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## Empowering and Equipping Hispanic Immigrant Parents to Actively Engage in Their Children's Education

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EMPOWERING AND EQUIPPING HISPANIC IMMIGRANT PARENTS TO  
ACTIVELY ENGAGE IN THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

by

Fernando G. Rogante

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching.

Hamline University

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To my wife, who was patient, encouraging, and supporting throughout the process of researching and writing the Capstone, and delivering the project. To the parents who participated in the project. Without their interest and motivation the project would have not been possible.

“Education is the kindling of a flame, not the filling of a vessel.”  
-Socrates

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

Many images appear on the screen when searching the word “education” in Google. Among the most common ones include a person standing in front of a room, an apple, books, pencils, students collaborating, images of a globe, graduation caps, computers, and of course, the famous building with the flag on top. All these concepts mentioned before are valid concepts that in one way or another describe education. However, there is one element that is not often immediately associated with education, even when that element is the beginning of life training before a child steps into a school. That element is the child’s parents.

In correlation with the Google images that pop up when searching the word education, many parents also associate education with elements found in a school building. However, education begins long before the first day of kindergarten, and the experiences that young children have before that day comes set the stage for later learning (Sheridan, Knoche, Edwards, Bovaird, & Kupzyk, 2010). While middle class families often have a higher level of education and usually understand that the cognitive development of preschool children depends on the stimulating materials and learning experiences that are provided at home, many lower socio economic immigrant parents often lack this knowledge and therefore fail to provide such opportunities to their children (Pong & Landale, 2012).

Another important aspect that middle class families understand is the importance of parental involvement at school (Hill & Taylor, 2004). Immigrant parents often

withdraw from their role in the partnership that they are expected to have in the educational process. Two of the most significant reasons for this are their low socioeconomic status (Hill & Taylor, 2004; Pong & Landale, 2012) and the lack of understanding of how the educational system works in the US (Hill & Taylor, 2004; Reardon & Galindo, 2009). Considering these facts, as part of my thesis and project, I would like to address the following question: *How can Hispanic immigrant parents be effectively equipped to support their Pre K-3 children's education in order to reduce the existing achievement gap?*

### **Chapter Overview**

Taking into consideration the question expressed above, in the remainder of the first chapter I will explain my personal experiences that have made me conscious of the needs of Hispanic immigrant parents in terms of their children's education and that have served to motivate me to find solutions. Also, I will share my experiences working as a Hispanic Outreach worker, a job that gave me the opportunity to work directly with school administrators, families, and students, and from which I gained the perspective that led me to do this Capstone Project. In addition, I will explain how equipping parents with the necessary tools will lead to higher levels of proficiency for children of immigrants which at the same time will help schools to close the achievement gap that persists despite the effort of legislators and educators.

### **My Experience as an Immigrant**

I came to the United States at the age of 21. Even though I had studied English as a child in my country of origin, I struggled to express myself. Since I lived in South

Florida where a person can always find a way to communicate in Spanish, I opted for the easy way out and did not use my limited English unless it was needed. This is how I lived during my first five years in the U.S. However, my motivation changed when I decided to go back to college. I realized that my English was not good enough, and I had to improve it. My wife (who was born and raised in the U.S. but also grew up speaking Spanish) and I started speaking English at home, began studying for the TOEFL exam, and reading books in English. After about a year, I passed the TOEFL and was accepted to the University of Northwestern in St. Paul, MN. In college, I learned aspects of the educational system in the U.S., such as how the GPA works and certain academic expectations in writing and reading. It was a challenging but rewarding process which formed me as a bicultural person. When I see the situation of many Hispanic immigrant parents, in a sense, I see a reflection of myself; not knowing the language or how to navigate the system. However, as I had my wife guiding me through the process, I believe that they can also succeed if they are provided with the appropriate guidance to help them understand what is expected of them in the education of their children.

### **My Experience as a Husband and as a Father**

My journey in the field of education in the United States started when I married my wife. She is an elementary school teacher whose experience is mainly in first grade. Although I was not yet involved in the world of education, in my conversations with her I learned the importance of early literacy and the great benefits that reading to preschool age children has in terms of later literacy skills such as letter recognition and letter/sound association. However, that knowledge was not personalized until I had children and

realized the great impact that reading *to* my preschool children had in order for them to gain literary concepts that would eventually help them learn to read. I have innumerable examples that I can mention from my children, but a few of them will suffice to show how something as simple as reading at home prepares children to be ready to enter kindergarten. In terms of vocabulary, books allow children to be exposed to words beyond their day to day lexicon. Just the other day, my family and I were in the car when a city train passed by and one of my two year old twins said, "Look, an urban train!" I gazed at my wife and asked her, "When did he learn the word urban?" "It is in one of his books about modes of transportation," she answered. Urban is not a word that he would have learned if it was not for the importance that we give to literacy at home. But that is not the most surprising story. A couple of months ago, my wife and the kids were at the library when one of the twins said, "That's the E of Elephant." Even though we have an alphabet book at home, we never directly taught beginning sounds of words to them. They just grasped the concept by spending hours being read to and exposed to children's literature. This experience made me realize the difference that early literacy makes in preschool age children and how it prepares them to be ready to learn how to read independently.

### **My Experience as a Hispanic Outreach Worker**

Beyond my second-hand experience in education through my wife, I eventually entered the field myself as a Hispanic Outreach Worker at an elementary school. When I was hired to do this job, I was often referred to as the *liaison* of the school. According to the dictionary, a *liaison* is defined as "a person who establishes and maintains

communication for mutual understanding and cooperation” (Merriam Webster Dictionary). As this definition stated, my job was to facilitate the relationship between the parents and the members of the school due to the existing difference in language between the two parties. However, throughout the years, I began realizing that there was a greater problem beyond the language barrier. Even though a bridge was provided for parents so they could communicate with the school members, these parents were being passive. In other words, while they were attending meetings and conferences regularly, their involvement was limited to *receiving* information about their children’s performance.

Furthermore, through my job as an Outreach Worker, it became evident to me the difference in kindergarten readiness between middle class families and Hispanic immigrant families that came from a lower socioeconomic class. While the great majority of middle class families understood the importance for their children to know letters, sounds and numbers before entering kindergarten (Hatcher, Nuner, & Paulsel, 2012), the expectation of the immigrant families was for their children to learn those things at school. This fact was beyond the difference in language, because the vast majority of this group of immigrant children neither knew the letters nor numbers in Spanish.

### **Rationale for the Project**

Through my training to become a teacher, I learned that the gap that I had observed first-hand between middle class and lower socioeconomic Hispanic families was not unique to my school, but that it is a nationwide problem. Reardon and Galindo (2009) stated the following:

Hispanic children are three times more likely than White children to grow up in poverty, four times more likely to have parents who did not complete high school, and one third more likely to have moved within the past year, they have, on average, fewer educational resources and opportunities than White children do. (p. 857)

These statistics are significant because a large number of Hispanic children “lack the cultural and material resources of the middle class and they are overlooked and underserved by the U.S. schools, which often struggle with dropouts or school failure rates” (Pong & Landale, 2012, p. 2). Because of these challenges that many Hispanic immigrant students face, I believe that it is key to empower parents to not just be present in the education of their children, but to be part of that education. It is for this reason that my Capstone Project is creating a four session program in which immigrant parents of Pre K-3 grade children could be equipped with practical information on how to complement their children’s education through knowledge of the school system as well as how and why to create a home environment that is academically stimulating.

### **Significance of the Research Question to Students, Families, Colleagues, and Policy Makers**

Equipping parents to be effectively involved in the education of their children is, for obvious reasons, important for the students themselves because they would have more support to be successful in school as well as set the foundation for college and rest of their lives. Furthermore, taking this route would alleviate pressure on teachers who are trying to support academic proficiency of low performing Hispanic immigrant students.

Even though educators would still have to differentiate and put into practice strategies to raise students' academic achievement, they would at least have the active support of parents at home who would now be able to complement the efforts that are made by educators at school. With regard to parents, even when they might lack education and language skills, they will feel empowered by being part of the educational process of their children. Finally, I believe that the route of training parents would give legislators an idea of where to destine money to try to fight the existing achievement gap between middle class and Hispanic immigrant families. Funding programs that equip parents on how to be part of the educational system has benefits at every level of society which legislators cannot overlook.

### **Summary**

In this chapter I discussed the important role that parents play in students' education. Through my personal experience as a parent and as Outreach Worker, I was able to see the difference in involvement between middle class families and Hispanic immigrant families. I argued that due to the high percentage of poverty among Hispanic immigrants in the U.S., families of this ethnic group lack cultural, educational and material resources that members of the middle class possess. Among these resources are the pre-literacy activities such as reading to children and the presence of books in the household. Also, the lack of understanding of how to navigate the educational system is a factor that affects immigrant students. In this Capstone project I will create a series of sessions in which low socioeconomic Hispanic immigrant families will be equipped with activities that they could do with their children to in order to prepare them to be

successful in kindergarten and support students through their K-3 educational experience. In these sessions I will also include basic information about the school system such expectations of lower elementary levels and how the performance of students in these levels will impact future accomplishments. The implementation of this information will help reduce the existing academic achievement gap between Hispanic immigrant families and the American middle class. In the following chapter I will expand on the issue of the academic achievement gap between middle class families and Hispanic immigrant families as well as the influence of parent involvement in this issue.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

Typically parents and caregivers are a child's first and most interested teachers.

This role does not cease to exist when children enter school; in fact, families play a critical role in the education of their children. Working with the school, parents and caregivers can help create collaborative partnerships that support all aspects of a child's achievement at school. Increased parental involvement in their child's education has many positive implications, including increased achievement levels.

(Larocque, Kleiman, & Darlin, 2011, p. 115)

The quote cited above contains an undeniable truth which is that the collaboration between parents and schools helps students achieve greater levels of success in school. However, collaboration might have different connotations. While schools might have specific expectations of how parents ought to collaborate, parents might have a contrasting perspective. This is especially true when considering immigrant families that, beyond dealing with a difference in language, may overlook the cultural connotations that the word collaboration has in a classroom of the U.S. educational system. Although this is something that immigrants from different parts of the world might have to deal with when coming to the U.S., only Hispanic families with a low socioeconomic status are going to be considered in this project. For the sake of brevity, for the rest of the paper, "Hispanic families" will refer to Hispanic immigrant families with a low socioeconomic status. Therefore, my research question is *How can Hispanic immigrant parents be*

*effectively equipped to support their Pre K-3 children's education in order to reduce the existing achievement gap?*

### **Overview**

As mentioned on the research question, the purpose of this capstone project is to equip Hispanic families with the right tools so that they can support their children's education in collaboration with schools. However, before explaining *how* Hispanic families can be equipped, it is important to explain *why* they should engage and *what* effective parental involvement means in order to be more engaged in the education of their students. This chapter contains three major sections.

The first section will cover the *why* question; why is it important that Hispanic families get involved? In this section, information will be provided about the reality of the existing achievement gap that involves Hispanic students in comparison with their middle class peers. Also, various ways in which parents can be involved will be shared and the difference that this can make not only in students success in school until third grade, but also the positive consequences in future years.

The second section will consider the *what* question: what do parents need to know in terms of how the educational system works as well as the expectations that teachers and schools, including post secondary institutions, have concerning parent involvement? This section will expand on the importance of knowing key aspects of education in the US such as the GPA and college readiness, and how knowing those concepts can help parents start preparing preschoolers and elementary school children at a young age to be ready for future stages in life.

Finally, the third stage will cover the *how* question. After explaining why parent involvement is important and what is needed to know, this third section will inform about different ways parents can be involved based on research done by experts. This section will be divided into three subsections which will be early literacy support, the importance of native language maintenance, and how to access community resources.

### **Why is it Important that Hispanic Families get Involved?**

To those familiar with the educational language, the phrase “achievement gap” is not only common knowledge, but it is a reality that teachers, principals, and state legislators have been trying to reduce since the time of desegregation (Ricks, 2016). However, many immigrant families might not be aware that this gap exists or even what it is. While Carpenter, Ramirez, and Severn defined the achievement gap as the academic differences in achievement for minority students as compared with their white peers (2006), Boyd expanded on this idea by explaining that it is “the disparity on a number of educational measures between the performance of groups of students, especially groups defined by gender, race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status” (2007, p. 5). Both of these definitions clearly emphasize the contrast in academic accomplishments between groups of people.

When searching for achievement gap, a person can find many academic areas and grade levels in which disparities between race/ethnic groups exist. For example, the National Center for Education Statistics showed discrepancies between White students and minority students, including Hispanics, in areas such as participation of early childhood education, 4th and 8th grade reading, 4th and 8th grade math, High School

dropout, and High School graduation rates, among others, between the years 1992 and 2013 (2016).

In all of these areas, not only did White students have better percentages than their Hispanic peers, but in many cases the existing gap between those two groups did not narrow throughout the years (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). For example, the gap between Whites and Hispanics in 4th grade reading, as well as the math gap in both 4th and 8th grade, did not narrow during the 21 years shown in the study. In spite of this, there was an area in which the gap did narrow. This area was in high school graduation rates, in which Hispanics rose from a 59% in 1992 to an 85% graduation rate in 2013. In any case, these numbers are to be taken carefully due to the fact that all other races/ethnicities, including Whites, also rose in percentages. Furthermore, even when Hispanics improved in this area, this group also ranked last in taking more challenging academic courses such as Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB).

Consequently, the achievement gap is a reality today as much as it was in the time of desegregation. But why and how is this significant to Hispanic parents? Experts in the topic have shown that, among other circumstances, parent involvement is one of the most significant aspects of student academic success and, consequently, a contributor to the achievement gap (Boyd, 2007; Ricks, 2016; Ross, 2016). Parent involvement is so important that even the 2003 federal educational law No Child Left Behind (NCLB), which had the purpose of holding teachers, schools and districts accountable for the learning of students (Ricks, 2016; U. S. Department of Education, 2003), dedicated a

section in which it mandated Title I schools (schools with low income families) to separate funds for promoting parent involvement “including promoting family literacy and parenting skills” (U. S. Department of Education, 2003, p. 16). This federal document explained the following:

[...] families have a major influence on their children’s achievement in school and through life. When schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more. (U. S. Department of Education, 2003, p. 3)

According to this quote, it is noteworthy that parent involvement does not only make an impact on student achievement *in* school, but also influences student retention and has an impact on later life. Many experts have concluded that the relationship between parent involvement and students’ overall success. Laroque, Kleiman, and Darling (2011) stated the following:

Higher levels of parental involvement has been associated with better student attendance, higher math and reading scores, higher graduation rates, and less grade retention. Parental involvement has also been found to be important for the quality of education the students receive beyond just achievement. It has been associated with nonacademic outcomes such as parent and student satisfaction with school and fewer discipline problems as well as positive attitudes and more effective programs and schools. (p. 117)

Other authors such as Ross (2016), Ortiz and Ordonez -Jasis (2005), Hill and Taylor (2004), Cattanach (2013), and Sonnenschein, Stapleton & Metzger (2014) are a few of the experts who confirm the importance of parent involvement in the areas of school achievement, high school completion, and higher education.

It is evident that parent involvement makes a difference. The question now becomes: what does parent involvement look like and how can schools do a better job of allowing opportunities for meaningful parent engagement.

### **What Does it Mean to be an Involved Parent in the U.S.?**

In the previous section the importance of parents being engaged in their children's education and the difference that this involvement makes in students at different levels in their education was discussed. However, parent involvement may mean different things to various stakeholders. For example, Baird (2015) explained that immigrant parents in the U.S. who are fleeing from persecution or violence in their home country feel that they are being involved in their children's education by just sending them to school. On the other hand, teachers may interpret this passivity as lack of interest from the parents (LaRocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011).

This erroneous idea of involvement also happens in other circumstances. In relation specifically to the Hispanic culture, Cattanach (2013) affirmed the following:

Knowing your child has homework and goes to school and is passing and not in trouble often constitutes engagement in many Hispanic homes.

Seeing that the homework is finished, offering to help, finding out from teachers how well their student is doing compared to others, assessing

where their children can improve, and how they should be prepared for the future are not steps many Hispanic parents see as necessary for their child's educational success. (p. 23)

Therefore, it is important that the concept of parent involvement is well established in order to avoid confusion and frustration from the different parties involved. Keyes (2002) identified three parent involvement categories: parent focused, where parents have the primary responsibility in the education of their children; school focused, where the major responsibility lies on the school; and partnership focused, where families and schools work together. Concerning these three categories, Laroque, Kleiman, and Darling (2011) declared that even though in the past the parent focused and the school focused approaches were more accepted, they promoted separation between home and school. It is for this reason that in recent times the partnership approach has become more popular.

However, a partnership between families and schools requires a deeper relationship between the parties than a mere communication between the two. For example, Ricks affirmed that the partnership approach requires more than “parents fulfill[ing] their legal responsibilities to send their children to school, but their personal participation” (2014, p. 3). Also, Boyd (2007) argued that a true partnership requires more than parent attendance to parent-teacher conferences, but it is necessary to train parents on how to discuss their student's progress with the teachers. Other authors such as Ross (2016) and Cattanach (2013) mentioned that activities that are commonly associated to parent involvement such as volunteering at school or participating at PTA meetings do not have an influence on academic growth.

Then, if some of the activities that are normally linked to parent involvement do not have an effect on academic achievement, what are the activities that do make a difference? For LaRocque, Kleiman, & Darling (2011), Hill and Taylor (2004) and Epstein, (1995) the activities that actually do help students attain better results at school are those related to academics such as providing a regular time and place for students to do their homework, limiting television time and two way communication between home and school. Concerning this last point, Ross (2010) mentioned a study done by Fan (2001) who showed that while communication between home and school concerning negative issues had a negative impact on students' achievement, when the communication happened in order to motivate and encourage, it had a positive result in academic outcomes.

Another aspect that was found to have a great impact on student performance is parents' expectations for their children concerning high school graduation and post secondary education. Ross (2016) cited studies that show that "students whose parents had low educational expectations for them (i.e., only expecting high school graduation) were more than five times as likely as other students to drop out of school in the eighth grade" (p. 16). Furthermore, "students who often discussed school courses with their parents had 44% higher odds of immediate enrollment in postsecondary education, compared to those who never had these discussions with their parents" (Ross, 2016, p. 16). This information is significant because in order to motivate Hispanic students and have discussions with them about which courses are more significant and encourage students to pursue higher education, it is necessary to know the different options available

as well as the requirements that are needed for both finishing high school and going to college. Kimura-Walsh, Yamamura, Griffin and Allen (2009) explained that while Hispanic families do encourage their children to pursue higher education degrees, many parents lack experience dealing with the educational system, which impedes them from providing accurate advice in order to attain this goal. Furthermore, Kimura-Walsh et al. (2009) explained that while schools do provide counselors that help students in the process of guiding them through the requirements of colleges, these counselors are in most cases overloaded and they tend to focus their attention on high-achieving students. In addition, Hispanic students “are also often counseled away from Advanced Placement courses or face additional barriers in accessing college preparatory courses as compared to their White and Asian American counterparts” (Kimura-Walsh et al., 2009, p. 301). Therefore, as Medina, Guzmán and Wong-Ratcliff explained, the problem is not that Hispanic parents do not care or have no expectations for their students; the issue is that “they lack the fundamental information about their rights as parents and their responsibilities in their children’s education prescribed in the U.S. school system” (p. 6).

Knowing how the U.S. educational system works in order for a students to be able to achieve higher education might seem irrelevant for a discussion that encourages parent involvement in a Pre K-3 setting. However, Maxwell (2013) explained that “parental expectations and literacy development as early as kindergarten could influence academic outcomes much later in school” (p. 131).

In summary, while it was established that parent involvement is key to educational success, it is imperative that it is clearly defined and understood by all parties

involved. It cannot be assumed that people coming from other cultures have the same understanding of what it means to support their child's education. As mentioned earlier, for some immigrant parents, involvement might simply mean diligently sending their children to school. Others think that being involved is participating in parent teacher conferences or PTA meetings. However, there are many other aspects that can make a significant academic difference when talking about parental involvement. The next section will describe specific research based strategies that are most effective for parents to implement in order for students to reach their full academic potential.

### **How Can Parents Effectively Support Their Children's Education**

In the previous section it was mentioned that parent involvement means more than simply being present at parent teacher conferences or PTA meetings. It was also pointed out that activities such as providing a regular space and time for students to do their homework can boost student achievement. However, such types of involvement without the right context might not be effective. For example, Hill and Taylor mentioned that even when a parent shows involvement by going to a classroom to “monitor the children's behavior” (2004, p. 163), this involvement did not always show positive results. In the same way, providing a space for children to do their homework might be ineffective if that time is not used wisely (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009). It is for this reason that beyond an appropriate home environment and a positive family school involvement, McMurray (2012) identified “personal literacy practices of the families [and] family expectations regarding literacy practices” as fundamental complements for successful parent involvement (p. 8). Therefore, this section will explain specific literacy approaches

that parents can put into practice in partnership with schools and the community in order to positively impact students learning. This segment will be divided into two sub-sections which include literacy support and native language maintenance.

**Literacy support.** Wise stated that “[l]iteracy is, in reality, the cornerstone of student achievement for any student in any grade” (2009, p. 373). He also stated that “[n]o student with low literacy skills can graduate from high school prepared for college or a career” (Wise, 2009, p. 369). These quotes demonstrate the importance of literacy. Since the present study focuses on Pre K-3 children, the literature used in this section emphasizes the importance of parent involvement with regard to literacy in the early years. The literature will also show how this type of involvement has an effect on school performance in later years.

Ortiz and Ordoñez-Jasis (2005) defined literacy as the ability to decode and comprehend written language at a rudimentary level, that is, the ability to look at written words corresponding to ordinary oral discourse, to say them and to understand them” (p. 112). This “decoding” aspect is probably what it is most commonly associated with early literacy. However, Ortiz and Ordoñez-Jasis also recognized that “literacy can be viewed in a broader sense, that is, as the ability to think and reason within a particular society” (2005, p. 112). But a foundation of concepts and lexicon needs to be in place in order to be able to reason and think. In her dissertation, McMurray (2012) described the development of literacy during the first three years of life. She explained that some aspects of literacy such as phonemes begin a month after birth. She continued saying that

at 4 months, babies are able to “process speech sounds and attend only to sounds to which they have been exposed to in their native language” (p. 11). Between 10 and 12 months babies start saying their first words and at around 18 months they acquire 9 words per day. By the time they turn 3, they begin using complete sentences. Nevertheless, all this progress does not happen in a vacuum but is the result of the interaction between the parents and the child during those first years of life (McMurray, 2012). Therefore, literacy does not begin in kindergarten when a child officially starts school. Literacy begins with the environment provided by the caregivers shortly after a baby comes out of the womb. Furthermore, Snow, Tabors, and Dickinson (2001) asserted that it is the language environment provided at home during the first 5 years of life that can assure reading success in later years.

It is evident that the language environment is important, but how can a caregiver provide this type of environment? One aspect that many authors such as Farver, Xu, Eppe, and Lonigan (2006; 2013), Caspe (2009), McMurray (2012), and Ortiz and Ordoñez-Jasis (2005) agreed that having reading materials at home helps children engage in literary activities. However, the mere fact that literature is available does not have as positive of an effect as the interaction between adults and children reading the literature. There are many levels in which parents can have literary interactions with children using books. The most basic one is just reading to children. Caspe (2009) said that reading different types of books to children is important because they are exposed to words, ideas, and concepts that they otherwise would not have access to in a normal daily interaction.

McMurray (2012) explained that another way of reading books can be by using “nominative talk” which is a kind of reading that goes beyond the immediate context of the text and motivates children to use inferences and predictions (p. 31). In this way, children are not merely listen to a story and being exposed to words and ideas, but they are using cognitive abilities by interacting with the text.

McMurray (2012) and Caspe (2009) acknowledged a third way of reading books known as dialogic reading. In this type of reading, the adults start gradually incorporating higher level questions about the content of the book to the point where the child ends up being the storyteller. This is important because children need to use expanded vocabulary to answer the questions which helps with reading comprehension, an important ability needed when children learn how to read independently.

Even though there are other strategies used when reading with children, the three mentioned above show that reading with children is important and helps to develop abilities that pupils will need when entering school. In spite of this fact and the difference that reading at home makes during the preschool year, Caspe (2009) mentioned that “Latino parents are less-likely to read books with their young children than other ethnic groups [and] Latino mothers are about half likely as white mothers to do so” (p. 308). This lack of involvement is not because lack of interest for their children’s education, and many times it is related to the socioeconomic status (SES) of these families. In 2014, 31.9% of Hispanic children were living in poverty as compared to the national average of 21.1% Caspe mentioned that that “children from low-income homes whose parents have low levels of education are at risk for early reading failure” (p. 307). The correlation

between SES and low reading skills is well explained by McMurray who said that while low income families will enter first grade with an average of 25 hours of one-on-one picture book reading, those in more advantageous situations will arrive at first grade with between 1,000 and 1,700 hours of reading with the same type of books. The effects of low SES among Hispanics are explained further by Farver, Xu, Eppe and Lonigan (2006):

Although the extended household is the common pattern for Latino families, due to high housing costs in many U.S. cities, low-income families are often forced to live in large households which typically include unrelated adults and their children. In urban inner city neighborhoods, it is not uncommon for two or three unrelated families to share the same home; thus raising stress levels considerably. Research on the effects of crowded home environments and child outcomes reported that high-density living conditions were associated with disparities in children's vocabulary growth rates, cognitive abilities and social functioning. In other studies, parents were rated as being less responsive to their children when compared to those who were living in less crowded homes, and the degree of stress associated with high density home environments was negatively correlated with the frequency and quality of parent to child speech. (p. 197)

It is evident that living in low income conditions have disadvantages that affect the home environment and influence literacy outcomes. However, there is another

important aspect of literacy related to vocabulary development of which Hispanics could take advantage. This is the use of oral language. McMurray (2012) explained that through intentional verbal interaction parents can “positively impact their children’s language and literacy development (p. 29). Ortiz and Ordoñez-Jasis (2005) explained that Hispanic parents can use oral storytelling with their children such as folktales, family histories, and fables to develop children’s vocabulary. Furthermore, regular activities such as cooking the child’s favorite meal can enhance not only vocabulary related to cooking but also math skills. Once again, McMurray (2012) pointed out that the amount of words parents speak to their children have an influence on their language skills at age 3 as well as to their expressive language at age 9. In this way, even though the SES of many Hispanic parents might be an impediment to provide a positive home environment for reading with their children, they can still use verbal interaction as a means of developing literacy skills.

**Language maintenance.** Another aspect that can support literacy in later years is the maintenance of the native language. Ordoñez-Jasis (2005) attributed ELL students’ success in literacy development to the use and maintenance of the native language. Farver, Xu, Lonigan, and Eppe also commented that “some research on children’s first language (L1) and second language (L2) acquisition suggests that the processes are interdependent, and efforts to enhance children’s native language proficiency do not impede, but rather support, the acquisition of English and vice versa” (2013, p. 776). Furthermore, Snow (1997) affirmed that “the greatest contribution that immigrant parents can make to their children’s success is to ensure they maintain fluency and continue to

develop the home language” (p. 29). Other authors such as Boyd (2007), Jiménez, García and Pearson (1995), and Schhneider, Martinez, and Ownes (2006) also supported the advantage of Spanish maintenance while adding English.

There are many benefits for children who can maintain their mother tongue. One of these benefits is related to vocabulary. Hernández, Montenegro, and Herter (2016) argued in favor of the importance of using cognates by teachers who instruct ELL Hispanic students. A cognate is a word that sounds like, is spelled almost exactly the same, and has the same meaning in two different languages. An example of a cognate between English and Spanish would be the word *animal*, which has similar pronunciation, is spelled the same, and has the same meaning in both languages. There are more than 20,000 Spanish-English cognates including a significant amount of academic vocabulary (Hernandez, Montenegro, & Herter, 2016). In addition, these authors affirmed that “cognates in English and Spanish account for one third to one-half the average educated person’s active vocabulary” (p. 234). What this data reveals is that Hispanic parents, especially those who do not speak English, should use and expose their children to the Spanish language as much as possible because many of the words that children will hear and learn how to say in their mother tongue will have a direct translation in English. Therefore, even though it will take longer for these children to grow their English language skills than those who were exposed to both English and Spanish (Farver, Xu, Lonigan, & Eppe, 2013), the amount of cognates between the languages will facilitate the process.

Another commonality that Farver et al. (2013) identified between English and Spanish is the phonological aspect. Phonology is defined as “the system of contrastive relationships among the speech sounds that constitute the fundamental components of a language.” (Oxford Living Dictionary, 2017). Concerning this characteristic of the language these authors affirmed the following:

...phonological awareness develops in young children in a similar sequence in both English and Spanish. Moreover, because English and Spanish share commonalities in syllable structure, they also proposed that the influence of word linguistic properties on phonological awareness in English (e.g., syllable-initial consonant cluster and phoneme articulatory properties) can be extrapolated to Spanish and vice versa; indicating a possible transfer of skills across two languages. (Farver et al., 2013, p. 777)

In a similar way as the use of the Spanish language would make the process of learning English easier in terms vocabulary, when Hispanic families use their mother tongue they can also enrich literacy skills when acquiring English as a second language.

Also, there is a correlation with the Spanish fluency between preschool-early elementary years and middle-high school. Caspe (2009) affirmed that, for instance, Hispanic children whose parents engaged in family literacy activities had high standardized Spanish reading scores in elementary school and high English reading achievement in the middle school grades (p. 307). Concerning the benefits that the maintenance of Spanish has on high school students, Tran (2010) affirmed that students

who were able to preserve the language while acquiring English achieved higher GPA's and performed better on academic tests than their monolingual peers. Furthermore, Jiménez, García and Pearson (1995) affirmed that bilingual high school Hispanic students considered their knowledge of Spanish as an asset for learning English and that they used the same strategies in Spanish and English for reading comprehension. Also, they relied on the Spanish language to construct meaning in English, and because they were working with two languages, they engaged in "self- evaluation, self-monitoring, self-management, and self-reinforcement" (Jiménez, García & Pearson, 1995, p. 69).

It has been suggested that the use and maintenance of Spanish as the first language has benefits for both acquiring English and academic performance in later years. However, there is a reality that explains why there still exists an achievement gap. Schneider, Martinez, and Ownes (2006) explained that Hispanic parents who only speak Spanish are less likely to read with their children or be involved in literacy activities than bilingual families or English monolingual families. These authors said the reason for this is that generally, these families are low income, live in disadvantaged neighborhoods, and do not know the culture. All of these factors affect the learning environment of their children and prevents them to enter school with the appropriate readiness (Schneider, Martinez, & Ownes, 2006).

Another fact is that many second generation Hispanic children experience is the loss of Spanish due to the hegemony of the English culture around them. Worthy (2006) called this deficit a linguistic subtraction, and explained that it does not only have a

negative effect on the language aspect but also has consequences concerning cultural practices as well as socioeconomic effects. He explained that,

[t]he resulting subtraction of linguistic and cultural resources has been tied to achievement gaps, increased dropout rates, and, eventually, lowered socioeconomic status. As linguistic connections with their families and roots fade, these children also face a loss of cultural knowledge, family values, personal nurturing, and academic support. (Worthy, 2006, p. 140)

Therefore, the language maintenance for Hispanic children is important for multiple reasons. First of all it is the deep connection of culture, traditions and values. Sheridan, Knoche, Kupzyk, Edwards, and Marvin (2011) affirmed that “family is the primary system, and because it is generally a lifelong resource, it is the most important” (p. 362). Considering this fact, when Hispanic immigrant children lose their mother tongue, they are losing more than a language. They are losing the most important connection that they can have: their families. Secondly, by losing the ability to use Spanish at a young age, children are missing the opportunity to make connections between Spanish and English which will affect and postpone the learning of the second language. Finally, the delay created due to the Spanish language loss will influence academic performance in later school years, which at the same time might have negative socio economic effect when these children become adults.

**School and community support.** In this last section of chapter two *how can parents effectively support their child’s education?* it was shown that literacy support and language maintenance from preschool age through the early elementary years is essential

for future academic success. However, it was also demonstrated that lower socioeconomic status is a fact that many Hispanic immigrant families face, which affect both the support of literacy as well as maintenance of the mother tongue. In spite of this, there is assistance available from schools and communities that can help families overcome negative circumstances. One resource that low income families with limited literacy abilities can use is the public library. In a study done by Park and Yau (2014) it was demonstrated that Hispanics of a low socioeconomic background who used the library for educational purposes had a positive relationship with academic achievement. Furthermore, this achievement was greater for the Latino students than for their English speaking counterparts.

Another obstacle that low income families face and that is related to academic performance is that of health. Blank (2015) affirmed that,

[h]igh rates of chronic absence and suspensions from school, and low levels of third-grade reading scores, are often rooted in health issues. Research suggests correlations between academic success and vision challenges, asthma, teen pregnancy, aggression, violence, and lack of physical. (p. 810)

Blank (2015) gave examples of many school districts who partnered with the community in order to create health equity for all students and demonstrated how this support not only helped improved the health of students but also had an impact on academic performance.

One last aspect concerning the assistance that schools and communities offer to low performing students, including Hispanics, is the raising amount of summer programs offered to these families. David (2010) notes that summer programs are important because it is during this period when the academic achievement gap broadens. Tenzian, Anderson and Hamilton (2009) explained:

Children and youth who reside in economically disadvantaged households and who live in low- resource, urban neighborhoods are more likely to lose ground in reading over the summer than their middle- and upper-income peers. These children and youth also often come from ethnic minority backgrounds. In addition, both lower and higher income students lose ground in math over the summer. The academic disparities between low-income and higher-income children increase as children grow older, widening this achievement gap. Summer learning programs are an important strategy for “narrowing the gap (p. 2).

However, many libraries and schools offer summer programs for families of low socioeconomic status. These programs have shown to improve student achievement. (David, 2010). Furthermore, David (2010) mentioned that beyond these programs, local businesses normally are willing to help subsidise other types of camps to which the more advantageous families have access.

Therefore Hispanic families who are in a disadvantaged position need to know that there are options and resources available to them that can help them overcome their situations. Many times schools provide these resources, such as summer programs and

health programs, or they have access to these types of resources. Furthermore, public libraries can directly help students overcome academic obstacles that Hispanic parents who do not have the sufficient tools would not be able to do.

### **Conclusion**

Chapter two touched on three main sections: The importance of Hispanic families getting involved, the true meaning and significance of parent involvement, and the resources upon which parents can rely to support their children's education.

During the first section the existing academic achievement gap was described. Part of the reason for this achievement gap is parent involvement. It was explained how even when Hispanics parents are involved, they might not do so in a way that it is most effective to help their children academically. The second section touched on what is effective parent involvement and how the Hispanic families' lack of knowledge of the educational system in the US in aspects such as GPA, and more prestigious courses and programs like AP and IB schools affected their students' future opportunities. Finally, the third section explained how parents can actually help their children so they can have better chances to succeed in school and in life. Among other things, it was mentioned how parents can be intentional in speaking to their children in Spanish. This will not only help maintain the children's native language but it will help making a smoother transition when learning English. Also, parents need to be aware that even when they might lack the resources needed for their children to be completely successful, they can access school and community resources to compensate for those missing aspects.

Considering the details explained in chapter two, the next chapter takes into consideration all that information to create different sessions for Hispanic parents in which they will be informed about the aspect that they need to know in order for their children to be successful in school and, consequently, in life.

### CHAPTER THREE

The previous chapter discussed the existing academic achievement gap between the middle class and children of Hispanic immigrant with low SES. It was also mentioned that part of the problem was not that these immigrant parents do not care for their children but that, due to different circumstances, they might have different concepts of what being involved in their education looks like. Some of these concepts had to do with the environment created at home in terms of oral language and literacy activities provided for children. Also, the lack of knowledge about the importance of maintaining and developing the native language was explained. Furthermore, unfamiliarity with the educational system on the part of immigrant parents was also a factor that affected the achievement gap. Finally, it was mentioned how these parents could become partners with the schools and the communities in order to be able to overcome the existing deficiencies. Consequently, the research question is *How can Hispanic immigrant parents be effectively equipped to support their Pre K-3 children's education in order to reduce the existing achievement gap?*

This chapter provides information about programs that were successfully established in order to equip immigrant Hispanic parents with the appropriate information in order for their children to be successful in school. Based on this information, a description of a project that I implemented with Hispanic immigrant parents is provided. This training program for parents included aspects such as home environment, literacy strategies to implement at home, the importance of Spanish language maintenance, key characteristics about the US educational system, and how to partner with the school and

communities. Following the description of the project, a description of the participants, the setting, and the time of the project is given. Finally, the chapter will end with a summary and an introduction to chapter four which explains the results of the project.

## **Research**

According to the United States Census Bureau, in 2014 the Hispanic population in the US accounted for the 17.4 % of the total population of the country (Rosales, 2016) and is the fastest growing segment of the school-age population (Oberg De La Garza & Kuri, 2014). In spite of these statistics, Hispanic children represent the lowest number of college enrollments when compared with other ethnic groups such as Whites, African Americans, and Asians (Pstross, Rodríguez, Knopf, & Paris, 2014). As mentioned in chapter two, it is the first five years of a child that set the literacy foundation for later years (McMurray, 2012; Snow, Tabors, & Dickinson, 2001). It is for this reason that many programs have been established in order to help parents that lack the knowledge and ability to implement the necessary literacy strategies at early stages. These early trainings facilitate students' readiness which would allow them to have more opportunities to achieve greater academic levels.

O'Donnell, Kirkner, and Meyer-Adams (2008) presented information about a community program called Stevenson-YMCA Community School. This program was an extended day program that served low income families of a community in southern California of which 78% were Hispanics. The goals of the program were the following:

- (a) to improve school behavior and performance by providing high quality and integrated out-of-school programming for children and families;
- (b) to

provide programming to strengthen parenting skills and promote self-sufficiency; (c) to develop grassroots community leaders with the skills to reduce barriers to positive child, family, and school functioning; and (d) to increase collaboration between the family, school, and community to improve children's learning. (O'Donnell, Kirkner, & Meyer-Adams, 2008, p. 151)

The program offers support in areas such as family literacy, family communication, school advocacy, parenting skills, how to help your child in school, college preparation, healthy lifestyles, English as a Second Language (ESL), and others (O'Donnell, Kirkner, & Meyer-Adams, 2008). From a list of more than 40 areas, parents that participated in the program expressed a sense of pride and accomplishment, a better knowledge on how to help their children in school, actual improvement of their children's academic performance, better behavior on the part of their children, and greater home-school connections (O'Donnell, Kirkner, & Meyer-Adams, 2008).

Another program that sought to help Hispanic parents with their involvement in their children's education is the American Dream Academy (ADA) (Pstross, Rodríguez, Knopf, & Paris, 2014). This program served Title I schools, which means that at least 40% of the student population of a particular school has to live under the poverty line, in a suburban area of Phoenix, Arizona. 90% of the participants of the this program were hispanic parents. The vision of the program is that "transformative change can occur by empowering parents with the hope and tools to provide their children with the focus, guidance, and support to succeed in their academic careers and to see college as an

important pathway to success.” (Pstross, Rodríguez, Knopf, & Paris, 2014, p. 652) The program is nine weeks long, but only six of them are dedicated to instruction in areas such as home-school collaboration, communication and discipline, academic standards/reading, the US educational system, and the requirements for college. The other three sessions are for the introduction of the program, a meeting with the principal, and a graduation at the end of the program. Between 2006 and 2013, the program graduated more than 29,000 parents who expressed great satisfaction about their learning. Many testimonies are provided in Pstross, Rodríguez, Knopf, and Paris’ article about the significance of programs like ADA. However the authors themselves summarize the importance of of such programs by saying that their study,

validates a prevailing view in the literature that Latino parents are indeed personally invested in their children’s education, but often find it difficult to orient themselves in the U.S. educational system. For these reasons, programs such as the ADA fill the gap in resources that are available to Latino parents. (Pstross, Rodríguez, Knopf, & Paris, 2014, p. 666)

A third program that made a positive impact on parental involvement and student performance was the Logan Square Neighborhood Association. This program served families in the northwest side of Chicago in a community where 71% of the population were Hispanics. The program looked to improve literacy achievement of Hispanic students by creating a partnership between homes, schools, and communities. The program contacted a local university whose professors created lessons for parents and students. Also, undergraduate students collaborated as tutors for the programs. The local

schools provided the buildings where the classes took place, and some of their teachers also collaborated with planning and facilitating lessons. Due to problems with the budget, the program only provided about 10 hours of service for parents and students for a length of ten weeks instead of the 20 hours originally planned. In spite of this, the results at the end of the ten weeks showed improvement concerning parents' attitudes towards involvement in terms of helping their children at home. An example of a positive attitude demonstrated by parents is the testimony of one of them who said the following: "I can do these strategies with my kids at home and at school. Teaching reading was such a scary thing before, but now it is not." (Oberge De La Garza & Kuri, 2014, p. 128) A change was not only seen in parents' attitude towards being involved in reading activities, but students' performance also demonstrated improvement. Students' journals that documented lesson content, methodology, and assessment summaries and reflections for each session demonstrated growth throughout the program. Furthermore, the program was also helpful to create awareness among those who think that Hispanic parents do not care about the education of their children. One volunteer expressed: "I didn't realize that parents in the community desperately want their children be successful in school but feel powerless to help" (Oberge De La Garza & Kuri, 2014, p. 128).

As it can be seen, short term programs that seek to educate and empower Hispanic families by providing trainings through which they can learn strategies and make connections with school and community resources make an impact on parent involvement and student achievement.

### **Project Description**

The programs described above focused on training parents on how to be involved in their children's education by providing key information about topics such as involvement, literacy strategies, and community partnership. These programs met weekly and their duration was between two and three months. At the completion of the programs parents reported that they felt more equipped and demonstrated more confidence about supporting the education of their children. It is for this reason and based on these types of programs that I decided to create eight sessions in which I included training on topics such as home environment, literacy strategies to implement at home, the importance of Spanish language maintenance, important characteristics about the US educational system, and how to partner with school and communities. The Appendix shows a table which is an outline of the objectives and a brief description of topics covered during the parent training sessions.

These sessions were implemented with Hispanic parents of a pre-K-5 Title I public school in Kannapolis, NC whose student body was composed of 33.7% of Hispanics at the time. This particular school in Kannapolis has the biggest concentration of Hispanics in comparison to the other elementary schools in the city. Hispanics are the biggest minority in the school, right behind White students who form the 36.1% of the student body of the school. Concerning the socio economic details, 71.8% of the students of the school are eligible to participate from the national School Lunch Program. This percentage is greater than the NC 57.2% state average. For the 2015-16 school year, the school had grade level proficiency of 38% in reading and 57% in math. Once again, the reading proficiency is significantly lower than the state median which is of 56%.

Considering the demographics and the reading level performance, this school was a perfect setting for my project. The sessions were held during the Fall semester of the 2017-18 school year. The place for the meetings was the school building in order to provide parents with a familiar setting, and all Hispanic parents who wanted to participate were welcomed. At the end of the program, a parent survey was administered to assess the attitudes and motivation for increased involvement. Parents also created a specific plan for their family of how to implement the information gained.

### **Summary**

Based on the research question *How can schools effectively equip Hispanic immigrant parents to support their Pre K-3 children's education in order to reduce the existing achievement gap?*, this chapter reviewed the causes of the existing academic achievement gap between middle class White and Hispanics. Then, the chapter discussed the positive results shown by three programs that equipped Hispanic parents with strategies to implement in topics such as home environment, literacy support, aspects of the US educational system, and collaboration with different community organizations. Finally, a description of the academic performance and demographic of a school was provided in order to demonstrate the necessity of a program such as the one I implemented so that the existing needs on that particular community can be fulfilled. The next chapter reflects on the results of the sessions implemented as well as the reaction of the parents who participated in the program.

## CHAPTER FOUR

Chapter two explained that parent involvement can have different meanings. While for some parents it might mean just sending their children to school, for others it might be being involved in school activities, or working together with the school to support their children's education. It was seen that, among others, one of the factors that affected the perspective of educational involvement was the SES of parents, and those with a low SES tend to have a distorted view of parent involvement that would affect their children's performance in school. It was also seen that many Hispanic immigrant families have a low SES and, even though they care about their children as much as more affluent families, these immigrant parents lack the appropriate information to provide their children with the same opportunities as their more advantageous peers. It is for this reason that my project and my thesis was based on the question *How can Hispanic immigrant parents be effectively equipped to support their Pre K-3 children's education in order to reduce the existing achievement gap?*

### **Chapter Overview**

Chapter four provides a brief summary of the literature review in relation to the parent training project, some policy implications about the project, areas of future research, limitations of the project, future steps, summary, and conclusion.

Concerning the literature review, I make the connection between the research developed in chapter two and how that research helped form the topics of the sessions as well as how it was related to the interaction with parents during the training. With regard to the implications, I share the excitement that parents demonstrated during the meetings

and how their eagerness to learn demonstrate the need for more programs like the one I provided to be offered to low SES families. In relation to this, Chapter Four provides a section about policy implications and future research. In this section I express the need to for public resources to be invested in parent programs as related to education. In relation to this, I suggest to do research in order to compare the effectiveness of programs such as Early Childhood Education, which only works with children, in comparison with programs like Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) that train parents alongside their children. In the limitation section, I share some drawbacks that I think this program had at the time of implementing it as well as looking into the future in terms of reproducing it. Then I discuss my desired future steps and my hope to see myself and the program being expanded in the future. Following the future steps comes a summary of the chapter, which emphasizes the main points developed in the chapter so that the reader can have clear sense of the important ideas that were communicated. Finally, I finish with a conclusion where I share how the project impacted me personally and professionally.

### **Revisit of Literature Review**

When I first considered the idea of providing a parent involvement training for Hispanic families, I made the mistake of generalizing all Hispanic immigrants. Through my research, I learned more about how the problem of involvement is multifaceted, and it is affected by other factors beyond immigration. Even though many immigrant Hispanic families have the disadvantage of coming to the US without knowing the language and the culture, while doing my research I noticed that the problem was not as much with language and culture but with the socio economical status of these families. Furthermore,

while doing my project, I discovered that there is a wide range of diversity in terms of levels of education within the families with low SES. Therefore, while going through the different sessions of my project, I noticed that those parents that had higher level of education were already doing some of the suggestions provided in the training. For example, one of the key strategies in order to reduce the achievement gap as mentioned in chapter two was parent's providing a literacy-rich environment at home during the first five years of a child's life (Dickinson, 2001; McMurray, 2012). Considering this aspect of parent involvement, I noticed that those parents with more years of education were more prone to read with their children and use pre-literacy strategies at home than those with lower levels of education.

Another aspect mentioned in chapter two in relation to parent involvement was the focused use of oral language at home in different aspects of life (Snow, Tabors, and Dickinson, 2001). Oral language is important because it not only enhances vocabulary in the mother tongue, but it is beneficial for learning English due to the high number of cognates that exists between Spanish and English (Hernandez, Montenegro, & Herter, 2016). In this area, parents with more years of education proved to be using more oral language with their children than those with fewer years of education. Furthermore, those parents who did not finish elementary school felt like they had nothing to offer to their children until they realized that an act as simple as creating conversations with them in Spanish was something from which their sons and daughters would benefit. Therefore, even though there were different levels of education among parents of low SES, all parents testified to benefiting from the training in different ways. While parents with

higher levels of education learned specific strategies on how to support their children and felt affirmed in what they were already doing, those with less experience in education felt encouraged by understanding that in spite of their lack of formal education at an institution they still had abilities to offer. For example, one of the most consistent comments that I heard from parents is that they had started using more oral language with their children. This simple strategy is important because, as mentioned in chapter 2, oral language in Spanish facilitates the learning of English due to the amount of cognates between the two languages as well as facilitating latter reading stages. Furthermore, other parents emphasized how they were more intentional in improving their communication with the school by, for example, searching for an adult that would serve as an interpreter for them instead of just using their children to translate. These are a few of examples among many comments that parents shared at the last session.

### **Implications**

Throughout the training, parents demonstrated through different comments their excitement about their learning and how much they valued being given the opportunity to be equipped so they could be part of their children's education. For example, in the first session, only five of the thirty two families who had registered attended the training. However, by the end of the session, those five families who participated asked for permission and took the initiative to invite other parents who could benefit from the training. As a result, the following week twenty two families were represented in the room.

Considering the fact that the training targeted low SES families, we assured to have food that was served half an hour before the trainings began and child care during the sessions. These services were provided through volunteers from my church that donated their time and money to provide this amazing opportunity for these caring parents. Something that might have improved attendance from the first week, is that we saw the necessity of providing transportation. Therefore, beginning the second week, we ensured transportation through a local church near the school where the training was held.

Another example of the enthusiasm that these parents showed was their request to have extended time to expand on the topics being offered. Since the meetings were held on Thursday evenings and the next day was a work day for the majority of the people, I tried to be respectful of the time of parents, volunteers, and the principal of the school who stayed until the meetings were over. For this reason, the families themselves suggested giving up the first half hour during which the food was served in order to use that time to discuss the topics offered during the sessions.

These examples clearly show that these parents do care about their children, and they are willing to take initiatives in order to support them. This is true when opportunities are provided to them so they can have the knowledge and be equipped with the right tools in order to help their children be successful. Therefore, a clear implication is that more trainings like this are needed so that parents can be the first advocates and educators of their children.

### **Policy Implications and Future Research**

What parent does not want their children to be successful? The answer is obvious, but this training showed me that parents sometimes feel helpless, and if they seem like they are passive in supporting their children it is not because they do not want the best for them but because they lack the tools and knowledge to do so. As a teacher, I see how pressure is put over educators and much money is spent on resources to guarantee students' educational success. But after doing this training and seeing parents' excitement over learning as well as their applying the abilities learned, the unavoidable question that keeps coming to my head is, "Why are school districts not investing in programs to help engage and train parents to be part of the educational process?" After all, and as argued in chapter one, education starts at home, and that privilege should not be substituted, at least in its totality, by any other institution (Sheridan, Knoche, Edwards, Bovaird, & Kupzyk, 2010).

In relation to government programs and future research, I would be interested in investigating how successful government programs such as Head Start are and compare their outcomes in relation to families who implement at home strategies like the ones presented in this Capstone. Also, states like Minnesota and New York have implemented parent trainings such as ECFE (Early Childhood Family education) and Harlem Children's Zone that focus on educating parents alongside the child. It would be interesting to compare the results of these programs and determine where the money would be better invested. Also, as argued in chapter two, it is vital to maintain the mother tongue for more than one reason. Therefore, I believe that it is important to provide

programs, either early childhood or parenting training, in the native language as well as invest more money on preschool immersion programs as well as in higher grade levels.

### **Limitations**

In spite of the great knowledge, encouragement, and applications that the training provided for parents, the program has some limitations that are listed and explained as follows.

**Length and resources.** One of these limitations was the length of the program. Ideally, it would be beneficial to have a long term program that would follow parents and students in order to give advice as situations arise. Even though during the training parents had the opportunity to share and implement strategies in simulated situations, those same strategies might look different in the rhythm of real life. For this reason, it would be ideal for schools or districts to create a family outreach type position where parents are provided with long term support to help them be effectively be involved in their children's education. Consequently, this limitation is not only about the length of the program but also concerning resources because districts would have to be able and willing to dedicate some money to provide these kinds of services.

In relation to resources, there are other limitations that might be obstacles when thinking about reproducing this type of program. For example, during the eight weeks that the program lasted, I was able to use my personal contacts in order to provide transportation, childcare, and food for the families participating. Considering that the program was targeted to low SES families, these services were a must for it to be successful. However, if this program were to be reproduced on a regular basis, I would

need a longer term commitment from volunteers who provided their time and money which would be more challenging. Also, the principal and assistant principal of the school where the program was held were willing to stay until eight at night every week in order to support the program. Without this support, a place would be needed to hold the meetings. Therefore, in order to have a real impact on education for the non-privileged, I think that districts need to invest some of their resources in programs that educate not only the children but the families as well.

**Data.** In spite of the great tools that the program provided for parents and the positive feedback received from them, I think it would be beneficial to follow up with the students whose parents participated in the training in order to make a comparison between these children and their peers of same socio-economic background to truly establish the level of success of the program. I firmly believe that the program will make a difference in the children whose parents apply the abilities learned during the training. However, it would be powerful to have the data that confirms it.

**Individualized training.** The last significant limitation that I encountered while implementing the parent training was concerning the different levels of education represented in the group of parents. While some did not know how to read even in their native language, others had finished high school in their home countries and were already implementing some of the strategies that were suggested throughout the program. Considering this, I think that the program needs to provide some differentiated activities in order for every family to reach their full potential in term of involvement.

**Next Steps**

Even though Thursdays were long days for me because of the evening training, seeing the level of interest and engagement of the families participating in the program and the relationships formed during the eight weeks that it lasted were powerful for me personally. Considering this, there are two things that I would like to do with this project. The first one is to keep up the relationship with the parents who participated, and provide support in other areas such as English classes and literacy training in Spanish. Many of the parents showed interested in achieving those abilities, and I think that, in a sense, they supplement the training that was provided.

Secondly, I would like to offer the training to other elementary schools in the same district where the program was offered. The district has other three elementary schools with a high population of Hispanics in each of them, and families could benefit from the training. However, as mentioned above, the limitation to accomplish this will depend on the resources that I would be able to find in order to be able to obtain the necessary support that is required to run the training.

### **Summary**

Chapter four was a reflection of the involvement program created for low SES Hispanic parents. During this chapter I reflected on aspects and situations that occurred during the program as well as implications for future policies and complementary trainings that might be useful for parents. Concerning future policies, I suggested for districts to consider investing money in trainings like the one I provided in order to educate not only students but also parents so they can be part of their children's education. In addition, I also talked about the limitations of the program and how some

resources might be needed in order for the training to be reproduced and supplemented. In spite of these limitations, I believe that the program made a difference in the families that were able to participate. Furthermore, I think that the topic of parent involvement is one that is gaining more attention and states such as Minnesota and New York are already providing some programs to help parents understand their important role in the education of their sons and daughters. Therefore, while writing Chapter four, I think that I became aware of the importance and necessity of parent involvement programs at a national level. It is my desire to see the government spend more on resources in order to prevent the education gap instead of trying to remediate later.

### **Conclusion**

When I registered for the Capstone Practicum course, I had no idea what my research topic was going to be about. However, when I found out that there was an option of a project, it almost immediately came to my mind the idea of creating a program for parents. Having a background as a Hispanic outreach worker, I was aware of the lack of effective parent involvement in this community in relation to education. Doing this project allowed me to contribute and provide some ideas to what I consider to be one of the most important factors of the existing educational achievement gap. Also, as a teacher, and at a personal level, doing this project developed in me a deeper level of consciousness concerning the situations that my students might be living. Even though I myself am Hispanic and I always knew about the situations that many of my Hispanic students experience at home, doing this program and forming a friendship with many of the parents that participated in the training deepened my understanding of the situation

and created an awareness in me that impacted the relationship with my students in a more personal way. It is my hope to keep being involved with low SES families and help them realize that they have a lot to offer and, furthermore, that they are able to do so.

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## Appendix

## Outline of Parent Training Sessions

<b>Session</b>	<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Topics</b>
<b>1</b>	<p>By the end of the session, parents will be able to...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feel connected to and comfortable in the group</li> <li>• Understand the importance of parent involvement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Achievement gap</li> <li>• Effects of parents involvement on student success in the short and long-term</li> </ul>
<b>2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain and describe effective methods of parent involvement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-evaluations of current involvement</li> <li>• Expectations that teachers have of parents</li> <li>• Parent expectations of students</li> <li>• Types of parent involvement</li> <li>• Effective/ineffective involvement</li> </ul>
<b>3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Articulate the importance of native language maintenance</li> <li>• Implement native language maintenance strategies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research on language maintenance</li> <li>• Strategies for maintaining Spanish</li> </ul>
<b>4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain the connection between oral language and literacy</li> <li>• Implement oral languages strategies to support literacy learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oral language and literacy connections</li> <li>• Oral language and vocabulary strategies</li> <li>• Cognates</li> </ul>
<b>5</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apply strategies for literacy support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research and rationale for early literacy support</li> <li>• Vocabulary</li> <li>• Read-aloud</li> <li>• Comprehension strategies</li> </ul>
<b>6</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe the U.S. school system grades and college preparation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Types of schools (Elementary, Middle, High)</li> <li>• School choice</li> <li>• G.P.A.</li> <li>• College requirements</li> </ul>
<b>7</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access and utilize community and school resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resources and assistance available at school</li> <li>• Public library programming and resources</li> <li>• Health centers</li> </ul>
<b>8</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluate and reflect on what they have learned throughout the parent training sessions</li> <li>• Make a plan for how to become more involved in their child's learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creation of involvement plan</li> <li>• Evaluation of parent training sessions</li> <li>• Graduation</li> </ul>