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## **A Family Approach to Family Literacy with Latino Parents**

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A FAMILY APPROACH TO FAMILY LITERACY WITH LATINO  
PARENTS

by

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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 three intelligent, kind and genuine daughters. I want this capstone to be a reminder that anything is possible when you put your mind to it.

"I wasn't born to just teach. I was born to inspire others, to change people, and to never give up; even when faced with challenges that seem impossible"

-Teresa Kwant

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### CHAPTER ONE:

Introduction.....	8
Childhood.....	9
My Education.....	10
Teaching.....	12
Summary.....	14

### CHAPTER TWO:

Literature Review.....	15
Introduction.....	15
Parent Involvement.....	16
History of Parent Involvement.....	16
Approaches to Increase Parent Involvement.....	17
Importance of Parent Involvement.....	18
Formal and Informal Parent Involvement.....	20
Parent Involvement in Latino Community.....	21
What parent involvement means in the Latino community.....	21

Psychological methods to Latino parent involvement.....	23
Bridging the cultural gap.....	26
Barriers to Latino parent involvement.....	28
Cultural ties to educating Latino children.....	29
Family Literacy.....	30
Defining family literacy through parent involvement.....	30
Exploring family literacy approaches.....	31
Family Literacy Nights/ Noches de Lectura Con la Familia.....	32
Parent Partnership for Achieving Literacy Program.....	33
The Family Literacy Project.....	35
Rationale.....	36
Conclusion.....	37
CHAPTER THREE:	
Introduction.....	39
Project Overview.....	39
Project Audience and Setting.....	40
Project Timeline.....	41
Framework: Andragogy Model of Adult Learning.....	41
Project Description.....	42
Conclusion.....	44
CHAPTER FOUR	
Introduction.....	46

Chapter Overview.....	46
Reflections on Literature Review.....	48
Implications and Limitations.....	50
Future Projects.....	51
Summary.....	51
REFERENCES.....	53

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

Parent involvement in their child's education is a key component to a child's success. Parent involvement may mean different things to different groups of people. For schools, it may mean participating in school events, while for parents it may mean supporting their child while at home working on schoolwork. Parent involvement can create a world of opportunities for the parent and child involved.

For some parents, however, the American school system is difficult to navigate. For many immigrant families, whose English skills may be limited, they struggle to find a place within their child's school. Another factor that may inhibit their ability to participate in their child's education is the lack of correspondence in their native language. These barriers are small obstacles that can potentially be eliminated.

I started to think about my students and the interactions I have had with their parents both inside and outside of the school. In my experience, parents are interested and want to help, but it is clear that many of them do not know where to begin. I have always wanted to involve parents as well, but I also fell short of ideas on how to do that. This need for involvement led me to the idea of creating an online space to post videos about different literacy skills, and it inspired the development of the research question, "*How can Latino parent involvement and direct teaching of literacy skills help to improve their child's reading skills?*"

My plan to address this issue of involvement is to create a space both within the classroom and on a website to provide parents with the skills they need to read a book to their child and to ask questions that will help them further understand the book. In the past, I have had parents who were unable to read, so creating a website, or using an existing site, to post videos of different people orally reading books and asking engagement questions will help to support the parents who may not have their own literacy skills to support their child. My hope is to provide a space for both parents and their children to enjoy a book together while growing together as learners.

In this chapter, I share my life's journey and give insight into what led me to ask the research question I chose. I also speak on my teaching experience and how that played a role in the research I am pursuing.

### **Childhood**

As a child, I was surrounded by literature. At any given moment, I could open a book and start a new adventure. I learned from an early age the beauty of getting lost in the pages of a book. I would crawl into our crawl space and sit there for hours reading. Each page brought a new adventure for me to explore. I was not just reading; I was creating a motion picture in my mind. With every book, my imagination would take flight. My love for books did not start with me though. I had role models around me modeling what it looks like to be a reader.

Growing up, my mom was always a good example of the importance of reading; she would read books nonstop. She would finish one, only to immediately start a new one. Her love for reading was also instilled in me. Simply seeing her read made me crave

a good book. The internet was not as accessible when I was a child as it is now. When my mom wanted to find a book, it required a lot of time reading the backs of books to find just what she was looking for. During her search for the perfect book, I was introduced to the endless world of literature.

As a child, we would spend hours at a time at the local library. I would get lost in the stacks of books trying to find the book just right for my current mood. Looking back, I remember my mom taking us there in the summer to load up on books. My brothers and I would walk out of the library with books piled higher than my head. As soon as the car door would close, I would crack open my next adventure. One summer, I was recognized for reading the most books one summer. That was the summer my parents got a divorce.

Books were more than just a pastime for me, they were an opportunity to become the character and escape from my reality. I identify with them as an individual, and I become emotionally invested in the story. I cannot imagine having made it through my childhood without books to give me access to a world I might otherwise have never experienced firsthand.

### **My Education**

My journey through education was a little rocky. I understood the importance of a college education, but it was with finding my place within education that I struggled. I did not start college right away. When I graduated from high school, I traveled around Peru before settling down and starting my first semester at a local community college. It was during my travels that I discovered my passion for the Spanish language, I slowly worked my way towards an Associates Degree only to realize that I needed more than

that in order to pursue my desire to work with Spanish speaking kids. At that moment in time, I was not on the path to becoming a teacher. I continued my studies at the University of Minnesota.

I knew I wanted to work with children, I just did not know in what capacity. During my final semester at the University of Minnesota, I took a course that involved volunteering at Academia Cesar Chavez. This course has helped me identify my purpose. My desire was to work with Latino children. That Spring of 2009, I received my undergraduate degree in Child Psychology. I was pregnant with my first child at the time, and I decided to take a break from school and raise my daughter.

As my daughter grew older and struggled with her speech and her ability to communicate, I realized that I did not know how to help her. Her speech difficulties then turned into academic obstacles. I was devastated. My devastation stemmed from the helplessness I felt. My daughter loved engaging with me, but I was only able to understand roughly 25% of her spoken words. One day during our tea party, I realized that I was not capable of teaching my daughter. My next goal was to learn the skills to help my daughter. It is an overwhelming feeling to not be equipped with what your child needs.

In 2014, when my daughter was five years old, I started my studies at Hamline University. Two years later, I had fulfilled the requirements to attain my teaching license. My daughter was now seven and she was reading, writing and 100% thriving in school. Her success was accomplished through a team of people who believed in her. Through

my experience with education, her teachers and our collaboration, my daughter was able to overcome her obstacles and be a successful learner.

### **Teaching**

After graduation, I found the perfect teaching job for me, teaching second grade in Spanish to native Spanish-speaking students. I teach in the Traditional Dual Language (TDL) classroom, which means the students I teach are receiving their full education in the Spanish language. I have been in the same school since receiving my teaching license, and I just achieved tenure this year.

When I found out how close-knit of a community we had within our school, I automatically thought that the parent involvement would be consistent due to the teachers knowing the families for the last two years. Unfortunately, that was not the case. In fact, it appeared the parents were very hands-off with their child's education. After researching, I discovered that with many Latino families, they trust the teacher and give them the space to teach their child. Parents were always present at conferences, but even with all of the information I was giving them, their only questions were if their child was behaving and when would they get homework.

Parent after parent would ask me these same questions. I was fascinated with the trust they gave me, yet, I wanted more connection. I desired a relationship with parents because their children were like my children; I wanted the learning to continue on at home. Our school attempted to implement a "read in" program once a month. Parents were invited to come to the class and read a story to their child. The same two parents would arrive those Friday mornings. They would say they did not have books at home

and asked if they could borrow one of mine. While reading the book to the class, they would hold the book towards them, never showing the pictures and never asking questions. It was at this moment I realized, parents cannot replicate what goes on at school if they have not experienced it.

At our next conferences, I started asking parents what their hopes and dreams were for their child. I asked them what they needed from me and how I could better help their families. After the third conversation, I realized that the parents wanted the exact same thing for their child as I did. They wanted to be able to help their child learn and for them to receive an education. I thought those were two goals I could easily help them fulfill. My goal was to provide the families with the tools to feel successful when they are home with their child.

My goal fell short. Without a specific plan and not enough time or tools to implement it, my goal fell to the wayside. I am a single mother of three and when I left the school at the end of each day, I promised that all of my attention would go to them, and I would leave work at work. Due to my prioritized time and mentality, which I do not regret at all, my ability to work alongside families to the extent I was hoping to did not work out. I am well aware of where my shortfalls are, and I trust that, with an actual plan and timeline, I will be successful in providing families the skills they need in order to work alongside their children and attain the goals that we both hold near and dear to our hearts: help their children learn and give them the best possible education.

## Summary

In pursuit of answering my research question, “*How can Latino parent involvement and direct teaching of literacy skills help to improve their child’s reading skills?*”, I am hoping to increase parent involvement, as well as, give them the confidence to work alongside their child and be able to understand the questions that are being asked. I hope that the results will help bridge the gap in my classroom. The answer to this question could potentially influence how my school envisions parent involvement. We may be able to move forward and have parents on board with what we are trying to accomplish as a school community.

In the following chapter, I will highlight the importance of parental support and involvement in their child’s education. In addition to the importance, I will highlight what parental support looks like and potentially means in the Latino Community. Finally, I will explore family literacy programs and their effectiveness.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Introduction**

Chapter One shared the professional experiences as a student and a teacher that led to questioning what can be done as a Spanish-speaking teacher to help Latino families better understand their child's literacy learning and teach them ways to further help their children. An inner city school in Minneapolis, MN started implementing "Family Read In's" on the first Friday of each month. Families were invited to the school to read in their child's classroom. This was just a start to getting parents involved, it was during these "Family Read In's" that teachers realized that Latino parent involvement looked different compared to what they have viewed as normal parent involvement.

The teachers to 100% native Spanish speakers, decided that they needed to understand their students' families better if they were going to improve their relationship. They hoped that by building their relationships, they would help their children as they continue their education in the U.S. school system. Teachers started to wonder -what does Latino parent involvement mean to Latino families? How can they work alongside them to help teach them different literary approaches that they could easily implement during their shared readings at home? This curiosity led me to the guiding question for the

research, “*How can Latino parent involvement and direct teaching of literacy skills help to improve their child’s reading skills?*”

This chapter will discuss the history and importance of parent involvement, describe what parent involvement looks like in Latino communities, and lastly, it will present family literacy and its different approaches.

### **Parent Involvement**

For years, research has demonstrated the importance of parent involvement and the relation to a child’s success in education. For example, according to Epstein and Sheldon (2002), parental involvement aims to increase the educational achievements of children by strengthening communication between home and school and enriching educational programs with the contribution of the parents to the education process. The involvement of families has shown a connection to the improvement of students’ of students’ willingness to read, self esteem, and the development of positive attitudes towards school (Celal Erol, & Turhan, 2018).

This section will provide an overview of the history of parent involvement, with what it is, the reasons why parent involvement should be encouraged, the different forms of parent involvement, and how parent involvement impacts students’ growth.

**History of Parent Involvement.** Parent Involvement is not a new phenomenon or concept. Anselmo (1977) reported on how the interest in involving parents peaked in the 1960’s, which can be documented with the implementation of pre-kindergarten education that aimed at involving parents in both the programming and educational decision making. She claimed that even with almost 60 years of research supporting parent

involvement, it appears the schools and administration continue to struggle with decisions on how to best involve parents. Many of these struggles stem from families and schools having different approaches and goals for their child's education (Anselmo, 1977). To combat these struggles, researchers created different approaches that can be used to help increase parent involvement.

**Approaches to Increase Parent Involvement.** According to Anselmo (1977) there are three approaches that schools continue to implement:

1. Utilizing parents as educational facilitators for their child.
2. Involving parents with the desired outcome to benefit both parents and the education program.
3. Involving parents solely to support the educational program.

There are benefits to all three approaches; when it comes to deciding, schools need to determine their desired outcome.

Anselmo (1977) explained that once a school determines their motivation behind the need for parent involvement, it is important for them to analyze which approach best aligns with that motivation. The first approach, incorporating parents as educational facilitators for their child, requires premeditated planning that is designed to specifically meet the needs of both the parents and child. This approach may require more in-depth training for educators. According to Anselmo (1977) programs such as Head Start typically attempt to utilize the first two approaches which aim to strengthen parenting skills in addition to maximizing the additional classroom support.

The second approach reported by Anselmo (1977), that is even more complex to implement, discussed the importance of involving parents with the desired outcome to benefit both parents and the education program. This approach entails a lot of balancing between the needs of parents and children, meanwhile, coordinating the curriculum in order to align with those needs (Anselmo, 1977). This approach requires a lot of reflection and planning in order to keep it relevant to the ever-changing needs of families involved.

The third, and final, approach identified by Anselmo (1977) is the approach of involving parents solely to support the educational program. She stated that this approach involves less planning and coordinating. However, this approach does not take into account parents' needs, it simply is an approach that includes parents in activities that are already occurring within the school and classrooms (Anselmo, 1977). Each approach serves a different purpose, but no matter what approach is used, parent involvement is important and schools should utilize parents in their efforts to educate their children.

**Importance of Parent Involvement.** Levine (2002) reported on how research has demonstrated the importance of parent involvement and the significance it has on students' overall achievement. Levine (2002) identified three main reasons why parent involvement is important and should be supported. First, parent involvement should be encouraged because it sends a positive message to children that education is important. She explained that when a parent is actively involved in what their child is doing and learning in school, it makes the child feel that there is value to their schooling. When a parent schedules homework time and goes over the child's homework with them, it sends

a message of importance. Being actively involved also keeps parents “in the know.” Parents who are “in the know” may be more aware of deadlines and activities that are going on in the class. If a parent is aware of the curriculum, it may give them the opportunity to engage in discussions on specific topics with their child (Levine, 2002).

Second, Levine (2002) discussed that parents should be involved because it allows them to be aware of the teacher’s goals and expectations. With this knowledge, parents are then able to continue those goals at home (El Nokali, Bachman & Votruba-Drzal, 2010). When parents are aware of what is going on in the schools, they can then extend that into the home environment. If the parent is involved and has open communication with their child and their teacher they will be better informed about their child’s performance. According to El Nokali, Bachman & Votruba-Drzal (2010) when a parent is informed about potential areas of concern, they can then work specifically on those items to help their child be successful.

Lastly, parent involvement helps bridge the gap between school and home (Levine, 2002). When schools and families can work together and create clear paths of communication, the student can benefit from the continuance of the home to school environment. Levine (2002) points out that one key advantage of parent involvement is the consistency between the home and school. Parents can maintain the same expectations as those held by the school, in addition to expanding what those expectations look like in the home setting. It is clear that parent involvement is important and beneficial in a student's academic achievement. There appears to be an abundance of

reasons to encourage parent support. Aside from these reasons, it is important to understand the different kinds of support that parents can contribute.

**Formal and Informal Parent Involvement.** LeFevre and Shaw (2012) identified two forms of parent involvement. Parent involvement can be both formal and informal. Formal parent involvement is seen as visible participation in schools. These visible activities may include volunteering in the classroom, attending field trips, and actively participating in the Parent Teacher Association (PTA). These types of participation are easily measured and teachers and schools can clearly see the parent participating in activities deemed important by the schools (LeFevre & Shaw, 2012). These types of involvement rely on parents being directly involved with the school and the activities that occur within that setting. While this form of parent involvement is important, it may not be practical for all parents to be able to participate.

Informal parent involvement is less visible. Types of informal parent involvement include supporting behaviors, emotional support, and joint activities that occur in the home setting (LeFevre & Shaw, 2012). LeFevre and Shaw (2012) suggested that some of the joint activities that parents can engage with are reading aloud to their children from a young age, and pointing out letters or words while spending time together. Working on these simple skills may help children know more about language and literacy before they even start school, which may better equip them for reading.

In addition to the items listed above, LeFevre and Shaw (2012) discussed that parents may also show informal support by providing a space that is both quiet and well lit for them to study and emphasizing the importance of school attendance not only by

bringing them to school, but also by making school attendance a priority. Creating a relaxed environment provides an environment conducive to learning. According to Epstein (2001) parent involvement is a key component in securing a productive and academically successful school year. She also suggested that parents who were actively involved in their child's homework were more likely to encourage and cultivate academic achievement.

### **Parent involvement in Latino Communities**

Parent involvement goes beyond the school environment. Auerbach (2006) pointed out the importance for educators and schools to be able to look past what schools see as norms and look into what Latino communities view as their role for parent involvement. Hills and Torres (2010) emphasized the damage that can occur when Latino parents are judged on their involvement based on mainstream values, and they reiterated the necessity for Latino parents to be judged based on their cultural values instead. The forms of involvement that Latino parents view as typical may not be what is typically expected or observed by schools or teachers.

This section will highlight what parent involvement means to Latino families. It will discuss ways to bridge the cultural gap between schools and Latino families. It will also shine light on the cultural ties to Latino parents' engagement as well as potential barriers to their involvement.

**What parent involvement means in the Latino community.** Parent involvement is valuable for students from all races and ethnicities; however, research has shown that parent involvement tends to be an even larger factor in academic success for

Latino students (Glick & White, 2004). Parent involvement in the Latino community has demonstrated benefits that far exceed expectations, even when research has taken into account parent education, nativity and language proficiency (DeGarmo & Martinez, 2006). Parent involvement clearly has its advantages, but it is important to understand that what Latino families view as parent involvement may differ from the school's definition.

As mentioned earlier, there are two forms of parent involvement: formal and informal. According to LeFevre and Shaw (2012) formal involvement includes those activities that are visible to the school, while informal are the activities that occur outside of the school setting and are considered invisible. Recent studies have shown that while Latino parents hold high educational expectations, value education, and feel that supporting their children's education is very important, the forms of involvement that they are most comfortable with and choose to utilize may not be what is typically observed by schools (Walker, Ice & Hoover-Dempsey, 2011).

LeFevre and Shaw (2012) explained that Latino families show their informal support by helping their children with homework, providing a quiet space for their children to study, and discussing their children's future endeavors and what those future plans may entail. De Gaetano (2007) claimed that, in essence, Latino parents become their child's academic cheerleaders. Many parents provide emotional support by boosting their child's self-esteem through heavy praise on their hard work and persistence. Latino parent involvement includes spoken and unspoken methods that send the same message around the importance of an education (De Gaetano, 2007).

**Psychological methods of Latino parent involvement.** Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2011) identified three major categories of parents' motivation for involvement: personal-psychological beliefs, contextual motivators of involvement, and perceptions of life-context variables.

When parent involvement is viewed through the category of personal psychological beliefs, Hoover-Dempsey and Sander (2005) identified two motivators of involvement that guide the research: parental role construction for involvement and parents' sense of self-efficacy for helping their child succeed in school. The first motivator, parental role construction for involvement, stems from parents' beliefs about what their role is in relation to their child's school. These beliefs usually stem from their own upbringing.

According to Hoover-Dempsey and Sander (2005), those who are close to the parents may hold certain beliefs about school, and that can affect their view on their own personal role. These beliefs may be passed down from one generation to another.

Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese, and Garnier (2002) explained that while Latino parents hold high educational expectations for their children, they also hold the belief that it is the schools' job to teach their children. Walker, Ice, and Hoover-Dempsey (2011) acknowledged how this belief creates distance between the parents and the schools because parents may avoid formally involving themselves in the school because they do not want to disrespect the teachers and the knowledge and competence that they bring to their role.

The second motivator of involvement is the parents' sense of self-efficacy for helping their child succeed in school. Bandura (2007) recognized that parents who believe that their involvement in school activities may have a positive impact on their child's learning are more likely to engage in those activities. While in contrast, parents who feel that their involvement does not have a positive impact, in other words they have a weaker sense of self-efficacy, may lead them to engage in lower levels of involvement. (Bandura, 2007).

Okagaki, Frensch and Gordon (1998) identified similar findings. For example, Mexican American families who believed that they could help their children be successful in school were more likely to participate and actively be involved in their children's education. They also noted that the sense of self-efficacy was typically high for those parents who had students who were academically achieving.

In addition to the two motivators of involvement listed above, Walker, Ice, and Hoover-Dempsey (2011) examined three patterns of involvement: parent-focused role construction, partnership-focused role construction, and school-focused role construction. The first pattern examined is the parent-focused role construction. According to Walker, Ice, and Hoover-Dempsey (2011), this model is based on the manifested beliefs that parents are solely responsible for their child's school outcome. This model does not always pertain to formal education, but it does extend to their child's attitudes toward school and the advice they can give them to be successful in their world. This model revolves around self-efficacy. When parents have a stronger sense of self-efficacy, they are more likely to be involved in their child's education. In contrast, parents who have a

weaker sense of self-efficacy tend to be less involved in their child's education (Walker, Ice & Hoover-Dempsey, 2011).

The second pattern examined is the partnership-focused role construction. In this model, parents believe that the parents and the school should work together for the success of their child. When the schools and the parents work together, they give the child the support needed to reach their full potential. The weight is not placed on any individual but instead, they share joint responsibility (Walker, Ice & Hoover-Dempsey, 2011).

A study performed by Trevino (2004) demonstrated that Mexican migrant families of high-achieving secondary students showed that their success was based on the partnership that was created between the parents and teachers. These parents provided as much academic support as they could within the home setting. When translations were provided, these parents regularly attended conferences, schoolwide meetings, and they were strong advocates for their children.

The third and final pattern examined is the school-focused role construction. In this model, Walker, Ice, and Hoover-Dempsey (2011) suggested that parents believe and engage in behaviors that suggest that the schools are solely responsible for the education of their children. To combat these beliefs, an adult in- service program was created to emphasize the importance of parent involvement in actively supporting and communicating with schools. According to Walker, Ice, and Hoover-Dempsey (2011), the goal was for parents to become advocates for their children and to bridge a cultural divide.

Returning to the three categories of parents' motivations for involvement, the second category is the contextual motivators of involvement. This category focuses on the finding of Garcia Coll, Akiba, Palacios, Bailey, Silver & DiMartino (2002) which stated that schools that made strong attempts to reach out to parents resulted in the schools having more family involvement. These attempts consisted of general invitations from the school and specific invitations from teachers and then even more effective personal invitations from the student. Lopez, Sanchez, and Hamilton (2002) reported that these personalized invited are responded to positively to and it overall makes families feel welcomed.

The third category is perceived life-context variables. Walker, Ice, and Hoover-Dempsey (2011) suggests that parent's frequency and forms of involvement are based off their recognition of their knowledge skillset and what they can bring to their child's education. In addition to their skills, this category also acknowledges parents' involvement based off the time and energy they have to contribute to involvement. (Walk, Ice & Hoover-Dempsey, 2001).

**Bridging the cultural gap.** There is a gap between what mainstream educators and Latino parents view as appropriate parent involvement in school (Walker, Ice & Hoover-Dempsey, 2011). Unfortunately, when educators discuss parent involvement in the Latino community, they tend to see it as a deficit. "When teachers do not see Latino parents visibly participating in the schools within the teachers' framework of what participation means, they may often conclude that Latino parents are "not involved" in their children's schooling or that they "do not care" about their children's education."(De

Gaetano, 2007, p. 149). This is an issue because educators may be basing what they see as norms onto a community that may value other forms of involvement (Lightfoot, 2004).

As mentioned earlier, Latino parents value education and instill that same value in their children through different cultural approaches that are invisible to the schools.

It is important for schools to focus on what diverse communities can contribute to academic and social success rather than focus on what they lack (Scribner, Young, & Pedroza, 1999). When parents and teachers share a common culture, language, and background, it may be easier for them to build a relationship. The disconnect occurs when they do not share those common aspects and need to see beyond the barriers to build a relationship. By changing their lens, teachers can benefit from the cultural wealth that Latino parents provide.

One way to understand the cultural wealth that Latino parents encompass is through acknowledging their funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, and González, 1992). Moll et al. (1992) developed the term funds of knowledge to create a more inclusive classroom environment. The term is used to understand the diverse ways in which different cultures demonstrate their ways of knowing, learning, and acting. Moll et al. (1992) elaborated that when educators acknowledge the strengths and opportunities that other cultures bring to the table, they open a door of communication that may otherwise have been blocked. One way to welcome Latino students and families to the school is through accessing their funds of knowledge (Moll, et al., 1992).

While tapping into the cultural relevance of Latino families is important, there are other approaches that schools as a whole can participate in. A study done by Garcia Coll

et. al (2002) demonstrated the benefits of schools which made multiple approaches to reach out and involve families through bilingual fliers, events, and education within the school. These school efforts resulted in more Latino family involvement.

Like all parents, Latino parents may be receptive to working in more formal/visible approaches. It appears that when they feel they are a valuable part of the school and perceive themselves as a valuable member of the school community, as well as a valued participant in their child's education, they become more visibly involved. This may not be the case for all Latino families; there may still be other barriers prohibiting formal means of participation.

**Barriers to Latino parent involvement.** Many Latino parents may lean more towards informal involvement due to feeling uncomfortable within the school setting. Auerbach (2007) informed that Latino parents may feel uncomfortable due to their own school experiences, or it may stem from having limited English and/or limited knowledge of the school system. Aside from their feelings, Lee and Bowen (2006) explained that there may be factors outside of their control that prohibit them from being more visible in schools: work schedule, lack of daycare, or transportation.

When it comes to cultural differences, it is important to understand that Latino parents may avoid formal participation out of respect for teachers. According to Chavkin & Gonzalez (1995), Latino parents see educators as authorities on their child's education. Culturally, Latinos have a lot of respect for teachers and they trust the American school system. It is believed to be disrespectful to challenge a teacher or to interfere with a

teacher's authority (Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese, & Garnier, 2002; Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995).

**Cultural ties to educating Latino children.** Latino families thrive on tradition and culture. The informal support that Latino families value revolves around behaviors, activities, and emotional support, all of which occur in the home setting (LeFevre & Shaw, 2012). Many of these behaviors, activities, and forms of emotional support may be based on deep cultural ties.

These culturally rich traditions are one aspect that Latinos utilize which may help develop the literacy development of their children (Larrotta & Yamamura, (2011). One form of informal parent involvement that Latino parents partake in is the sharing of oral traditions, *consejos* (advise). These consejos, which are a form of oral tradition, are often used as a supplement to homework (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994). Due to the language barrier, parents may not be able to help directly with their child's homework, but they view consejos as an extension to that help.

Another cultural activity they utilize are cultural narratives. Latino culture is rich in cultural narratives. A lot of parents use the sharing of these narratives as a way to invest in their child (Auerbach, 2007). Latino parents want more for their children than what they were able to personally accomplish, and by using their own experiences it may help their child relate. For example, a Latino dad shared with his son that "...success comes according to te empeña (dedication, commitment, effort) you invest in what you are doing...If you are dedicated, then you can achieve whatever you want. If you do not

put ganas (will, drive) into it, you become like us” (Auerbach, 2007). Even though that is only one example, it demonstrates the viewpoint of many Latino parents.

### **Family Literacy**

Family literacy is the concept of parents/adults and children learning together. (Morrow, Paratore, Gaber, Harrison & Tracey, 1993; Marcella & Howes, 2014; Neuman, 1996). It has been shown that children’s literacy learning begins way before they enter school. Literacy begins in the home alongside a familiar adult while they are reading to the child.

This section will focus on defining family literacy and discussing different approaches that have been successful within the Latino community. Following that discussion, I will touch on the importance of understanding diverse cultures. I will explore how family literacy goes beyond what parents can learn from the schools and instead, how schools can learn from the diverse group of parents they have.

**Defining family literacy through parent involvement.** Informal parent involvement is usually seen in the home environment. Parental engagement in the home has shown the greatest gains affecting students’ achievement (Harris & Goodall, 2008). Senechal and Young (2008) identified three types of informal parent involvement: parents reading to their children, children reading to their parents, and parents tutoring their child in reading. Among those three types, the latter two had demonstrated the most significant impact on students’ learning.

It does not mean that parents reading to their children is not important, it just appears that once children are able to read, it is more beneficial for the students to engage

in different types of reading and literacy activities. It is important to keep in mind, whether formal or informal, parent involvement has demonstrated increased self-esteem in students, improved parent/child relationship, positive impact on academic achievement and it may cause parents to create a more positive attitude towards the school (Brown, 1989).

“The parent is the child’s first teacher” concept has been used time and time again when introducing the concept of family literacy. It is also important to understand that not only are they their first teacher, but parents’ desire to help their children is also a guiding force behind most family literacy programs (DeBruin-Parecki, 2008). Designing a successful family literacy program requires the ability to not only teach the child, but to train the parents on techniques to best engage with their child. These programs go beyond just reading alongside your child, these programs to take into consideration which skills need to be taught to best help parents work to help create future academic success.

**Exploring family literacy approaches.** DeBruin-Parecki (2009) reported that a successful family literacy program needs to focus on four fundamental categories. First, they need to hone in on the exact literacy skills the program should focus on. These skills need to be ones that parents can easily access and implement in the home setting. Second, the program needs to discover how they are going to measure the mastery of the skills they have implemented. In addition to measuring the mastery, they also need a system to carefully track the implementation and growth of each skill. Third, the program needs to be culturally relevant and accessible to families across various cultural backgrounds.

Lastly, the program needs to be able to recruit and retain families who are in need of learning the specific skills identified (DeBruin-Parecki, 2009). In addition, they need families who will be willing to participate for the duration of the program to successfully record its results.

**Family Literacy Nights/ Noches de Lectura Con la Familia.** The following study implemented by DeBruin-Parecki (2009) took into account those four categories and implemented a Family Literacy Night program, which was an interactive reading program for young children and adults. The goal of this eight week program was to comprehensively teach adults and children ways to read together that would create a positive effect on their academic achievement (DeBruin-Parecki, 2009).

The Family Literacy Night program included transportation, childcare, dinner for the entire family, as well as activity supplies for both school and home-based activities. The activities for the program were designed to follow the Adult/Child Interactive Reading Inventory, which is an observational measurement that assesses joint storybook reading under natural conditions (DeBruin-Parecki, 2009). The inventory pays particular attention to techniques to enhance attention to text, strategies to promote interactive reading and support comprehension, and it uses literacy strategies to help guide the reading.

Debruin-Parecki's (2009) program demonstrated that even a short eight-week-long family literacy program can be effective. The Family Literacy Night program was a well-constructed family literacy program that focused on the interactive

reading model. Results demonstrated that both adults and children improved on the skills being measured on the Adult/Child Interactive Reading Inventory.

**Parent Partnership for Achieving Literacy Program.** A district in Massachusetts took a different approach to creating a partnership between Latino families and educators. The district implemented Parent Partnership for Achieving Literacy program (PAL).

According to Colombo (2006), this program implemented a dual approach to minimize the gap between school, home, and community influences through building relationships between educators and culturally and linguistically diverse families. Parent Partnership for Achieving Literacy Program (PAL) included professional development for educators and workshops, meetings, and bilingual informational mailings all aimed at helping families understand the expectations of the schools. Parent Partnership for Achieving Literacy Program's philosophy was that parents and teachers want what is best for all children (Colombo, 2006).

Colombo (2006) stated that in order to be successful, PAL needed to access the strengths of teachers and parents. This was their first obstacle. Since schools tend to see the deficits Latino parents have, the school was not aware of their strengths. Colombo (2006) described the reality in their school district implying that, "for the most part, teachers viewed students and families through mainstream lenses, and so they saw deficits rather than strengths and opportunities" ( p. 315). The school used parent coordinators to educate them on the specific strengths and needs of the community. It

was at this moment that educators realized that Latino families clearly valued education and that their support was offered through informal approaches in their homes.

Part of PAL was ongoing professional development for educators. It focused on informing teachers of the strengths within culturally diverse families, and instead of focusing on what educators feel Latino families lacked, it shifted their focus on the wealth of knowledge that they provide through their own funds of knowledge. These courses also raised awareness of cultural differences, second-language acquisition, second-language literacy, and parent/communication involvement (Colombo, 2006).

The Parent Partnership for Achieving Literacy program (PAL) was a responsive approach that evolved to meet the needs of families as they faced them. When parents voiced their needs or concerns, the school would work alongside them for a solution. In addition to being responsive, PAL also helped parents understand how to help their children and how to communicate with the school when they have limited English skills. Research conducted by Swick (1991), acknowledged that “parent involvement indicates that parents and teachers can create viable partnerships by engaging in joint learning activities” (Swick, 1991, pg. 46). Colombo (2006), expressed that PAL also helped parents by providing hands-on math activities, additional homework help, and ESL classes for parents.

Colombo (2006) informed that in order to assess the outcomes of the program, the district issued a survey to the teachers to assess the progress of the children who participated. The results indicated progress in reading, verbal communication and overall behaviors. The district is aware that actual gains will be more prevalent the longer the

program is implemented, but they see the benefits of continuing the Parent Partnership for Achieving Literacy program.

**The Family Literacy Project.** Another family literacy project implemented by Larrotta and Yamamura (2011) was created to help Latina mothers develop literacy skills and gain confidence in their ability to support the education of their children. This program was 12 weeks long, as its purpose was to give parents an opportunity to participate in a meaningful parent involvement experience. This project worked with mothers and one of their children. It focused on culturally responsive readings. The mothers and children had two separate readings. They explained that the mothers were given topics that were focused on areas that would lead to building a community through shared life experiences. The children were assigned age appropriate/culturally relevant readings (Larrotta & Yamamura, 2011).

Larrotta and Yamamura (2011) explained the outline of this project. It would always start with a school representative sharing different services provided by the school. From there, the mothers would write in their reflective journals, and then they would work in parent-parent groups, followed by parent-child pairs. In the first pairing, parents were coached on different techniques on how to work with their child, and then the children would be invited into the space to work with one another on a comprehension strategy. Each meeting would end with parents writing in their journals and then sharing any questions they may have in regards to the new skill.

This program took a different approach in regards to their outcomes. This project was seen as an opportunity for mothers to strengthen their aspirational capital for

themselves. Larrotta and Yamamura (2011) identified that many of the participants who improved their own learning skills left the program viewing themselves as lifelong learners. The authors recounted that “no matter how difficult their immigration pathways or lifestyles, parent participants had high aspirations for their children and maintained hope for their future success” (Larrotta & Yamamura, 2011, p. 78). This program allowed the parents to be active participants in their child’s journey to achieve educational goals that perhaps they themselves were not able to attain due to their own upbringing.

Larrotta and Yamamura (2011) reported on how the program also allowed a space for parents to increase their social capital. Through the use of culturally relevant texts and honing in on their funds of knowledge, they were able to cover issues and share their diverse experiences with those issues while practicing literacy skills. They were given a space to talk about traditions and lifestyles, which in turn allowed them to gain confidence as they used and shared their expertise on topics that are relevant to them.

They acknowledged that “the culturally relevant readings and associated literacy practices allowed the mothers to share their diverse life histories and experiences with each other, thereby increasing their social capital” (Larrotta & Yamamura, 2011, p. 78). In this project, parents were viewed as cultural experts and as capable adults who, through the use of their funds of knowledge, can play an active role in their child’s education (Larrotta & Yamamura, 2011).

### **Rationale**

There have been numerous studies performed that associate Latino parent involvement with overall student academic success. Latino parent involvement can look a

multitude of different ways and still have an impact on student achievement. Schools have the capability of incorporating Latino parent involvement to make an even greater impact on students. Schools can integrate a family literacy approach, where students and parents can learn alongside one another. Through family literacy, schools can teach parents specific techniques and skills to help them help their child.

### **Conclusion**

Chapter Two touched on three main topics: Parent Involvement, Latino Parent Involvement, and Family Literacy Programs. The first topic gave an overview of the history of parent involvement. It reviewed the different types of parent involvement and what that looks like in a school setting. After discussing the different types of involvement, it looked at the approaches to parent involvement and the importance of it. After exploring those two subtopics, two different methods of parent involvement, formal and informal, were discussed.

The second section focused on Latino parent involvement. This section describes the different expectations that Latino parents have in regards to education. After discussing the differences, it then described ways to bridge the cultural gap between Latino families and schools. In addition to bridging the gap, it also explains cultural ties to education and barriers that may play a role in parents not engaging in formal parent involvement. This section ends by examining the different psychological methods to parent involvement.

The third section discussed family literacy. It begins with defining family literacy through parent involvement. After defining it, this section explored three different

program approaches to family literacy. All of the topics were carefully chosen to help further understand the guided question: “*How can Latino parent involvement and direct teaching of literacy skills help to improve their child’s reading skills?*”

## CHAPTER THREE

### **Introduction**

In order to answer the research question: *How can Latino parent involvement and direct teaching of literacy skills help to improve their child's reading skills?* a program was developed that gives parents the opportunity to learn and explore what their children learn during literacy instruction. Currently there are resources available in English to help parents of English-speaking children with their literacy development, but few options are available for those parents who do not speak English as their first language. The purpose of this Capstone project was to create a parent-friendly program to help Latino parents support their children in literacy. This chapter presents the project overview, audience and setting, framework used, and the project description. It also provides a timeline explaining what the facilitator did during each session and when the sessions were held.

### **Project Overview**

The goal of this project was to create a literacy program to help Latino parents better support their children with literacy in their homes. In addition to creating a literacy curriculum, this project aimed at building rapport with parents through weekly sessions. This project aimed at creating an engaging curriculum that gives Latino parents the skills and confidence they need to understand their child's education, as well as the ability to access these skills on their own. Lee and Bowen (2006) stated that some Latino parents

are intimidated by schools in the United States, and due to barriers out of their control, they may not be able to participate in the school in a formal manner. This project aimed at using a formal approach that transitioned into a more informal approach for Latino parents based on this and the research from Chapter Two.

Becoming “literate” can mean different things in different cultures. Latino parents may use different approaches to encourage literacy in the home and community. It is because of these differences this project was aimed to boost parents’ self-efficacy around literacy and introduced them to different approaches to literacy while incorporating their funds of knowledge and being culturally relevant.

The project stretched over a two month period. Latino parents attended eight weekly sessions that aimed to comprehensively teach them how to read and engage with their child in ways that will positively affect their child’s future academic achievement. Each week focused on a different strategy that students learned in second grade.

### **Project Audience and Setting**

The audience of this study was Latino parents of second grade students from a Traditional Dual Language classroom who volunteered to be a part of the research project. All of the students were English Language Learners and their parents were non-English speakers. This audience worked best for the project because the facilitator was able to work on skills that they taught throughout the year. Since the project aimed at teaching literacy skills and building rapport with the parents, it was necessary to work with the parents of the current students. The research study took place in a second grade

classroom in a public elementary school for Pre-K through fifth grade students in an urban school in Minnesota.

### **Project Timeline**

The implementation of this project entailed eight workshop sessions each lasting two hours. The first workshop session was held early in the school year. The remaining seven workshops followed bi-weekly.

### **Framework: Andragogy Model of Adult Learning**

The framework chosen to guide the project is the work created by Malcolm Knowles, the Adult Learning Theory-Andragogy. Knowles (1984) explained the idea that teaching adults is not the same as teaching children. Knowles stated the importance of pedagogy and andragogy not being seen as a dichotomy, “the models are probably most useful when seen not as dichotomous but rather as two ends of a spectrum, with a realistic assumption in a given situation falling in between the two ends” (p. 43). His theory is applied to the project by acknowledging that when teaching adults it should not be either pedagogy or andragogy. Within andragogy, these assumptions differ from pedagogy. Adults tend to seek out information or education that will improve their way of living and benefit their interests or goals for their own lives or the lives of their family members. (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005).

The chosen approach differed throughout the project depending on the tasks necessitated. Pedagogy was utilized more so in the beginning of the sessions. As the

Latino parents become more comfortable with the structure and strategies presented, the approach shifted into an andragogy approach.

Knowles (1984) acknowledged the struggles that teachers of adults may encounter. He explained that in a school setting adults have been programmed to view their role of a learner to be dependent. Knowles (1984) suggested to avoid this dilemma, “there is the need to build into our program designs some preparatory experiences that will help adults get a new way of thinking about the role of learner and some new skills in self-directed learning. (p.46). By being aware of this struggle, it helped the facilitator address the parents in a different manner. Throughout the planning, tasks were considered for the parents to be active participants and to guide them to be self-directed throughout the process.

### **Project Description**

The family literacy programs reviewed in Chapter Two focused on ways to train parents on how to be involved in their child’s education through community partnership, literacy strategies, and different levels of involvement. Many of these programs were implemented over an eight-12 week time span. At the end of each one of the programs, parents reported feelings of confidence in their skills to better support their children’s education (DeBruin-Parecki, 2009). The project followed a similar timeline as the ones researched. The eight sessions were two hours long and focused on training parents in how to use shared reading strategies.

Parents and their child started each session in different rooms. The program had volunteers working to watch the parents’ children during the first part of the session. In

the second part of the session the children were brought to their parents. When the children were brought in, each child were grouped with their parent, a facilitator and one or two other parent/child groups. During this part of the session, parents worked directly with their child working on the strategy they just learned. If needed, the facilitator gave parents additional tips on the targeted strategy.

The first session was a meet and greet. Latino parents had the opportunity to meet the staff. Each staff member had the opportunity to introduce themselves and talk about their hopes and dreams for the program. The parents introduced themselves and shared their hopes and dreams. During this session, facilitators discussed what parent involvement can look like in both formal and informal settings and the importance both settings have on their child's academic success. Lastly, parents left with a handout and timeline in Spanish highlighting the remaining sessions.

The second session began with a *Know, Want to Know, Learned* (KWL) chart. Firstly, parents shared what they *Know about* shared reading. Secondly, parents shared what they *Want to Know* about shared reading. Lastly, they shared what they *Learned* about shared reading. Following their discussion, the facilitator demonstrated what a shared reading looks, sounds, and feels like. For each session, the read-alouds were recorded and posted to a private Facebook page. The parents were able to reference the videos when needed. Every piece of literature selected for the read-alouds were Spanish and were culturally relevant to the students and their families.

Following the reading, parents broke off into small groups with another facilitator and practiced some of the shared reading skills they had learned with their own children.

Parents and their child sat together, discussed the book, and shared their thoughts and feelings about what they are reading. The session ended with the group coming back together and doing a group share.

The remaining weekly sessions all followed the same structure listed below. The sessions began with an introduction to one of the second grade literacy standards. The facilitator did a shared reading revolving around that skill and demonstrated how to use the corresponding strategies. After the reading, parents, and facilitators broke off into the same small groups as the previous week. Prior to the children being brought into the session, parents had the opportunity to ask any questions or concerns they may have had. Parents practiced the read-aloud with their own child. Following the read-aloud, the group came together one last time to reflect and share.

### **Conclusion**

Parents from culturally diverse backgrounds may encounter difficulties in finding their place within the United States public education system. Due to barriers potentially out of their control, it was important to create a program that catered to them and their needs. The purpose of the project was to help Latino parents with strategies they can use at home with their child to improve their child's reading skills. At the end of my project, the data provided was used to better answer the guiding question, *How can Latino parent involvement and direct teaching of literacy skills help to improve their child's reading skills?*

Chapter three described the project that was designed to help answer the research question. The intended audience and school setting were identified. The who, what,

where, when and why of my project were explained. The final chapter will reflect on the work completed and its results.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Introduction

Throughout this process it was frequently mentioned the importance of parent involvement. It further addressed the importance of understanding the different types of involvement that are utilized across different cultures. The difference between formal and informal involvement was discussed at length, as was the importance of understanding that many Latino families, due to a multitude of different barriers, are more comfortable supporting their children in an informal approach. It was determined that when Latino parents felt welcomed to the school, and their native language and cultural differences were embraced, they were more likely to participate in a more formal approach. It was for these reasons that the project was based on the question, *How can Latino parent involvement and direct teaching of literacy skills help to improve their child's reading skills?*

### Chapter Overview

Chapter Four will reflect on the project as a whole. Throughout Chapter Four, I will reflect on the project as a whole. In this chapter, the overall process as a learner, researcher, and writer will be reviewed. Following the reflection, the literature review will be readdressed. The most prominent research that helped guide the project will be analyzed on how it influenced the process. Next, the implications and limitations of the

project will be explained. Finally, plan for the future as a researcher, writer, learner, and educator will be addressed.

Throughout the process of researching the question: *How can Latino parent involvement and direct teaching of literacy skills help to improve their child's reading skills*, many different approaches have been taken to address the question. What I thought was going to be a linear process turned out to be a twisting, turning adventure.

Throughout this journey my turns became unpredictable; the more I learned about my topic the more precise my thinking became, and the better I was able to organize my thoughts. One of the largest challenges was allowing others to read and reflect on my writing. Writing has never been my strong suit, I have always struggled with academic language, formal writing and eliminating my own voice. This project gave me a space to work on those skills and to hone in on what is most important for this project. The literature review introduced an entirely different challenge.

I always knew I was opinionated. It was not until I was unable to share my opinion throughout my literature review that I realized to what extent. The literature review exposed many biases that I had and it allowed me to further research those biases and better understand where they stemmed from. Another challenge was conquering the APA format. Even after hours of research, I am still baffled by it, and I hope with more time and exposure it will become second nature. This project allowed me to challenge myself in areas I did not realize I needed growth.

Over the trajectory of this process, the biggest takeaway was that, as an educator and student, there is no end to the acquirement of knowledge. Education is forever

changing and in order to be on top, it is necessary to follow the research and best practices. The more I researched, the more I felt capable of providing the best possible practice for my students and their parents. This literature review and project were just the beginning of my educational journey. All the research I have accomplished has sparked an interest in further understanding my Latino families and how I, as an educator, can work best alongside them as we work together to further the education of their children.

I have always seen myself as an elementary teacher, the thought of working with anyone older than age 11 felt terrifying. What I learned throughout the journey is that I would benefit from working with adults. I enjoyed the energy that I received from the parents. Their excitement over the idea of helping their children was contagious. I felt honored to equip parents to be a part of their child's educational journey so they would not just be a bystander, but now have the skills to thoroughly help them.

### **Reflections on Literature Review**

The literature review focused on family literacy programs within the Latino community and how it affects student performance which supported my research question: *How can Latino parent involvement and direct teaching of literacy skills help to improve their child's reading skills?* The research discussed the importance of parent involvement and the value of understanding the different ways diverse cultures engage with their child's education. Parent involvement is valuable for students from all races and ethnicities; however, research has shown that parent involvement tends to be an even larger factor in academic success for Latino students. (Glick & White, 2004)

LeFevre and Shaw (2012) identified two forms of parent involvement. Parent involvement can be both formal and informal. Formal parent involvement is performed in a school setting and is visible to schools. These types of participation are easily measured and teachers and schools can clearly see the parent participating in activities deemed important by the schools (LeFevre & Shaw, 2012).

Informal parent involvement is less visible. Latino parents are more likely to be involved informally which means they support their students education through supporting behaviors, emotional support, and joint activities that occur in the home setting. LeFevre and Shaw (2012) discussed that parents may also show informal support by providing a space that is both quiet and well lit for them to study and emphasizing the importance of school attendance not only by bringing them to school, but also by making school attendance a priority

The research is clear that parent involvement looks different across cultures and that it is crucial for educators to understand that what they deem as normal may not be the consensus across cultures. When schools and families realize that they both have the same goals and are able to work together in any capacity their children will succeed. Lee and Bowen (2006) explained that there may be factors outside of their control that prohibit them from being more visible in schools: work schedule, lack of daycare, or transportation. It is vital for schools to understand the barriers Latino families face and to work to support them in whatever capacity they feel comfortable in, whether that be formal or informal involvement.

## **Implications and Limitations**

The intent of this project was to teach parents literacy skills to help improve their child's reading skills. If attendees are present for all of the sessions and the lessons are taught with fidelity, this project should give parents enough literacy experience and exposure to literacy skills that will allow them to work directly with their students during a shared reading and help improve their reading skills. The project was created to work alongside families to help them discover new ways to engage in reading with their child. Educators observed parents struggling through shared readings during monthly Read Ins. The educators wanted to help teach parents different strategies and techniques to help them help their child with their literacy development. More than anything, they saw an opportunity to inform parents of different strategies that can be used within a home setting to help their children.

One of the limitations of this project was successfully reaching families. I understand that not all families have the internet or a home computer. When I originally started planning, I had hopes of meeting with all of my students' parents and together creating a family within our classroom, but not every parent wants that kind of relationship, nor do they have the time. Many of my students' families work multiple jobs, and even though they want the best for their child, it does not necessarily mean that they will be able to participate at the level I would have hoped. Whether or not parents were able to attend in person, I still planned on creating handouts and step-by-step guides to potentially help guide them even if they were not able to attend.

Another limitation was not fully being aware of the parents' funds of knowledge. The books I chose were based off what I knew about the families. In the future, I would consider creating a funds of knowledge inventory to better understand where my students' families came from.

### **Future Projects**

The next steps would be to implement the program. I hope to implement the program in the 2020/2021 school year. The program would be introduced and explained to parents at open house. The program would then be further explained during parent-teacher conferences. Parents would have the opportunity to sign up and receive the program curriculum. The sessions would start a few weeks after parent-teacher conferences. For those parents who were not able to attend open house or parent-teacher conferences, I would reach out to them over the phone and send home a newsletter.

After fully implementing this program, I may decide to add on more follow up sessions. If all goes well, I may even consider extending the program through the entire Traditional Dual Language (TDL) program. That would entail creating additional sessions that would work well through K-3. In order to implement across the entire TDL program, I would have to have all teachers on board, but I feel by including them and their input it will only make the program that much more in depth and purposeful

### **Summary**

In this chapter I reflected on the capstone project experience in an attempt to answer my research question, *How can Latino parent involvement and direct teaching of literacy skills help to improve their child's reading skills?* I deliberated on what I learned

about myself as a researcher, writer and learner throughout the process. I addressed the implications and limitations of my project. Finally, I reflected on the overall capstone experience and how it changed me as an educator. This overall journey has allowed me the space to become a better educator and to embrace my students families, which I was never quite sure of how to do previously.

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