartment situation at the time, and it resulted in a dictation/writing exercise for the entire class. The students appreciated the fact that Margaret taught them a practical writing sample that they could use in a real situation. In one of her interviews Estela reported that she never had a chance to use the letter because the manager actually fixed these problems before she could write them up. But she was pleased with having learned the pieces necessary to write a letter of complaint just in case she needed to write one in the future.

### **Competence-based skills within English language teaching and learning**

The teaching of English language skills was accompanied by the teaching of a competence-based curriculum, which is defined by Grognet and Crandall (1982, cited by Auerbach, 1986) as "performance-based...language tasks...associated with specific skills that are necessary for individuals to function proficiently in the society in which they live" (p. 413). These skills were interconnected to teaching students about American culture, and the ways in which one interacts with others within U.S. society in different settings. They included ordering food in a restaurant, writing checks, and being able to call the school to report a child's absence. They were explicitly taught alongside the vocabulary, pronunciation, sentence structures and oral and written skills needed for each situation, in keeping with Margaret's goal to help her students function outside of the CBET classroom, and to become more self-confident about their language use (personal interviews, October 4, 2005 and February 9, 2006).

To take one example, using the resources of the restaurant unit in one of the class textbooks, *Word by word picture dictionary*, the students were taught how to pronounce basic restaurant vocabulary such as “high chair,” “dinner fork,” “salad fork,” “soup spoon,” “butter knife,” “saucer,” and “wine glass” among others. In addition, Margaret explained how to interact with restaurant personnel. She emphasized that they should begin their order or requests with words such as “Excuse me,” “May I,” “Can I,” “I need a table for...,” “Can you bring...please?” They also learned how to ask for the check, and about tipping customs in the U.S. Another competence skill that Margaret considers important is being able to write out numbers for handling finances such as writing checks or money orders. Students were given worksheets with blank checks so they could practice writing checks to different people and institutions. With good humor, they started with a check for Margaret for \$125. While students were filling out the check, Margaret walked around and reminded them to write the date. Other tasks included writing a check to a local supermarket for \$20.50, and a mortgage payment to Washington Mutual for \$1,622.34. The lesson also emphasized punctuation marks used with currency and check writing, e.g. “1 dollar, 75 cents” for \$1.75, and “One hundred twenty five and 00/100” for \$125.00.

Because of CBET’s emphasis on parent-school relationships, calling the school to report an absence and being able to interact with a teacher during a parent-teacher conference were important competence-based lessons. Both lessons were based on scripts that are aligned with the local Adult ESL/Civics program (see Figure 7). The Adult

ESL/Civics program<sup>15</sup> offered to test the students on their skills at being able to report an absence, and participating in a parent-teacher conference.<sup>16</sup> Lessons emphasized that the students “greet and identify themselves,” and that they “conclude the message with an appropriate goodbye” (Worksheet on EL Civics Assessment #13). The script is as follows:

Answering machine:  
 If you are calling to report your child’s absence, please leave the following information on the machine: Your name, your child’s name, your child’s grade and teacher, and the reason for the absence. Thank you and have a nice day.  
 Parent’s response:  
 I am calling to report my child’s absence. My name is\_\_\_ My child’s name is\_\_\_ He/she is in the \_\_\_grade His/her teacher is\_\_\_ The reason for absence is\_\_\_

*Figure 7.* Reporting an absence on the school’s answering machine

Two volunteers from the Adult ESL/Civics program came to four classes and pulled out individual students for about fifteen to twenty minutes. I did not observe these tests, but was told that they used the same script that was given to the students to practice. The majority of the students were able to take the test, and according to Margaret, they all passed the test and obtained a certificate from the program. Great emphasis was placed on the adult ESL/Civics oral exam. Though it bears no credit towards the adult students’ CBET records, the students practiced for this test for at least three class sessions. Also, I was asked to practice with individual students to help them prepare for the exam. The

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<sup>15</sup> This is a local program that focuses on the development of English language skills in connection to good citizenship and community involvement.

<sup>16</sup> Though the test was not mandatory, and was not tied to CBET’s core lessons, students were encouraged to take the test to practice their conversation skills. As a result of taking the test, and passing it, students could receive a certificate from the Adult ESL/Civics program. The test was administered by two Adult ESL/Civics instructors and lasted about fifteen minutes.

content of the exam depended on the students' English level. At the beginning level, students were tested on calling the school to report an absence to the school's secretary or attendance clerk. At the intermediate level, students were asked to report the absence on the school's answering machine. In addition to reporting the absence on the school's answering machine, the advanced level students were asked to participate in a mock parent-teacher conference, during which they were to ask the teacher two questions, and then respond to three questions from the teacher. According to Margaret, as long as the students made the appropriate greeting, said their name, their child's name and grade, said good-bye, and showed they understood what was being asked, the order of the scripted statements did not really matter. However, they were awarded points for complete sentences.

### **How to be an “American parent”**

This section examines the teachings of CBET with regards to the roles and expectations of mainstream parents, which included, helping children with homework, reading to their children, and being involved in school activities such as parent-teacher conferences and meetings. One of the primary goals of CBET is to teach parenting skills and family literacy skills through an emphasis on reading to children, helping their children at school, and developing communication with the school. As required by Proposition 227, which led to the creation of CBET, each adult student signs a pledge to tutor school aged children in English, so the program provides training in tutoring, as

well as opportunities to tutor pre-kindergarten and kindergarten English learners at the school.

The CBET program has collections of children's books that are used to teach parents to read to their children and that can be checked out by the adults.

We have...must have 20-25 sets of books. I try to choose a book that's in line with a topic or a grammar point somehow related (M. Gensler, personal interview, February 9, 2006).

On one occasion, Margaret modeled a "read aloud" to her adult students with the intention that parents would go home and read the same book to their children. She chose Remy Charlip's (1993) book *Fortunately* for children ages four to eight, which tells the story of a young man who is invited to his own surprise birthday party. The book narrates the young man's adventures as he tries to get from his home in New York to the party in Florida. Margaret related the book to the fact that it was someone's birthday on the day of the lesson. She explained that in CBET classes students do not just study English but also read children's books, and she encouraged the students to take the books home to read to their children. She did not have enough copies of the books, and students had to share, but they all received a photocopy of the text.

Three strategies for reading aloud to children were explicitly shared with the students. First, Margaret told the students to look at the cover of the book and read the title along with their children. Margaret then proceeded to her first reading of the book aloud to the students. The students followed along as Margaret read the book to them. At several points, Margaret stopped to ask students if they had vocabulary questions, or to emphasize pronunciation. She also shared a second strategy which was to ask children

questions about what they saw in the book. One of the pages of the book shows that the protagonist has fallen in the ocean and encountered sharks. Margaret explained that children could count the number of sharks in the water. She re-emphasized this strategy during the second reading of the book which was done in choral form with the students. When she landed on the shark page, she asked “What are you going to ask the children?” Only a few students responded and said that they would ask their children to count how many sharks they found on that page. The third explicit read aloud strategy that she taught was to stop before finishing a sentence so that children could complete it. Margaret believes that teaching her students how to read children’s books also encourages critical thinking:

We... model how to read to the children, how to be on a page and ask other critical thinking questions that get children to talk about other things (personal interview, February 9, 2006).

But it was unclear how this was achieved, however, since the read aloud was not followed by a book discussion. The main focus of the read aloud was vocabulary development, checking for understanding, and above all, pronunciation. I also noticed that not all parents were paying attention; they got distracted or started side conversations when Margaret was reading the book to them. During the break Margaret said that the students might have been distracted because some of them had attended last year’s program and may have found reading the same book boring. At the end of the class, the students were given a copy of the text and were once again encouraged to practice reading it to their children.

CBET students were frequently reminded that they were learning English not only for themselves and their children, but also to help tutor children at the school in English. Margaret's original plan was for all students to tutor in a kindergarten class at the school, but only a handful was able to do it, mainly because of time limitations. The CBET lessons were on a tight, structured schedule, one which did not normally afford additional or free time for students to leave the classroom for tutoring duty. Nevertheless, the students received some training to be tutors. For that session, Margaret used alphabet cards which contained a picture of an object, the name of the object, and the first letter of the name of the object. Margaret also emphasized that this alphabet activity could be used with their children at home. Though there are many uses for these flashcards, Margaret modeled the steps that parents would use when tutoring a child at school. The activity started with asking students to name the letter, and then to make the sound of the letter. The activity also asked for students to name the object depicted on the card, and to give other words that started with the same letter. Students were given a worksheet with a script for what to ask children during the tutoring session (see Figure 8).

Teaching the alphabet to children 1) What letter is this? B 2) What is the sound of "b"? "ba" 3) (Point to the picture.) What is this? Ball 4) What letter does it begin with? B 5) What are some other words that begin with this sound? Bat, brother, bicycle
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*Figure 8.* Alphabet activity script

This activity was also used as a lesson for the adult students to practice listening and speaking, pronunciation and vocabulary development with each other. However, some



students were not able to participate fully since they were not able understand the activity. One student told her classmate “*No le entiendo*” (“I do not understand her.”) Margaret walked around the classroom helping different students, but there was a sense of frustration on the part of some of the students who did not understand how to use the cards according to the teacher’s instructions. Margaret was cognizant of the fact that parents and potential tutees may not have enough vocabulary to use the cards efficiently. Consequently, she explained that if a child used a Spanish word to provide examples of other words that start with the letter “p,” like “*pozole*” (a Mexican soup), these words should be accepted because they also proved that the children were learning sounds and words (CBET Observation field notes, October 10, 2005).

Another important parenting skill that CBET taught was how to interact with teachers during their children’s parent-teacher conferences. To coincide with the school’s parent-teacher conferences in December, the CBET class taught three lessons on parent-school relationships. The three lessons were meant to help adults develop their communication skills with their children’s schools, but they were also designed to prepare them for the adult ESL/Civics exam mentioned in the last section. The first lesson, “Reporting an Absence,” had a two-fold purpose; first to teach the students how to report a child’s absence on the school’s answering machine, and second to teach the students how to report a child’s absence to the school’s attendance clerk or secretary. Using a series of worksheets that depicted different scenarios and different teachers’ names, the students practiced how to report a child’s absence. A basic script was provided for the students, but students were also taught different reasons that could be

used when reporting an absence, such as “My child has a doctor’s appointment, dentist appointment;” “My family is going to Mexico for vacation;” “Because my car didn’t start;” or “I had car problems.” The CBET students were given a worksheet that prompted them to fill in the blanks.

During the parent-teacher conference lessons, adult students were given specific questions to ask, as well as possible questions that teachers would ask of them (see Figure 9<sup>17</sup>). These questions were developed by Margaret and were also drawn from other ESL materials. They were in script form for the parents to use during the actual conferences, and during classroom practice. The questions focused on student behavior and academic performance. In bold, Figure 9 also shows the types of questions that were most emphasized in class.

<p><b>How can my child improve?</b></p> <p><b>How is my child doing in school?</b></p> <p>Does she work hard?</p> <p><b>Does my child get along with other children?</b></p> <p>Does my child have friends?</p> <p>Does my child have problems in school?</p> <p><b>Does my child need to improve in Math?</b></p> <p><b>What can I do to help my child?</b></p> <p>Does my son play with other children?</p> <p>May I have an interpreter/translator?</p> <p><b>Does my son pay attention?</b></p> <p><b>Does my son talk too much in class?</b></p> <p><b>Does my son follow directions/rules?</b></p> <p><b>How is my child in math/science/writing/reading/computers/physical education/spelling/homework/classroom behavior? (This is based on a worksheet with graphics portraying different subjects)</b></p>
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*Figure 9.* Questions to ask during a parent-teacher conference

<sup>17</sup> This is not the actual worksheet, but these are a subset of the questions from the worksheet.

Parents were also taught to respond to possible teacher questions, which were also expressed in terms of behavior and academic performance (see Figure 10<sup>18</sup>). All these questions were written in English.

- |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How much time does your child read at home each week?</li> <li>2. What time [sic] does your child do homework?</li> <li>3. How often do you help your child with homework?</li> <li>4. How do you help your child with homework?</li> <li>5. Tell me about your child's study habits.</li> </ol> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

*Figure 10.* Parent-teacher conference teacher questions

Parents practiced how to answer teacher questions by using scripted sentences which Margaret helped co-construct. For example, to answer the question “How much does your child read at home each week?” a student responded, “30 minutes,” which caused protest from other parents who said that 30 minutes was too little time. This made the parent rectify her answer to, “30 minutes per day.” The students were then taught that they could choose from different options to respond to that question such as, “My child reads for 30 minutes a day or 3 hours each week.” The students were also given answers to other questions such as, “At what time does your child do homework?” by responding “He does his homework at 6:00 everyday.” To the question, “Tell me about your child’s study habits,” a student responded, “My child reads a book everyday for 20 or 30 minutes, then do [sic] his homework.” To the question of, “How often do you help your child with homework?” the students were taught the option of saying, “I help my child with homework every day.” Because, Margaret said, their children were good students

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<sup>18</sup> This is not the actual worksheet, but these are the questions pulled from the worksheet.

and probably did not need their help daily, they might also answer, “I help my child when she needs it.”

### **CBET’s notion of “good parenting”**

In this class, CBET students were viewed as good students and as good parents by Margaret. The program in general seems to assume that the parents’ behaviors as students in the program are closely connected to their parenting skills at home, and their desire to provide a better life for themselves and their children. Parents who attend CBET and show growth in their English language learning are, consequently, good parents, because they are studying English in order to help their children and to better themselves. The program understands that these adults may have other more pressing responsibilities than the classes, but the students are held accountable for their academic progress, for example, they were given homework assignments and biweekly tests. There were no grades or academic credit, so the motivation for doing the assignments, participating in class, and taking tests was many times extrinsic rather than intrinsic. According to Estela Arriaga,

*Cada vez que hacemos un porcentaje de exámenes [Margaret] nos cuenta... y nos da como gratificación un libro, un diccionario, un lápiz...entre más pruebas hagamos nos da mejor el libro.*

[Each time we do a percentage of tests [Margaret] counts them...and gives us a book, a dictionary, a pencil...the more tests we do, the better the book] (Estela Arriaga, personal interview, November 10, 2005).

In Marcela Tapia’s case, the motivation for taking tests was rooted in her desire to show personal growth (as explained in the next chapter).

The instructor also charted each student's progress in individual files which could be accessed by any student at any time. A powerful extrinsic motivator was certainly the instructor's praise of the adult students as being good parents, and not just because they were enrolled in ESL classes. This was stated on more than one occasion, including one day when the children in childcare were leaving the multipurpose classroom to go to the school's playground with the babysitters. They lined up, and after waving and saying good bye to their parents, they left quietly. Margaret complimented the parents by saying that their children were good because they stayed in line and walked out of the classroom quietly. She used her Spanish to add that the children would be "*lista*" [sic] meaning ready for school. Implicitly, parents learned what was considered bad behavior and bad parenting. On another occasion, two Lawrence male students in third or fourth grade walked by and one of them yelled out, "What the hell!" before leaving the multipurpose room. Margaret explained to the parents that this was an example of a bad word, and jokingly explained to the parents that if she were the child's mother, she would wash his mouth with soap.

The CBET participants were also formally recognized for their accomplishments as good students and parents. When the first semester ended, the students had a small *convivio* (get together) to celebrate, where Margaret awarded certificates of attendance. These certificates noted the number of hours that students attended class, and one of the three mothers who is profiled in this study, Estela Arriaga, earned second place. When Margaret gave out the certificates, she told the students that they should be proud about being in this program because it showed their dedication and their good parenting. She

also encouraged them to use the certificates as documentation when applying for jobs.

According to Margaret,

The students value them greatly, they often show them to their employers to show they're learning English. They don't carry any official weight because...it's signed by the instructor...all it's saying is that they have so many hours of attendance...it's not verifying level of completion, we have other certificates that do that (at the end of the year), but this is just verifying attendance...We have a different certificate that we give at the end of the year that acknowledges whether they helped tutor children or not and to what extent they furthered their family literacy skills so there's more CBET language on the end of the year certificate...they tutored children, they read to their children...it's not quantitative (M. Gensler, Personal interview, February 9, 2006).

It is not clear if these certificates actually help adult students get jobs, and during my interviews, my case studies were not sure how to use them either. At the end of the semester Margaret raffled items such as children's books, American history flash cards, a bottle of perfume and an apron. The students knew that this was not the "big" graduation day,<sup>19</sup> but they were excited to get certificates and to have a chance to celebrate. In addition, Margaret provided each student with a handout taken from Colorín Colorado (<http://www.colorincolorado.org/>), a website dedicated to promoting reading for kids, which includes information in Spanish for parents. The handout contained tips for parents to promote reading to their children through various activities and strategies.

There was evidence that the school, like Margaret, also views CBET as an important component in parent involvement, and also views CBET parents as good parents. On one occasion I witnessed a school staff member walking four students to the main office. She told them that mothers and fathers learn English too, and that they do so in this

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<sup>19</sup> The CBET yearly cycle ends in June; this is when the "big" celebration takes place.

classroom. Furthermore, the school principal has shared with Margaret how instrumental this program has been for Lawrence's parent involvement. The principal has seen "changes in all the parents" because he sees them at school events, and "he sees them getting involved in things that they weren't involved in before and they're more proactive, they're more interactive" (M. Gensler, personal interview, February 9, 2006).

CBET teaches immigrants what they need to know to navigate in the U.S. school system, and help their children succeed. By teaching parents how to help their children with homework, how to read to their children at home, and how to interact with their children's school, they are being taught how to act like mainstream, middle class, Anglo-American parents. The values about schooling and about what it means to be a good student --and therefore a good parent-- are integrated in the CBET lessons via explicit messages about good parenting. Parents were constantly told that they were great examples to their children because of various reasons, the most salient ones being: They came to school regularly, they showed progress via their test scores, they showed great effort in class, they participated as classroom tutors, and they were involved in school. Margaret does not believe that CBET teaches parenting skills "directly because...it would require a level of English that would be beyond the level of many of my students to talk about behavioral things." She acknowledges that regardless of parents' English language level, CBET does encourage parents to do "the right thing" (personal interview, February 9, 2006). That is, besides reading to their children and helping them with homework, they are encouraged to attend parent-teacher conferences, family literacy nights, the *Viernes Familiar* (Family Friday at Lawrence), school events, and overall to

be role models for their children. They are also encouraged to do their CBET homework alongside their children while their children are working on their own homework assignments in order to model study habits. The program also believes that “through modeling the children’s stories and letting them [parents] take the book home, then hopefully they are replicating what we’ve been doing in class” (M. Gensler, personal interview, February 9, 2006). The parents were told that children like school if their parents like school (CBET classroom observation, December 1, 2005). According to Margaret, the program teaches parents “to model academic skills they want their children to have” and this “perhaps raises the value of education in their [children’s] eyes” (personal interview, February 9, 2006). Moreover, parents are taught that well behaved students are seen as good students. These views reveal an assumption made about how immigrant parents and their children perceive the concept of “education,” and what steps parents should take in order to instill educational values in their children.

The lesson on parent-teacher conferences was an important example of how U.S. mainstream values are transmitted to CBET students. Parents were taught the communicative language to use during parent-teacher conferences; that is the vocabulary, the pronunciation, the grammar and the listening and speaking skills needed to interact with their children’s teachers. But they were also taught what to ask and how to respond to possible teacher questions. Parent-teacher conference questions presented in the lesson materials dealt with a child’s homework behaviors, reading patterns and overall classroom behavior. To help parents practice responding to teachers’ inquiries, certain notions of what good study behaviors were taught. To the question of “Where does he



[child] do his homework?” it was suggested that parents use “My child studies or does his homework in the dining room, when the TV is off,” thus emphasizing the importance of not having the TV on while doing homework. Because this is a group of parents with limited English skills, a highly scripted set of questions and answers can prove useful for initial interactions with their child’s teacher. These scripts reflect what is valued in U.S. mainstream school culture, which fundamentally seems to be good classroom behavior, good homework patterns at home, and the time spent reading at home. These short and basic scripts do not lend themselves to bring about a deeper culturally relevant dialogue between teachers and parents about teachers’ classroom practices, and parents’ educational practices, and how collaborations can be bridged between both to help the child succeed.

### **The role of critical pedagogy in the adult students’ learning experiences**

Margaret understands the value of critical pedagogy as a way to build “language learning around problems or situations they face in their communities...” but also believes that it is most valuable when done within a “homogenous group of people in a homogenous community of the same situation and have a language level to express themselves” (M. Gensler, personal interview, February 9, 2006). Margaret believes that the main difference between her CBET class and Auerbach’s (1996) programs in Massachusetts is the student population. Lawrence’s class is multilevel both in English language proficiency and students’ level of education, whereas Margaret claims that Auerbach’s student population was linguistically, culturally and educationally

homogeneous. Consequently, in the Lawrence's CBET program, a total critical pedagogy approach is not perceived by Margaret as feasible, because "you can't build a curriculum around" a common goal "unless everyone can relate to it" (M. Gensler, personal interview, February 9, 2006).

So Margaret takes bits and pieces of what she considers to be a critical approach to teaching adult ESL by teaching to the emerging needs of the students, whether it is responding to students' wishes to practice the use of "the," "a" and "an," by doing extra drills, or creating a lesson on the use of definite and indefinite articles. But Margaret also perceives that critical pedagogy is enacted by responding to the students' wishes to learn about Rosa Parks for instance, by reading a story, and then using the story as a way to learn a new fact of American history, as well as a springboard to learn new vocabulary. Margaret considered her approach eclectic, which seems to be a widespread practice in adult ESL programs, as reported by Crandall (1993).

Margaret did provide curricular material to raise students' social and political consciousness. These lessons were based on news events and traditional American holiday celebrations. With Rosa Parks' passing on October 24, 2005, one of the students asked Margaret if she could talk to them about Rosa Parks. The student's curiosity was sparked by the news, and also by the fact that she had African American neighbors. In response to this request, Margaret gave a quick oral biography of Rosa Parks. I noticed that only about five students were paying attention, the rest were engaged in conversation with their classmates or writing. Margaret's short biographical sketch ended by concluding that Parks' refusal to move from her seat changed civil rights history in this

country. I was not present at the next class, when Margaret brought a story about Rosa Parks to share with the students, but I was present at the following session when Margaret reviewed the vocabulary from the story. As it happened on that particular day, the CBET program was moved to a small classroom because the multipurpose room was being used by a school event. The desks and chairs were elementary school student size, not adult size. This prompted Margaret to tell the students that she felt like Rosa Parks. Here Margaret made an allusion to what was being learned by relating that historical moment to the particular setting and situation at hand. Though her comment was made in an off hand manner, Margaret connected the low status and little respect for Rosa Parks with the low status and little power of CBET, which could not command a stable classroom. There was no response from most students to her comment. Only a few chuckles suggested that some students “got it.”

Another example of Margaret’s use of curriculum materials to discuss social issues was the Thanksgiving lesson. Before the school went on Thanksgiving break, Margaret taught a lesson on the history of Thanksgiving. The overheads showed the story from the settlers’ point of view, but Margaret repeatedly told the students that this was not a “good episode” in American history, and also acknowledged that California used to belong to Mexico. This last comment sparked a side conversation between two students, who started dialoguing about the political events in Mexico that led that to Mexico losing land to the United States. Margaret continued her lesson, but the students continued their side conversation which was disruptive because they were seated one table away from each other. Their conversation was in Spanish and did not include the rest of the class or

Margaret. The lesson brought out a couple of unscripted questions from the students with regards to the role of the settlers in this episode of American history. One of the students asked if, “The Americans helped the *indígenas*?” Margaret stated that the Indians did help the “Americans” with farming because they did not know how to farm the new land. Another student corrected Margaret by saying “not the Americans, the pilgrims” and added that, “the Americans are the Indians.” Standing corrected, Margaret agreed with the student’s statements and explained that one should indeed refer to them as “Native Americans.” Margaret went beyond what was in the overheads to add that the settlers brought diseases and ambition, and as a result today the Native Americans have the worst land, and despite the money generated by their casinos, their land is “no good” (CBET classroom observation notes, November 17, 2005).

Margaret’s attempts to respond to the students’ difficult questions and the students’ opinions about controversial issues corroborate her argument that a pedagogy of liberation cannot be fully implemented when teaching multilevel groups. Perhaps there were lost opportunities for critical pedagogy-based discussions and lessons in both episodes, where students’ prior knowledge or students’ own experiences could have been connected to the situations of oppression, colonization and social injustice behind Rosa Parks and Thanksgiving. Some come to mind: Mentioning the discriminatory attitudes towards American Indians, and the vulnerability of the CBET program as she related their situation to the Rosa Parks’ story. Indeed, not all students were engaged while Margaret told the story of Rosa Parks, and only a couple of students verbalized their knowledge of Mexican history in relationship to American history. It may well be that

lack of vocabulary to understand or verbally express their opinions would have stopped the rest of the students from speaking out. But it could also be argued that because students did use their limited English to probe or to ask questions that were clearly related to issues of social justice, this might be expanded upon. Buttaro (2004) posits that ESL programs should be built around the context of the students' lives, and not around the simple teaching of basic skills. Furthermore, Auerbach (1986) critiques an approach that is simply fact-based and does not lead to critical thinking. Teaching poignant biographical facts about Rosa Parks, and telling the Thanksgiving story from the Native Americans' perspective brought out students' curiosity and desire to discuss larger social and political issues. But these opportunities were not capitalized on because as Auerbach (1986) states, this type of adult ESL curriculum does not question "the existing economic order" (p. 411), thus making the program seem to promote neutrality and the maintenance of the status quo.

But in Margaret's view and experience, "You can't get a lot of in depth analysis... it's hard to get to that level when you have a limited language, especially with a...multilevel class" (personal interview, February 9, 2006). By being responsive to the emergent needs of the students, Margaret believes that the classroom becomes a safe environment for students to bring up issues, and adds that as an instructor one should not bring his/her political beliefs into the classroom or impose them on the students.

There will be issues that will come up... I've had students very depressed over their relationship with her husbands... one woman really needed to leave her boyfriend and I tried on a personal level to give her...I'll do my best to empower them to deal with that... in a good way... You know, try to support them in their struggles and...and Mexican women... I'm hesitant to bring up problems that I know, some are having, but others

may not because... they don't always want people to know about their situation... like some are documented and some aren't. And because of that there are a whole set of problems related to that... it would have to be in Spanish... I don't want them to feel like...they may expose themselves when they don't want to... I'm not sure about that, how far you can go or not (M. Gensler, personal interview, October 4, 2005).

In the attempt to respect the student's privacy, issues of power and struggle become lost opportunities for interesting discussion. Margaret understands the importance of offering a curriculum that provides meaningful content, that integrates stories of problem-posing, problem-solving nature, but she also believes her students do not have enough English knowledge yet to fully discuss those issues. She also perceives that the students appreciate learning the basics. She explains that she would prefer to teach less grammar and more content-based lessons, but she believes that the students really like learning grammar, because she has noticed that every time she starts teaching grammar, students immediately take notes or pay more attention to the class.

The work of adult ESL and adult literacy scholars such as Auerbach (1996) reflects a critical approach to teaching adult students ESL, one that provides a curriculum that is participatory, meaningful, and embedded in real life context. In their view, this type of curriculum allows students to learn about ways to overcome difficult conditions and gain access to rights and resources to help them advance socially, economically and educationally. This approach also favors classroom conditions that are more about learning language within a problem-posing, dialogical approach, and less about learning language through a competence-based approach (Auerbach, 1986). Auerbach claims that the adult students in her studies (1996) not only learned English language skills but also skills to allow them to confront issues that affect their lives. Consequently, in Auerbach's

adult ESL programs, students set their own goals, curriculum, and topics and also developed leadership and mentorship skills to become adult ESL instructors, or community mentors and educators. In Lawrence's CBET class, critical pedagogy is viewed as occurring when emergent topics that students bring up are incorporated in the lesson, but are not part of the formal curriculum. A critical approach to adult ESL is not centrally integrated, but it takes place sporadically as students' needs for learning about different topics or different language skills are exposed and honored. Margaret explains that she builds on students' previous knowledge to teach to the moment:

I try to find out what they already know... like when I do new vocabulary. I want to see what words they already know... if it's a reading. I try to ask questions about what they already know about the subject... it's possible I try to get general conversation with them... I find that it was somebody's wedding anniversary, and her husband's birthday<sup>20</sup>... so that gave a few words to teach "wedding anniversary, congratulations"... so just social conversation... sometimes will bring out. Things are happening that then we can teach to and I will teach to that moment, when it comes up... you know, I hear about a funeral or somebody dies. Then we can often turn it into a lesson (personal interview, October 4, 2005).

In this view and this context, critical pedagogy is interpreted as a way to listen to the students' needs for learning a certain skill, and then teaching that skill immediately in the form of an English language lesson. And a communicative approach to teaching is used, because it is believed that this will translate into helping students use as much English as possible in their everyday lives, therefore allowing them to build their self-confidence, and to possibly better their lives.

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<sup>20</sup> The student in question came to class dressed up, and that prompted Margaret to ask the student if she was celebrating a special occasion. The student responded that it was her husband's birthday and their wedding anniversary.

Margaret also believes that if all the students were at the same language and academic level, a critical pedagogy approach would fit appropriately. To illustrate her point, she told me the following story:

We had --at another school-- I taught there...the parents were upset over how their children were being treated in an afternoon program...afternoon reading program. So we immediately stopped and then did a lesson on writing a complaint letter and what strategies they should use to complain and who they should talk to. They were ready to go to the news media...without going through the counselor, the principal and so we cut that on the bud [sic] and... we wrote a letter together [to the principal] so they could see ways to... make things happen... and because it was something real that happened... and because it was a homogeneous group of students, ...that's where critical pedagogy works... has to come from the students, has to be a homogeneous motive behind it and then I think...it's important to give them the skills to handle the task (personal interview, October 4, 2005).

Margaret recognizes that a program such as CBET can offer adult students venues to express their concerns, as well as the support and advice of caring and conscientious adult ESL teachers who can help them find ways to address such concerns. Teaching a multilevel classroom is not an easy task because each student has different needs and goals, and each comes with different educational and life experiences. But Margaret has taken on this challenge and she works hard to ensure that her classroom is a welcoming environment for students of all levels, where all are given a chance to learn English, and the skills needed to function in U.S. society.

## Summary

To the occasional consternation of the CBET community aide who would like the clock to be followed more rigorously, Lawrence's CBET program is indeed built around



a flexible and welcoming environment. Spanish use is allowed, and both student and the instructor openly spoke in Spanish during class time. There is also opportunity for socializing, and for meeting new people. Parents can find a safe place for childcare and can be close to their children who attend Lawrence. Because of this flexible nature, Margaret tries to maximize her lessons to address the students' learning needs, even if this might run counter to her philosophy of teaching less drills and more communicative skills using a whole language approach (personal interviews, December 9, 2005 and February 9, 2006). As we shall see in the next chapter, my conversations with the three case study mothers indicate that their notions of learning are in keeping with their Mexican education upbringing. They are more interested in activities that will keep them busy and engaged, and in material that can increase their vocabulary knowledge and their writing skills. For example, I imagined that the read aloud lesson would have generated great interest, but while the instructor read the book, students were distracted and seemed uninterested. On the other hand, whenever Margaret would conduct a dictation exercise, students were keen on listening, asking their classmates for help, and making sure that their writing was as accurate as possible.

The program is also teaching students how a competent American adult acts in society. It teaches them about civil relations, that is how to greet, and how to address school personnel and their children's teachers. It also teaches them about functioning in a consumer society by learning how to pay bills, how to ask for the check, how to write a check (of little use to immigrant students who do not have the appropriate documentation for opening a bank account), how to get change for a dollar, etc. And according to

Margaret, the students are mainly learning the importance of a sense of community, which she illustrated with the students' weekly collection of food for a classmate who had to leave the program and her job to care for her daughter who was in a coma after suffering a seizure. But more importantly, it also teaches them about what schools expect of parents, and the way in which parents should behave and interact in school. Lawrence Elementary's CBET community aide put it best when she said that when the children of those who are in the program walk across the multipurpose room during CBET sessions, there is "happiness" in the children's eyes. She claims that CBET parents show their "*amor*" (love) towards their children because they are learning, "*estudiando*" to better themselves. The following chapter provides details, from the mothers' point of view, of what they consider the greatest benefits of attending CBET classes.

## **Chapter 3: Getting what they want: Mothers' reflections on**

### **CBET**

Adult learners face demands in the home, community, school, and workplace...Learners come to the [adult ESL] program with different goals and needs...Some adults may want to learn English to work in a restaurant. Others may be interested in opening a business. Some may need to learn English for a job interview, and others may want to help their children write folk tales in their native language. Still others may have more general goals such as learning English to communicate and negotiate in daily life (Holt, 2000, p. 11).

This chapter addresses how students make sense of their experiences learning English, and in particular, of their experiences as students in CBET. More specifically, the focus is their goals, aspirations and reasons for learning English and for participating in CBET, as well as how they use CBET to attain their goals. The data were gathered over a five month period, from September of 2005 to January of 2006. I conducted three, 30 to 35 minute interviews with the three students (here named Estela, Marcela and Rafaela), made three home visits (one to one hour and a half each) which included interviews with the children in each family, and I observed the mothers in their CBET classroom for over 30 hours.

During the interviews and home visits, the mothers explained their reasons for learning English and participating in CBET. As outlined in the previous chapters, CBET's main expressed goals are to improve English conversation, reading and writing skills; to learn how to help one's children in school; to learn parenting techniques; to practice reading to children; to tutor students in grades K-12; and to meet other parents.

Estela, Marcela and Rafaela agree with those goals, and also indicated other benefits not expressly outlined by CBET.

All three mothers agreed that the two most positive aspects of CBET were a) its organizational structure, and b) the teacher and her pedagogical practices. Organizational structure included the class schedule, the flexibility of the program and more importantly, childcare. The provision of daycare was of great benefit for the mothers, not only because it offered free babysitting, but because it provided an educational experience for their children. All three mothers also appreciated Margaret's friendly demeanor, her hardworking nature and dedication, her knowledge and instructional practices, her honest interest in learning about other cultures -particularly Mexican culture- and her open use of Spanish in class. Although the three mothers did share common perspectives on how CBET benefits them and their children, each mother had a different take on how learning English, and being a student in CBET was tied to their personal experiences and aspirations. This chapter features the perspectives of the three mothers who are the principal subjects of this study, highlighting what each mother takes home from CBET, and their reasons for staying in the program.

To better understand the mother's perspectives, I asked them about their English learning history; education background; immigration history; family information; employment history; goals, aspirations and reasons for learning English and attending CBET; goals and aspirations for their children; what they considered to be the most important topics in CBET; comments and suggestions for CBET; possible changes that CBET may have brought into their lives; CBET's benefits to them and their children;

their experience as CBET tutors; their language ideologies; how they teach their children as well as what they teach their children; and their definition of *educación* (education).

(Please see Appendix for interview questionnaires.)

The mothers that are the focus of this study have been in the U.S. between seven and twelve years. Estela Arriaga has been in the U.S. for seven years, Rafaela Salvador for ten, and Marcela Tapia for 12. Their English language skills show a correlation between their education levels, the number of years they have lived in this country and their English language use outside CBET classroom settings -including the workplace or interacting regularly with non Spanish-speaking people. The CASAS pre and post test results show that all three women improved their scores within a twomonth period (see Table 7), but the changes in language levels are more evident in Estela and Marcela's scores. This is because Estela and Marcela have the most years of education, and Marcela's current work and social patterns allow for her greater use of English. She is the only participant who currently works under the supervision of a non-Spanish speaker, and who enjoys socializing with non Spanish-speaking acquaintances and friends. Regardless of English language levels, improvement in scores represents growth in English language skills for all three, which is a positive result for CBET.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> CBET depends on CASAS scores to receive State funding. The funding for each type of gain is the same.

Table 7. Pre and post CASAS scores

	<b>Estela's scores</b>	<b>Marcela's scores</b>	<b>Rafaela's scores</b>
Pre-test administered on September 20, 2005	218	213	202
Pre-test English level	Advanced Intermediate	Advanced Intermediate	Low Intermediate
Post-test administered on November 22, 2005	222	228	207
Post-test English level	Early Advanced	Early Advanced	Low Intermediate

My conversations with all three mothers were always in Spanish, and even in the case of Marcela who has been in this country the longest (twelve years), there was no code switching emblematic of second generation Latinos and some long term immigrants. English insertions were limited to popular loan words such as “babysitters,” “heater,” or “college.” The Spanish language skills of Estela, Marcela and Rafaela corresponded to their level of formal education and where they grew up. Rafaela, who had six years of formal schooling in a small town in Mexico, was sometimes insecure about a word and would ask me if she was using the correct one, e.g. *espontánea* (spontaneous) and *sílaba* (syllable). Marcela, who had finished *secundaria* (middle school up to ninth grade), in a city, not in a rural setting, was more articulate and had a larger formal vocabulary than Rafaela. Estela had been in school for close to twelve years, and although she was the least verbose of the three mothers, her Spanish language skills were more sophisticated. For example Estela spoke of *gratificación* (gratification) when talking about the rewards of CBET. All three mothers used a lot of *mexicanismos* (Mexican expressions or language use), e.g. the verb *agarrar* (to hold, to grab) to indicate various actions such as

to get a job (*agarrar un trabajo*), to study a career (*agarrar una carrera*), or to earn points (*agarrar puntos*); this usage differs from Standard Spanish.

Because I have lived in the border region of Southern California for close to twenty years and worked with first and second generation Mexican students and their families in the public schools for twelve years, I have learned the linguistic expressions and ways of speaking of both newly arrived Mexican immigrants and U.S. born or raised Mexicans. Consequently, my conversations and interactions with the mothers and their children were relaxed in nature. Being able to converse with the mothers was instrumental in my research, but having access to their homes and arranging interviews and visits were also important aspects of this study. I was fortunate in that I was able to interview them at school and at home because they agreed to participate after I explained the project to them. Margaret, the teacher, also played a vital role by introducing me to the students and encouraging their participation in this project. The mothers had also seen me in their classroom and interacted with me during class time and breaks.

When I first approached them to ask their consent to be case studies, I shared my personal experiences as a second generation Chinese born in Ecuador, as a Chinese-Latina immigrant living in the United States, and as a former public school bilingual teacher and administrator who also coordinated parent involvement programs while working in the public school system. Despite having known me for a short period of time, and despite the differences in our cultural and educational backgrounds, the mothers were very willing to give me their time, open their homes, allow me to talk to their children, and read and sign the daunting Human Subject forms. Not only did the three participants

accept the terms and conditions of this study, but they also encouraged me and praised my work, particularly as a working woman. I recall my first encounter with Rafaela, who told me that I should be proud of being a woman who wants to *superarse* (attain personal and professional growth) by going to school and doing this type of research. I am thankful to these women for having welcomed a stranger to come into their lives with no guarantee of monetary reward for their participation. They were at ease during our interactions, smiled and laughed easily, and welcomed me to their homes without reservation. The women were also interested in my personal life, and went so far as to encourage me to have children of my own to experience the joys of motherhood and raising children. Because of their openness, I am confident they felt free to share their honest opinions. I plan to reciprocate their support and encouragement by arranging a parent college counseling workshop for them in the late May of 2006.<sup>22</sup>

For these mothers, CBET has been their first formal English learning experience in the U.S. Estela had learned some English back in school in Mexico, and three years ago she attended Center Elementary's<sup>23</sup> CBET for about six months when her oldest, Susana, was three years old. She left the program when she became pregnant with her second child, Jacqueline, and did not return to CBET officially until a year ago. Rafaela started CBET about four years ago and left after two years, but came back about a year ago. Marcela also learned some English back in Mexico as a student in *secundaria* (middle school), and this was her first semester in CBET. The women believe that learning English is beneficial for their children because it allows them to help their children with

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<sup>22</sup> This idea stemmed from Marcela's wish to learn more about college for her son Keith.

<sup>23</sup> The name of the location has been changed to protect the participant's anonymity. Lawrence and Center are in the same school district.



homework, read to them, and participate in school events and other parent involvement opportunities. In addition to these altruistic reasons, they also expressed their awareness of the symbolic power of English, as a vehicle for earning them respect from mainstream society, for getting a job, and for furthering their education. They also believed it would help them function independently in an English speaking environment, including being able to talk to people, to shop, to meet their appointments with the school, the doctor, etc. Therefore, they viewed their CBET classes as an opportunity to earn the linguistic and social skills for *superación* (personal growth and advancement), skills which are defined by Bourdieu (1991) as capital.

These mothers are raising their children in an environment very different from their own upbringing. They were between nineteen and twenty six years of age when they came to this country, and they had all their children in the U.S. As mothers of second generation children who have been exposed primarily to English in school, they recognize the need to speak English for their children's benefit and their own. As a result, they see English as central to helping their children with schoolwork. CBET allows them not to have to choose between their children's schedule and their own schedule. CBET fits in their lives because it provides childcare, a major benefit in the eyes of the mothers, and also because it is conveniently scheduled during school hours, and at their children's school site. The CBET program advertises at each school where it is located. Because the three mothers have children attending Lawrence Elementary they were aware of the program's existence and found it convenient. None of the mothers believes that CBET is going to make them a "good" or a "better" mother, but they did find some collateral

benefits in the way in which CBET backed up some of their cultural values, e.g. by pointing out the characteristics of good behavior in a particular reading about a child who is *bien educado* (well behaved). CBET also affirmed their cultural notions of what it means to be a *buen estudiante* (good student), because the teacher pointed to their own “good” behaviors as adult students, such as attending regularly and showing improvement in test scores. CBET is seen as a beneficial program that allows them to mesh their children’s schedule with theirs and to *avanzar* (to advance) in their learning of English. This contributes to their sense of *superación*. Table 8 gives an overview of the key benefits that each mother believed CBET offered.

Table 8. The benefits of CBET

<b>Benefits of CBET</b>	<b>Estela</b>	<b>Rafaela</b>	<b>Marcela</b>
English skills			
Conversation	✓	✓	✓
Comprehension	✓	✓	✓
Reading	✓	✓	✓
Vocabulary	✓		✓
Pronunciation	✓		✓
Writing	✓		✓
Communication skills			
School related (calling the school, talking to a teacher, attending school events and meetings, etc.)	✓	✓	✓
“Real life” (talking to the doctor, shopping, interacting with English speakers in different settings including the workplace, etc.)	✓	✓	✓
<i>Bienestar y superación personal</i> (personal well being and advancement/growth)	✓	✓	✓
Being able to socialize	✓	✓	✓
Being independent and self confident	✓	✓	✓
Furthering their education	✓		✓
Obtaining the respect of the <i>americanos</i>		✓	✓
Obtaining a job		✓	
For the children			
Teaching and learning at home (homework help, reading to the children at home, interacting with their children, etc.)	✓	✓	✓
The importance of learning about American culture to support their children who are growing up bicultural.	✓		✓
The importance of learning English to better understand the school system.			✓

There were important commonalities in the participants’ perceptions of the major benefits of CBET, such as being able to learn conversation and writing skills, to communicate in real life settings, to socialize and become independent, and to help their children at home. But each participant had individual views about what they deemed to be the most important aspects of CBET, and how these aspects could satisfy their personal aspirations

and goals for learning English and being in CBET. The following sections address each participant's perspectives and experiences with regards to how they use and make sense of CBET. The three mothers are presented in order of their levels of education, beginning with Estela Arriaga who had close to twelve years of schooling, and ending with Rafaela Salvador who had six years of schooling.

### **The “good student:” Estela Arriaga**

*Se siente uno bien cuando ya aprende a contestar.* [One feels good when one finally learns how to answer] (E. Arriaga, personal interview, November 10, 2005).

Estela Arriaga is a vivacious 31 year old from a small town in the *Estado de México* (the state of Mexico), about 40 kilometers from Mexico's capital city. She is tall and dark-haired, and always displays a cheerful demeanor which is a perfect complement to her wonderful, contagious smile. Estela met her husband, who lived in the U.S., when he went to Mexico for a visit. After their wedding, they moved to the U.S. and started a family. That was about seven years ago, and she has never lived anywhere in the U.S. except for her current city of residence, where her three young children who were born. Six year old Susana is the oldest and attended first grade at Lawrence Elementary. Jacqueline is three years old and attended the local Head Start preschool program and also CBET's childcare on non Head Start days. The youngest child, Richard, was one year and five months old when we met. He also attended CBET's childcare. Estela did not work, in order to stay home and take care of her children while her husband works painting houses.

Of the three mothers, Estela has the most formal years of education. She attended *preparatoria* (high school) up until the fourth semester (around her junior year). After leaving school, she took a few computer literacy courses in Mexico. She studied English in Mexico, but the English she was taught was “*muy básico*” (“very basic”), not enough to make her a fluent speaker. She has been a student in Lawrence’s CBET class for approximately one year. Estela enrolled in CBET primarily because her oldest daughter began school and Estela felt the need “*de saber más*” (“to know more”). She wanted to know more “words” in order to help her daughter Susana with schoolwork, and to be able to understand the English language books she reads to her children (personal interviews, November 10, 2005 and December 1, 2005).

Estela sees her learning of English as closely connected to her personal aspirations for her children. She wants them to learn “*lo más que puedan*” (“as much as they can”) and “*que sepan hablar dos lenguas*” (“know how to speak two languages”) (personal interview, December 1, 2005). And Estela has also become aware of the power of English as a child rearing tool. For example, when she needs to call her children’s attention, she has noticed that her children respond better to commands or questions in English, so she has chosen to switch to English in certain instances. Estela explains that

*Pues a veces como que sí funciona hablarles [a sus hijos] en inglés porque reaccionan rápido (se ríe)... les dices ‘ven, ven acá’ en español y no entienden y ya les dices en inglés luego, luego voltean (se ríe).*

[Well sometimes it seems that talking to them [the children] in English works because they react quickly (laughs)...you tell them ‘come, come here’ in Spanish and they do not understand and then you tell them in Spanish and right away they turn to look at you (laughs)] (personal interview, December 1, 2005).

Even if her children can understand her requests or commands in Spanish, she finds that using English is more effective in getting them to respond or comply. Hence, she is not reluctant to use English in communicating with her children.

As for her own English development, Estela considers CBET to be valuable for learning pronunciation and vocabulary, which she views as important linguistic skills because they can help her own daily activities, her children, and they can even help her husband. She believes that better pronunciation and more vocabulary will allow her to interact with English speakers at the doctor's office or when shopping. With these skills she can also read aloud to her children using correct pronunciation, and understand the content of what she is reading. In addition, these skills allow her to help her children with reading assignments, and her husband when he needs to translate work related documents that he is unable to understand, despite having been in the U.S. longer than Estela (personal interview, November 10, 2005). Furthermore, Estela believes that CBET's effective English instruction is complemented by the teachings about U.S. culture:

*Pues los que tenemos hijos nacidos aquí pues tenemos que educarlos...la mitad y la mitad pues nosotros aprender el inglés... para enseñarles a ellos... lo que es de aquí y lo que es de México pues también enseñarles.*  
 [Well for those of us who have children born here well we have to educate them...half and half, well we have to learn English...in order to teach them...we should teach them what is from here and what is from Mexico]  
 (personal interview, November 10, 2005).

Estela, therefore, does not believe that CBET's sole purpose should be the teaching of English, because learning cultural facts about the U.S. can help her understand the context within which her children are growing up. But at the same time, Estela is cognizant that her duties as a parent include teaching her children about their Mexican

roots and the importance of being bicultural. CBET has enhanced her belief in English as essential for progress and fulfillment, and CBET has changed her views of English, from “boring” to useful.

*Pues antes... me aburría el inglés, me caía gordo (se ríe), creo que hasta reprobaba [en la escuela en México] (se ríe)... pues significa mucho... como le dije ya sé hablarlo, sé leerlo, ya sé entender cuando me hablan por teléfono, es importante para mí...mi esposo también se siente... orgulloso de que estoy aprendiendo... le tengo que traducir [a su esposo] cuando le mandan algún papel.*

[Well before...English bored me, I did not like it (laughs), I think I even failed it [in school in Mexico] (laughs)...well it means a lot...like I said to you before, now I know how to speak it, how to read it, I can understand when someone speaks to me on the phone, it is important for me...my husband also feels...proud that I am learning...I have to translate [for her husband] when they send him some document (personal interview, January 19, 2006).

As Estela points out, more than being useful as a functional tool for communicating and going about their daily lives in mainstream society, English is also an important source of pride for these women; for example in knowing that they can help their husbands who interact with the outside English speaking world more than they do.

Because of the flexible and welcoming environment that characterizes Lawrence’s CBET program, many parents are open to sharing concerns or questions with the instructor. As mentioned in the last chapter, Margaret has used many of those concerns or questions as topics for whole class lessons, Estela’s problems with some of the physical conditions of her apartment for example, prompted Margaret to teach students to write a letter of complaint to an apartment manager. Estela was thankful for this lesson because it was applicable to her situation, and she reported that other students had also brought up issues that became topics for short vocabulary and pronunciation lessons. She said that

one of her fellow classmates brought in her November election ballot to class and asked Margaret to help her understand the measures being presented to the voters. Margaret turned this opportunity into a small lesson during which she talked about the elections and introduced new vocabulary words (personal interview, November 10, 2005).

In sum, Estela's point of view of CBET is that it is open to students' questions about ways of participating in mainstream society, and also provides tools for students to become more self-confident about the use of their English language skills in real situations such as being able to exchange merchandise at stores (personal interview, January 19, 2006). Above all, for Estela these tools are particularly important in dealing with her children's schools, when interacting with the non Spanish-speaking school staff, or when participating in school meetings. She believes that this program can lessen her dependence on interpreters assigned to assist non English speaking parents at school events, meetings and conferences. She believes that in order to function as a parent in U.S. schools she needs to access the information first hand, rather than via an interpreter's translation, which she thinks can be incomplete and may be even wrong:

*A mí no me gusta que me pongan [traductor] porque yo digo que a lo mejor no dicen [los traductores] lo que yo digo (se ríe), o me dicen otra cosa y... hay que esforzarse para aprender.*

[I do not like to have a [translator] because I think that maybe they do not say [the translators] what I am saying (laughs), or they tell me something else and...we have to make an effort to learn] (personal interview, November 10, 2005).

Clearly, Estela also aims for self-reliance and independence, mainly for the purpose of being able to access, interpret, evaluate and use school related information freely and on her own, at any time, anywhere. But more importantly, the CBET experience has



strengthened her confidence to become an active participant in Jacqueline's Head Start program. As such, she has been able to fulfill her child's teachers' requests to read aloud to the children in English on a couple of occasions. Estela explains that prior to attending CBET, she did not want to participate in her children's schools because she was afraid that she would not be able to understand what was being said to her. After being in the program, she no longer has to bring her husband to attend school meetings or parent-teacher conferences to translate for her. She finds this independence to be a crucial consequence of her own learning, and an invaluable aspect of her own life. She also finds satisfaction in being able to understand and respond to a teacher's question without having to resort to the services of a secondary source such as an interpreter, her husband, or her oldest child.

On a more personal level, Estela also views learning English as a vehicle to explore new possibilities that she did not deem feasible before joining the program. Acquiring linguistic capital has proven important for Estela's self image and awareness of her own potential. After having participated in CBET, she views herself as being capable of learning other subjects, and of venturing out to more mainstream educational settings.

Estela shared that,

*Como que ya me están dando ganas de aprender otras cosas (se ríe) como computación o algo diferente, quisiera meterme en otra escuela... ya le entiendo un poquito [el inglés] y con eso yo creo que ya... puedo... por el inglés uno no se mueve como uno quiere, uno no se siente bien. Ya cuando uno sabe algunas cosas pues ya se puede uno mover en cualquier ámbito. [I want to learn other things (laughs) like computers or something different, I would like to go to another school...I understand it [English] a little and I think that with that...I can...because of English one can move about like one wishes to, one feels good. Once one knows some things, one can move about in any environment] (personal interview, January 19, 2006).*

Learning English has motivated her to reflect on her present situation in order to see how she can use this new capital for personal and future professional mobility. But besides learning about computers, she was also interested in learning about the laws and regulations for providing childcare and for opening a childcare center (home visit, January 25, 2006). But Estela's future business or workforce aspirations are secondary to her aspirations as a mother. In her opinion, one of the major benefits of being able to speak English is closely connected to the perception that she wants her children to have of her as a mother and as a teacher. She wants her children to see that her mother can indeed speak English, can respond to their inquiries, and can read to them in English. Above all, she wants her children to be proud of her:

*Pero más que nada [para que estén] orgullosos de su mamá...de que estoy aprendiendo y de que ya le puedo hablar a mi hija algunas cosas... a veces ella me pregunta en inglés y sí le contesto... de la tarea o de algún pensamiento que tenga ella... que puedan entenderme cuando yo les lea un libro y que yo entienda también, porque es si uno no entiende y lee el libro nada más por leerlo luego le preguntan a uno '¿y esto qué es?' Y uno 'pos quién sabe'.*

[But above all [so that they are] proud of their mother...that I am learning and that I can now say some things to my daughter...sometimes she asks me in English and I do answer...about the homework or some thought that she might have...that they can understand me when I read a book to them and that I understand [the book] as well. Because if one is unable to understand and reads the book only for reading sake, then they ask you 'and what is this?' And one replies 'who knows'] (personal interview, January 19, 2006).

Estela believes it is important for mothers to be involved in their children's education at home, so they should acquire more knowledge in order to help children as they progress in school. She wants to increase her computer literacy skills because she believes that one has to keep up to date with computers, but her primary reason is to be able to help her

children in the future; she foresees the use and the complexity of computers in schools increasing with time (personal interview, January 19, 2006).

In Estela's case, whether it is English, American culture, or writing a letter of complaint to her apartment manager, learning is closely related to her own goals as a mother. This is why she believes that CBET's parent training component is important for both parents and non-parents. She argues that CBET does not teach her how to be a "good parent," because according to her "*no por aprender inglés voy a ser una mejor mamá o voy a ser peor mamá*" ("just because I am learning English it does not mean that I can be a better mother or a worse mother.") But Estela believes that one of the most valuable CBET lessons is the methodology of reading to a child (such as pointing to pages and looking at the index), along with the correct pronunciation and the meaning of the words in the reading. She thinks that all adult students, including those without children, can eventually use these teachings with their own children in the future, or with their relatives' children (personal interview, November 10, 2005). This is why her experiences as a CBET tutor, for which she was chosen twice by Margaret during my observation period, are important to her. They allowed her to practice her English language skills and to feel as if she was providing an important service to the children, especially because she believes that the children assigned to tutors are the "*más atrasados*" ("the ones who are behind in school"). She admitted being frustrated with some of the children who were unable to answer correctly either because they were embarrassed, or because they really did not know the answer. Attimes she spoke to them in Spanish in order to help them out. When she tutored, Margaret asked her to do the

same alphabet activity that she had taught in the CBET class. During each tutoring session, Estela worked with one child for about 30 minutes, trying to stay true to Margaret's script, but in both cases the child did not know all the answers in English, so she accepted their answers in Spanish because "*yo creo que se sienten más cómodos cuando uno habla en español*" ("I believe they feel more comfortable because one speaks Spanish") (home visits, November 16, 2005 and January 25, 2006).

Overall, Estela experienced two different "in classroom" events working directly with children, one as a CBET tutor, and another one as a volunteer reader for Jacqueline's Head Start program. That is why she stressed the importance of improving her English reading, speaking and comprehension skills. She believes that helping children is a noble task. When asked about her feelings about having to tutor children she expressed that being a tutor is,

*Muy bonito... porque... yo creo que es como un maestro que se siente muy contento porque ve que sus alumnos están aprendiendo... es muy bonito sentirse que ayuda uno a los demás.*

[Very nice...because...I think that it is like a teacher who feels happy because he sees that his students are learning...it is nice to feel that one is helping others] (personal interview, November 10, 2005).

The CBET experience increased her admiration and respect for teachers and allowed her to establish closer connections with her daughter's Head Start teachers. It also allowed her to use her skills not just for her own personal use, but also to help other children and to support the work of the teachers and schools, which matches quite well with what is explicitly taught in CBET with regards to parent-school relationships and interactions.

Estela Arriaga's behaviors, positive attitudes towards parenting and parenting training, attendance records (she was awarded second place for her attendance record at

the end of the semester), willingness to tutor, volunteer and read in classrooms, all make her an exemplary CBET student. Furthermore, Estela sees her parent role as a teaching role, and she invested a great deal of effort in becoming independent. She liked learning through the many linguistic drills that CBET offers to practice pronunciation and vocabulary building, and appreciated her CBET classes because she learns “*algo diferente, ya sea una palabra o algo*” (“something new, whether it is a new word or something”) (personal interview, January 19, 2006). As a result she recognizes good teaching, and what it means to behave like a good student, which is linked to her many years of formal schooling.

I understand that I risk pigeonholing the participants with regards to some of the qualities that became obvious to me as a result of spending time with them. It is not my intention to imply that by calling Estela a “good student,” the other participants are not as dedicated or studious. But Estela was a model student because of her achievement, her effort to participate in CBET’s required activities, her attendance records, interest in learning, positive attitude in the classroom, and her belief in CBET as a positive venue for learning English, American culture, and parenting skills.

### **Juggling traditional expectations and modern behaviors: Marcela Tapia**

*Le quiero enseñar [a mi hijo Keith] a leer y escribir en español...y también...a cocinar... por lo menos para que se sepa hacer unos huevitos porque aquí las mujeres no cocinan (se ríe).*

[I want to teach him [my son Keith] to read and write in Spanish...and also...to cook...so that he can at least make some eggs because here women do not cook (laughs)] (M. Tapia, home visit, January 18, 2006).

Marcela Tapia is a young thirty one year old mother with a bubbly, self-assured personality. Born in a large city in the Western part of Mexico, Marcela came to the United States over twelve years ago to visit her brothers who live in the same city where she now resides. She decided to stay in the United States because both her parents had died, and she did not see any reason to remain in Mexico. Marcela completed middle school (*secundaria*) in Mexico but did not continue on to high school. Once in the United States, Marcela attended an adult school for a short period of time. She married a Mexican immigrant and had a child, Keith, who is now ten years-old. Marcela's child was named after the character of a popular American TV show of the late nineties. Keith attended fifth grade at Lawrence Elementary.

Marcela reported learning *lo básico* (the basics) of English during her last three years of middle school in Mexico. But she was introduced to the real life use of English when she worked as a cleaning lady for eight years in different houses in one of the wealthiest neighborhoods of the city. There she learned to "listen" to English, but not to speak it or write it. At the time of this research, Marcela was only cleaning one house, once a week on Fridays, which allowed her to enroll in her first semester in CBET.

Marcela's primary goals for learning English are to help her child, but also for her personal *bienestar* (well-being), *superación personal* (personal advancement) and *para salir adelante* (to get ahead). Marcela believes that in this country, you cannot remain stagnant and you must learn in order to be able to fend for yourself. This includes being able to interact with non English speakers or being able to read and understand written documents that come from the child's school without having to depend on an interpreter

or translator. The personal advancement (*superación personal*) that Marcela refers to has to do with establishing and maintaining relationships with friends who do not speak Spanish. She believes that her non Spanish-speaking friends are happy that she is learning English and is now able to participate in English language conversations with more confidence. One of the friends that Marcela referred to was born in the United States to Latino parents. Her friend never learned Spanish well and prefers to speak in English. According to Marcela, though her friend tries to speak to her in broken Spanish, Marcela knows that the woman prefers to speak in English, so she accommodates to her language preference by trying to communicate in English. She does not have an opinion as to whether her friend should speak Spanish given her Latino heritage, but Marcela perceives that being able to communicate in the dominant language, even with a Latina woman, can be good for creating and keeping relationships in this country. She illustrates this with the following vignette:

*El domingo fuimos a desayunar juntos [con la amiga latina que no habla español], estuvimos platicando...le dije que estaba yendo la escuela... ‘oh qué bien’ [dijo su amiga]...y la miré que iba más contenta [porque le puede hablar a Marcela en inglés]. [En]... otros lugares... reuniones siempre hay alguien ahí que no quiere hablar español o no sabe... llega uno con más confianza... para tener mejor relación.*

[Last Sunday we went to breakfast [with her non Spanish-speaking Latina friend], we were talking...and I told her that I was going to school... ‘oh, that’s good’ [said the friend]...I saw that she was happier [because now she can talk to Marcela in English]. [In]...other places...gatherings there is always someone there who does not want to speak in Spanish or does not know how...one gets there with more confidence...to have a better relationship] (personal interview, January 19, 2006).

Learning English therefore is not simply about acquiring enough skills to be able to function in work, school or chore-oriented activities, but also to socialize and keep friendships and relationships alive.

Another important goal for Marcela is to learn more about computers, and to be able to attend computer courses in the future. She does not believe that she will be able to succeed as a student in a computer course without a solid knowledge of English. She already uses the computer for basic functions such as e-mail, web surfing and chatting, but she wants to attain a higher proficiency in computer use so that she can use it beyond those functions, and learn how to troubleshoot a computer with confidence. Marcela said that,

*Me gustaría aprender a manejar bien la computadora. Es algo que tengo así como que me encanta, me gusta mucho la computación y tomé un curso de computación en México y lo único que sé es 'chatear' con mis amigos (se ríe).*

[I would like to learn how to work on the computer well. It is something that I love, I really like to learn about computers, and I took a computer course in Mexico and the only thing I know how to do is to 'chat' with my friends (laughs)] (personal interview, November 11, 2005).

Learning English then is a vehicle for Marcela to attain her personal goal of successfully participating in an all English computer class because she finds computers fascinating. Her computer is in her living room, next to the television. She believes that to take computer courses it might not be necessary to know English perfectly, but that it would be helpful to be able to read the English text on the computer itself, such as commands and message boxes, which Marcela considers are important skills for using a computer properly.



Marcela may not yet have the linguistic capital to be able to fully function in the mainstream society, but she has the knowledge and understanding of what it takes to attain the goals she has set for her son. For example, she believes that her child would be better off attending a high performing school<sup>24</sup> and that he should not attend the two neighborhood middle schools, which she perceives as the wrong environment for Keith to develop the academic skills necessary for college. In her opinion, these schools are gang-ridden and dangerous for Keith. She wants him to either attend a well known charter school housed in a prestigious local state university, or to attend a school in a different neighborhood. At the time of our last conversation, Marcela had taken a couple of tours of schools in other neighborhoods, and had just sent her son's application to the charter school. Her primary goal is to provide her son with opportunities that neither of his parents had, namely, a college education and a profession. Marcela is not ashamed of working as a cleaning lady or of her husband's work as a car painter, but she believes that this country affords opportunities for improving one's social and economic condition through education, so anything related to her son's schooling is extremely important. Consequently, she views English language skills as tools that can enable her to help her child with homework, to read school notes, to be able to communicate with her son's school staff and teachers, and to be actively involved in her child's education.

Because Marcela's husband speaks English, he used to attend all parent-teacher conferences and parent meetings. At the time of my research, Marcela's husband had

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<sup>24</sup> Under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), "AYP requires each state to ensure that all schools and districts make Adequate Yearly Progress based on assessments included in the statewide accountability system" (from California Department of Education, <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/>). Based on the 2004-2005 student standardized test scores, Lawrence Elementary has not yet met AYP.

changed jobs and could no longer leave work to attend school events or meetings. She found herself having to represent them both at school, and having to communicate with non Spanish-speaking staff and teachers. This was not a task that daunted her, because Marcela is the type of mother who is very involved in her child's education. She wants to know what is going on at school, she wants to make sure that her son is treated fairly by the teacher, and that he is provided with equal opportunities for success. She is also the type of mother who is knowledgeable of federal issues such as No Child Left Behind's (NCLB) ramifications for underperforming schools. She is also knowledgeable of her child's school's resources (such as after school programs and Intersession) which she perceived can help her son improve his skills and scores. Her husband might possess the linguistic capital to communicate with the school personnel, but Marcela has the knowledge capital about educational opportunities for her son, and how to secure them. She viewed the opportunity to learn English within a school context at CBET as ideal.

Marcela did see the value of learning the English language skills necessary to call the school or to participate in a parent-teacher conference, but she did not feel the same about learning how to read to a child or practicing an alphabet activity. She considered these activities to be appropriate and useful for those with small children only. Marcela shared that her son is older now and jokingly said that it is now Keith who reads to her, because he does not want to be read to as if he were a small child.

*Pues aparte como yo mi hijo ya está grande ya qué le voy a enseñar a leer, mas bien él me enseña a leer a mi (se ríe)... mi hijo... ya ni me deja que le abra sus libros.*

[Well moreover since my child is older why would I teach him to read, rather he teaches me to read (laughs)...my son...does not even let me open his books now] (personal interview, January 19, 2006).

Marcela considers Keith to be old enough not to depend on her reading to him every night. She also feels that now that he is in fifth grade, and very close to starting middle school, his assignments and readings have become more complex, therefore reading to him is not as important as helping him with other school subjects and making sure that he does his homework every night. She did understand the value that reading to a child or working on the alphabet might have for parents of small children, but she would rather learn more practical material relevant to her as an adult learner, such as learning about computers or about other programs that offer computer classes.

Marcela was another student that Margaret considered to be a “good student,” because she has shown great progress (M. Gensler, personal interview, February 9, 2006). Consequently, the teacher asked Marcela to tutor a preschool child using the alphabet activity taught in class. Marcela went with another student who had tutored before so that she could learn from her. They divided the cards in half and each worked with a child for about 30 minutes. The child was sitting in front of Marcela and she attempted to do the activity as she had been taught by Margaret. Her concern was that she herself did not know all the English letter sounds, so she felt awkward having to teach them to the child. Nonetheless, Marcela believes this was a useful activity for her personal use because it allowed her to learn about letter sounds, which in her opinion is a key English language skill. Because of this belief, she has asked her more advanced classmates to help her learn some sounds, and she has also asked her son to teach her.

Just like Estela and Rafaela, Marcela took her learning of English seriously, and appreciated the academic-like activities such as writing and taking tests. They gave her a

sense that she was part of a formal learning setting where she had to be accountable to the instructor via her academic performance. CBET also became a place where Marcela could live the life of a “regular” student, so she enjoyed the student-like activities required of her such as doing homework, studying for tests and doing writing exercises. Above all, she considered writing to be an important learning tool in the English language, and because all CBET tests were written,<sup>25</sup> she felt that she was improving her English by writing correctly. She also believed that the academic activities were complemented by important lessons in classroom socialization, such as learning to be *tolerante* (tolerant). In her view, her traditional Mexican education led Marcela to have different expectations of her CBET classroom. She did not expect it to be so relaxed and flexible, and had to adjust to the atmosphere which she felt encouraged socialization and *relajo* (debauchery/commotion/racket) instead of the quiet environment she needed in order to concentrate. She noticed that many students started side conversations and did not pay attention to the teacher; which distracted her. But Marcela took ownership of her own learning experiences, so she valued that CBET had taught her about her own limitations, her learning styles, and how to deal with distractions and interruptions:

*Pero he aprendido pues que así es la vida, o sea dondequiera va a ser así. No puede uno a decirle a todo el mundo ‘cállate porque vengo a aprender’...Entonces estoy aprendiendo a ser tolerante...y a entrar al relajo también (se ríe). Me gusta el relajo...Me gusta hacer amistades también.*

[But I have learned that this is how life is, that is, everywhere it is going to be like this. I cannot say to everyone ‘be quiet because I come to learn’...Then, I am learning to be tolerant...and to be part of the ‘racket’

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<sup>25</sup> Lawrence CBET tests usually included fill in the blank, multiple choice, spelling, vocabulary and dictation exercises.

(laughs). I like to have fun...I like to make friends also] (personal interview, November 11, 2005).

The CBET experience has been valuable for Marcela's personal growth because it enabled her to reflect on the differences in teaching methods, classroom management styles and culture between her formal education in Mexico, and the way CBET functions. She has learned that to thrive in this new educational environment, one has to be flexible as well, which may mean leaving behind some of the cultural beliefs about how classrooms function. Consequently, despite the fact that Marcela has a strong belief system as to how one should behave in a classroom, she has found comfort in making new friends who not only socialized with her in class, but also helped her with her English by correcting her and explaining concepts to her when Margaret was busy working with other students. Above all, because Marcela did not drive, and rarely left her apartment during the week, CBET became an important place to learn and socialize.

Marcela understands that she has choices, and that she can exercise her right to speak the language of her choice, and express her views in that language. She only uses English when she needs to, as evidenced by this quote:

*[Uso] el español todo el tiempo...el inglés cuando tengo que o sea ahora si no me queda de otra (se ríe). Y con mi niño últimamente sí trato de decirle palabritas para que me las corrija...Y pues sí con la gente que no habla español pues si se me antoja un café del Starbucks (se ríe).*

[I use] Spanish all the time...I use English only when I have to, that is if I have no other choice (laughs). And lately with my son I do try to say some words so that he can correct them...And also with people who do not speak Spanish, if I get a hankering for a coffee from Starbucks (laughs)] (personal interview, November 11, 2005).

English is more of a commodity that allows her to take advantage of the little luxuries that are available to her, such as ordering in a coffeehouse and socializing with non

Spanish-speaking friends. But English is also a vehicle to obtain the information she needs to help her child advance. She is aware of the need to manage the new world she lives in where English is the dominant language, and where certain notions, such as classroom management, clash with her own traditional philosophies. She wants to be able to take the best out of CBET and learn to deal with what she disagrees with, and to negotiate the new with the old values. Marcela understands the need to learn the ropes of the school system in order to achieve her goals for her child, but she is not willing to shed her cultural identity to assimilate totally.

**Rafaela Salvador: English earns *más respeto* (more respect) from the *personas americanas* (American people)**

*Me ha servido bastante [el aprender inglés]... en el futuro quiero trabajar claro. Yo pienso que cuando empiece a trabajar ya voy a estar más preparada, voy a poder entender a las personas. Y sí cuando me ha tocado hablar con alguna persona americana sí me puedo comunicar... lo básico.*

[It has helped me a lot [to learn English]...I would like to work in the future of course. I think that I will be more prepared when I start working, I will be able to understand people. And yes, when I have had to talk to an American, I have been able to communicate...the basics] (personal interview, January 19, 2006).

When first meeting Rafaela Salvador, she gives the impression of being shy and reserved because of her serene demeanor, but she can speak with great passion and at great lengths about her family, her background, and her children. She is a 36 year old woman from a small *pueblo* (town) near Culiacán who moved to Southern California ten years ago. Like the other two women, Rafaela has never lived anywhere else in this

country. Before moving to the United States, she worked as a babysitter for a wealthy Mexican couple who lived near her village. The couple owns a home in one of the most exclusive neighborhoods in Southern California, and the family travels frequently, visiting this side of the border for extended periods of time. It was during one of these visits that Rafaela accompanied the family as their son's babysitter. The couple's son was very attached to Rafaela and since they planned to be in this country for one year, they got her a passport and she came to live with them for that year. During that time, Rafaela met the man who was to become her husband and decided to remain in the U.S. She has stayed in touch with the Mexican family and visits with them when they are in town. She has fond memories of the child, who is now 18 years old, and to whom she was so attached that she named her second son, Diego, after him.

Growing up poor in her small town did not provide Rafaela the educational opportunities she longed for. She finished elementary school (sixth grade), but was unable to continue her studies because her town did not have a high school. Going to high school would have meant walking to Culiacán and, according to Rafaela, it was very difficult for a young girl to make this trip alone. Those who were able to attend high school were mostly men. Moreover, Rafaela's oldest siblings were married, and as the third child of a family of seven children with a widowed mother, Rafaela felt obliged to work to support her family. Her family did not force her to leave school and start working, but her own perception of her family's precarious situation pushed her to put their needs first. She reflected with great sadness on the terrible choice that the economic situation of Mexico forced her to make as a girl:

*Más bien si yo estudiaba no comían mis hermanos... ya al ver la situación...por ayudar a los hermanos...que estén un poco felices, que sonrían, que es triste la verdad cuando se tiene hambre...es la historia de estar en México...muy difícil.*

[If I studied, my siblings would not eat...and seeing this situation...to help my siblings...to see them a little happy, that they smile, because truly it is sad when one is hungry...it is the story of being in Mexico...very difficult] (personal interview, November 15, 2005).

After her marriage, Rafaela stayed at home to raise her three children, all three of whom were born in this country. Her oldest boys, Tony and Diego, are ten and eight years-old, and attend fifth and third grade respectively at Lawrence Elementary. Rafaelita is a little over a year-old, and attends CBET's childcare. Rafaela has been studying English in a CBET program longer than the two other mothers featured in my case studies, but not without interruption. She started attending CBET four years ago, but stopped after two years and re-enrolled this past year in two different CBET programs (one at Lawrence on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and another at Center Elementary, on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.) Never having studied English in elementary school in Mexico, CBET has been the source of all her formal English language education.

Rafaela wants to learn English to be able to communicate with *personas americanas* and to be able to work outside the home in the future. Her goals for learning English are very much tied to what she wants to do once her children are older, i.e. to work either at a restaurant or a clothing store. Citing her husband, she explains why being able to speak English to communicate at work and to understand English speakers are crucial skills that determine a worker's ability to advance:<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Rafaela's husband works in a hotel in the food service department.



*Mi esposo él en su trabajo habla el inglés... lo habla bien y se puede comunicar bien... como él ha trabajado él sí dice que... cuando una persona no habla inglés pues siempre se va a quedar en un trabajo bajo donde no va a ganar bien donde siempre... no va a ascender a otro puesto...porque no sabe hablar inglés. Y cuando habla inglés pues tiene más posibilidades de ascender a un puesto mejor... te puedes comunicar con todas las personas... cuando no... te sientes como apenado.*

[My husband speaks English in his work...he speaks it well and can communicate well...because he has worked he says that...when a person does not speak English he/she will stay in a low paying job...and will not be promoted to another post...because he/she does not speak English. And when one speaks English one has more possibilities to be promoted...you can communicate with everyone...when not...you feel sort of ashamed] (personal interview, January 19, 2006).

The ability to communicate in English is important for Rafaela because this represents being able to show English speakers that one is capable, which can lead to new options for personal and economic advancement. Knowledge of English not only improves one's chances as an employee and develops self-assurance, it can also earn the *americanos'* respect. But Rafaela is also aware that learning English can benefit her interactions with her children. Like Estela, Rafaela is proud that she can now read aloud in English to her children, and she also takes pleasure in having her oldest children correct and teach her vocabulary or pronunciation. For Rafaela this represents mutual learning, where both mother and children can learn from each other and participate in each other's learning experiences at home. She does not view this as an erosion of the mother's authority because she sees the value in teaching and learning at home.

Rafaela believes that CBET is an important program particularly for mothers because it provides the double benefit of teaching English and providing babysitting services. Rafaela views this program as a *bendición* (blessing) for the mothers. CBET is also

important for her as a woman because it has helped her become more independent, meet other women, be less shy and feel more confident:

*Estoy aprendiendo el inglés y más aparte como para abrir comunicación con otras personas o sea como que antes era muy tímida... y ahora soy...más espontánea.*

[I am learning English and in a way how to open communication with other people, that is before I was very shy...and now I am...more spontaneous] (personal interview, November 15, 2005).

Rafaela appreciates what CBET has taught her to read, write, speak and to say in English, but what seems more important to her about the program is being in a stimulating social environment outside her home that can promote interactions with other people, and that can push her to *seguir adelante* (to move on). Other than attending CBET, Rafaela rarely leaves her house because she does not have a car; her daily routine is limited to walking back and forth from home to her CBET classes five days a week.

Another major aspect of CBET that Rafaela considers to be crucial is the readings that are given in class. She found the stories in the readings to be fascinating because they ranged from the fantastic to the very real. Those stories were not part of Lawrence's CBET program, she read them in the CBET classes at Center Elementary. She thought that many of them were simply entertaining or *chuscas* (corny), like the story of a woman who had sixty children, or the story of a woman who found a snake stuck in her car. But others were poignant and relevant to the adults' lives, in particular to their parental roles. Those stories dealt with issues such as domestic violence against women, substance abuse, and raising children. What Rafaela enjoyed the most were the discussions led by the instructor, when he connected the stories with the students' personal experiences. She believes that such open discussions took place because of the relatively smaller size of

Center's CBET class compared to Lawrence's. At Center's CBET, the instructor had the luxury to be able to sit with a group for prolonged periods of time to lead the discussions. In Rafaela's view, the freedom to offer opinions on real life problems generated discussions that taught a great deal:

*Casi la mayoría de las historias muchas veces son parecidas a la vida de uno de diario entonces muchas veces basado en las historias o sea te preguntan a uno '¿has pasado por esa situación?' Y opinamos acerca de las situaciones y uno puede expresar lo que siente, puede opinar 'no a mí no me gusta' o muchas veces te dice '¿tú has conocido a una persona... que ha estado drogadicta... o una persona alcohólica... que por ser alcohólico qué le va a pasar, una persona alcohólica cuál es su conducta?' Así muchas preguntas... de la familia, de tus hijos, qué le gusta a tus hijos, qué no te gusta a uno... sí aprende uno bastante.*

[Almost all the stories many times are similar to one's daily life, so many times based on those stories they ask you 'have you been through such situation?' And we give our opinions about those situations and one can express what one feels, one can say 'no, I do not like it' or many times you are asked 'have you met such person...a drug addict...or an alcoholic...because he/she is an alcoholic what could happen to him/her, how does an alcoholic's behave?' Like that, many questions...about family, your children, what your children like, what you like...yes, one learns a lot] (personal interview, November 15, 2005).

Learning about oneself and about different situations and problems that people face are important for Rafaela because she views them as knowledge-building opportunities to become a better person and a better parent. Sometimes the lack of English vocabulary would limit the students' participation, but she enjoyed the lessons nevertheless, especially those that addressed parenting in particular. Because some of these parenting stories made an impression on her, she has read them to her two sons. She believes that these stories can teach children lessons about the characteristics of a well behaved, well mannered, well raised child:

*A Diego<sup>27</sup> a mi hijo le leo historias que me dan en escuela... de un padre de familia que tiene un niño un hijo y le dice 'ya es hora de irte a la cama' y entonces el niño le dice 'no todavía no es hora déjame jugar un poquito más.' [El padre de familia le dice] 'no te tienes que ir a acostar a las nueve.' Y yo esa se la leo a mi hijo para que él vea el ejemplo del niño que es obediente y que tiene que irse a la cama. Y luego le dice el padre que el niño tiene que vestirse bien con ropa bonita para ir a la escuela, entonces el niño se quiere vestir como su amigo... y no dice 'mi amigo Roberto se pone jeans como hoyos... y los pelos parados (se ríe)... y no pasa nada' dice, entonces le dice [el padre] 'no pero tú no porque yo tengo reglas aquí en la casa, aquí hay reglas.'*

[I read the stories that I get at school to my son Diego...about a parent who has a son and tells his son 'it is time to go to bed' and then the son says 'it is not time yet, let me play a bit more.' [The parent tells the son] 'no, you have to go to bed at nine.' And that is the story that I read to my son so that he can see the example of the son who is obedient and has to go to bed. And then the parent of the son tells him that he has to dress well with nice clothes to go to school, and then the son wants to dress like his friend...and he says 'my friend Roberto wears jeans with holes...and spiked hair (laughs)...and nothing happens,' then [the parent] tells him 'but not you because there are rules in this house'] (personal interview, November 15, 2005).

This is corroborated by Rafaela's belief that educating children also means teaching them to behave well and to be respectful in school, and sending them to school clean and appropriately dressed. This belief is rooted on the values instilled in her as a student in Mexico, and resonates with Goldenberg and Gallimore's (1995) and Reese et al.'s (1995) findings on Mexican families' philosophies on education and the importance of raising children to be *bien educados* (well behaved).

Rafaela is pleased with CBET because she believes that she is learning *lo básico* (the basics). Her definition of *lo básico* is being able to communicate with others whether at home, at school, at the doctor's office, or any other place where English is needed. But unlike Estela, Rafaela did not specify pronunciation or vocabulary building as key

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<sup>27</sup> Pseudonym.

components of the class. To Rafaela, being able to learn *de todo un poco* (a little bit of everything), which includes reading stories that talk about real life issues and communication skills for interacting with non English speakers, is an important aspect of this program. Also, she believes that tests are important measures of their learning, and that one's progress does not depend on the instructor, but on one's own efforts (*las ganas que uno le ponga*) to learn. Because Rafaela has been in CBET programs for over two years, she also appreciates that Lawrence's CBET class promotes an active learning environment that is rigorous yet flexible, unlike other CBET programs, where the instructor shushed the students every time they spoke Spanish. She also criticized a program where the instructor was not actively engaged with the students and would simply give them busy textbook work, while she sat at her desk away from the students. This particular class was "*mucho libro... nosotros necesitábamos hablar*" ("too much 'textbook' ...we needed to speak"). Consequently, Rafaela speaks appreciatively of Margaret's style as positive because she is always active, moving about the classroom and keeping them constantly engaged and busy. Moreover, having childcare on site was also a key factor that kept her in the program, and why she recommended it to other parents. The childcare component is beyond a simple babysitting situation in her view because her toddler, Rafaelita, has learned a great deal in CBET's childcare. The childcare providers are not babysitters, but *maestras* (teachers) who have dual functions as caregivers and educators (personal interview, January 19, 2006).

Rafaela speaks highly of Lawrence's CBET program and of Margaret's respect for the students and the atmosphere that makes it clear it is a place to *estudiar inglés* (to learn

English). She is also aware of the precarious nature of the program, and believes that its future depends on the students' continued participation in all of its required components, including attending classes regularly, taking tests and tutoring. Rafaela has not tutored for Lawrence's CBET program, but she has tutored at Center Elementary. That tutoring task was assigned by the kindergarten teacher and not by the CBET instructor. The kindergarten teacher asked Rafaela to help the children write the letters of the alphabet. Many of the children spoke no English and communicated with Rafaela in Spanish. Rafaela was critical of her tutoring assignment and claims that this view was shared by others who had tutored in this particular classroom before. Her criticism was not based on the actual activity, or on working one on one with a child, but on the attitude and behavior of the kindergarten teacher towards the CBET students. When Rafaela arrived, the teacher greeted her, but continued teaching her lesson as if Rafaela were not there. The teacher left her standing and waiting for about ten minutes without acknowledging her presence or giving her any direction as to what she needed to do. Rafaela feel awkward and *apenada* (embarrassed) because all she could do was watch the teacher and wait for directions. She saw the teacher's behavior as coming from someone who did not want CBET tutors in her classroom in the first place, and that perhaps it would best to find a teacher who would be "*feliz cuando uno llegue y le ayude*" ("happy when a tutor comes to help him/her.") Although her tutoring experience was not as positive as Estela's, she understands the value of participating, not so much for the services they can provide as tutors, but mainly for the sake of the program's survival:

*Uno tiene que disponerse... si no, se cierra la clase si nadie quiere ir [a ser tutor/a] y no nos conviene a nosotros que se cierre... y está bien...*

*claro que ahí pasó ese pequeño [inconveniente] pues que ninguna estuvo contenta... Se sintieron [las estudiantes de CBET] apenadas pues porque como uno no tiene mucho vocabulario, mucha conversación tampoco tenías que llegar ahí y estar interrumpiendo a la maestra.*

[One has to be willing...if not, the class will close if nobody wants to go [tutoring] and it is not convenient for us that this program closes...and it is a good thing...of course that there was that small [problem] where nobody was happy...They [CBET students] felt embarrassed because since one does not have much vocabulary, any conversation skills, you could not just go there and interrupt the teacher] (personal interview, January 19, 2006).

The students complained about the tutoring situation in the hope of being assigned to a different classroom, but the experience made Rafaela aware of their subjugated position with regards to the classroom teacher who not only gives the orders, but also who shall not be “interrupted.” And, since CBET students lack sufficient English communication skills, as in Rafaela’s case, it made it difficult to call this to the teacher’s attention, or to express frustration with being ignored in front of others. Margaret has not run into this type of situation at Lawrence Elementary, but she admitted that CBET does not always do a good job preparing its tutors to deal with the classroom teachers’ expectations, or to deal with the children’s learning differences and needs. At the same time, the teacher volunteers are not necessarily trained to deal with CBET tutors either, and some might open up their classrooms without really understanding what this experience entails (M. Gensler, personal interview, February 9, 2006).

Rafaela is a CBET advocate because of what she believes it can do for women in particular, empowering them to meet others, to get out of their houses and learn something new, to get respect and to develop their self-worth as women. She remains aware, however, of social hierarchies and of what it means to be *bien educado* (well

educated) in different settings, whether at home, at school or as a tutor in a classroom. Her experiences as a poor woman in Mexico who had to put her ambitions and needs aside to help her family, guide her behaviors and beliefs with respect to how one must act in various situations, no matter how difficult or challenging they might be.

### **Taking what they need from CBET: Meeting their goals and aspirations**

All three mothers are relatively young, but Marcela strikes me as the one who most dresses, talks and acts like a modern mother. Whereas Estela and Rafaela would usually wear comfortable jeans, sweatshirts and regular white sneakers, Marcela wore more fashionable jeans or pants, tops and sneakers. All three mothers owned computers, but only Marcela's was up to date and connected to the Internet via a fast connection. When I visited Rafaela, their computer was not working, and Estela's computer was mainly used by the children to play educational games (I never witnessed Estela using it during my visits.) Marcela on the other hand was computer savvy and used it to chat with her relatives in other parts of California as well as in Mexico. I also witnessed her fixing her computer's Internet connection during one of my visits. Marcela was the only mother who also worked, not just to help the family's financial situation, but also because she liked earning money to be able to spend it anyway she wanted (home visit, January 18, 2006). Also, whereas Rafaela rarely talked about socializing or going out and Estela talked about socializing in the context of holiday meals with friends, Marcela often went out to eat with other couples, not just during special occasions.



The three mothers in this study viewed the learning of English as an important part of their lives as mothers and as women. They shared the common belief that attending CBET and learning English could help them attain their own personal goals of *superación*, and to help them become more independent and self-confident when dealing with people outside the safety zone of their homes and their CBET classroom. Supporting their children's learning and schooling was another primary reason for learning English, because these are Mexican immigrant women who deeply cherish their children's education, and view it as instrumental in bringing about positive outcomes for their children. Valdés' (1996) ethnography of Mexican families confirms the value placed in supporting their children's education by the three mothers in my study. Valdés states that the parents in her study, "Without exception...expressed very positive views about education." Moreover, "They felt that education was important and that it was their duty as parents to send their children to school" (p. 152). But each woman expressed their goals and aspirations and what they had learned in the program in different ways. This was based on their individual understanding of CBET as well as on their past histories, and current situations. Each had a different educational background and different personal experiences. Their goals were informed by their experience with the social, educational and work worlds.

In the classroom, the three women rarely socialized with each other, they sat at different tables, and interacted with different groups. Despite their differences, learning English was a vehicle for each woman to attain a variety of ends, as well as a vehicle to individualize their own learning. For example, though the CASAS test scores were an

integral component of the program, each mother assessed their English language acquisition in her own way. Both Estela and Marcela jumped to the next level, from Advanced Intermediate to Early Advanced, but Marcela's gains were far higher point-wise. She gained fifteen points, while Estela gained four points. Estela most likely did not increase her scores as dramatically as Marcela because she already came with a strong educational background, participated in all CBET activities, was considered a "good student" by Margaret, and hence, did not feel the need to "prove herself" as a student in the class. On the other hand, Marcela was highly focused on test scores and viewed them as true measures of her progress, therefore she placed great value in performance-based outcomes. Rafaela went up four points and remained at the same level, Intermediate Low, but she did not place a strong value on test scores, but rather on the content that she learned in class and the hope that the program gave her as she saw herself entering the workforce in the future. Consequently, all three mothers got what they each deemed necessary and relevant out of CBET. For instance, Estela values learning pronunciation and new vocabulary words because these are linguistic skills that she considered essential for reading to her children in proper English, whether at home or in their classrooms, and to understand the content of the readings. These are also important skills for understanding her children's homework assignments in order to help them appropriately. Participating in her children's schools and being actively involved also became important goals, especially in being able to understand, without the support of an interpreter or translator, the spoken and written English that is communicated at school events and meetings. Estela is also aware that her children are growing up in an English speaking

world outside of her home, and wants them to be able to function in these two worlds. Consequently, Estela wants her children to grow up bilingual and bicultural, and understands that being bilingual can help her children have the “*libertad de moverse como uno no tiene*” (“freedom to move about that she does not have”). Estela reported that at home the prevalent language is Spanish and that her children do not *reniegan* (reject) Spanish, but she is aware that in certain aspects of their home life, English is the language of choice used, especially by her husband, when giving her children commands such as “Turn the TV off” (personal interview, November 10, 2005). She sees that English can be useful in communicating with her children in situations where they respond better to English even if they speak and understand both languages. Estela’s purposes for learning English are closely connected to her children’s learning and schooling. This is why she volunteers in Jacqueline’s Head Start classroom, and programs her schedule on her kitchen calendar so that she can attend school events such as Family Fridays, Open Houses and parent meetings. This is also why Estela’s aspirations for learning about computers are not connected to a desire to enter the workplace, but rather to be able to keep abreast of what she considers will be necessary skills for her children to know once they are older.

Rafaela values learning from the various stories she reads in her Center Elementary CBET program. She believes that these stories teach good values, and provide good parenting advice. This does not mean that Rafaela does not value learning basic English language skills, or learning how to communicate with her children’s schools and teachers in English. Like Estela, Rafaela wants her children to be successful in school, wants to be

able to help them with their homework assignments, and wants to have an open and honest communication with her children's teachers. But Rafaela deems such readings and their perceived morals to be of great worth to her as a mother because she can immediately use the stories as lessons to teach her children about behaviors, manners and values. But above all, Rafaela believes that being able to learn how to communicate with *americanos* can earn their respect, help her family members get a job, and possibly earn them access to upward mobility in the workplace.

Like Estela and Rafaela, Marcela wants the well being of her child, and wants him to be successful in school. But for Marcela, CBET and learning English in general are also vehicles to empower herself to reach her ultimate personal goal of learning enough English to be able to take computer courses. Because Marcela is adamant about assessing her own progress, she uses Margaret's regular exams as measures of her own growth as a student, and was proud that her test scores jumped from 86/100 points at the beginning of the semester to 99/100 towards the end of the semester. Marcela also views learning English as a vehicle to understand the educational system in order to send her son to a non-neighborhood middle school, and to take advantage of all the possible opportunities that can help him improve his academic skills. She is anxious to learn about the mainstream educational system so that she can be empowered to be a player in that system, to take advantage of what it has to offer her and her child, and to stand up for her son when she believes that he is being treated unjustly. For example, when Marcela perceived that her son's teacher had unfairly assigned him detention, she immediately demanded a meeting with the teacher to clarify the situation.

All three mothers spoke highly of Margaret, their instructor, and specifically praised her respect for the students, her dedication, her knowledge, her teaching methods and her caring personality. And because the three mothers could clearly articulate what they want out of CBET, they were also open about suggesting program improvements. For instance, Estela would like to see Lawrence's CBET program group students according to their English language level, and to teach accordingly, because the multilevel approach loses students in lessons that might be too advanced for their knowledge and skill levels. Or, it bores others with lessons and content that might be too basic. Estela also enjoyed the opportunity to take the Adult ESL/Civics oral test simply because she felt that this was a good occasion to practice her English, because she believes that they seldom have the opportunity to speak to each other in English in class. She would also like to learn more about interacting and communicating within environments outside their homes. Learning the vocabulary about the living room, for example, was fine for adult students like her who are stay at home mothers, but she also felt that it would be important to learn how to converse with one's coworkers, neighbors, doctors, supervisors, and building managers. Also, Estela would have liked to learn more about the cultures and life stories of the African students when they first arrived at the program. She was intrigued because Margaret had started telling the class that the students from Africa had fled war torn countries, but this was the extent of her explanation (personal interviews, November 10, 2005, December 1, 2005 and January 19, 2006). Marcela admits that she enjoys CBET because it is a place to socialize and a place to learn how to get along with others. But while she appreciates the social nature of the class, she also suggested that there should

be stricter rules to control students who become disruptive, or who start side conversations, which she views as disrespecting the teacher. Jokingly, Marcela said that she would like Margaret “*que se ponga más dura con nosotras*” (“to be tougher with us”) (personal interview, January 19, 2006).

Rafaela suggested that Margaret might provide each student with a weekly package of activities, vocabulary words and various exercises. This package could be used in class as reference, but could also be taken home for students to practice and to prepare themselves for the next class session. During my home visits to Rafaela’s house, I noticed that her oldest children, Diego and Tony, had homework packages which they received at the beginning of the week, and were due at the end of the week. These may have inspired her suggestion.

In conclusion, the learning objectives of CBET are clear to the three mothers in this study, but each one of them interprets them differently, takes what they need from CBET, and applies their learning in their own ways to satisfy their personal objectives. CBET seems to attract a select group of parents who bring their own values, norms, beliefs and well established ideas about learning, schooling, and raising their children, so the mothers also prioritize their learning outcomes and their learning goals. CBET attracts a group of people with a certain capital who are eager to expand it.

Learning English also becomes a political act. As Rafaela expressed, learning English can earn them the *respeto* from the *americanos*. Estela also commented on this issue by explaining that learning English can help immigrants show the dominant culture that one is respectful, educated and capable of answering well in English (personal

interview, January 19, 2006). But Marcela went even further and expressed that she is not sure if the *americanos* are being honest when they say they are happy to see immigrants learning English. Marcela believes that no matter how much English they learn, Mexican immigrants are still an oppressed group,

*La verdad para los americanos entre menos hable uno inglés para ellos es mejor, porque siempre lo quiere ver a uno por abajo de ellos, siempre quieren pisotearlo a uno.*

[The truth is that to the Americans, the less one speaks English, the better it is for them, because they always want to see us under them, they always want to step on us] (personal interview, January 19, 2006).

Thus, acquiring the linguistic and school culture capital can lessen anxiety levels when interacting with *americanos*, especially when the *americanos* are authority figures such as their children's teachers, their landlords, and their bosses. Such capital can also help bring down barriers to be able to access certain resources, such as information about applying for a transfer to a non-neighborhood school, or learning about other educational opportunities for adults. But as Marcela points out, this capital may not be enough to earn immigrants' mainstream acceptance. Is learning English going to help these mothers move beyond the use of English to function in every day activities, or to help their children at home? Is learning English itself going to change anti-immigrant sentiments and oppression?

### Summary

By examining these women's experiences, this chapter looked at how learning English and participating in CBET informs their decisions, attitudes and actions in their roles as parents, teachers and citizens in terms of their personal notions of what it means

to be an active participant of society. Their reflections and their needs are rooted in their personal backgrounds (they are in the same class but have different experiences), their proficiency in English, and their education levels. CBET is very successful in this regard because it has kept these women in the program, and is able to meet their different needs. These participants have learned to take what they need. They are quite clear about their aspirations as CBET students and as women. They know what they want from their English learning experience, and are not afraid to express their points of view. The three women have dreams of *superación*, whether this means eventually opening a childcare center (Estela), joining the workforce (Rafaela), or sending her children to college to obtain the educational and career opportunities that she was never afforded (Marcela). The three women are eager to receive input in the form of English language and parenting skills lessons, but they are also eager to participate, to contribute and to share their opinions, questions and even disagreements with their CBET classroom. English language learning is a primary reason for attending the program, but they also want to learn about becoming self-sufficient, independent women, about helping their children attain equal opportunities for attending college, and about attaining new skills to either continue their education or get a job. The three mothers agree that not being able to speak English fluently might be why they are unable to fully participate and express themselves in their CBET class, but they are willing to try regardless. Consequently, a critical approach to learning English would be possible with this group of women, because they are in fact looking for a forum to express themselves. CBET could very well capitalize on the energy, the skills, the resources, the questions, the aspirations and motivations that



these women bring to the table, in order to provide learning opportunities that move beyond language learning and parenting skills, and bring them closer to self-determination and empowerment.

## **Chapter 4: The mother as teacher**

Upon their arrival in this country, immigrants draw on their past histories to interpret and construct new ways of participating in families and communities, a process that is reflected in their reference to Mexican cultural values and structural forces. As they experience life in US communities characterized by different institutional constraints and accompanying social relationships, some parents construct new dispositions toward language and learning. In some cases these transformations emerge through a negotiation of past histories and ongoing experiences (Pease Alvarez, 2003, p. 21).

As documented in the previous chapter, the mothers in this study were not passive recipients of information, but were actively engaged in ensuring that their personal and family goals were achieved by different means, including attending CBET. Similarly, they brought their prior knowledge and experiences to CBET and extracted what they wanted and needed from CBET to benefit their children. In this chapter, the focus is the learning activities and interactions that took place at the homes of Estela, Marcela and Rafaela, specifically, a) the educational philosophies of the mothers, that is what and how they believe their children should learn; and b) the educational activities that occurred in the home. CBET's expressed goals include teaching parents skills to help their children with school work and promote home literacy. All three mothers agreed with these goals, and with the importance of being involved in their children's educational experiences, whether at school or at home. The data gathered from the home visits indicate that all three mothers helped their children with homework, read to their children, participated in school events such as parent-teacher conferences, maintained Spanish language use at home, encouraged their children to do well, and imparted their philosophical beliefs

about *educación* in various ways. The data also show that all three mothers taught a wide range of topics, including values, behaviors, Spanish language, religion, mathematics, art, and good study habits. No explicit transfer of CBET activities or teachings was observed during the home visits, although in their interviews, the mothers gave general comments about the benefits of CBET with relationship to parenting. They recognized the importance of reading to their children, teaching literacy skills, helping them with homework, and participating in school events, but they did not credit CBET with being the sole vehicle that informs this consciousness. Their home learning and literacy practices were explained as their own, and not the result of being in CBET. For them, CBET promotes important parenting values that they already espouse, and shares interesting and useful content in the form of short stories, children's books and parent teacher conference scripts. But their personal beliefs revealed that CBET was not their source for learning how to be "good mothers" or how to teach their children at home.

All but one of the nine family visits took place at the mothers' homes, and all visits were conducted primarily in Spanish depending on the children's language use , circumstances, and the types of conversations that occurred between mothers and children, and between children. I visited after school hours, sometimes during the early afternoon, and sometimes during the early evening hours. Just as they had been in my individual interviews with them, in their homes the mothers were open, relaxed and very welcoming. They always made me feel at ease, offering me hospitality and making sure that I was comfortable and had all I needed to conduct my research. When I was introduced to the children, I explained that I was there to ask them a few questions about

their schoolwork, the type of activities they like to do with their mothers, the type of learning they do with their mothers, to observe them while they do homework or while they play or talk to their siblings and their mother, and to get to know them and their families. The mothers were present during the interviews, and sometimes would leave the room to care for their youngest children. But for the most part, the mothers were integral parts of the conversations with the children, and I found recording and examining the interactions between mothers and children to be extremely important to this research.

Like the mothers, the children became comfortable with my presence and were open and willing to talk to me and ask me questions. They were also eager to share their school work, hobbies, books, toys, photographs and other personal objects, and to show me their homes and tell me about their families. According to the mothers, after my first visit the children began asking them when I would return, and would anxiously await my arrival on the appointed dates. When I visited, the children displayed the same hospitality and friendliness as their mothers. Estela's oldest child, Susana, went as far as extending an open invitation to dinner the next time her mother made tamales. Tony and Diego, Rafaela's oldest children, drew pictures for me, shared their Nintendo games, and even gave me a drawing of The Hulk that Diego made. Marcela's son, Keith, asked her to send me an electronic Christmas card using a Spanish language website. He would also ask his mother when her *amiga* (female friend) was coming for another visit. I am truly fortunate that the families allowed me in the very private world of their home life. I also appreciate the trust they placed in me, not just by asking me about my own professional opinions about teaching and learning, but also by entrusting me with their children. On my first

visit to Rafaela's house, she left me caring for one year-old Rafaelita while she went to fetch her two oldest children from their neighbor's house. She was only gone for about ten minutes, but I was flattered that I had been entrusted with her daughter's care because I witnessed the seriousness and responsibility of Rafaela's care for her daughter during my CBET classroom observations.

The literacy and learning practices that occurred at each family's home were guided by two principal factors: a) each mother's philosophy of *educación* and their life experiences; and b) the children's ages and needs. Each mother had her own method of teaching, interacting with and helping her children with homework, and her own perspective on what parent involvement means and how it should be enacted. The following sections examine what is fundamental to the teaching philosophies and practices of each mother.

### **The educational philosophies of the mothers**

Each mother used teaching practices guided by personal goals and aspirations for her children, which were based on her philosophies of education and raising children. What the mothers believed their children should be learning, and how they should be learning it, were rooted in their experiences as students in Mexico and in CBET, and in their personal experiences living in this U.S.

**The teachings of Estela Arriaga: From good student to good teacher**

Estela lived with her husband and three children, ages six, three, and 17 months, in a two bedroom, two bathroom apartment on the second floor of a small apartment complex. There was a small living room, and no separate dining room; the dining table was located in the nook of their kitchen. This table served many purposes, including a place to do homework and a place where Estela and her children worked on crafts and played games. The living room had a two-seater couch, a big screen television, an armoire, and a small, but colorful center table made for kids where the children could play and draw. In addition, there was an antique desk in the corner where the children stored arts and crafts materials such as crayons, markers, paper, as well as books and toys. During my visits, the children would often go to that desk to retrieve toys, reading or writing materials. Estela's husband collected antiques and the décor of the apartment reflected his hobby. In addition to the corner desk, there were a couple of children's antique chairs in the living room, and a working colonial style country kitchen telephone on the kitchen wall. Seventeen month-old Richard slept in his parents' bedroom, while six year-old Susana and three year-old Jacqueline shared the other bedroom. Susana invited me to her bedroom which had pink curtains and bed covers, a small television on top of the corner dresser, a small desk for the computer, and a small closet. One of the walls had a map of the United States. Opposite that wall, there was an alphabet strip with lower and upper case letters, as well as pictures representing each letter. Susana's first grade teacher distributed this strip to all her students so that they could practice the alphabet with their families at home.

Like her mother, Susana had a contagious smile and vivacious eyes. She was also very sociable and talkative, and made me feel at ease immediately, sharing her books, art work, computer educational games and showing me her room. She spoke both English and Spanish, and communicated with her siblings and with me mostly in English, but spoke primarily in Spanish to her mother. She liked speaking “the both of them,” meaning both English and Spanish, and preferred it when her mother spoke to her in “the thing that she talks,” meaning Spanish. Estela emphasized to Susana that “*español es lo que nosotros hablamos*” (“Spanish is what we speak”), but that English is what is written in most of her books and textbooks. Susana had a few storybooks in Spanish that were gifts from her uncle in Mexico. Estela read these books to her, and Susana liked the books. During my visits Susana would tell me about her school day, and would also share the different projects she had worked on at school, with her mother, or with her mother’s friend, as well as significant artifacts that her family had just acquired, such as a new set of Disney character Christmas ornaments, or the small plastic baby Jesus she found in the *Rosca de Reyes* (King’s day bread). She was comfortable telling me about her family, explaining that her mother had three children, but her father had four, meaning that she had a half-brother who lived in another state with another mother. During recess or nutrition breaks at Lawrence Elementary, Susana would often visit her mother in her CBET class, and she would make a point to talk to me and to ask me when I would visit them again at home. Her younger sister Jacqueline was three years old and was also active and talkative. She spoke mostly Spanish to her mother, her siblings and me, and also code switched once in a while, for example Estela said that she said once “sorry

*mamá porque tiré chocolate*” (“sorry mom because I dropped the chocolate.”) At seventeen months-old, the youngest, Richard, also had a contagious smile and enjoyed being with us. He would crawl on the table and play with the various toys, artifacts and books that Susana shared with me, or would sit on his mother’s lap while we were talking.

Estela had the most formal education of the three case study mothers, and as noted in the previous chapter, was considered an excellent student by CBET standards because she was perceived by the instructor as enacting CBET’s parenting training in the tutoring setting and with her own children. Indeed, Estela believed in creating a learning environment at home where literacy was abundant and present everywhere in the house, and where children could have easy access to educational tools and materials, including arts and crafts. Her teaching style at home clearly stemmed from the principle of being a teacher for her children, and a model of good academic skills and study habits. Consequently, her educational ideology included, a) using educational toys, games as well as arts and crafts as learning tools; and b) modeling and teaching study skills and learning patterns. It is no wonder then that Susana’s favorite activities with her mother were based on learning something new and enhancing her skills. For example, she liked them to play with their Mickey Mouse and Toy Story memory games, to have her mother teach her how to draw, or to have her mother teach her how to crack eggs to prepare a “delicious flan” (home visits, November 16, 2005 & January 25, 2006).

Estela’s views on education matched her actions and attitudes relevant to raising her children. She believes that there are two types of education when it comes to raising



children. One of them is “*de letras*” (“of letters”), which she meant as academic or school related, “*para que sepan más, tengan más conocimientos*” (“so that they know more and have more knowledge”); and the other one is “*cómo se comportan ellos*” (“how they behave”) (home visit, November 16, 2006). She believes that character development is the responsibility of the parent, rather than the teacher’s, because school should focus on “*la formación educacional*” (“academic development.”) This is why Estela is quick to criticize the American school system for not being as rigorous as that of her native Mexico, where students are responsible for a larger load of subjects in their daily school schedules. She believes this rigor to be important in providing children with solid foundations for academic growth (personal interview, December 1, 2005).

The belief that her children should learn as much as they can influenced the types of books and toys Estela bought for her children. During my visits, Susana showed me her LeapPad learning system, an electronic, interactive book that speaks and plays music with the touch of an attached stylus pen. The book asks questions and children respond by tapping the right answer or a graphic representation of that answer. Children can also tap different locations to learn the pronunciation of a word, or to learn the meaning of a word in various languages, including Japanese and German. Susana’s LeapPad had the U.S. state maps, the human skeleton, musical instruments, and sections for teaching children rhyming words. The book showed signs of frequent usage, and according to Estela, this was one of the children’s favorites because “*cada ratito lo están viendo*” (“they play with it all the time”) and this was good, in her view, because they learn to

read, listen and speak the words correctly. Susana liked her LeapPad collection of books and CDs because they “make you smart” (home visit, November 16, 2005).

The type of educational books and materials that Susana’s parents bought for her also included arts and crafts, as well as science. During one of my visits, Susana brought out two large paper cups and a roll of thread to make a “phone” using the model in one of her science crafts books. As we talked, Estela helped her daughter make the string-cup phone, much to Susana’s delight. According to her mother, Susana enjoys watching PBS shows related to science and has always liked collecting rocks, shells and leaves, and is constantly asking for help with the science experiments she watches on television or reads in her book. “This is observation,” Susana told me when she brought out some of her collected objects, and explained that it is called observation “‘cause we don’t know what it is, like this thing it [pointing to an unidentifiable object] looks like a tooth, but it’s not a tooth.” She learned this information from PBS (home visit, December 7, 2005), not at school. As much as she would like to do more science-like activities with her daughter, Estela explained that the materials are not always available. The string-cup phone was in fact their first book related science project together, and Susana played with it throughout my entire visit, making sure that we all used it and tested it.

Estela established a daily routine which included time to sit with her daughter to work on homework assignments. Her mother joked that if it were up to Susana, “*se pasaría viendo la televisión*” (“she would spend her time watching television”) after school, so she created a schedule that balanced school work and recreation activities. According to Estela,

*Cuando viene [de la escuela] la dejo poquito a que descanse para que no se estrese tanto de la tarea... que vea tantito la tele. Comemos... y luego ya terminamos de comer, limpio la cocina y ya se pone a hacer su tarea... se baña, la baño y ya a descansar.*

When she arrives [from school] I let her rest a little bit so that she does not stress out over homework...so that she can watch a little bit of TV. We eat...and then we finish eating, I clean the kitchen and then she starts doing her homework...she takes a bath, I bathe her, and then to rest (home visit, November 16, 2005).

Estela thought it important to balance her children's lives by giving them time to clear their minds of school related activities before they started studying, and by providing them with a clean and neat space to work. The kitchen table was kept clutter free. Susana liked this work station because it was next to a large window facing the alley and the other apartments, where "we could look at the clouds...and the houses and some things that are outside" (home visit, November 16, 2005).

Estela's apartment was a testament to how much learning occurred at her home. The corner antique desk was not just a decorative piece, but also served as a central storage place for school supplies, arts and crafts materials and books. Her children were free to fetch supplies to do their artwork at any time. When Susana wanted to draw, she chose one of the books from the desk or the shelf next to the desk and copied one of the drawings on a white piece of paper. The girls' room had a large U.S. state map which Estela used to teach U.S. geography, and to show the girls where their half-brother lived on the East coast. Also the apartment's refrigerator displayed evidence of home literacy because it had a family calendar where Estela jotted down appointments, special occasions, and other pertinent notes. It also displayed symbols like a heart for *el Día del Amor y la Amistad*, (Valentine's day), and stars for upcoming school vacation days; but

its main purpose was to organize the children's academic life and the family's social life. On the calendar, Estela wrote birthdays, doctors' appointments, due dates for school library books, Physical Education days at Lawrence, and the monthly *Viernes Familiar* (Family Friday), when parents were invited to their children's classrooms to read to the class for fifteen minutes, or when the children read to their parents. Estela considered the *Viernes Familiar* of extreme importance because in her own words "*he visto que cuando [los padres] no van, los niños se quedan así tristes*" ("I have seen that when [the parents] do not go, the children become sad.") The calendar also marked parent-teacher conferences dates and social family outings such as the day they went to buy the Christmas tree. It also served as a learning object because Estela used it to have Susana count the months that had passed since November, or to narrate some of the events noted on the calendar, such as the time when Estela had a dentist's appointment, and Susana explained that "*le picaron*" ("they drilled") her mother's teeth (home visit, November 16, 2005).

Because of all the literacy activities going on in Estela's household to teach her children reading, writing and good study habits, she was surprised to learn from Susana's first grade teacher that the child was *atrasada en lectura* (behind in reading). The teacher's advice was for Susana to read "*libros que tengan ya más contenido...que tenga más letras...que se tenía que esforzar más en leer y que memorizara lo que está leyendo, que me explique qué es lo que ve y todo*" ("books with higher content...with more words...that she would have to put more effort in reading, that she should explain to me what she is reading and all.") Estela was nonplussed because she constantly practiced

reading with Susana by doing exactly what the teacher was suggesting. She even explained to the teacher that “*a veces ella [Susana] primero lee o yo primero lo leo y ya ella lo lee y luego me explica lo que [ha leído]*” (“sometimes she [Susana] reads first or I read first, and then she reads it and then explains to me what [she had read].”) She was pleased that her daughter’s teacher believed that she was doing well in mathematics and writing, but could not understand the perceived deficit in reading skills (home visit, December 7, 2005). After all, Estela’s teaching methods were a combination of her own beliefs of how a good student acts, and what good teaching looks like. She herself enacted these beliefs as a student in CBET and as a mother raising her children. She did what the CBET teacher said and wanted her students to do, that is she tutored children, participated in all CBET activities, and attended class regularly. She also did what Susana’s teacher asked parents to do at home to support literacy, such as using the alphabet strip and reading to her child. This is why she questioned the teacher’s assessment of Susana’s reading skill level and progress. She was puzzled by the mismatch between the teacher’s perception and her own views of Susana’s progress and skills. The nature of the teacher’s assessment of Susana’s progress was not clear to Estela or to me, leaving us to question if this is an incomplete assessment of Susana’s skills, or if this is the beginning of a serious gap between all the efforts that Estela invests in educating her children and the expectations that schools have of what children should already know, and what they should be learning at home.

### **The teachings of Marcela: Balancing tradition with modern mainstream values**

Marcela also lived on the second floor of a small apartment complex near Lawrence Elementary. It was a simple, homey, two bedroom apartment with a small balcony. Like Estela's apartment, Marcela's home did not have a separate dining room, and the dining table was in a small nook attached to the kitchen. The living room had a medium size television, an "L" shaped sofa that could sit about six people, and a computer against a wall between the dining table and the living room. Her ten year-old son, Keith, showed me his bedroom, which had a small bed, a television and a karaoke machine, which also served as a DVD and music CD player. When I was first introduced to Keith, he seemed quiet and shy, but this was probably due to the circumstances surrounding this introduction. I first met him at the *Día de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead) celebration at the local Catholic church. As part of his *doctrina* (catechism) classes, Keith and his mother were participating in the celebration by putting together an altar along with the families of Keith's *doctrina* classmates. During this event, Keith spent most of the time with his mother, making decorations and putting together the altar. Because the children and their families were being rushed to complete the project by a certain time, and due to the noise level of the room, I did not have much opportunity to talk to him individually. However, once I visited him at his home, he proved to be very talkative and sociable. He was a delightful fifth grader who always gave elaborate answers to my questions. Like Susana, Keith also made me feel at ease during the interviews, showing me his room, his books, his homework assignments, his karaoke machine, and sharing his thoughts about school, his teacher, and his mother's teachings. He was a very polite boy, who spoke

Spanish to his mother and to me. During my visits, he seldom used English, only when he could not find the right Spanish word, or whenever I addressed him in English.

Like Estela, Marcela also directed her teaching practices to helping Keith with his schoolwork, but they were more focused on building appropriate academic skills, and connecting him with the “right” programs and schools, to provide him with the tools to put him on the road to college. Her teaching underscored Keith’s future prospects in education, including preparing him to be ready for the upper grades and learning about every opportunity available to support him as he moves ahead in school. She believed that her son should start thinking about college and about future careers early. Despite her emphasis on the academic preparation needed to attain these goals, Marcela also believed that there should be a balance between teaching academic and social behavior, because *“muchas personas tienen la educación de la escuela, están hasta el tope... pero la educación personal la tienen por el suelo”* (“many people have a lot of academic type education, they are at the top...but their personal development is at the very lowest level.”) In her view, by achieving this balance, one can grow up to be a well rounded individual who knows how to successfully navigate in different environments. This is why, unlike Estela, she thinks that school has to play a role in teaching children character development, especially because as they grow older, they spend more time at school (Keith attends after school programs.) Marcela explained that children learn from their parents as well as from their teachers, and therefore neither should blame the other for a child’s behavior or academic performance (personal interview, December 6, 2005). Her ideology of education is a mix of the traditional Mexican values of raising a *niño bien*

*educado* (a well-behaved child) who knows right from wrong, with a middle class mainstream belief system in pursuing upper mobility.

Because Marcela believes that, at ten years of age, Keith is “too old” to be read to, she focused her energy on teaching him the necessary skills to complete his homework successfully, to help him plan out his busy academic calendar, and to be actively involved in finding resources to ensure that her goals for Keith are met. The types of interactions that I observed between mother and son were based on these principles, and on the idea that Keith should be more independent in his learning. Marcela expects that as her son grows up, he will become more independent of her, so he might not want to “hang out” with her as much as before. She understands this well, and sees it as a fact of life, so she wants to find ways to remain involved in his life. The *doctrina* classes at their local Catholic church became a vehicle to bring them together. Both mother and child attended *doctrina* classes once a week, albeit in separate classrooms. Keith was in a 5<sup>th</sup> grade catechism class conducted in English while his mother attended a Spanish language catechism class for adults. The *doctrina* classes also provided venues for different celebrations which brought families together. Like the *Día de los Muertos* celebration, these were opportunities for families and their children to work on a common project and to showcase it to the other students and parents. Marcela was not particularly religious, but the church provided a dual service for her, that of teaching her son the Catholic traditions that she grew up with but did not practice, and therefore felt unqualified to pass on to her son, and that of offering activities where she could still spend time with Keith. Despite her fear that her son would grow farther apart from her as he got older, I



observed a close relationship between mother and son. At the *Día de los Muertos* celebration, while the other children were mostly working and visiting other altars with their friends, Keith stayed with his mother for most of the time, making decorations, talking and visiting the altars. It was not until almost the end of the event that Keith left his mother's side to be with one of his cousins.

Mother and child are close probably because Marcela is the main caretaker for her son. Her husband does help Keith with homework and is an involved parent; up until he recently changed his job, he was the one who attended conferences and meetings at his son's school. But when his job became less flexible and required long hours, Keith and his mother fitted their routines into each other's schedules, so to accomplish their personal goals and still find time to eat, do homework and relax together. When he was smaller, Keith was always left under someone else's care or in an after school program because his mother worked full time. He knew that "*no me podían dejar solo*" ("they could not just leave me alone"), and that his mother would always enroll him in school-related activities to keep him occupied and cared for until she could pick him up after work. So to this day, even though his mother does not work full time, he has a busy after school schedule, because he is enrolled in extra reading classes and homework help sessions.

Having had a busy routine since a young age has shaped Keith's understanding of the need to plan his daily agenda to fit school, his mother's work, and fun. He would sometimes skip recess to finish an assignment or to start working on his homework early. To him, there is satisfaction in having accomplished a major task, and the relief of being

able to enjoy play time guilt free. This is why he would choose the most difficult assignments first, and leave the easier, or the most “fun” tasks for later, so that he could enjoy them to their fullest, “*porque si haces el fácil te vas a estar divirtiéndote*” (“because if you do the easy one, you will have fun.”) His mother joked that her son plans purposefully so that when he arrives home he will be done with homework in order to be “*relajadito para ver sus caricaturas*” (“very relaxed so that he can watch his cartoons.”) Both agree that being in the “6 to 6”<sup>28</sup> after school program from an early age has allowed Keith to take advantage of the school resources, such as receiving help to complete his homework assignments and getting as much assistance as possible from available tutors and teachers (home visit, December 14, 2005). In fact, Keith was so attuned to scheduling and planning that one of the first pieces of school work he showed me was his planner, which he explained as follows:

*Tenemos que leer 45 minutos... luego tenemos que escribir... como el último capítulo de una historia que estamos leyendo y luego tenemos que hacer el health journal [diario de salud]... qué comimos y poner... media hora de un tipo de ejercicio...terminé a las 6:22, comí... fui a mi cuarto. Leí por 45 minutos...y... luego hice lo que faltaba del ejercicio porque ya había caminado [para el diario de salud].*

We have to read 45 minutes...then we have to write...like the last chapter of a story we are reading and then we have to do the health journal...what we eat and write...half an hour of a type of exercise...I finished at 6:22, I ate, I went to my room. I read for 45 minutes...and...since I had already walked [for the health diary], I filled out the rest of the diary (Home visit, January 18, 2006).

Whether he finished his homework at school or at home, Keith was conditioned to creating and managing a schedule that would allow him to finish his tasks and give him

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<sup>28</sup> The “6 to 6” is an after school program that, depending on the school and its funds, provides academic support, miscellaneous clubs and activities, sports, arts and crafts, and other types of enrichment activities before and after school. Some schools have programs starting at 6 AM, and most have programs that end at 6 PM.

enough time to balance school and leisure. This was one of the major lessons that his mother taught him and modeled for him since his early years.

Being an active participant in Keith's education is instrumental for Marcela in supporting her son and her goals for him. But rather than volunteering in her child's classroom, she prefers to be an informed mother, and to search for venues to help her son attain what she considers to be worthy goals. When her son was younger, Marcela did read to him and because his favorite books were the Dr. Seuss series, she indulged his love for them by buying him a "cat in the hat" outfit that he would wear constantly, and a bilingual version of Dr. Seuss' *Cat in the hat*. She also checked out other Dr. Seuss books from the public library. During school breaks, she would take Keith to work so that he could spend the day browsing through the entire Dr. Seuss collection which belonged to the child of one of the families for whom she cleaned. When that child was at home, Keith and he would play together, otherwise, Marcela would tell him "*ándale, aquí llénate del Dr. Seuss*" ("go ahead, fill yourself with Dr. Seuss here"), and he would spend the day perusing the books. She always sought to keep her son busy, yet involved in activities that were enjoyable, educational and useful.

Unlike Estela, Marcela did not focus her purchases on educational type books or toys for her son because, as she said, he was older. When he was smaller, she would buy him Pokémon and Dr. Seuss' books, but now that he is older, she lets him buy the books of his choice. She recently bought him a subscription to *Game Informer* magazine, which offers news and reviews of videogames, which Keith claimed to read from beginning to end, though Marcela told me that she had only seen him skimming it. Her latest book

purchase was about the magic of Harry Potter because she knew this book series is a favorite of Keith's. Keith was also excited to show me his latest purchases from the school's book fair which included fiction books on adventure and vampires. His choices were informed by reading the cover and the back of the books, by what his classmates had chosen, and by the price of the book. Marcela trusted her son's reading choices, and believed that he was a good student who still had a lot to learn, not just content-wise, but also skill-wise. She concentrated on what and how he needed to be learning, and why he needed to be involved in certain academic activities. Because she saw that his schoolwork had become progressively more complex as the years went by, she was convinced that his work load and his curriculum would get harder as he entered sixth grade, and that he needed to be prepared for middle school. When Keith was told by his school that he needed to enroll in the after school reading program, his self esteem hit a low point. He got upset with his mother for enrolling him because he viewed it as a class designed for poor students: "*yo sentía como si yo estaba fallando como un estudiante porque como nunca me habían mandado yo sentía como si yo estaba haciendo algo mal*" ("I felt as if I were failing as a student because since I had never been sent there I felt as if I were doing something wrong.") But Marcela saw it as an opportunity to get additional support for her son so that he could be better prepared for middle school, high school, and eventually college. For her, these are resources, and not punishments that schools afford children and that parents need to take advantage of in order to motivate their children to continue learning and to think about their future and well being. She explained to her son that he does indeed skip or replace words when reading (e.g. "kid" for "child"), and that he reads

so fast that it seems that someone is “*correteando[le]*” (“running after him”) whenever he reads. And according to Keith, his mother also explained that,

*Que no es mi culpa...y que sí lo ocupo para poder aprender mejor. Así mejor que haga todo lo que ella pueda hacer para ayudarme en los estudios.*

[That it is not my fault...and that I do need it to learn better. That is why it is better that she does all she can do for me to help me in my studies]  
(home visit, December 14, 2005).

Marcela instilled in Keith the value of learning and the importance of taking advantage of opportunities to advance one’s cause, and to draw from the experience as much as possible in order to become more successful in school. In fact, during Winter break, she would have liked to send her son to Intersession classes so that he could stay focused in school and obtain some more knowledge and skills, but he did not qualify since he was doing well in school. Instead, he stayed home with his mom and accompanied her to CBET classes, much to her delight and pride.

She also saw CBET as a resource that taught parents specific skills to work with their own children, which she considered important but not applicable to her family. Marcela was not interested in learning how to use alphabet cards, read to a child, or create a literacy rich environment at home. She was interested in getting resources that could directly increase her son’s chances of getting into a “better” middle school, high school, and eventually college, which she believed would help him attain the professional career that neither she nor her husband had a chance to pursue. She thoroughly read every notice from school, carefully absorbed information pertaining to K-12 education presented in the Spanish language television channels, and talked to other parents about their own

knowledge of available support programs for the children at Lawrence or at other schools. She knew of “*Que Ningún Niño Se Quede Atrás*” (“No Child Left Behind,” NCLB) from the Spanish language television news, and school and district documents sent home. She knew that NCLB meant getting extra help for children in low performing schools, such as Lawrence, which included after school tutoring at the child’s home or at other schools and locations. She also knew that even if Keith did not qualify for all the services provided under NCLB, nonetheless, she felt empowered knowing that she could make direct and informed inquiries and decisions about these and other resources. She also worked hard to put together the many pages of the application packet for the charter school of her choice. In less than a two week period, she had gathered the necessary letters of recommendation, tax documentation, student work, and other student documentation to be sent to the charter school for review. In addition, she stayed in constant contact with Lawrence’s secretary who had promised her and other prospective applicants that she would personally drive the application packets to the charter school by the deadline. Because Marcela wanted to be reassured that her son’s application packet would arrive on time, she even considered spending an entire morning riding the city bus, and skipping the CBET class, in order to hand-deliver the application.

### **The teachings of Rafaela: Respect and moral values earn respect from others**

Rafaela and her family lived in the front of a one story duplex apartment. The exterior of the apartment showed evidence of wear and tear on the paint, and the cracks on the exterior walls gave the impression that the apartment was in bad condition. Inside,

the apartment was humble but comfortable. It had a kitchen, a dining room, a living room and three bedrooms. Rafaela's mother-in-law lived with the family and occupied the bedroom near the kitchen. Tony and Diego (ages ten and eight respectively) shared another bedroom and one year-old Rafaelita slept in her parents' bedroom. The living room had two small sofas, a fireplace on one side of the wall, a couple of side tables next to each sofa and a small television opposite the fireplace. There was a non-functioning computer on a desk next to the dining room. This desk also served as storage for Rafaela's CBET materials and some of the children's books. Unlike Estela's and Marcela's homes, Rafaela's apartment was more cramped and had older furniture. It was also noisier given its location on a major road near a highway. Rafaela's walls were more crowded, with many paintings and photographs. Because Rafaela liked to draw and paint, several of her paintings were hanging on the walls.

Her two oldest boys were probably responsible for some of the disorder in the apartment. Both Tony and Diego were very active, loud, and liked to play-fight with each other in the living room. My first introduction to the children did not go as smoothly as with Estela and Marcela's children. The night of my first visit, the children had been at a neighbor's playing videogames and had forgotten to get back to their house on time to meet me. After waiting for about ten minutes, and after calling the neighbor on the phone but getting no answer, Rafaela left to fetch the two boys. She was embarrassed that they were not there on time as told, and wanted them to make a good first impression. My own three nephews, aged eleven to sixteen, are passionate about playing videogames, so I had a feeling that the boys were not going to be happy meeting the person who interrupted

their gaming time. When they arrived, Rafaela had Tony and Diego sit on the couch, and indeed, they both looked upset and disappointed. When I started speaking Spanish to them, the youngest, Diego, said he did not understand Spanish, in a rebellious tone of voice. Fortunately, I had an “ace” up my sleeve in the shape of Clifford the Big Red Dog and Sponge Bob stickers. These two items lighted up the boys’ eyes and at that point, they seemed to have forgotten my intrusion. The oldest, ten year-old Tony was the first one to open up to my questions. Eight year-old Diego followed up, but was not as focused as Tony. Tony was very attached to his mother and constantly hugged her and gave her kisses during my visits. Diego would hug her as well but less frequently. Tony and Diego were playful, talkative and rowdy, but they were very different when it came to expressing themselves orally, and when talking about their schooling and learning experiences. Fifth grader Tony liked talking about what he learned in school, how much his mother helped him, and he took school work seriously, one time politely asking to be excused to leave the living room to go and complete his homework because it was getting late. Tony also expressed himself well, and he spoke to me mostly in English. Sometimes he would code switch to Spanish whenever he would talk to his mother, or when he wanted to interject in a conversation between Rafaela and me. Tony was not as fluent in Spanish as Marcela’s son, Keith, but made an effort to speak Spanish and said he appreciated his mother teaching him Spanish. Third grader Diego on the other hand, was easily distracted and yelled at his brother and his mother when he was frustrated or when his brother teased him. Diego was in Special Education, which Rafaela said was because he was *atrasado* (behind) in school. Diego did speak some Spanish, but not as much as



Tony. He spoke to his mother mainly in English even when she addressed him in Spanish. He did not articulate words clearly. Diego did not speak about school or schoolwork with the same enthusiasm as his brother, and showed great frustration when doing his homework, to the point of tears. Tony and Diego interrupted each other during the interviews, often yelling over each other as they were answering my questions, or whenever Rafaela and I would start a side conversation. Rafaela was very patient with their loudness and hyperactivity. Rafaelita, the one year-old toddler did not seem to mind her oldest brothers' rambunctious behavior, and was rather calm and constantly smiling and curious about everything around her, including her brothers' toys, drawings, school materials and books.

Rafaela had the least formal education of the three mothers, only six years of schooling. Her education had been stopped because of harsh economic conditions, but she longed to continue studying and had a nostalgic view of her education. She had attended a school in a small rural town in Mexico, that was not *muy elegante* (very fancy), in a *rancho*, but it left a lasting impression on how children should be taught, the expectations for what their assignments should look like, and methods to teach children. She believed in the way she learned, and taught her children the same way. In the following passage, Rafaela gave an example of how she would correct her children's assignments (this one in particular was about capitalizing letters), and how she would teach them about neatness and presentation, based on her personal experiences as a student:

*Siempre la primera si es un nombre propio o de ciudad... y de estado tiene que ir con... letra grande [mayúscula] y él [Diego] escribía todo revuelto*

*y no me gustaba a mí... Cuando estaba en segundo [grado]... no le corregían eso y entonces yo siempre le estaba corrigiendo eso... o cuando hace una palabra o una letra mal en lugar de borrarla, tachaba con la pluma le rayaba y se veía mal su lectura [escritura]. Y yo me acuerdo que en México...desde chiquita aprendí a escribir... bien limpiecito ... no más fui hasta el seis pero... allá te enseñan desde primero a escribir en limpio que no sea borradero ahí... porque escribe uno con lápiz, pueden borrar, y es lo que quería yo que aprendieran... y ahorita escribe bonito él [Diego]... me gusta cómo escribe lecturas... le digo 'hazlo bonito'... escribo yo primero, le digo 'así como ves que yo escribo así escribe.'*  
 [Always the first [letter] if it is a proper noun or the name of a city...and of a state has to go with...big letters [capitals] and he [Diego] would write everything mixed up and I did not like that...When he was in second [grade]...they did not correct this and then I would always correct this...or when he makes a mistake when writing a word or a letter, instead of erasing it, he would cross it out with a pen, and his reading [writing] would look bad. And I remember that in Mexico...when I was little, I learned to write...very neatly...I only went to the sixth grade but...over there they teach you starting in first grade to write neatly, so that it is not a mess...because one writes with a pencil and can erase it, and that is what I wanted them to learn...and now [Diego] writes beautifully...I like how he writes readings...I tell him 'do it nicely' ...I write first, I tell him 'just like I write, you go ahead and write' (home visit, January 24, 2006).

For Rafaela, modeling such academic behaviors brought her back to her roots in Mexico.

Although her children were being raised in a different school system with different values, traditions and expectations, she wanted to maintain her own traditions and make sure that those were instilled in her children, and integrated in their learning experiences at home and at school.

She viewed education as “*esencial, muy importante*” (“essential, very important”), a combination of the academic, and *principios* (principles), and *comportamiento* (behavior) (personal interview, December 6, 2005). This is why she concentrated her teachings on transmitting religious values, art, the Spanish language, and traditions. She believed in the importance of getting respect from the *americanos*, as explained in the previous

chapter, and she also wanted to instill respect in her children through an education based on the traditional Mexican roots to which she was so attached. She raised her children to be well-behaved, respectful, and appreciative of religious values, art, and their own culture.

While Marcela had a schedule organized around her son's academic needs and activities, and modeled good planning for her son, Rafaela's home was not as child centered and did not have such a routine scheduled for her school aged children. Her oldest, Tony, was independent and understood the responsibilities of doing homework, helping his mom take care of his little sister, and accompanying and helping his mom during errands and appointments. Tony acted as if being the oldest meant being responsible for his mom, his brother and his sister, and being a good role model for his siblings. Without needing to say it explicitly, Tony viewed his brother Diego as young and irresponsible, and knew that he was not as academically capable and that he needed one on one help both from his teachers and his mother. He was also aware that it took his brother longer to complete assignments:

It takes him a really long time...I like do three pages of [Math] problems and Diego is not even done...I'm faster... and I copied what Diego was copying...I passed him (home visit, November 29, 2005).

He did not call it a learning disability, but rather credited his academic edge over Diego to being faster and a more responsible student. He did his homework alone, without much help from his mother, especially since Rafaela did not understand all of Tony's assignments. He was the older brother who needed to correct Diego's behaviors, such as the time when Diego claimed that his mother never helped him with homework. In reply,

Tony angrily yelled, “She always helps you!” But as competitive as Tony was with this brother and as much as they fought with each other, they got along, played together, and joked with each other. Rafaela displayed equal affection for both and was proud of both of them for who they were, and for their personal talents. She let Tony be more independent in his schoolwork, and she trusted that he was doing well. Tony also understood that he was too old to be read to, and that he was responsible for his own success. But she took greater care in helping Diego gently even when he acted defiantly towards her. Her teaching was not limited to her sons, she included her daughter Rafaelita. She would read to her using the same books that she had bought for her other children. On one occasion, I saw her put Rafaelita on her lap and show her the children’s Bible, asking the child to search for the different animals (home visit, January 24, 2006).

Rafaela’s house did not have much evidence of home literacy on the surface; rather the apartment was busy with ornaments and Rafaelita’s toys. The disarray that the boys created when play-fighting or when playing videogames overshadowed the books that Rafaela provided for the children. There was no central location where the children would go to retrieve art supplies, paper or books for their drawings. Tony had his materials in his backpack and in his room, but Diego was more scattered and needed to scramble to find them. Rafaela was, however, interested in literacy and in teaching her children at home. She considered literacy the foundation for learning: “*Para entender tiene uno que saber leer*” (“To understand, one must know how to read”), and told her children that if they wanted to “*aprender de las estrellas, de los planetas*” (“learn about the stars, the planets”) for example, they could learn about them from books. She

frequented thriftstores to find book bargains and also visited religious bookstores to find books that could both entertain and educate her children. When looking for religious books, she would search for “*historias reales...que no son muy largas*” (“real stories...that are not very long”), but mostly found them in English. But because she was familiar with most of them, she could test her children’s reading comprehension without having to know how to read them in English. The children used these books to satisfy their independent reading requirements for school, so for Rafaela these texts served a dual purpose: helping her children attain a school literacy goal, and teaching them religious traditions and values. She estimated having bought about 30 books total and wished she could afford many more (home visit, January 24, 2006). The children were interested in books as well, and because of their interest in drawing action figures, she allowed them to splurge on coloring books and books about comic figures like The Hulk.

In general, each of the three mothers’ espoused philosophies about teaching and learning were tied to their life experiences, their educational backgrounds and their goals for their children. All three mothers enacted their philosophies in different ways, from teaching their children the necessary academic skills and knowledge to be successful in school, to modeling behaviors that can promote a sense of independence and responsibility, to inculcating moral and religious values through the discussion of Bible stories, while sharing the common purpose of helping their children become academically and socially successful. And, contrary to one of its main objectives of teaching parenting skills and influencing the way parents help their children at home, CBET did not have a direct impact on how these mothers raised their children and how they taught them at

home. As illustrated in the previous chapter, the mothers viewed CBET as a strategic resource for attaining their goals of *superación*. Consequently, in these mothers' eyes, CBET was not the primary factor in guiding their parenting decisions, or their choices of content and instructional methods used to teach their children at home.

### **The learning activities that took place at home**

I realize that children could find it intimidating to have their parents bring a teacher home to observe them and ask them questions. Even though I was not their teacher, I am certain that my title carried a formal connotation for both the children and the mothers in this study. To the mothers' credit, they turned my visits into something positive and non-threatening for their children. This allowed me to observe how each mother enacted her notions of *educación*. Because each participating mother had different points of view as to how and what is appropriate to teach their children, the instructional models used to teach their children at home were also different. This section will examine specific learning events that took place during my visits to illustrate the different aspects of their philosophies of education and their teaching methods.

#### **Doing homework with Estela and Susana**

Modeling good study habits and learning patterns was an important part of Estela's teaching. I observed a math homework session where Estela sat down to work with Susana. Estela sat next to Susana and read the questions and assignments with her, in English. On one occasion, Estela encouraged her daughter to do simple addition and

subtraction problems without the manipulatives which were required by the homework packet. Estela said that Susana already knew how to do this type of math mentally, and did not understand why she needed these manipulative aides to help her add or subtract one digit numbers “*porque ella ya los [los problemas] ha hecho así [sin los manipulativos] rapidito*” (“because she has done them [the math problems] like this [without manipulatives] quickly.”) She told Susana “*esto es rápido, ya sabes hacerlo*” (“this is quick, you know how to do it”), to which an excited Susana responded “*ya lo hice, mira*” (“I did it already, look.”)

But besides mental math and agility, Estela also emphasized neatness and presentation and constantly reminded Susana to write *bonitos números* (nice numbers), and to use her eraser when she made a mistake. Also, posture was important and when Estela noticed that her daughter’s forehead was glued to the paper while she was writing, she asked her gently to correct her posture (“*álzate mi amor*” [“sit up straight sweetheart”]). They also counted off the number of pages left to fill out in the homework packet. This interaction between mother and daughter is evidence of Estela’s philosophy of education which calls for, a) developing basic skills for academic growth, such as mental math agility; b) providing children encouraging words of support; c) promoting good habits such as neatness and good posture (which are some of the traditional qualities of a good student); and d) creating teachable moments out of common materials such as counting off the pages of the homework packet.

Estela also took advantage of other resources sent by Susana’s teacher to enhance her daughter’s literacy skills. The teacher sent home an envelope with “power words,” which

consisted of frequently used words written on cards, such as “why” and “what” so that parents could practice them in sentences with their children. Estela did use these cards by lining them up for Susana to recognize and use in a sentence. Consequently, Estela is more than happy to create learning opportunities for her children. But more importantly, she knows how she wants her children to learn, and how to utilize the resources that the school has made available to her daughter. She has taken advantage of the tutoring services provided under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) regulations which entitles parents at Lawrence to have a home tutor visit them once a week to work with their children. Estela knew that the reason why these services were provided at no cost to Lawrence families was because of the school’s low academic performance. She learned of this opportunity through fliers sent home from school, and from one of the monthly meetings that the principal holds with parents called “*café con el director*” (“coffee with the principal”), where she found out the process to obtain a private tutor. Susana has had two tutors so far; the first one was an older man who had been a teacher, the current one was a younger man, with very little teaching experience. Both Estela and Susana found the more experienced man to be a better tutor. In talking about her daughter’s current tutor, Estela expressed that,

*No me gusta cómo le da en comparación al otro maestro... él [tutor anterior] era maestro... le hacía preguntas, le leía libros, le contaba chistes... cuando veía que se estaba cansando le decía ‘vamos a hacer stretch’... a hacer ejercicio (se ríe) y este maestro no (laughs)... se la pasa sentado.*

[I do not like how he tutors her in comparison to the other teacher...he [former tutor] was a teacher...he would ask her questions, read her books, tell her jokes...when he saw that she was getting tired, he would tell her ‘let’s stretch’...to exercise (laughs) and this teacher does not (laughs)...he just sits there (home visit, January 25, 2006).



Estela believes that an effective tutor, like an effective teacher, must be dynamic, experienced and must be able to assess the child's needs and act accordingly in order to keep the learner's interest up, and to motivate the child. She was aware of how her daughter learned best, and agreed with the older tutor's methods because they were similar to hers, and matched her philosophy of balancing fun and games with academic rigor and learning.

The modeling and the teaching was not limited to Susana; it also transferred to her siblings via Susana and her mother. The educational materials were also pertinent to the development of the younger children. In fact, Estela would sometimes examine the puzzles and games being used in CBET's childcare, and if one caught her attention, she would ask the childcare providers' supervisor about its use, and where she could purchase one. Estela wanted to encourage her children to learn and to be immersed in activities that were educational, yet fun. She was not a rigid teacher, even though Susana believed that her school teacher gave her more opportunities to use games and play especially when learning math. Nonetheless, Estela did encourage curiosity and creativity, as well as having her children teach each other. On another occasion I observed Susana taking out some of the construction paper shapes and colors from Jacqueline's Head Start bag and use them to test her little sister's knowledge and pronunciation. Afterwards, both Susana and Jacqueline did the same exercise with Richard. Estela was delighted to see her children "play-teach" each other and participated when needed.

Estela's own knowledge and experience were the greatest influences in her teaching practices at home. And, even if I did not observe explicit CBET activities at home, Estela

believes that CBET has offered her important resources, especially in learning the script to communicate with Susana's teachers during parent-teacher conferences. And though Susana's teacher spoke Spanish and the conference was conducted in Spanish, Estela did admit to translating some of the questions obtained in Margaret's class to find out specific information about her daughter's academic performance and class behavior. But more importantly, by being actively involved in her children's schooling, she has also built her self-confidence which has propelled her to work with other children, both as a tutor at Lawrence, and as a volunteer in Head Start. Above all, Estela's actions clearly oppose common conceptions that Mexican immigrant parents are uninvolved in their children's schools. Estela seeks opportunities to be an active participant in her children's classrooms, and makes it a priority to attend Lawrence Elementary parent meetings and events targeted at families, and to implement Susana's first grade teacher's recommended home literacy activities to enhance her reading skills. Estela's beliefs about how parents should contribute to their children's education are not much different from those promoted by Lawrence Elementary, and in many ways, by the majority of mainstream schools. But this does not mean that Estela has wholeheartedly adopted American mainstream values on parenting. In her ways of teaching her children, it is clear that she infuses her personal notions of *educación* which are clearly rooted in her life experiences as a student and as a mother.

**Establishing mutual goals as mother and child: Marcela and Keith**

Unlike Estela, Marcela did not frequently sit with Keith to help him with his homework. She only did so when he needed her help, because for the most part he would have already completed his assignments at school. But they both helped and supported each other in their schoolwork whenever possible. Marcela's learning style requires her to be in a noise free environment in order to concentrate. She did her CBET homework at night, after completing the household chores so that she could avoid any distractions. If her son was still up, he would translate parts of the assignment that were unclear to her or correct her homework.

Besides CBET homework, Keith would also help translating school and non-school related documents, as well as interpreting for her whenever she needed it outside the home or the school. Keith felt good about translating for his mother, but was not sure if he did a good job. He said that he translates correctly about 85% of the time, and that some of the translations, like reading the instructions for the lotto machine, can be hard for him "*porque soy un niño*" ("because I am kid") (home visit, January 18, 2006). Like the children who played contributing roles as translators and interpreters for their non-English speaking family members featured in Orellana's (2003) study, Keith did not have any qualms about helping his mother with homework, translating for her, watching movies with her, and accompanying her to different places.

Marcela did not stay solely focused on looking for opportunities to advance her son's educational prospects such as enrolling him in an after school reading program, or putting his application together for the charter school. She also focused on finding strategies to

help him accomplish his everyday school tasks with greater ease and effectiveness. For example, her knowledge of computers and ability to do web searches, as well as her inquisitive nature led her to help him find sites where Keith could look up vocabulary words required for his reading journal assignments. On one occasion, I observed Keith working on a vocabulary search based on his reading assignment, and recording the word meanings into his reading journal. He was seated in front of the computer by himself. He showed me the process by which he looked up words online. He would go to a site such as *askjeeves* and type the word. He then read the definitions, and selected the one that made most sense within the context of his reading. When asked how he learned about looking up words on the Internet, he credited his mother. Marcela shared that,

*Como yo a veces ando buscando palabras también... al principio cuando empezó el año la maestra [Margaret] nos dijo que buscáramos lo mismo que está haciendo ahorita [Keith estaba buscando palabras de vocabulario]...en un diccionario [Thesaurus]... y dije 'ay pues yo no tengo y la computadora ha de tener' (se ríe)... tenemos un diccionario ahí pero no siempre vienen las palabras.*

[Because sometimes I am also looking up vocabulary words...at the beginning of the school year the teacher [Margaret] told us to do the same thing that he is doing now [Keith was looking up vocabulary words]...in a dictionary [Thesaurus]...and I said 'ay, well I do not have it, and the computer must have it' (laughs)...we have a dictionary but it does not always have all the words (home visit, January 18, 2006).

Marcela did agree that perhaps looking up words on the Internet was not the best way to learn because one could become *flojo* (lazy), and only justified it when Keith had too much homework and was afraid that he would stay up too late finishing it all. She encouraged him to use a print dictionary if looking up vocabulary words were his only assignment for the day, so that he could keep himself busy rather than rushing the process

so that he could go and play. She also believed that using the dictionary would allow him to enrich his own vocabulary:

*Pienso que porque tiene que buscar... y va a mirar otras palabras... yo me fijo que cuando yo estoy buscando una palabra ahora que estoy yendo a la escuela, y para llegar a las que ando buscando siempre encuentro... otra palabra... y pienso que para él es lo mismo.*

[I think that because he has to look...he will find other words...I notice that when I am looking for a word now that I am going to school, and to get to the words that I am looking for I always find...another word...and I think that for him it is the same] (home visit, January 18, 2006).

But Keith would argue that he actually did learn using the web-based dictionaries because the vocabulary words he had to look up came from his reading assignments. He also explained that looking up words online was not only useful for school assignment purposes, but it was also a way of learning interesting facts, such as the meaning and the origin of one's name. Regardless, his mother would still check his vocabulary search process to make sure that he did not simply pick the first definition, or the shortest one, and that he read them first before copying them down in his journal.

Besides teaching her son how to effectively use the computer, she taught him math from an early age, something that Keith is proud of since he claims that at fourth grade he was the only child in his class who knew how to divide because his mother had taught him to do so a year earlier. And though he is aware that the way his parents learned math in Mexico differs from the way he is being taught in this country, he understands that his parents are there to support him, even if that means that the parents end up arguing over which method should be taught, the Mexican or the American method of solving a long division for instance. Now that Keith is older, Marcela lets him be more independent and trusts that he is learning well. She even jokes with her husband and tells him to stop

arguing with her son regarding how math should be done because “*aquí las matemáticas no son como en tu rancho*” (“here they do not do math like back at your *rancho*”).

Although Marcela views her son as more independent because he is older, and trusts that he does well in school, this does not preclude her checking on his work or making sure that his work reflects good academic skills. As a perfectionist, Marcela always corrected his work by telling him “*escribe bien*” (“write well”) because she claims that he writes “*todo pegado*” (“words too close to each other”), or by asking him “*mira aquí no se entiende... vuélvelo a hacer*” (“one cannot understand this here...do it again.”) Because he did not want to have his mother constantly correct his work and have him do it over again, he stopped showing his work to her. Much to Keith’s surprise, during one of the visits Marcela revealed that she waited until he fell asleep to look into his backpack and check his work.

Contrary to common perceptions that Mexican immigrant parents who do not speak much English are passive and must rely on others to access important information, it is clear from Marcela’s experiences and actions that this is not the case. She takes the initiative to learn about the resources that can benefit her child’s academic future, and acts on her findings to make sure that her child is not denied access to such resources. Besides modeling important behaviors about time management, academic skills and personal responsibility, she is also teaching her son to develop the knowledge, the skills and the drive to pursue a college path in order to attain upward mobility. Her aspirations for her son are not too different from middle class mainstream American families, but like Estela, Marcela takes advantage of what the system can offer her son, without

becoming “Americanized,” that is, without shedding her personal notions of *educación*, and her beliefs about language, culture and identity.

### **Modeling good behaviors: Rafaela and her children**

Teaching her children was also an important aspect of Rafaela’s role as a mother. Like Estela and Marcela, Rafaela valued CBET’s focus on the importance of reading and spending time with their children. And like Estela and Marcela, Rafaela did not directly use the home literacy skills taught in CBET to teach her children. Rather, she tapped into her personal experiences as a student in Mexico to build her teaching methods and rationale. Because of this lasting impression, her teaching methods were very similar to how she remembers learning. She taught her children basic math operations using the algorithms that she learned in school. Tony appreciated having learned her mother’s method and favored it over his teacher’s because he considers it “easier” and

Faster than in here in the United States...This first grader [who came from Mexico] already knew...and I was in third grade, and this first grader already knew how to write in cursive...but I didn’t...that’s why I [sic] rather pay attention to my mom...in Mexico...they teach you faster (home visit, January 24, 2006).

And, even though his younger brother Diego preferred his teacher’s ways of teaching math, Diego did appreciate his mother helping him memorize passages from a religious book they use in their Bible study group, because they got prizes for memorizing them correctly. She also bought a small white board to teach her children Spanish. She wanted them to learn to write it, read it and speak it fluently. The board used to hang prominently on a wall but “*después como ya no le hicieron mucho caso*” (“later, because they did not

pay much attention to it'), she put it away. When younger, the boys showed interest in learning Spanish, but as they grew older they lost interest, much to Rafaela's chagrin and bewilderment. But she believes that her oldest Tony, still knows Spanish and to prove it, on one occasion, she wrote "*El caballo corre por el campo*" ("The horse runs on the field") on the board. She asked Tony to read and translate the sentence; he did well, much to the delight of his mother. Despite this small demonstration of Spanish language knowledge, Rafaela reminisced about the time when a five year old Tony was learning Spanish rather quickly because "*le estaba poniendo muchas ganas*" ("he was putting a lot of effort.") Besides having him translate words from Spanish to English and vice versa, Rafaela would also use other teaching methods to make the learning more interactive and interesting:

*Le recorté muchas figuras de libros que agarré...pues ya abajo le ponía el nombre en español... y aprendió. Y me acuerdo que le enseñé por sílabas... le decía... 'la, le, li, lo, lu, pa, pe, pi, po, pu' así... y después decía... 'pa, palomà me acuerdo... 'pa-lo-ma...o-so' así por sílabas... era más fácil para él y así empecé...y llenaba hojas. Decía 'sa, se, si, so, su, pa, pe, pi, po' y así...sí iba aprendiendo bien.*

[I cut out several pictures from books that I got...and then below I would write the name of the picture in Spanish...and he learned. And I remember that I taught him by syllables...I would tell him 'la, le, li, lo, lu, pa, pe, pi, po, pu' like that...and then I would tell him... 'pa, paloma [dove]' I remember... 'pa-lo-ma...o-so [bear]' like that using syllables...it was easier for him and that is how I started...and I filled out pages. I would say 'sa, se, si, so, su, pa, pe, pi, po' and like that...he was learning well] (home visit, November 29, 2006).

Rafaela used school-like traditional and non-traditional methods to teach her oldest son Spanish, applying the basics about language learning and teaching from her schooling years in Mexico such as drills and repetition, and more creative methods such as visuals to build vocabulary. Ironically, because her youngest son, Diego, was in Special



Education and often needed to be placed in a school that could appropriately serve his learning needs, he spent his first years in an elementary school that offered a bilingual program. She was happy to see him learn Spanish but had heard from others that he “*se va a confundir*” (“he will get confused”) and that it was “*mejor que aprenda en inglés*” (“it would be best if he learned in English.”) She regrets having pulled him out of the school because she believes that learning Spanish,

*No los confunde porque son muy inteligentes los niños ... yo me hubiera quedado en esa escuela a él le gustaba mucho... y la maestra que le tocó muy buena maestra lo quería mucho...y estaba aprendiendo bien el español... Y tenía muy buenos modos para enseñárselo porque... hazle cuenta que si decía ‘cepillo’ le decían el sonido de la primera letra, pero todo el día andaba pronunciando la primera letra... y haciendo el sonido.*  
 [Does not confuse them because children are very intelligent...I would have stayed at that school, he liked it very much...and the teacher that he had was a good teacher who loved him a lot...and he was learning Spanish well...And she had good ways of teaching him Spanish because...for example if he learned to say ‘cepillo’ [brush], he would learn the sound of the first letter, but the entire day he would pronounce the first letter...and make the sound (home visit, November 29, 2005).

Rafaela is aware that she missed out on the opportunity to help Diego child grow up bilingual and biliterate, and with some sadness she told me that now he rarely speaks Spanish to her, or refuses to admit that he does. But she is happy with Lawrence because Diego’s teachers care about him and because he has been able to make friends easily in this new setting.

Because Tony was more independent, he did his homework in his room, on his own. While Tony would show me the different books he was reading for school, and would tell me all about his school assignments, his younger brother Diego showed little interest in schoolwork. Diego required more one on one help from his mother. One night, I observed

mother and child working together on a word search for his homework packet. Diego and his mother were seating in the couch next to each other. She first read the instructions and explained the assignment to him. Even before reading the instructions, Diego became frustrated, and as his mother was showing him what he needed to do, he started crying and his speech became unintelligible. He kept yelling at her in an accusatory tone claiming that she never helped him with his homework, but his mother's response to his behavior was calm and tender. Rather than becoming upset at his outburst, Rafaela proceeded to show him by example and explained how she was able to find one of the words in the word search. She kept reassuring him by telling him "*es bien fácil esto*" ("this is really easy"), and "*tú ya sabes lo que tienes que hacer...no está batalloso ... tienes que pensar...ya te di la estrategia*" ("you know what to do...it is not hard...you have to think...I already gave you the strategy.") Despite her words, Diego kept crying and yelling out of frustration. He quieted down for a bit and attempted to do one exercise on his own. But for the most part, the one on one session became a battle between Rafaela and her son. Rafaela always remained calm, patient and never raised her voice nor scolded him for his behavior. She knew that Diego had learning problems, but she was also a proud mother who always found the best in each of her children, and made sure they were aware of such feelings of pride. Through her teaching and care, she offered him comfort, and taught him academic skills, while encouraging him to do his best. And, like the Dominican families of children with learning disabilities studied by Rodríguez (2005), Rafaela provided all her children with opportunities to build up their language and literacy skills in a variety of ways, regardless of their developmental levels

and school placement. The fact that she was not a forceful disciplinarian, but rather subdued and patient, matched what she values, that is getting along with others and respecting others for who they are, while encouraging them to do their best (home visit, November 29, 2005).

Rafaela's teachings were not limited to academic skills or school type work. She was very religious and believed that the stories in the Bible, books and texts that she bought or obtained from her church were true, and taught important human values. These teachings were explicit, such as having the children review and evaluate Bible stories for their church's Bible group. But they were also more indirect and embedded in multimodal literacy practices. Because of her artistic inclinations, Rafaela made a birthday card out of construction paper for her oldest son, Tony. She glued a large picture of her son on the cover and wrote a dedication, which she called a *pensamiento* (a thought). Also, when buying books for her children, she would often write dedications inside the books where she expressed her love for her children. She read this dedication on one of my visits:

*A Diego de parte de tu mamá, te amo, tú eres un regalo de Dios. El día que tú naciste no fue un error, fue porque Dios quiso que vinieras, que vinieras a dar alegría con tu sonrisa, para Dios eres muy especial. Dieguito nunca te apartes de los caminos de Dios. Te deseo lo mejor para tu vida. Que Dios te bendiga todos los días de tu vida.*  
 [To Diego from your mother, I love you, you are a gift from God. The day you were born, it was not a mistake, God wanted you to come into this world, to come to give us happiness with your smile, for God you are someone very special. Dieguito, never sway away from the paths of God. I wish you all the best in your life. God bless everyday of your life] (home visit, January 24, 2006).

The children knew that their mother wrote dedications on their books, and were happy that she did. They knew that they were loved by their mother, and that family was important to her. This is why Tony enjoyed accompanying his mother when she went out to run errands; he knew that she considered her children her companions and friends (home visit, November 29, 2005).

In addition, Rafaela was an artist and her passion for drawing, painting and making crafts transferred to her children, in whom she instilled a love for drawing and painting, even at Rafaelita's early age:

*Cuando me pongo a colorear con ellos [los niños], ella [Rafaelita]...también quiere colorear... ya que esté más grandecita se me hace que... a ella le va a gustar colorear, pintar... A mí me gusta pintar con pincel, con lo que sea pintura, crayola... me gusta pintar entonces a él [Tony] le gusta pintar, a él le gusta lo que yo hago...El [Tony] primero empezó a pintar mucho y ahora Diego está empezando también a hacer pinturas...Tony le está ayudando a que él aprenda [Diego] porque Diego quiere hacer lo que él hace; entonces Tony le ayuda a que haga Spiderman ...Diego va a aprender todo lo que Tony haga... pasan haciendo dibujos.*

[When I color with them [the boys], she [Rafaelita]...also wants to color...when she is older I believe...that she will like to color, to paint...I like to paint with a brush, with whatever, paint, crayola...I like to paint so he [Tony] likes to paint, he likes to do what I do...He [Tony] first started painting a lot and now Diego is starting to make paintings as well...Tony is helping him learn because Diego wants to do what he does; then Tony helps him draw Spiderman...Diego is going to learn everything that Tony does...they spend their time drawing] (home visit, November 29, 2005).

The children inherited their love for art from Rafaela, and the younger children were learning to model the older children. Her husband insisted that she should pursue her passion and take art lessons, especially because before Rafaelita was born she would draw and paint profusely, mostly animals and landscapes. Her children not only enjoyed

watching her work, but also participated in making arts and crafts together as family, and were proud of the paintings she displayed on the walls of the apartment.

Of the three mothers, Rafaela has the least number of years of formal schooling, and she received the lowest scores in CBET's CASAS English tests. On the surface, it would be easy to misjudge her as not having the necessary skills to teach or help her children at home. But her actions and philosophies of *educación* disconfirm general assumptions about low income Mexican immigrant mothers with little educational experience, which paint these mothers as incapable of providing appropriate literacy and learning support to their children at home. Rafaela has proven that she is as resourceful as any other mainstream mother in finding ways to teach her children, in learning what they need to succeed in school, and in providing support and love. She is also genuinely interested and involved in their formal and informal schooling, which included arts and crafts, moral and religious values, and the Spanish language. Like Estela and Marcela, Rafaela is deeply concerned about her children's schooling, their future, and the maintenance of their linguistic and cultural identities.

### **Summary**

During the home visits, the children showed me their books, their arts and crafts, their homework assignments, and told me about how and what they learn at home, demonstrating that they were socialized to the values of mainstream education. They knew exactly what a teacher would want to see and immediately directed my attention to their educational games, their books, etc. This was more evident with Estela's oldest

child, Susana, with Marcela's son, Keith, and with Rafaela's oldest son, Tony. Estela's child clearly knew what a teacher would think would be evidence of a "smart girl," which in her mind was using educational books and toys such as her LeapPad series for both fun and learning. Keith knew that his planner and his planning in general were essential for being a successful student. Tony equated being "faster" at doing math or at copying down a page, as being smarter. But the three mothers also viewed having a teacher in their home as advantageous. They would ask me for advice about teaching and learning, e.g. when sharing her opinion of Susana's new tutor, Estela asked me how best to approach him to help him improve his practice; Rafaela wanted my advice to help Tony get rid of what she considered a bad habit, playing with his hands; Marcela asked me for advice on the best middle schools in the city for Keith, and what else she could do to support him on his path to college.

For all three mothers, education is very important and their personal inquiries indicate their concern for their children's well being, their *comportamiento* (behavior) and their future. As with the Mexican parents in Valdés' (1996) study, my case study mothers' notions of education were not limited to general American mainstream values which equate academic performance and achievement with being well educated, and with having exceptional talents. Rather, the mothers' notions span multiple dimensions beyond the definition of education within a formal school setting.

Above all, the mothers were clear about what they wanted for their children and how they wanted them to achieve those goals. Estela believes that her children need to have strong basic academic skills in reading, math, science, and geography. But she also

considers it important that children learn through games, arts and crafts, and through interactions with their parents and their siblings, in order to develop good habits and a lifelong interest in learning. For Marcela, planning for the future and her son's college education were crucial in how she raised her son, and in how she viewed her teaching. At ten years old, Keith was already managing a demanding schedule, which included time with the family, for school, for homework, and for fun. He followed his mother's model, and was aware of her points of view and the reasons behind her actions. In contrast, Rafaela's education was truncated in such a severe way, that her nostalgia about school and her lost opportunities made her stress formal and informal schooling because, in her view, they develop a well rounded, well respected, good natured child.

### **Upholding their mother's language**

Spanish language maintenance was another important aspect of the mothers' teaching philosophies. All three mothers said they wanted their children to maintain Spanish, and to be able to speak it and write it well so that they could communicate with their families, strengthen their ties to their parents' Mexican culture and traditions, and use their knowledge of a second language for the purpose of academic and socioeconomic advancement. It is ironic then that they are students in a program created by a Proposition that virtually eliminated bilingual education in California, thereby eliminating opportunities for families such as these to provide academic support to their children in their native language. By choosing English over Spanish at home when communicating with their parents, Estela's children are not on the path to become

bilingual and biliterate as their mother wishes. And, because they do not have the primary language support at Lawrence, they are in danger of not acquiring Spanish properly or losing it all together. This language attrition is accelerated by Proposition 227, and of the views and practices of those who consider primary language education as un-American and damaging to a child's English language development. This finding is corroborated by Ana Celia Zentella's (1997) work with New York Puerto Rican families where "Given the symbolic domination of English in general and the lack of power and status of PRS [Puerto Rican Spanish] in particular, language attrition in *el bloque* [the community studied in this book] was predictable" (p. 212). Well meaning parents like Estela were told of the wrongs of bilingual education and that it affected children's general school progress negatively:

*Dijeron que los niños cuando entraban a otro nivel académico... el sexto grado...estaban un poquito atrasados porque a partir del sexto ya era puro inglés y pues aquí se dedicaban a las dos lenguas y pues no ponen atención a la una ni atención a la otra.*

[They said that when children entered another academic level...sixth grade...they were a bit behind because starting in sixth grade they only taught in English, and here they would teach in two languages and they would not pay attention to neither one] (home visit, November 16, 2005).

Wanting what is best for their children, parents like Estela accepted the arguments against bilingual education, and agreed that her children could learn Spanish "*más adelante...porque español pues lo aprende aquí en la casa*" ("later on...because she can learn Spanish here at home" (home visit, November 16, 2005). The mothers may accept such arguments, but they may not be aware of the possible loss of primary language that their children can experience without academic support at school. This does not mean that these mothers do not make conscious efforts to promote Spanish at home. Rafaela for



example shared her efforts to teach Spanish to her children from an early age, and her regret for having pulled her youngest son out of a bilingual program in a different school (home visit, November 29, 2005). Likewise, Marcela and Keith were both conscious of how important Spanish was for their family, and both were unhappy with his fifth grade teacher's rule to punish the class every time Spanish was spoken in the classroom. That teacher believed that using Spanish in the classroom could be "confusing" and lead children to interchange Spanish for English words when writing. Punishments could be as extreme as taking away recess from the children. Keith did not understand why the children were not allowed to speak their native language, when like him, they had been speaking it since they were small and that was an integral part of their lives. Marcela agreed with her son and went as far as explaining that,

*A lo mejor ella [la maestra] no entiende mucho [español], que le disgusta a ella que hablen ellos español... pero ellos por su naturaleza, porque en la casa hablan español...se les va a salir hablar algún español.*  
 [Perhaps she [the teacher] does not understand much [Spanish], so she gets upset when they speak Spanish...but they because of their nature, because at home they speak Spanish...some Spanish is going to come out when they are speaking] (home visit, December 14, 2005).

Marcela saw Spanish as part of the fabric of her family, her culture, her tradition, and this was no different for the other mothers, who like Marcela, also wanted to maintain this "natural" part of their children's lives, namely, their mother language. The feelings of all three mothers were also expressed by the Mexican parents in Orellana, Ek and Hernández' (1999) study. They too explained that English is the language of access to U.S. mainstream resources, but that Spanish is the language that enables their children to maintain cultural ties to their parents and their homeland.

Regardless of the controversial origins of CBET, for these mothers, CBET is nevertheless a supplementary resource, a source of information about U.S. schooling, parent involvement opportunities, how to talk to teachers and other school personnel, and learning about certain educational sources for enriching their children's literacy skills. Based on my conversations with the mothers, and watching them interact with their children, it became evident to me that CBET is not the primary influence on how parents teach their children at home. In general, CBET was not mentioned unless I elicited specific information about the program or the instructor. On the contrary, their ways of working with their children and of educating them are based on their personal philosophies, aspirations, personal experience with schooling practices as students in Mexico, their children's personal and educational needs and learning styles, and the age and developmental level of their children. The mothers' espoused philosophies of education, their teaching methods and practices at home, and their love for their children counter the belief system of some, who essentialize Latino parents, and judge them as uncaring, incapable and unaware of how to help their children develop appropriate academic skills to successfully navigate in mainstream classrooms. Even well meaning teachers who welcome Mexican parents into their classrooms as volunteer readers or helpers, may not fully recognize that parents such as Estela, Marcela and Rafaela instill a wealth of meaningful values and skills in their children, which could be integrated in the fabric of a classroom to enrich the learning experiences of the children, and to provide vehicles for all students to be successful. As Valdés (1996) points out:

Schools expect a 'standard' family, a family whose 'blueprints for living' are based on particular notions of achievement. They have little understanding about other ways of looking at the world and about other definitions of success...In order to understand how school failure comes to be constructed in the United States for and by newly arrived groups, one must have an understanding of the worlds from which these individuals come (p. 5).

Therefore, it becomes easier to blame Mexican parents for their children's perceived failures, than to build strong bridges between schools and homes by taking the time to deeply examine the mismatch between parental and school ideologies, as well as to problematize society's expectations and stereotypes of Mexican immigrants and their families. But this calls for a radical change in the philosophies and actions of mainstream, dominant groups with regards to the education and the educational practices of Mexican immigrant families. As Thomas (2001) explains:

From a sociocultural perspective, traditional education systems are inadequate to bridge the social gulf that exists in effective collaboration with families. Changes in school cultures are needed to address inequalities in relationships between school and home (p. 176).

All eleven chapters of Zentella's (2005) *Building on strength: Language and literacy in Latino families and communities*, point out, educators still blame Latino parents when their children perform poorly in school, by claiming that Latino parents are not interested in educating their children. These educators have clearly not met Estela, Marcela, and Rafaela, whose beliefs and actions as teachers and mothers contradict the notion that Mexican parents are all the same, that they teach their children one way, and that they are not sure how to help their children at home because of language, socioeconomic and cultural differences. The findings presented in this chapter support previous studies of Mexican parents and their learning practices at home (González, 2001; Schecter and

Bayley, 2002). All three mothers deeply care about raising children who are *bien educados* and bilingual, and about offering them a diversity of tools, the support, and the lessons to help them succeed at meeting the demands of their mainstream schools.

## Chapter 5: Superación por amor a sus hijos

CBET attracts a unique population of students who are self-motivated, have a set of specific goals for themselves and their children, and are able to accommodate six hours per week (or more, in Rafaela's case) in their schedules to attend English classes. These students bring important capital from their native countries such as a formal education that may go as high as university level training, and a range of work and life experiences. In other words, although they are not wealthy, these students do not come to the class empty handed. They are in the class because they want to attain their personal aspirations of *superación* ("personal advancement"), to help their children achieve academically, and to become contributing members to this society, primarily "*por amor a sus hijos*" ("because of their love for their children"). Learning English is a vehicle through which these students believe they can achieve their goals, and CBET enables them not only to learn language skills, but also to learn about the "American way" of life --including raising children, using English to carry out everyday tasks outside the home and school, and discovering bits and pieces of U.S. history and culture. With the support of their husbands, and in particular of their children who are proud that their mothers go to school with them to learn English, the CBET students are making a great effort to improve their families' lives in ways that are keeping with the nation's most cherished hopes for its hard working immigrants.

The CBET program, particularly its staff, facilitates and enhances their efforts in many ways, but there are other ways in which students, instructors, and administrators might benefit from rethinking the program from the perspective of critical pedagogy.

Adult immigrant students experience many barriers such as “being unable to find work, dealing with discrimination on the job, raising children in a new country, maintaining communication with their families at home, and more” (Auerbach, 1996, p. xv).

Therefore, regardless of how an adult ESL program was conceived, it “should enable participants to understand the social nature of these problems...” (Auerbach, 1996, p. xv).

As Street (1995) believes, a critical approach to teaching and learning is possible regardless of the ESL or literacy level of the students. Adult educators such as Auerbach (1996), Ferguson (1998), and Purcell-Gates and Waterman (2000) have demonstrated that it is possible to integrate the teaching of the fundamental elements of language and functional skills with socially, politically and culturally meaningful content that can encourage “critical reflection...and incorporates competencies as a means for taking action” (Auerbach, 1986, p. 426). For example, a CBET unit could be modeled after Ferguson’s (1998) example of using a critical approach to teaching her students to become actively engaged in democratic processes. As a result of that approach, among other outcomes, Ferguson’s students helped save their ESL program from funding cuts. I understand the reluctance of the CBET instructor to promote her agenda, but make an exploration with the students with regards to what aspects of the program they appreciate and find valuable might prove useful to the instructor and meaningful to the students, and could potentially provide fuel for CBET to advocate for itself to stay alive. In the case of Lawrence’s CBET program, this should be possible because of its students’ strong commitment to the goals of the program.

CBET students are a self-selected group of parents who are willing and able to commit to the many requirements of the program, which include tutoring children in a pre or kindergarten classroom, taking tests (e.g. CASAS, adult ESL/Civics), doing homework assignments, and attending class twice a week. Because of their commitment, the mothers in this study are the perfect target audience for CBET, given the program's interest in promoting good parenting and citizenship. Despite the case study mothers' alignment with CBET's noble goals, the program's objectives are not what kept the participants motivated. As illustrated in their stories, the mothers took what they needed from CBET and applied it to their lives according to their belief systems, their goals, and their life experiences. All three mothers wanted to improve their English language skills (oral, written, reading and writing); to use English functionally in scenarios that they encountered in their daily lives such as going to the store or the doctor, or talking to their children's teachers; and to be able to help their children with schoolwork that was all in English. They also had other reasons for being in an adult ESL program, only some of which were met. Estela and Marcela wanted to learn about opportunities to further their own education, and Rafaela and Estela wanted venues to talk about real life issues that related to them as women, immigrants, and mothers.

As documented in the previous chapters, the three mothers were actively involved in taking control of their lives, and in taking advantage of the resources that CBET could offer them. There was also a sense of self-empowerment among the three women because they were clearly aware that they were taking the appropriate steps to achieve their personal goals and their goals for their children. They were, in fact, effective problem

solvers who actively sought out the means to ensure their family's success in mainstream society. Therefore, they took advantage of the resources that CBET offered them for diverse ends, e.g., to learn how to function in an English speaking environment, to interact with their children's schools and teachers, to get out of their homes and socialize with other women, to seek opportunities for social mobility, and, in the absence of bilingual academic support for their children, to learn English to help their children with homework. Faced with economic, linguistic, social, educational, and political obstacles, they acted vigorously and optimistically to overcome them.

All three mothers agreed that it was important to learn parenting and literacy skills, but they did not find that the skills presented by CBET were applicable or relevant to their immediate lives because they had already established their own family literacy and learning practices prior to enrolling in CBET, and because they had their own belief systems about parenting and raising children. They viewed tutoring, for example, primarily as a CBET requirement, albeit one which could improve their knowledge of letter sounds and earn them recognition from their teacher, as well as a tangible reward. Marcela recalled that, "*la maestra [Margaret] dijo que cuando van tres veces [a ser tutoras] les regala el alfabeto [el juego de cartas del alfabeto] a las mamás*" ("the teacher [Margaret] said that when we go three times [to tutor] the mothers can earn the alphabet [the alphabet card set].") Another CBET student who went to tutor with Marcela confided that she was going because "*me lo quiero ganar [el juego de cartas del alfabeto]... para enseñarle a mi hija*" ("I want to win it [the alphabet card set]...to teach my daughter") (personal interview, January 19, 2006). For these mothers, learning about



home literacy and learning practices and tutoring other children are most valued when they matched their personal needs and beliefs. The teaching styles, pedagogical methods, and instructional content that Estela, Marcela and Rafaela employed at home were rooted in their educational experiences, their personal goals for their children, and their notion of *educación*, corroborating Goldenberg and Gallimore's (1995) and Reese et al's (1995) findings about the educational belief systems of Mexican immigrant parents. All three mothers viewed *educación* as both the teaching of cultural and moral values and the teaching of academic skills.

I did not see the mothers use any of CBET's explicit teachings of home literacy skills (e.g. regarding how to read a book to a child, during my home visits), nor did they claim to have adopted any when they were interviewed. But this does not mean that the mothers did not employ their own strategies to promote reading and writing with their children. Rafaela writes dedications on the children's books that she purchases, and then reads what she has written to her children. Estela encourages all in her family to use the calendar on the refrigerator to write down upcoming events or appointments, as well as school literacy events such as the *Viernes Familiar*. Marcela teaches her son strategies for using the web for educational purposes, such as finding and using effective search pages to find new vocabulary word meanings, and learning to evaluate search results thoroughly so that searching is not a mindless experience, but an educational one. Nevertheless, all agreed with CBET's emphasis on promoting learning and literacy at home, and they believe in helping their children with homework and in staying connected and involved with their children's teachers and schools. However, they had their own

ways of teaching and helping their children, as well as their own ideologies as to what they needed to learn, which were not based on what they learned in CBET, but rather on what they believed children should know. Estela wanted her children to be proficient in all core subjects and adopt a culture of learning that goes beyond school. Marcela wanted her child to be academically, culturally and socially prepared to face the challenges of the upper grades, and to put himself on the road to college. Rafaela wanted her children to grow up *bien educados*, with strong traditional Mexican cultural values and Christian religious beliefs to guide their lives. As Goldenberg and Gallimore's (1995) and Reese et al.'s (1995) would argue, attention to contrasting cultural notions of education and *educación* would help educators appreciate the ways in which parental teaching strategies are in accordance with or differ from the school's expectations, and help parents understand how they might expand and/or vary their strategies at home.

CBET clearly performs a valuable service for non-mainstream communities who want to learn the dominant language for personal advancement. But it also sends a strong message about the power of English as a vehicle to earn them access to mainstream American society, and to their children's schools, teachers and curriculum. The mothers in this study recognize the power of the dominant language and specifically, see pronunciation as a crucial element of their learning, not only because it is useful for communication and clarity, but also because they hope it can help reduce stigmas, stereotypes and assumptions attached to immigrants' accented English, as explained by Wolfram et al. (1999). But as they are learning that English is the language of access via explicit lessons that tell them how English is used in a variety of settings including

school, restaurants and banks, this CBET program also teaches them implicitly that there is room for their native language. This is the positive message communicated by Margaret's free use of Spanish to explain or translate a concept or a word, and the fact that students are "allowed" to speak Spanish to each other and to Margaret, without fear of reprimand. Furthermore, by incorporating parenting skills and home literacy education, CBET adds a special dimension to adult second language acquisition. They are taught how to be good parents in an American way; that is by being responsible for reporting their children's absences, participating in parent-conferences, following established rules of communication with teachers and school staff such as introducing oneself and saying "Thank you." Also, they learn the importance of their own attendance and commitment to school as a way to model behaviors for their children, because they are rewarded with attendance certificates at the end of the semester, are expected to take tests, and are recognized for their progress. But these mothers already had similar patterns of behavior established at home, which is why they were able to adapt so easily to CBET's program.

It is difficult to ignore the fact that CBET was born out of an effort to block the bilingual education of children who speak languages other than English at home, in direct opposition to one of the deeply held values of Mexican and other Latina mothers. The historical roots of the program and its push towards assimilation via the teachings of English and American mainstream schooling practices should not be denied, or demonized. The women in this study were unaware of the origins of CBET, and it was never a subject of discussion in class or during interviews, but they were aware that

bilingual education programs had been eliminated at Lawrence. They had been told that bilingual education could only confuse their children and delay their English language development, yet they were solidly committed to raising their children bilingually and biculturally.

The irony is that in order to learn the English they need to help their children, they are participating in a program born of legislation that delivered a death blow to their children's formal bilingual development. Furthermore, as enthusiastic as they are in helping their children with schoolwork, these women cannot always help them because the curricular materials are all in English. They are deprived of playing a key role in the supervision of their children's academic development. The reduction of bilingual classes which would support their children's primary language and which built upon it to enhance their grasp of English also limits how much parents can be involved in their children's classrooms, schools, and homework because of language differences. This reduction demonstrates the shortsightedness of proponents of Proposition 227 who touted the legislation as "for the children," but made it almost impossible for children to be taught in their native language, even when most of the day was devoted to teaching them in English. Nor is Proposition 227's outreach to parents really "for the parents," because it seems to assume that immigrant parents lack the skills, resources, knowledge or commitment to teach their children in ways that promote literacy and learning practices at home. As this research and many recent studies of Latino families prove, Latino immigrants work with their children at home, actively participate in their children's schooling despite their limited English knowledge, and instill educational practices that

promote achievement in school (Goldenberg and Gallimore, 1995; González, 2001; Reese et al's, 1995; Schechter & Bayley, 2002; Valdés, 1996; Zentella, 2005).

The mothers who are at the core of this research believe in education and in the value of Spanish as an academic, cultural, and social asset. But, inadvertently, they may be participating in the weakening of the role that Spanish language skills should play in the education of their children. For example Estela is puzzled by the first grade teacher's assessment of her daughter's reading skills, when she has been doing everything the teacher suggests-- even before the teacher suggested it-- to help Susana improve. But the school is not tapping into Susana's bilingual skills and her interest in science and other topics which would encourage her to read more and more widely. If the whole child were taught instead of just the English skills, educators would be able to take advantage of Susana's Spanish skills and translate them into more advanced English reading skills. Instead, speaking to the children in English, the language of power in the classroom, becomes the most effective way of disciplining or asking them to respond to parental commands. In Estela's home, Susana and the other children are beginning to shift from Spanish to English. Marcela and Rafaela are openly perplexed about language debates, and disagree with the idea that children become confused when they use or learn Spanish. But as much as Marcela wants for Keith to maintain his primary language, she is also pushing for him to become more mainstream, and to learn to be a player in the system so that he can be college-bound once he is in middle school. It is uncertain what this might mean for Keith in the future, perhaps both mother and son will learn to view his Spanish skills as an asset when it comes to fulfilling college requirements, or perhaps the

maintenance of Spanish will not be viewed as important as the enhancement of his English skills for the purpose of A.P. coursework participation and college applications. Rafaela also wishes to teach her children Spanish, but feels almost powerless in the face of the school system that does not have Spanish language support for her special needs child Diego, so she must accept whatever resources the Special Education program can offer her child.

Despite the language, culture, and socialization barriers they face, I admire the three mothers in this study for their courage, their passion for life, the personal sacrifices they have made to come to this country, to raise their children in a foreign land, and for the efforts they make on a daily basis to help their children succeed. It is a testament to agency that these women seek and want to take advantage of opportunities to help their children, and to fulfill their goals of *superación*. Margaret, the instructor, as well should be praised for her hard work, her dedication, her instructional delivery and her honest commitment to helping her adult ESL students learn English and be able to fully participate in American mainstream society. It is clear from her interviews and her teachings, that she is aware of the tensions between the political divisive origins of the CBET program, her beliefs about the roles and responsibilities of a socially conscious adult ESL teacher, and her personal goals for her students. Remarkably, Margaret is also a problem solver who took advantage of the funds available to her institution, regardless of their controversial source, to develop a program to help adult immigrants learn English, build community, help their children at home, and seek new opportunities for personal advancement, while satisfying state requirements for CASAS testing and

tutoring in order to continue receiving program funding. Above all, Margaret truly cares for each one of her students, and works hard to ensure that all students are welcomed and at ease. She is a highly experienced and well respected ESL teacher, who designs her lessons thoroughly, and builds her students' needs and goals into her curriculum.

Overall, the three mothers appreciated the CBET classroom because it made them feel "*más seguros*" (more self assured) to speak when they were outside of a safe environment like their home. They could go to the store and exchange clothes, order at Starbucks, and when reading to their children, understand the text and pronounce the words correctly. Learning English also inspired them to think about furthering their education (Estela and Marcela), and eventually finding a job (Rafaela).

### **Recommendations**

Without doubt, CBET provides immigrants with much appreciated opportunities to learn English in a setting that welcomes students of all backgrounds, while offering convenient schedules and childcare. Students are improving their English skills and learning how to comply with school attendance requirements, and how to participate in parent-teacher conferences. Everyone agreed enthusiastically that Margaret really made a difference in their lives. She provided them with the support, respect, and a dynamic classroom where students were constantly active, and where the instructor was constantly engaged with the students. My observations and conversations with the instructor and the mothers indicate that CBET would be even more successful if the instruction and curriculum could be adapted to the personal goals and social needs of the students. The

following recommendations, which are offered in the same spirit of support and collaboration that CBET's instructor and students extended to me, emerged from the classroom observations and the instructor and case study interviews:

1. Continue, and advertise widely, the offer of free childcare with an educational component. Parents appreciate CBET's childcare not just because it allows them to study, but also because children develop their learning skills and can socialize with others. The precarious nature of many of these programs does not always allow the luxury of a separate room for childcare, but when the children are not in the same room as their parents, the parents are less distracted from their studies and children have room to play, sing, and express themselves without feeling restricted. Considerate and well supervised childcare providers are an essential part of CBET, and allow parents to feel that they are not sacrificing their children's development while they pursue their own.
2. Continue and reinforce the program's flexible and dynamic nature, which acknowledges that adult students have demands on their lives besides their English class, and where all students are made to feel welcome from their first day of arrival. Respect for the centrality of Spanish in the students' lives, as evidenced in the free and uncensored use of the language by staff and students, is a crucial element of this welcoming atmosphere. It also makes an important statement about the fact that a serious approach to learning English does not require eliminating the students' native language. Moreover, in classes with a high proportion of Latino immigrants, materials that incorporate the contrastive



analysis of lexical, phonological, and grammatical features of Spanish and English would accelerate the learning of English, even if they were only used in small group lessons. By incorporating Spanish, CBET can provide more “challenging content,” and a more extensive set of “strategies for using learner’s native language to support their children’s development” (Graham, 2000, p. 43).

3. In order to more effectively challenge advanced students and lessen beginners’ anxieties about language learning, grouping by levels should be attempted for some part(s) of the class. Problems with space, funds, and schedules understandably force CBET to offer a multilevel class, and instructors like Margaret are to be commended for meeting the challenges so admirably. Whole class lessons need not be discarded entirely, especially since they contribute to the sense of community. But students can also learn in small groups that would further develop the skills of the advanced students, by providing them with opportunities to discuss topics in greater depth and/or serve as peer tutors, and by encouraging beginning level students to speak more frequently and freely among themselves.
4. Students are interested in moving beyond basic and functional English skills and in favor of tackling larger issues, such as those that affected their lives as immigrant women and mothers. Historical and political issues intrigued these women, which including learning more about the histories of the African students that arrived, and about the civil rights movement in the U.S. Newspaper and magazine articles, and television programs about contemporary topics could spark

student interest in reading and writing. This community, in particular, has a major newspaper which publishes a Spanish news section every Saturday that includes articles in English. There are also other small scale Spanish language newspapers throughout the city which report on issues relevant to the Latino immigrant community. There are at least two major Spanish language television channels and radio stations that could be used as meaningful resources to complement discussions of various topics.

5. A more personalized program that took into account the students' goals for themselves and their children would ensure greater student progress and garner widespread support. A financially strapped program cannot be expected to tailor a curriculum and methods for changing groups of students, but personal interviews or surveys of the students can serve as the basis for some individualized learning. For example, for students who are looking for jobs, CBET can help them learn job-related vocabulary, job search skills, and job interview tactics. Similarly, by learning about the parents' teaching practices at home, the program could build on such knowledge to provide parents with different strategies and activities relevant to the age, interests, and developmental levels of specific children. Additionally, parents are interested in reading and hearing about resources for their children, including camps or scholarship opportunities that expand educational experiences beyond the school setting. For example, one of the research aquariums attached to a local major university offers scholarships for all its summer programs, and

parents would benefit from receiving help with calling for the application and filling it out.

6. Tutoring sessions are fairly short, but students face many challenges during that brief period of time. During a 30 minute slot, adult students have to assess the child's learning needs, utilize a particular teaching strategy, and assess the child's understanding. Children have different learning needs, and not all can fit the model advocated by CBET's tutorial training. Adult students, especially those without children or without any prior experience working with children, need specific training in tutoring techniques, differentiating instructional practices, and assessing children's learning needs and outcomes. This can help lessen anxiety levels when adult students are faced with a child who does not understand, or is unable to do the activity as planned in the CBET class.
7. Students also wanted to see changes in classroom management and organization of homework materials. For example, Marcela would like to see more "rigor" and discipline established in the classroom, where side conversations are kept at a minimum out of respect for the instructor and the other students. And, Rafaela would like the program to duplicate the way in which teachers at Lawrence Elementary assign homework. Many children receive a weekly homework packet which they work on throughout the week, and typically turn in at the end of the week. She thinks this method would provide a useful way to practice what they have learned in class on a daily basis.

## Final thoughts

CBET provides a potentially important service to immigrant parents, but we must still ask whether this program is challenging or perpetuating the inequalities that keep immigrants in their place and contribute to their children's failure. In the families I studied, the women had the time, and the family support to devote themselves to their education, and to their children's successful future. But they would have done that with or without CBET, despite free childcare, a dynamic and experienced instructor, and a flexible and welcoming atmosphere. But CBET cannot reach the masses of parents who need such programs because most immigrants work during the day. The real challenge ahead is for educators and immigrant communities to receive the state, local and federal funds necessary to offer expanded programs along the CBET model.

To my knowledge there are no other studies similar to mine, where in addition to being observed in their adult ESL classroom, parents are also interviewed about their learning experiences, and observed at home while interacting with their children. I was also fortunate because access to their homes gave me the opportunity to interview the children, and observe their behaviors with their mothers and siblings. I do not believe that I would have been able to obtain such rich information, especially in learning about the mothers' beliefs of *educación* and the way in which they enact them at home, had I not gone beyond classroom observations and one on one interviews with each mother. Through these different sources of data collection, I was able to get a much more in depth picture of each mother, their sense of agency in taking what they need from CBET for the benefit of their children and their personal advancement, their histories of struggle as

immigrant mothers fighting to raise their children bilingually and biculturally, and the ways in which they hope to make a better life for themselves and their families. For these mothers, the center of their lives is their home and their children, whom they want to be successful not only as students, but also as whole individuals. In the face of the current anti-immigrant sentiments fueled by oppressive legislation and years of bottled up discrimination, this research helps point out the positive roles that Latino mothers play in the education of their children, contrary to the negative perceptions of the mainstream public about the philosophies and actions of Latino immigrant parents towards their children's education and upbringing. These are hard working individuals, who are not only making a financial contribution to this country, but who also instill strong values of family, education, and personal advancement in their children from an early age.

I hope that findings from this study can potentially transform instructional practices for CBET coordinators and teachers, in particular, and adult ESL educators in general. This study could also contribute to K-12 teacher development by examining the roles that Latino immigrant parents play as students, parents, and teachers in the development of their own and their children's oral and literate English skills, thus enabling families and schools to work together in positive ways. I also plan to share my findings on the home literacy practices that were implemented by the mothers with CBET educators and students, in order to encourage pedagogical practices that empower adult students and their families. Building upon immigrant parents' interactions with their teachers and as teachers of their children challenges the inevitability of the reproduction of inequality. But more importantly, I hope that my research proved to be an empowering experience

for three very different, but equally strong women who shared their stories of struggle and success as they juggled multiple roles as mothers, students and teachers, and that it will serve to inspire them as they continue to navigate between two different languages, cultures, and teaching and learning philosophies and practices.

## Appendix

### Interview guides and protocols<sup>29</sup>

#### Exploratory questionnaire<sup>30</sup>

1. Background information
  - a. Age and age of arrival in the U.S.
  - b. Country and city/region of origin
  - c. Profession (both here and at home)
  - d. Number of children, and children's ages and grade levels
  - e. Language(s) spoken at home
  - f. Schooling history (both in the U.S. and at home)
  - g. Language skills (self-report)
    - i. I speak English: Very well Well Not well Not at all
    - ii. I speak Spanish: Very well Well Not well Not at all
    - iii. I read English: Very well Well Not well Not at all
    - iv. I write English: Very well Well Not well Not at all
2. Learning English history
  - a. How have you tried to learn English before (e.g. school, work, videotapes, etc.)?
  - b. How many years/months/weeks/days, etc. have you spent learning English?
  - c. Why did you choose CBET?
3. Aspirations
  - a. Reasons behind wanting to learn English
  - b. Personal and professional goals
4. Family learning practices
  - a. What activities do you do with your children at home (e.g. reading with and/or your children, writing letters, playing games, cooking, doing homework, etc.)? How often?
  - b. What language(s) is/are spoken at home and under which circumstances?

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<sup>29</sup> Instructor interviews were conducted in English. Parent interviews were conducted in Spanish. Children interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish.

<sup>30</sup> Exploring questionnaire was in Spanish.

## Case study parent interviews

1. Personal
  - a. Background information
    - i. Age and age of arrival in the U.S.
    - ii. Country and city/region of origin
    - iii. Profession (both here and at home)
    - iv. Number of children, and children's ages and grade levels
    - v. Language(s) spoken at home
    - vi. Schooling history (both in the U.S. and at home)
  - b. Learning English history
    - i. How have you tried to learn English before (e.g. school, work, videotapes, etc.)?
    - ii. How many years/months/weeks/days, etc. have you spent learning English?
    - iii. Why did you choose CBET?
  - c. Parental goals and aspirations
  - d. Parental notions of *educación*
  - e. Are parents participating in their child/children's school committees; actively working to obtain a new job; "standing up" to the landlord; being able to use English without an interpreter; etc.?
  - f. Are there any personal narratives that exemplify empowerment through language development?
2. Learning experiences in CBET classes
  - a. How much English are adult students acquiring through CBET?
  - b. What second language acquisition issues surface in the experiences (school, work, home) of parents attending CBET classes?
  - c. Reasons for participating in this program.
  - d. Is this an enriching/empowering experience?
  - e. Do they foresee changes in their lives because of this program?
  - f. What are they learning other than English, e.g. culture, socialization, etc.?
3. Tutoring experiences
  - a. How are parents trained to tutor young children?
  - b. How has tutoring changed their perceptions of self?
  - c. How was/were the tutoring session/s?
  - d. Does tutoring have an effect on their language development?
  - e. How is tutoring connected to their own teaching practices at home?
4. Language use, distribution and socialization experiences
  - a. What is their sense of self as they progress in their language learning continuum?
  - b. How (where and why) is language (English, Spanish or both) used in different contexts; e.g. work, community, school, etc.?
  - c. How is language distributed among the different domains where adult learners function?



- d. What are the domains that adult students and their families consider important?
  - e. What are the English speaking and the Spanish-speaking domains?
  - f. How do adult learners perceive these domains (safe, challenging, etc.?)
5. At home
- a. How has CBET (if at all) influenced their family literacy practices?
  - b. How do parents “distribute” their language use when at home and at school with their children?
  - c. What sorts of literacy and learning activities take place at home?
  - d. What is the literacy and learning/teaching role of each member of this family? (e.g. translators, interpreters, readers, writers, etc.)
  - e. What are the perceptions on how parent’s learning of English has impacted family literacy and learning practices?
  - f. Do parents read to their children in Spanish regularly (what, when), or in English (what, when)?

## Children interviews

1. School experiences
  - a. What do you learn at school? What kinds of language and literacy activities do you do?
  - b. When do you use a particular language at school?
  - c. Which way do you prefer to learn, your mother's or your teacher's?
  - d. What are your favorite subjects?
2. Home learning experiences
  - a. What are some of the things you like to do at home?
  - b. What do you learn at home? What kinds of learning activities do you do at home with your family?
  - c. What language(s) do you use at home? Which one(s) do you prefer? Why? When do you use a particular language at home?
  - d. What does your mother teach you?
3. Identity
  - a. What language(s) do you use and where? Which one(s) do you prefer?
  - b. What do you think of your mother attending English classes?
  - c. What things do you like to do?

**Instructor interviews**

1. Teaching philosophy
2. Teaching adult ESL philosophy
3. Theoretical frameworks of teaching, learning and second language acquisition which informs her practice
  - a. What informs curriculum design?
  - b. What type of approach is used to teach ESL?
  - c. How is instruction differentiated?
  - d. How is instruction delivered?
  - e. How is student learning assessed?
  - f. How is proficiency determined?
4. How language and culture socialization occurs in their classrooms
5. Their perceptions on immigrant adult learners and on student progress
6. Personal and professional goals as adult ESL teachers
7. Connections between teacher professional development opportunities and classroom practice
8. Perceptions of Proposition 227

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