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## WELCOMING 'NEW'COMERS: PROBLEMATIZING THE LATINA MOTHERS' EXPERIENCES IN A FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAM

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**Submitted:** September 23, 2016. Accepted for publication: March 20, 2017.

**Retrieved from:** <https://sinectica.iteso.mx/index.php/SINECTICA/article/view/664>

### Abstract

Ethnographic research has shown how familial outreach initiatives to Latino populations in demographically shifting communities can support schools' relationships with the changing community. However, recent research in 'semi-new' settlements of Latino populations suggests that students and their families continue experience education that promotes the dominant culture and that views well-established Latino populations as visitors. This study considers the experiences of Latina mothers participating in a school-sponsored family literacy program in Nebraska. The mothers' experiences in the program were influenced by program personnel's paternalistic perceptions of them as different and in need of help and by their agency in face of that treatment. Findings show two predominant perceptions mediated the mothers' experiences: *mothers as a 'good match'* for the program and *mothers as children*. Mothers were considered a 'good match' if they were available and eager to attend all program components. Yet in the program, they were treated like elementary students. The mothers' often resisted these perceptions and utilized the program to achieve their own goals. Findings shed light on how perceptions embedded in school-based familial outreach initiatives continue to play a role in keeping Latino families on the fringes of K-12 educational, despite their permanent status in the community.

**Keywords:** family literacy, parental partnerships, New Latino Diaspora, English language learning.

### INTRODUCTION

Ethnographic research has long shown how familial outreach initiatives to Latino newcomer populations in demographically shifting communities can support schools' relationships with the changing community. Lamphere's (1992) foundational work illustrated how schools serve as institutions that channel larger political, social, and economic forces that influence their constituents and that mediate interaction between newcomers and established residents. How newcomer and established residents interrelate on a micro-level in the community is fostered by individual schools' responses to the community's changing complexion (Lamphere, 1992). This indicates the immense power that schools possess with regard to how they go about reaching out to families and structuring educational experiences

that recognize, value, and capitalize on the transnational realities of their communities. Unfortunately, it is often the case that, while schools do take steps to account for changes in their community's cultural and linguistic characteristics through targeted initiatives (e.g. English language learning programs), these programs are marginalized within the school structure and, as a result, perpetuate mainstream, hegemonic ideologies concerning students who are learning English (Grey, 1991; Hamann et al., 2015; Perry & Hart, 2012). Newcomer students and their family interact with the mainstream structure of school on the peripheral, replicating society's greater expectations for them.

Such is the case regarding a family literacy program in Chesterfield\* (pseudonym), Nebraska that targets the parents of students who speak languages other than English, many who are Latino. Despite having an established Latino population in the state since the beginning of the twentieth century and experiencing consistent and rapid growth over the past twenty years, many Nebraska schools continue to view settlements of Latinos as 'new' to their communities. Recent research about Latinos in Nebraska and other 'semi-new' settlements of Latino populations—i.e., The New Latino Diaspora—suggests that students and their families continue to have educational experiences that promote the dominant culture and that view well-established Latino populations as visitors (Hamann et al., 2015). This ethnographic study considers the experiences of Latina mothers participating in the school-sponsored family literacy program, an outreach initiative with the goals of teaching newcomer parents English, familiarizing them with school practices, and fostering parenting practices to promote academic success. The majority of the Latina mothers who participated in the program were long-time members of the Chesterfield community and many had lived in the United States for more than ten years. Nevertheless, the school district viewed them as 'new' to the community and this perspective guided much of their outreach efforts within the family literacy program.

I studied the family literacy program to learn about the school's and Latino families' perceptions of and relationship with each other within this context. Thus, the ethnographic research questions addressed were: what was the family literacy program at Chesterfield Public Schools? And, how did Spanish-speaking mothers interact with the cultural space of an institutionalized family literacy program? This paper describes the cultural space of the family literacy program and focuses on the 'new'comer Latina mothers' experiences. Particularly, it explores how the mothers' experiences were mediated by the program personnel's perceptions of them and by their responses and displays of agency. Drawing on theories about pro-immigrant scripts (Suárez-Orozco, 1998; 2009) and social reform by way of social institutions (Foucault, 1970; 1977), I argue that this case illuminates how perceptions embedded in school-based familial outreach initiatives continue to play a role in keeping Latino families on the fringes of K-12 educational success, despite their permanent status in the community.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Latino adults in the United States are more likely to speak Spanish (American Community Survey, 2012), yet, unlike children who are required to attend public schooling, are not guaranteed any kind of formal support (ie. public schooling) to help them adjust to the cultural and linguistic demands of their community. In

Nebraska and throughout the country, adults seek out informal sights of learning, such as family literacy programs with Adult Basic Education (ABE) components, to learn these essential skills (Velázquez, 2014). These programs operate on the periphery of American education and are fraught with issues concerning minimal funding, high turnover, and little teacher preparation (Perry & Hart, 2012; Sun, 2010). Furthermore, adults take classes in a sociopolitical context that economically values immigrants but socially views them as “problems” that need to be “fixed” (Santa Ana, 2002). It is no surprise, then, that school-sponsored family literacy programs have generally employed a neo-deficit ideology that seeks to modify families’ home literacy and parenting practices to better match those promoted by schools in order to prepare their children for academic success (Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013). These programs target minoritized families with low income who are learning English as an additional language (Strucker et al., 2004) and women who are mothers (Prins et al., 2009; Prins & Van Horn, 2012).

Latino families have long been the focus of family literacy initiatives. While researchers have learned a lot about the rich, diverse literacies present in Latino homes (Alvarez, 2012; Moll et al., 1992; Reese, 2009; Scheffner et al., 2004), most family literacy programs focus on traditional print-literacy practices aligned with school practices and do not intentionally draw on the sociocultural repertoires of families (Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013). Instead, programs seek to help parents develop traditional literacy skills that can be shared with their child through activities such as storybook reading (Mandel Morrow et al., 2010) and it is common for these programs to include a parenting class that supports transferring these skills and other parenting practices into the home (Bryant & Wasik, 2004; Gomby, 2012; Powell, 2004). Integrated into family literacy programs is some form of adult education, such as English for speakers of other languages (Spruck Wrigley, 2004; Strucker et al., 2004). Despite the guiding ideology to “fix” home practices of diverse families, parents are generally attracted to family literacy programs because they view them as sites in which they can learn skills that will help them gain access to economic and cultural capital in society (Turner & Edwards, 2009). Furthermore, they see their participation in such programs as a way to provide opportunities and experiences for their children to acquire basic knowledge about language and literacy (Philips & Sample, 2005).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study is a part of a larger ethnographic research study about an ELL family literacy program for newcomer families in Chesterfield, Nebraska from May 2013 to November 2014. While the state has been home to an established Latino population since the early twentieth century, it experienced exponential growth in this population in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries due to geographical trends of meatpacking and other agricultural businesses (Hamann & Harklau, 2010). In 2015, more than 16,000 Latinos resided in Chesterfield and made up 6.3% of the city’s population: doubling in size over a span of ten years (US Census, 2010). The demographic landscape of Chesterfield is distinctive within the geographical context of the New Latino Diaspora. Following the Refugee Act of 1980, Chesterfield’s refugee population began to increase (Mitrofanova, 2004; Pipher, 2002). Now formally designated as a refugee relocation site, the city is comprised of people seeking asylum from countries all over the world. In the year

2012, the state received refugees from Bhutan, Burma/Myanmar, Cuba (who also fall into the broader category of Latino and were recognized as refugees at the time of this study), Ethiopia, Iran, Iraq, Malaysia, Somalia, Sudan and Thailand: Chesterfield was designated to receive about a third of this population (US Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2012). In many cases, the Latino population lies within close quarters with these folks, sharing neighborhoods, businesses, public spaces, social services, and schools. Thus, Latinos in Chesterfield come into contact with people of multiple cultural backgrounds who have migrated to the United States for a plethora of reasons, distinguishing these experiences in Chesterfield from others in the New Latino Diaspora.

When looking at these numbers, one thing is clear: Latinos are now a component of Chesterfield's demographic makeup and have shed their status as a "new" population. Still, Chesterfield Public Schools (CPS) began a family literacy program in 2009 to teach newcomer families print-literacy skills in English and to familiarize them with American schools and community resources. I studied CPS's family literacy program in order to better understand the school's and Latino families' perceptions of and relationship with each other.

At the time of this study, CPS had family literacy programs at eight of their thirty-eight elementary schools and was in the process of establishing a ninth site: I conducted research at three elementary schools. In step with my focus on families in the New Latino Diaspora, two focus schools had the largest Latino population in the district; at the third site, Latino families were the minority but represented an accurate account of multiculturalism in Chesterfield's neighborhoods. The demographic details of each of the three sites and the participating parents are presented in Tables 1 and 2. Pseudonyms have been used to denote the names of each school site and each participant throughout the study.

Table 1. Demographics of Elementary School Family Literacy Sites

Elementary School*	Neighborhood Characteristics	ELL Students	Hispanic Students	Free & Reduced Lunch Rate
Aster	Urban	28.32%	21.6%	92.05%
Verbena	Urban	48.64%	46.57%	90.74%
Blazing Star	Blue Collar Subdivision	37.93%	44.47%	80.59%

Table 2. Family Literacy Class Demographics by First Language Group

Elementary School*	Total	Spanish	Arabic	Kurdish	Karen*	Vietnamese
Aster	20	4 (spring)	8 (spring)	8 (spring)	0	0
		2-3 (fall)	9 (fall)	8 (fall)		
Verbena	20	11	1	3	5	0
Blazing Star	14	8	2	2	0	2

\*The Karen people stem from the country of Myanmar and have been resettled in the U.S. as a refugee population. These mothers spoke several languages, but received interpretation services in Karen.

Understanding the cultural space of family literacy required learning how it was constructed: Ethnographic research illuminates how nuanced interactions create the cultural space of a school-based family literacy program by capturing the rich webs of signification that unfold over time (Geertz, 1973). The school itself is located within a specific geographic-demographic setting, is charged with transmitting some of cultural material of the society, and is what Frederick Erickson (1984) calls a "network of communication, rights and obligations to larger social units" (p. 7). The family literacy classroom can be viewed as one social unit of this larger social institution (Erickson, 1984), and ethnographic methods illuminate the norms transmitted by those in power (the school personnel) and what happens when diverse parents (the Latina mothers) come into contact with them.

I observed the family literacy program (after gaining consent from all participants,  $n=69$ ) three times a week for eighteen months and wrote in-depth field notes that included description, dialogue, and characterization of my sites (Emerson et al., 2011). Field notes and relevant artifacts (handouts, work samples, and class materials) were analyzed using open and focused coding to capture what was going on in the data and to link these patterns to more general, analytical issues (Emerson et al., 2011). In depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted in participants' first language (Spanish or English), occurred across sites, and included Latina mothers ( $n=12$ ), program personnel ( $n=12$ ), and teaching assistants and volunteers ( $n=3$ ): Informal interviews were continuously conducted during observations. Interviews followed Spradley's (1979) ethnographic interview methods and were coded using domain analysis. Data from observations, interviews, and artifacts were triangulated to determine how stakeholders perceived the program, how those perceptions interacted to construct the family literacy cultural space, and how the Latina mothers responded within this space.

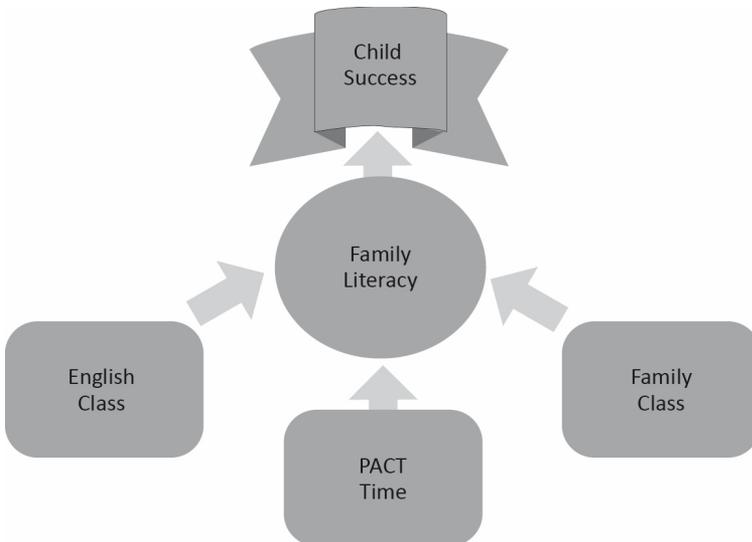
To understand this, I draw on a theoretical lens that views the social structure as a semiotic system constructed and negotiated interaction and language. This study draws on the theories of Foucault (1970; 1977) to explain how those in power use discourse to create and impose policies and expectations, and to determine whose capital is legitimate. It connects Foucault's theories with Suárez-Orozco's (1998; 2009) notion of pro-immigrant script to explain the perceptions the program personnel held about the Latina mothers and how this guided decision-making and practices within the program. I also recognize that within the cultural space of the family literacy program, individuals navigate and interact with it as a semiotic system, which simultaneously influences it. The participants' navigation of the family literacy program's semiotic webs, then, reflects the roles (Goffman, 1959) and agency (De Certeau, 1984) that they exert in the cultural space.

### *Findings*

To understand the experiences of the Latina mothers in the CPS family literacy program, it is important to understand the program's framework and the activities in which the women participated. The program was modeled after the National Center for Families Learning's (2016) and Toyota Family Learning's (2013) framework, its original grant funders. (At the time of the study, it no longer received funding from Toyota and instead operated on a combination of federal, state, and private grants.) The original four-component framework included adult literacy education; children's literacy education; parent and child time together (PACT); and

parent time class. However, CPS took pride in the fact that their model was distinct from the original model and included a fifth component: Childcare literacy class for very young children (birth through age four). The program intended to improve the educational experiences of the child (see Figure 1) and met five days a week, with specific activities designated for each day. The adult literacy education class was a class for English learners (ELs) that was taught by local community college instructors and met during the school day for two hours a day, four days a week. Parent Time class took place on the fifth day for two hours and focused on connecting parents with resources and on discussing topics (largely determined by the school) to benefit parents. This class was conducted in English, but interpreted by the district's cultural liaisons. The children's regular elementary class was considered their literacy class; they did not attend a program-specific class. Children did, however, participate in PACT time: one hour per week, during adult English class, parents observed children in their elementary classrooms. Childcare literacy class was available for very young children (6 months-4 years) and incorporated print literacy activities in English into a daycare setting.

Figure 1. Family Literacy Broader Goals Classroom Poster



The majority of the family literacy class included interactions between adults within the context of an elementary school. The adults that were involved in the program could be observed as fitting into three different categories: The program personnel who represented the school district or local community college (administrators, site coordinators and teachers), the parents who represented transnational communities and the bicultural liaisons who were situated in between the school district and the parents. The majority of the Latina mothers were from Mexico; of the twelve interviewed, one was from Guatemala. All indicated that they spoke Spanish as their primary language and were in the process of learning English. All had gone to school in Mexico through at least third grade, while

several had studied to sixth or ninth grade. One finished high school. This feature distinguished the Latina mothers from some of the other parents in the group who did not attend school or had interrupted schooling in their home country. The English instructors at the focus sites all identified as white: Two were female and one was male. Of the three site coordinators, one was a Latina female from Mexico who spoke Spanish and the others were white females. The names and roles of the adults are presented in Table 3. The interaction amongst adults in this setting was essential to determining how each person perceived the others and how the family literacy classroom experience was constructed through these enacted perceptions.

Table 3. Names and Roles of Focus Participants

Site	Name	Role
Chesterfield Public Schools: District Office	Nancy	Family Literacy Specialist
Aster Elementary School	Anne	Site Coordinator
	John	English Teacher (2013–2014)
	Cindy	English Teacher (2014–2015)
	Yolanda	Spanish-speaking Mother, from Mexico
	Sofia	Spanish-speaking Mother, from Mexico
	Gloria	Spanish-speaking Mother, from Mexico
	Verónica	Spanish-speaking Mother, from Mexico
	Ale	Spanish-speaking Mother, from Mexico & Bilingual Liaison
Blazing Star Elementary School	Amanda	Site Coordinator
	Melanie	English Teacher
	Gabriela	Spanish-speaking Mother, from Mexico
	Blanca	Spanish-speaking Mother, from Mexico
	Cyntia	Spanish-speaking Mother, from Mexico
	Flor	Spanish-speaking Mother, from Guatemala
	Carolina	Spanish-speaking Mother, from Mexico
	Lorena	Spanish-speaking Mother, from Mexico
Verbena Elementary School	Pilar	Site Coordinator
	John	English Teacher
	Xóchitl	Spanish-speaking Mother, from Mexico
	Martha	Spanish-speaking Mother, from Mexico
	Nora	Spanish-speaking Mother, from Mexico

The program personnel identified participants with the help of the bilingual liaisons and focused on parents of children enrolled in the district's English language learning (ELL) program. These families were characterized as 'in need' by the program personnel: they were thought to need help learning the American school system and becoming connected with community economic, social,

and emotional resources. However, the Latina mothers had been established in Chesterfield for years, some more than ten years, and had children enrolled in the school district for several years. Their engagement with CPS and the community was not new and their primary reason for attending the program was to learn English, as opposed to learning about the school and the community.

This discord is an example of the different perspectives the Latina mothers and the program personnel held about each other and the goals of family literacy. In this section, I present data about the perceptions that the program personnel held about the parents and the Latina mothers' responses to these perceptions. Findings show two predominant perceptions mediated the mothers' experiences: *mothers as a 'good match'* for the program and *mothers as children*. However, the mothers' responses indicated that they often resisted these perceptions and utilized the program to achieve their own goals.

### *Mothers as a 'Good Match'*

Commitment by way of attendance was the principal way of deciding which parents would be considered a 'good match' for the program. Parents who could attend and did attend all components of the family literacy program were considered a good match for the program and often received praise from the instructors for their dedication. Nancy, the Family Literacy Specialist, explained:

First of all we tell parents before they enter the program, you need to think about can you come to class every day? It's very important that you come every day. If this is, if you have a job that takes you away and you can't make it every day we don't, this is not a good match for you.

(Nancy, Family Literacy Specialist, Interview, February 28, 2014)

The regulations and expectations set by the program personnel reflected the school's desire for the parents to follow a *pro-immigrant* script (Hamann, 1999; Suárez-Orozco, 1998; 2009). The *pro-immigrant* script casts newcomers as hard-working, family oriented, and willing –and grateful– to assimilate to their new environment. Thus, a parent who was considered a 'good match' for the program was someone who could attend for two hours during the school day, five days a week and who did not have outside duties, like jobs or health issues, interfering. It was assumed that the parents were eager to learn skills to participate in Chesterfield, particularly learning English, and supporting their child in school. Interestingly, the *pro-immigrant* script guiding these policies also assumed that the parents were indeed 'new' and were looking for the school to guide their experiences. Most of the Latina mothers had been in the city for at least ten years and were familiar with the city.

Attending the program daily was important to the program personnel (and their funders) and was considered essential to determine if a parent was a 'good match'. Parents signed in each day on an attendance sheet when they arrived to family literacy. Despite efforts to encourage parents to schedule appointments outside of class, it was common for one or two parents per week to talk with the English teacher about missing a class for reasons such as housing, immigration, or doctor's appointments. At all three sites, attendance dropped significantly after a major school break, such as spring break or winter break. The responses to parents who were

absent at each site varied. Attendance was sometimes referred to as currency: parents "paid" for the free classes through their attendance. Parents were asked to be advocates for the program and to their classmates to come to class; they were constantly reminded that without their attendance, the free program would not exist (Field Notes, Aster Elementary, March 19, 2014). However, when absences did come up, the teachers simply stated, "okay" and continued with class. Persistent attendance issues were deflected to the bilingual liaisons to discuss with the parent. If a parent consistently violated the pro-immigrant expectations surrounding eager attendance and ample availability (Suárez-Orozco, 1998), they were counseled out of the program.

Most of the Latina mothers worked while attending the program and some of the instructors made arrangements for them to arrive late or leave early. John, an English instructor, commented that he always made sure to have a pot of fresh coffee for the Latina women who worked at night (John, Interview, English Teacher, Aster/Verbenia Elementary, August 14, 2014). Although these women heard the same messages about the importance of their attendance, they did not alter their work schedules and a few even took on additional employment throughout the year.

The attendance expectation excluded parents whose other commitments prevented them from investing so much of their time in the program. Instead, it targeted parents who were likely to already be home during the day or at least those who were willing to arrange their work schedules the best they could in order to attend. Despite their outside commitments, these Latina mothers were viewed as following the pro-immigrant script (Suárez-Orozco, 1998; 2009): they worked hard at work and school and made accommodations to their work schedules so that they could dedicate time to assimilating to the school's expectations. Being a 'good match' indicated that the mothers were working hard by coming every day to class to learn English and were assimilating to the schools' norms for parental involvement in education. However, it is likely that the program was targeting families who had already ascribed to some of these expectations: they had been living in Chesterfield for quite some time, had already sent their children to school, and had living situations where 10 hours per week could be dedicated to this program. The attendance policy, in turn, almost guaranteed that the program would attract parents who fit this script and weed out those who violated it. Through the program policies, the pro-immigrant script became a self-fulfilling prophecy.

During classes, however, other specific practices were acknowledged to indicate whether or not the parents were considered a 'good match' for the program (and therefore adhering to the pro-immigrant script). Academic practices, like completing homework, were highly valued by the instructors. Parents received praise when they completed their homework assignments or received a high grade on an English quiz. The Latina mothers mostly fell into the category of parents receiving praise for these tasks. At most sites, the Latina mothers were noted by the teachers as students who consistently returned homework assignments. This could be explained by their familiarity of school practices through their own educational backgrounds or through their children's schooling experience. Melanie explained:

...The Spanish-speakers are the ones that bring the homework back each time. The other ones, not as often...they do it almost religiously...If they aren't sure at home exactly what to do, they will do something on it and then bring it back and

say I'm not sure I understood or I don't know if I did it right. And, and they will let me know rather than just not doing it.

(Melanie, English Teacher, Blazing Star Elementary, Interview, December 9, 2014)

The degree to which the parents' home practices matched the expectations of the program also came into play. Often coordinators and teachers alluded to what the parents were doing at home with their families and these conversations often revolved around giving advice to what the parents *should* be doing. Seldom were the parents asked to contribute what they were already doing at home. If they did, the instructors were quick to give advice that altered their practices into common white middle class practices (such as scheduled routines, print literacy activities, and authoritative discipline approaches). Many of the instructors had raised children who were academically and economically successful and were eager to discuss their home practices with the parents. While these conversations were generally pleasant, they were instructor-centered and lecture-based.

Sometimes this advice included ways to integrate academic activities into daily tasks, like when Anne (site coordinator, Aster Elementary) suggested that the parents do math with the children as they pick up toys or cook together, or when Pilar (site coordinator, Verbena Elementary) demonstrated a math game that the parents could do with the children over the winter holiday. Other times, the coordinators offered advice to the parents concerning their cultural practices in the home, like suggesting that fathers should be involved with their daughters regarding housekeeping tasks like cooking and cleaning (Field Notes, Aster Elementary, February 26, 2014) or that parents should allow children to explore their interests, despite the financial investment required for materials or the mess it might make (Field Notes, Verbena Elementary, December 18, 2014).

Discipline and scheduling were two other topics about which the coordinators gave advice. Parents were discouraged from using corporeal punishment with their children and were encouraged to use tactics such as taking away privileges and holding children accountable for their actions. In fact, parents were encouraged to align their home discipline practices with the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports model (PBIS, 2015) that the district had adopted. Sessions were also dedicated to discussing the importance of routines at home and having parents create family schedules. Before spring break in 2014, Anne assigned creating a schedule for the week off as a homework assignment and encouraged parents to integrate school activities like math and reading into their daily schedules.

The pro-immigrant script (Hamann, 1999; Suárez-Orozco, 1998; 2009) applies to the program personnel's perceptions of the parents' home practices as well. They praised the Latina mothers for following the school's homework policies, indicating that they were fitting the script, and encouraged them to adapt school-like practices in their home, which reflect white middle class norms. The assumption by the instructors that the mothers' home practices did not already support their children's academic learning indicates a deficit ideology toward the newcomer parents or that they are in need of 'fixing' (Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013; Santa Ana, 2002). Following the pro-immigration script, the instructors expected the parents to accept their advice to foster their assimilation in the school and community. As we will see, the mothers did not always eagerly abide or did so in order to achieve their own goals.

*MOTHERS AS CHILDREN*

Given the focus on adult learning within the family literacy program, instructors and coordinators took steps to ensure that the family literacy classroom was a distinct space in the school for the adult learners: it included adult-sized tables and chairs, adult EL textbooks, and a coffeemaker. Everyone addressed each other by their first names, with the exception of one site coordinator at Aster Elementary, to whom the parents and other teachers referred to with a title: *Miss Anne*. Parents chose their own seats in the classrooms, which were arranged either in a U-shape or in table groups, and most often sat by parents who shared the same home language. Nevertheless, the paternalistic views of the program personnel toward the parents came through by way of the phrases used by instructors, content studied in English class and behavior expectations. These instances fell into three categories: using words associated with children to refer to the participating parents, asking parents to take on the role of a child-student in the school, and using elementary concepts to determine learning material for the class.

Quite often in family literacy, the parents were referred to as children or kids directly by the coordinator or teacher. Below are several excerpts from different instructors addressing the adults by calling them a word typically used for young learners or referencing their actions in the same capacity as those of children.

(Field Notes, English Class, Aster Elementary, April 28, 2014): The class had erupted in chatter. Verónica had told the class that her son had been diagnosed with the chicken pox and that he was in the childcare class today. John turned to the class, spread his arms and waved his hands. He said loudly, "Ok! **Kids!**"

(Field Notes, English Class, Aster Elementary, December 9, 2014): The parents had completed the My Plate activity and were cleaning up the markers. Cindy called their attention: "**Friends**, you have got to have lids on tight so that the kids can use the markers too."

(Field Notes, English Class, Blazing Star Elementary, December 10, 2014): Melanie confronted several parents about not bringing their homework to class. She asked the entire class, "**What happens if your children don't bring their homework?** Do it and bring it tomorrow." The class laughed at her comment.

Parents were also used as examples when talking about a concept that was meant to be for children. For example, the instructors made comments that the parents were participating in PACT time—an activity that was delineated as *parent and child together time*—when they worked with the instructors in small groups, indicating that the instructors were in the parent role and the parents in the role of the children.

The parents' behavior was monitored to resemble that of children while they were in the school. Their access to physical spaces was limited to those that children could access. For example, at Aster Elementary the parents were not permitted to use the school's workroom, housed in a small room between the two main hallways, as a shortcut to the classroom because it was deemed as an area for staff only. (As a visitor from the university, however, I was actually encouraged to use this shortcut by the school personnel, indicating that the rule was specifically targeted at the parents.)

Parents at Blazing Star Elementary met in a trailer outside of the school and had to request permission from the teacher each time they wished to enter the building.

During PACT time, parents were expected to behave like their children did in the elementary classroom: they were given strict guidelines and faced repercussions if they did not oblige. They sat next to their child and were expected to do exactly as their child did. While the teachers were instructed to provide the parents with an adult-sized chair, this only happened in the older classrooms I visited. In the younger classrooms, mothers sat on the carpet with their children or in child-sized chairs at the tables and desks. The classroom teacher typically greeted the mother upon arrival and provided her with any handouts or materials that the children were using. During the class, the mothers completed the grade-level assignments and took notes. The teacher checked in with the mothers about their understanding of the material, like she did with the elementary students. The children, however, did not look at their mother as another child. This was evident when the teacher asked the children to do something like share an answer with a partner or do a task like pass out materials. In these cases, the children spoke with their peers and not their mothers or gave materials to their peers and not their mothers. The mothers sat quietly while their children worked with other students.

Connections between parents and children were also made in regard to the content they were learning in English class. Cindy explained that most of her content came from what the parents learned in PACT or from the pacing charts that the elementary teachers used:

I have a daily objective and I choose that objective from several sources. One would be from our PACT discussion. If they see something in the classroom and they asked about it, or I hear a lot of them mentioning it then I think that's a good topic for us...We are supposed to collaborate with the classroom teachers so I have a pacing chart and I can take things off of there, for example, community. I can take animals, I can take the science experiment that we did before.

(Cindy, English Teacher, Aster Elementary, Interview, December 12, 2014)

All of the English teachers utilized topics from the elementary curriculum into their lessons. Cindy integrated topics like the US Department of Agriculture's *My Plate* (2016) initiative to promote healthy eating into her lessons to learn about food vocabulary. She also integrated topics like different spelling patterns and writing a story from the elementary curriculum guide. John dedicated a portion of his classes to studying the first and second grade spelling lists. Melanie drew upon the materials that she had used to teach all levels of elementary school for her English instruction in family literacy.

It is important to note that making explicit connections between English learning and the elementary concepts that the children were learning was a part of the English teachers' contract and it was considered something that they were expected to do. The teachers' actions, then, were more reflective of the structural aspects of the family literacy program's overarching goals and of the elementary context in which they were embedded.

Housing the family literacy site within elementary schools situated the adult English learning experience within the social latticework of an elementary school. In-nate to this social structure was the institutional power that has been used to reform

the minds and behaviors of those bound to the social institutions (Foucault, 1970; 1977). In elementary schools, this means that students are divided and segmented into classrooms, teachers form the dispersed omnipresent eye of authority by observing the students and monitoring their progress, and all intentional interactions are determined and supervised by teachers. The family literacy program adapted to this structure. From this perspective, the parents were the subjects of discipline, as individuals in a system that sought to change their behavior (i.e. language skills and parenting practices). They assumed a similar position in the elementary school as their children did. A key part of the process of disciplining with the intent to reform, according to Foucault (1977), was the individualization of a subject: by separating a person from a larger sect of society that resembles her quotidian language and cultural practices, she could reflect personally, not collectively, on the norm that the institution wished to impose on her.

Foucault (1977) wrote,

The disciplines mark the moment when the reversal of the political axis of individualization – as one might call it – takes place...In a disciplinary régime, on the other hand, individualization is descending': as power becomes more anonymous and more functional, those on whom it is exercised tend to be more strongly individualized; it is exercised by surveillance rather than ceremonies, by observation rather than commemorative accounts, by comparative measures that have the 'norm' as reference rather than genealogies giving ancestors points of reference; by 'gaps' rather than deeds...and when one wishes to individualize the healthy, normal and law-abiding adult, *it is always by asking him how much of the child he has in him*, what secret madness lies within him, what fundamental crime he has dreamt of committing (p. 192-193, emphasis added).

The parents in family literacy were perceived as being culturally different from each other and from the supposedly 'normative', English-speaking, American society that upheld certain school and parenting practices. A key piece to Foucault's reform process is to convince the adult (in this case the participating parents) to see their deviations from dominant norms as child-like or as developmentally malleable. During the times in family literacy when the parents were referred to as children (as 'kids' or 'friends') and were taught through elementary-influenced curriculum, the concept of "*how much of the child [they] had in [them]*" was being illuminated. Revealing the parents' lack of knowledge of elementary concepts and of the dominant language (English) in tandem with convincing the parents that they needed to know these things and change their behaviors for the betterment of their children presented an opportunity to develop the self-regulation necessary for deep self-reflection that would change the parents' behavior (Foucault, 1977) to those that were more desirable by the school: speaking English and executing certain parenting practices.

#### *Latina Mothers' Response*

The perceptions of the program personnel towards the mothers mediated their interactions in the program. It was a common practice for the program coordinators and teachers to begin the year with a short survey to gain insight from the

parents about their interests and follow up with a similar survey at the end of the year to see what was learned. However, in practice, the parents' interest did not guide the program. The coordinators planned parent class sessions mostly in unison across sites, meaning that each class received a visit from the same community program at the same time. Parents who had been in the program for multiple years had seen the same presentations multiple times. English teachers had more flexibility to tailor their instruction to the parents' language needs, but little opportunity was provided for the parents to give feedback about strategies and content. As previously explored, the program personnel's views of the mothers concerning their suitability as students/parents, along with their expected infantile role in the program, were enacted throughout daily interactions and tasks. However, the Latina mothers were not simply targets of these perceptions: their response also contributed to the co-construction of the culture of family literacy. They responded in ways that resisted these perceptions and regained control of their experience within the program. These responses fell into two categories: silence and subversion.

#### SILENCE

Silence was a common response from the Latina mothers during family literacy and was also an indicator of discomfort. This response was common when the topic of discussion was punitive or overtly regulatory about how parents should behave. As previously mentioned, this was most often linked to conversations about attendance and PACT time. When instructors discussed how parents' attendance was a form of payment for the class, the parents were silent, looked down at their desks or looked wearily at each other. The coordinators and teachers reminded the parents that there was a waiting list for the class and that if they were not going to come, someone else would be asked to take their place. Or, even worse, they would not be able to offer the program anymore.

Sometimes a punitive or regulatory stance was taken when discussing how the parents should behave during PACT time or a special event. The parents' response was again silence. For example, to prepare the parents for an event at the Chesterfield Symphony Orchestra, a representative from the orchestra came in to talk about how parents were expected to behave. They were told when they could clap and what to do if a child was crying or needed to use the bathroom. When this visit took place at Verbena Elementary, Belinda followed up by telling the parents that last year the parents who went to the symphony were talking and eating during the show and that that behavior was not permitted. Pilar expanded on this and stated that if parents behaved like this this year, they would not be invited back. The parents sat quietly as they received this information (Field Notes, Verbena Elementary, November 20, 2014).

The Latina mothers sometimes were silent by not attending the family literacy program. They decided to not attend class not because they had an appointment or other commitment, but because they either did not feel like the class was worth their time or because they did not feel like they were learning in class. Several mothers stated that they often skipped the parent time class because they did not learn anything they found relevant. What they did learn about community resources and parenting practices, they seldom followed up with or put into practice. Others intentionally did not come on days that included PACT time or, when they

left the classroom for PACT time, they did not go to their child's classroom. Instead, they hung around the hallways or went to their cars and took a break.

They mothers also monitored their attendance based on the quality of instruction that they felt they were receiving. For instance, Sofía explained her rationale behind when she did attend class and when she did not:

Pero con esta maestra [este año] está uno muy a gusto porque el tiempo se le va muy rápido. Muy rápido. Cada minuto se aprovecha y pues ahorita estoy contenta por eso. El año pasado faltaba mucho y en este año no he faltado. No he faltado mucho porque, porque, pues sí me gusta la clase. Pues sí, estoy contenta con la clase y con la maestra. Y siento también que estoy aprendiendo más... El año pasado [el maestro] ponía mucha atención en una persona que no sabía nada, que va empezando y las demás que entendemos un poquito más pues no, nos quedábamos igual porque él ponía atención en la persona que no sabía nada. Como que se enfocaba más en esa persona y a los demás del grupo nos dejaba solos.

[But with this teacher, a person is very happy because time goes by very fast. I missed a lot of classes last year and this year I haven't missed. I haven't missed a lot because, because, well, I like the class. Well yes, I am happy with the class and with the teacher. And I also feel like I am learning more... last year [the teacher] paid a lot of attention to one person who didn't know anything, who was just beginning and the rest of us who understand a little more, well, we stayed the same because he paid attention to the person who didn't know anything. It was like he focused more on this person and left the rest of us on our own.]

(Sofía, Mother, Aster Elementary, Interview, November 6, 2014)

Several of the mothers indicated that they stopped attending the program when they felt like they were not learning or when they did not agree with the teacher's strategies.

#### SUBVERSION

In some cases, instead of being vocally or physically silent, the mothers utilized various resources in class to shift what was happening to better meet their interests, needs, or goals. Most often, parents utilized the bilingual liaisons and/or their home languages to achieve a shift in control. The following vignette depicts how the parents initially responded to a presentation about domestic violence given during the Parent Time class by a representative of a local women's shelter.

(Field Notes, Aster Elementary, March 5, 2014): Diane, a representative from the local women's shelter, began her presentation about domestic violence. She first showed a definition of domestic violence, which focused on spousal abuse, on a PowerPoint and immediately the parents and the bilingual liaisons began discussing the topic animatedly in their home languages. Diane went on to discuss a chart of the different types of domestic violence and told the parents that violence is a choice. The group of Spanish-speaking women were talking and laughing. Gloria, the bilingual liaison, interpreted on behalf of the Latina mothers and asked Diane, "When the kid is not very nice, what is the correct way to say no?"

This question prompted a discussion about disciplining children. Marcia told the class that each family has different ways of disciplining. Anne, the coordinator, joined in and explained that while spanking a child is legal, leaving a mark on a child is not okay and could be an indicator of abuse to an outsider. After a lengthy and animated discussion about corporeal discipline, Anne encouraged the parents to avoid physical discipline and instead monitor their children's behavior by taking away privileges.

Diane then continued with her presentation about domestic violence, again focusing on spousal abuse and how to utilize the women's shelter for help. The mothers sat quietly as she spoke. After the presentation, Anne and the class continued to discuss effective methods of discipline for children.

In this scenario, the Latina mothers utilized the bilingual liaison in order to ask a question that changed the conversation from focusing on domestic violence to disciplining children. Later that day, the conversation continued to focus on disciplining children but not on necessarily corporeal discipline: instead, parents discussed what to do if children talk back or do not clean their rooms. They also asked about the school's discipline system.

Other times, parents reallocated control in more subtle ways. The mothers utilized bilingual liaisons (or sometimes me) to finish their assigned homework before class began and later eagerly accepted the praise for completing it at home, or being a 'good match' for the program. Generally, parents' home languages were welcome in the family literacy classroom but sometimes the teacher enforced an English-only rule. This typically happened out of frustration and when the teachers were trying to gain control of the class. The mothers responded to the teachers' request with a moment of silence, and then returned to speaking in their home language. For example:

(Field Notes, Aster Elementary, April 7, 2014): John sat at the table in the front of the room and graded the spelling tests that the parents had just completed. Some parents sat quietly as they waited for their scores; others looked at their phones and notebooks. A few parents began speaking to each other softly in their home languages. Slowly, more and more parents began having conversations in their home languages.

John looked up from his grading and said loudly and sternly, "Practice English! Talk English!" He then asked the two volunteers who were in the class to go and talk with the parents in English. One of the volunteers walked over to two Spanish-speaking women who were continuing to speak to each other in Spanish quietly. They looked at the volunteer and then turned back to their conversation in Spanish. The volunteer sat quietly.

As much as parents were subjects in the family literacy classroom, they were also agents performing social roles for different purposes. Goffman (1959) defined a social performance as, "all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by her continuous presence before a particular set of observers which has some influence over the observers" (p. 22). A social performance has three

key players: Those who perform, those performed to, and outsiders, who neither perform the show nor observe it but have influence over the performance. How parents performed within the family literacy program was evidenced by their responses to and interaction with the family literacy program (i.e. silence or subversion). Through these reactions, parents invoked different fronts that helped them to meet their goals and to gain a certain type of capital (Bourdieu, 1991), or that helped them reject the perspectives about them that were being imposed onto them. Goffman (1959) defined a front as an equipment of a standard kind that is intentionally or unwittingly employed by a person during her performance and that is determined by the setting, appearance, and manner of everyone involved.

When the women were listening to a presentation about domestic abuse, they utilized the bilingual liaisons as interpreters to change the topic to a discussion about disciplining their children and as a result, modifying their roles from possibly abused women to mothers who wish to properly discipline their children. Or, the women turned in homework and either attended PACT time or pretended to, they were presenting themselves as meeting the program personnel's perspective of them as good mothers. Even the parents' confident, lively discussions in their home languages, despite instructions to speak only English, were evidence of their performance as knowledgeable adults who had experience in the topic of interest. De Certeau (1984) would label this maneuver as a tactic: an isolated action that is responsive to and takes advantage of opportunities that emerge within the social structure to achieve a goal.

## CONCLUSIONS

Like similar programs, Chesterfield Public Schools' family literacy program was one way that the school acknowledged and reached out to the city's increasingly diverse population. However, a closer look at how the perceptions held by the program personnel were embedded into daily cultural practices illuminates how school-based familial outreach initiatives continue to play a role in keeping Latino families on the fringes of K-12 educational success, despite their permanent status in the community. The Latina mothers were viewed as newcomers who needed not only to learn English, but also to better assimilate to social norms expected by the school. Their established residency in Chesterfield during the past fifteen years was discredited and still considered 'new', and their home practices were not recognized as a part of the community's cultural complexity. Instead of the family literacy program embracing the unique realities of the Latina mothers (the fact that they had lived in the city for several years, were familiar with the school and the city, and had a wealth of knowledge to contribute), they were considered to be 'new' to the social and cultural fabric and in need of help to assimilate to Chesterfield's community. This is indication of a larger issue that Latinos are still viewed as 'the other' in Chesterfield and that programs like the family program are in place to attempt to change their practices that violate the pro-immigrant script (Hamann, 1999; Santa Ana, 2002; Suárez-Orozco, 1998; 2009).

By attending the program, certain Latina mothers were considered, by the school, to be a 'good match'. It must be noted that these were only a handful of mothers at each school site and sustaining this status also meant that they entered a social contract as subjects of the institution, disciplined to improve themselves according to the school's norms (Foucault, 1977). The mothers followed

the disciplinary regulations and practices that the school wanted them to observe and, consequently, they gained a certain cultural capital that was recognized and legitimized by the school: they were a "good match" for the program and were celebrated based on the behaviors that they exerted. By being a 'good match', the mothers were able to remain in the program, learn English, and as a result, they also gained a support system that could carry over outside of the program and into their home communities (Hamann, 1997). This is concerning for the Latino population in Chesterfield: those parents who already match the pro-immigrant script (Suárez-Orozco, 1998; 2009) are offered services to improve their experiences in Chesterfield while others who do not match these expectations are not receiving the same supports. Families who are different and have practices that are not congruent with the school, yet who are still an established component of the community, are further excluded.

The program is not intended to accommodate all parents within the district, but it is a reflection of CPS's underpinning ideologies when working with its stable Latino population. One cannot help but wonder, what happened to the parents that were not considered a 'good match' for family literacy? What about the Latino families who 'mismatched' the school's expectations? While the school district had other initiatives in place for families, such as family nights and parent-teacher conferences, these events were not consistent efforts of parental engagement and generally promoted traditional notions of parental involvement aligned with white, middle class norms. The participating mothers in family literacy had the opportunity to at least resist some of the deficit ideologies about them and recast their agency in the cultural space of school. Their resistance indicated that a culturally relevant framework to parental involvement was not a central component to the family literacy program. As a result, an opportunity was lost to weave the Latina mother's cultural practices and identities, as well as those of the other families, into the cultural fabric of the school.

Transnational movement of people has been and will continue to be an integral part of Chesterfield and other similar cities in the 'New' Latino Diaspora for the foreseen future. The transnational realities that Latino populations bring with them to Chesterfield do not just contribute to the community: they transform it. How the public schools approach and interact with these families will have an influence how they are received by the community and, ultimately, the educational attainment of child and adult students. While the family literacy program generally operated through a neo-deficit lens when working with the Latina mothers, it does not need to stay this way. Precisely because informal learning sites like family literacy operate on the periphery, they are not as tethered to standardization and regulation. This means that family literacy can serve as a site to try out culturally relevant approaches to teaching and learning with Latino parents to begin to better reflect and serve their permanent residents.

Understanding how, when, where perceptions that prohibit equity are embedded in these programs is the first step to identifying and dismantling these roadblocks to success. In this study, the mothers were indirectly asked to take on submissive roles by strictly following the program personnel's rules and when they were treated as children. This illuminates a few starting points for change within the family literacy program. First, the parents could be more involved in the construction and scheduling of the program; instead of the schedule meeting

the school's needs, it could meet the parents. This may require offering the classes several times and easing up on attendance policies. Drawing on parents' interests and funds of knowledge must extend past a survey and include more empowerment, such as ongoing conversations and relinquish of control by the program personnel. Integral to this is shifting the view that parents must assume the role of a child when attending the program.

Adults have multiple literacy sponsors (Brandt, 2001), or social forces, guiding their learning of English. In this study, the Latina mothers stated that learning English to gain more meaningful employment, to more confidently function in the community, and to spend more time with their young children sponsored their involvement in the program: re-learning elementary curriculum did not. Recognizing that by achieving their own goals, the adults will strengthen their family by their standards will be the first step in moving toward a more relevant learning experience in family literacy. In turn, this will open up space to learn more about the unique Latino culture in Chesterfield and integrate it into authentic, culturally congruent school practices.

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