

DISSERTATION

TRESPASSING BARRIERS:
RESEARCHING THE EXPERIENCES OF LATINA IMMIGRANTS IN A
COMMUNITY COLLEGE BILINGUAL EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

TRESPASSING BARRIERS: RESEARCHING THE EXPERIENCES OF LATINA IMMIGRANTS IN A COMMUNITY COLLEGE BILINGUAL EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM

There has been much debate on the politics and pedagogies of bilingual education in K-12 schools, but conspicuously absent in this debate are institutions of higher education. English-only ideologies are deeply embedded and rarely questioned in U.S. institutions of higher education, which predominantly require English language proficiency to access college-level coursework. Working within the intersections of critical race theory and participatory research, I engaged Latina immigrant students participating in a community college bilingual early childhood degree program as “research collaborators” in examining the influences of this program on their lives. Their stories, shared in a community narrative, reveal how this program opened the door to college access and empowered them as students, mothers, professionals, and advocates. In my discussion of our findings I highlight the capital Latina immigrant students bring to their academic journey, critique the English-only pathway to college, and underscore the importance of creating spaces for the voices of these students to be heard. Documenting our research journey, I also provide an analysis of the challenges and rewards of engaging students from a traditionally marginalized population as research collaborators.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As I reflect on this dissertation journey, and the people who were part of taking this journey with me, I am reminded of when Victoria (research collaborator) expressed her joy at the place she was in her own journey by cupping her hands together and stating, “My hands are full.” So too, are mine.

I’d like to begin by acknowledge the support of my advisor, Tim Davies. Tim, you not only walked beside me as this unique journey unfolded, but you (rather gleefully) took delight in pushing traditional boundaries of dissertation research that made it possible for me to engage in a research process and study that was, in your words, “Erica.” A comment I treasured.

There are others, who along the way helped nurture me during my journey. While I thank all of the numerous friends and colleagues who cheered me along the way, I’d like to thank in particular, Jo and Mirella. My fellow CSU “sisters,” you provided me with articles and feedback on my writing, as well as moral support and assurance that this White girl was honoring the voices of her research collaborators.

I also want to thank my mom. Mom, I came to be in this place, to embark on this journey because it speaks to who I am and who I want to be in the world, and you have always played a significant role in shaping this. Throughout my dissertation journey your support has been invaluable. Every weekend we talked on the phone you continued to ask for an update on my progress and helped me think through my reflections about the

research process. You are now probably as much of an expert on my dissertation as I am. You commiserated with me in my frustrations, danced with me in celebrations, and when I was in the midst of being overwhelmed with completing all of this you sent me cards with words of encouragement and money with orders to use it to “take care of myself.” Maybe now I can do a better job in following those orders.

Finally, I want to acknowledge my research collaborators. Your names should also be on the title page of this dissertation as you were co-authors of both the research process and the research study. Not only did you take a huge risk in agreeing to participate in this study but also you made it more than I dared to imagine. I cannot adequately express how much I admire each one of you. You are courageous, strong, beautiful, warrior women. I am a better person for knowing all of you.

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PREFACE

Often serving as a roadmap for readers, the traditional dissertation begins with an “Introduction” chapter in which the destination, or the purpose of the research study, is provided. As my research departs from tradition, so too, does some of the content of my chapters. In Chapter I, I offer a “Prelude”¹ in which I begin the story of how my dissertation journey unfolded. I share my perspective as a researcher, and how this perspective shaped my desire to engage in dissertation research that was compatible with a social justice agenda. I describe how my search for research methods that would empower participants of a research study led me to the creation of a research design informed by the intersections of critical race theory and participatory research. My hopes for this design was to engage those traditionally participating as “subjects” as “research collaborators” in defining the purpose of the study, crafting the research questions, identifying the data collection techniques, and analyzing the data. I also share the research questions that would guide my analysis of the research *process*.

It is in Chapter II that I review the literature that provides the context for the research question the research collaborators chose to explore in our research study. Chapter III continues with the story of my dissertation journey. I begin by documenting my experiences navigating the dissertation proposal and institutional review board processes, and I share my initial fears and hopes as I entered the research process. It is then that I am joined by the research collaborators in my dissertation journey. I use data

¹ The term and use of “Prelude” was adopted from E. Ankeny (2003)

collected during the research process to share our story of implementing a research design contextualized in the intersections of critical race theory and participatory research. The specific methods of the research process are described as they unfolded, accompanied by my ongoing analysis of each of the phases of the research design.

In Chapter IV, I sketch a profile of each the research collaborators as I had come to know them through the research process. While each of the research collaborators' voice was distinctly unique, our research findings are captured in a community narrative that emerged from our research study. It is in Chapter V that the research collaborators tell the story of their experiences in the bilingual early childhood program. My voice intertwines with theirs in providing further analysis and interpretation of this story. In Chapter VI, I discuss the implications of our research, and in Chapter VII I bring the story of the dissertation journey to a close by highlighting key aspects of the research process.

The structure of this dissertation is reflective of the unfolding process of the research design. This design has presented many challenges, especially while working within a traditional dissertation framework. I have grappled with how to respond to expectations for the articulation of explicit research questions at the onset of such a journey. I have debated when and how my researcher collaborators become part of the formal dissertation process. I have struggled with the design of a consent form that reflected the complexity of the design and minimized the implicit establishment of power inequities that I seek to avoid among research collaborators. And I was personally challenged with surrendering to an unfolding process. But in spite of the challenges, or perhaps because of them, my commitment to this design was strengthened.

CHAPTER I: PRELUDE

Researcher Perspective

This study was influenced by my perspective, shaped in earlier years by my own personal experiences with being “other” and further developed through my studies of critical theory and critical race theory. These learning experiences framed my journey to critical consciousness of my racial privilege and led to the place I am today; with an understanding of my privileged and oppressor status, an aversion to practices that silence and oppress, and a commitment to create spaces for marginalized populations to lead.

“Reborn White”

At the age of seventeen I experienced a sudden onset of physical disability fundamentally altering my perception of the world. I became intensely conscious of one aspect of the privilege that had shaped my perspective and this opened a door to understanding what it takes to negotiate the world with “otherness.” Repeatedly bumping up against physical barriers resulted in an acute awareness, even to this day, of spaces that exclude. I also gained an understanding of the heightened self-consciousness when being the “other” in the room; of constantly feeling monitored and judged based upon a difference that set me apart from the “norm.” Being “other” developed my awareness of privilege and laid the foundation from which I eventually developed a critical consciousness of my White privilege.

This consciousness was significantly impacted by my studies of critical theorists such as Foucault (1980), Giroux (2001), and Freire (2005). These studies informed a

critique of the dominant ideologies reproduced in education and educational research and fueled my desire to challenge oppressive and unjust structures and practices in our educational system. This was followed by my introduction to critical race theory (CRT), which centralized race in my political, social, economic, and historical constructs. This interpretative framework challenged my “liberal” perspective and the ways I had defined my role in addressing issues of social justice. It demanded a personal examination of Whiteness as a part of my identity and informed my role as an educator.

CRT, informed by the race-radical philosophies of people of color, awakened me. Freire (2005) stated, “Conversion to the people requires a profound rebirth” (p. 61). I wish I could say that I have arrived at a place in which I have unlearned the subjectivities, ideologies, and behaviors of being White. Unlike the consciousness my disability forces, race-consciousness is not endemic to being White. While I always will have blind-spots to my own Whiteness, being “reborn white” (Allen, 2005, p. 62) has endowed me with the ability to see the world with new eyes. Perhaps more importantly, it has influenced how I perceive my role in the world.

Race-consciousness challenged my behaviors, caused me to examine the ease with which I could tell my stories and have others listen, and with which I could lead and have others follow. It defined my role as a White anti-racist, my desire to create spaces for “others” to share their stories, and a desire to create opportunities for “others” to lead. Race-consciousness informed a critique of structures that maintain the domination of those with power and privilege through exclusive practices that marginalize and oppress. It fueled my desire to use my power and privilege to stand in opposition to such structures and practices, and be willing to risk standing to do so.

It was in the last stages of my doctoral journey I found myself using this lens to examine my role as a researcher. This examination was accompanied by the recognition that I cannot rely upon my own knowledge and experience to inform my worldview; that my desire to grow, to be “more fully human,” (Freire, 2005, p. 44) is dependent upon the knowledge of the oppressed. Seeking also to contribute to justice in my role as a researcher, I realized that I wanted to embrace research that unearthed insights about the barriers faced by populations traditionally marginalized in higher education.

The Source of Inspiration

When I began the process of crafting my dissertation research project my focus was on what research topics I could pursue that would contribute to social justice. At the time, as the director of education at a community college in the southwest, I was intimately involved with creating a post-secondary bilingual early childhood program. The creation of this program was motivated by a desire to provide primary Spanish-speaking early childhood workers access to post-secondary coursework that would expand their professional and educational opportunities. It also was motivated by the perspective that this population’s rich cultural and linguistic knowledge was an untapped asset in a state that was in desperate need of bilingual and bicultural educators.

The program maintained the early childhood course curriculum required for the associate of arts in early childhood. The difference was the instruction and the curriculum materials would primarily be provided in the students’ native language of Spanish. Additionally, students moved through the coursework as a cohort. I provided release for an instructor to serve as the program coordinator to help students navigate institutional processes (enrollment, registration, financial aid, etc.), as well as to support

continued academic progress. The early childhood curriculum was not designed to include English as second language (ESL) instruction, as the students were diverse in their English proficiency, but with each subsequent semester of instruction more opportunities were provided for students to practice and gain confidence in speaking, reading, and writing English. At later points in the program, students would need to take the required progression of ESL coursework if they were to move into the general education degree requirements, which were only offered in English.

All of the students were Latina immigrants who, at a minimum, had graduated from a foreign high school or had earned their General Education Development (GED) diploma equivalency. A few had post-secondary experiences either in foreign institutions of higher education or in U.S. community college ESL courses, but the majority of the students were first-time, first-generation college students.

My involvement with the program allowed me to gain a brief glimpse of the challenges, fears, and barriers these students continuously faced. At the same time, I was in awe of their commitment, courage, and vivacity of spirit. More than anything I had participated in during my career, my involvement with this program reinforced my belief in a community college mission guided by the principles of providing educational access and equity to underserved populations; thus, it became the source of inspiration for the topic of my dissertation research. I diligently reviewed the existing literature on adult ESL students, Latina immigrants, and bilingual education in higher education to learn all I could and identify gaps that existed in the research, of which there were many. I used this knowledge to develop potential research questions and explored methods that would yield answers to these questions. It was during this exploration I stumbled upon

inconsistencies between what I articulated as an outcome for my research, creating empowering experiences for populations traditionally marginalized in institutions of higher education, and the very process I would be engaged in to conduct the research.

Problematizing the Research Process

I initially approached my research project with a commitment to methods that would ensure the experiences and voices of participants in my study, students in the bilingual early childhood program, would be given a space in the research process and product. I substituted language from “subject” to “participant” and considered approaches that would “allow” participants to tell their stories. But my methodological critique was not silenced.

Pizarro (1999) stated it well when he spoke of his epiphany regarding his research with Chicano students and said, “I deceived myself into believing I had arrived at some innovation, when in fact I had only replicated traditional methodology using new subjects” (p. 56). It was my reading of Pizarro that prompted me to retrace the steps of my doctoral journey, to reexamine critical theory and critical race theory and to turn this lens on the very process in which I was engaged.

As a doctoral student I am poised to open and walk through a door in which I can claim my legitimacy as a researcher, as determined by the standards of academia. The very fact that I am representative of the majority of others, Whites, who also have the opportunity to open this door, is not only reflective of the institutional structures that privilege me, but of those that further perpetuate domination and oppression. I have realized that however well intentioned the process, as well as the product, of White researchers engaging in academic research reinforces White privilege. It is our voice that

gets heard, our values upheld, and our knowledge legitimized. Giroux (2005) stressed the importance of recognizing the political and social role of institutions of higher education in legitimizing existing views of the world, reproducing selected values, upholding particular relations of power, race, class, and gender, and perpetuating specific notions as to “what knowledge is of most worth, what it means to know something, and how one might construct representation of [themselves], others, and the social environment” (p. 227). While he was speaking in the context of the canon of the liberal arts curriculum and pedagogical practices, his analysis can be extended to the pinnacle of the journey in higher education; those who engage in academic research.

The canon of scholarship in most fields of educational research is overwhelmingly composed of White scholars and thus the dominance of research methods and measures reinforcing the standards of Whiteness (Foster, 2005; Lopez, 2001). It is only more recently that alternate conceptions of educational research have challenged this standard and have critiqued the practices and institutions that produce racial inequity and oppression (e.g., Leonardo, 2005; Parker, Deyhle, & Villenas, 1999; Scheurich & Young, 1997). And while many White scholars have engaged in such critique, they often fail to engage in practices that might transform the landscape of the academy. Foster (2005) stated:

For although much of scholarship academics have undertaken in education over the past thirty years has promoted a sense of social justices as well as an activist narrative, the scholarship merely pays lip service to these ideas. The result is that while academics easily problematize and critique the practices and institutions of others, they do not act in ways that are compatible with their critique nor do they engage in day-to-day actions within their own oppressive sites. Not only does this situation illuminate the elitist nature of the academy, it erodes academia’s already waning credibility. (p. 175)

I realized the reason my methodological critique was not silenced was because the methods I had considered were not compatible with my anti-racist critique. Acting in ways compatible with this critique begins with acknowledging the prevalence of institutional racism and White privilege in the academy (Campbell, Sanchez & Tierney, 2004; Lopez, 2001). I believe it also means understanding the epistemologies that inform our research are racially biased (Gordon, Miller, & Rollock, 1990; Scheurich & Young, 1997). Additionally, it means recognizing the inherent problems of White researchers engaged in researching the issues of “other.”

To address these problems requires interrogating the role of White researchers in the research process (Gallagher, 2000) and bringing to the center those most directly impacted by the issue (Gordon, Miller & Rollock, 1990; Pizarro, 1999). It means creating a “methodologically and dynamic research terrain” in which the researcher and the researched co-construct meaning (Carter, 2003, p. 32). It also means explicitly addressing the relationship between power and knowledge in the research process and utilizing methods that challenge the “traditionally hierarchical, closed models of research and knowledge production” (Torre, 2009, p. 112).

Allen (2005) wrote, “White privilege is structural and cannot be erased unless the structure that creates it is erased. There is no neutral position to take; one either decides to work against it or to go along for the ride” (p. 62). I was committed to working against it; thus, my desire was to implement a research design aligned to this commitment.

Conceptual Framework

Guided by a desire to explore how I, as a White researcher, could act in ways compatible with a social justice agenda through a research process that deliberately

engaged individuals from a traditionally marginalized population as empowered participants in the process, I explored the literature to determine what methods might best fit with this intent.

When I reviewed Heron and Reason's (1997) participatory inquiry paradigm, my attention was captured by the authors' premise that determining the questions to be asked and the methods for exploring these questions should be done collaboratively with the research participants. Fundamental to cooperative inquiry, a method framed by the participatory inquiry paradigm, was the idea that the "researcher" is equally a "subject" with experiential knowing that is valued, and that the "subject" is equally a "researcher" with rights to fully participate in the research design and process. With the participatory inquiry paradigm, I discovered an epistemology and methodology that reframed my research focus from the product, to one in which I was deeply engaged in examining the process. I delved further into the methodology of participatory action research (e.g., Atweh, Kemmis, & Weeks, 1998; Atweh & Burton, 1995; Greenwood, & Levin, 2005; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005), Latino critical theory (e.g., Delgado Bernal, 2002; Soloranzo & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Villalpando, 2004), critical qualitative research (e.g., Carspecken & Apple, 1992; Morrow & Brown, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), and transformative research (Mertens, 2009). But it was methodology influenced by both participatory research and critical race theory that seemed to fit best with my desired outcomes and thus informed the conceptual framework for this study.

Participatory Research

There are various forms of research that are informed by the participatory paradigm and these forms have both overlapping and distinguishing characteristics. The

terms participatory research (PR) and participatory action research (PAR) are often used interchangeably, but they each evolved from distinct projects (Hall, 1992). PR emerged through the work of adult educators researching and working in Africa in an effort to “put the less powerful at the center of the knowledge creation process, to move people and their daily-lived experiences of struggle and survival from the margins of epistemology to the center” (Hall, 1992, pp. 15-16). PAR emerged from Latin America and the work of Orlando Fals-Borda, which also placed an emphasis on the knowledge of the people but stressed an action component (Joyappa & Martin, 1996). While the origins of these approaches are distinct, the general characteristics are similar, and for the purpose of my discussion I will use the term participatory research to be inclusive of participatory action research.

PR not only developed as a result of activists concerned for addressing issues of the marginalized and oppressed, but as a deliberate reaction against elitist approaches to research which rarely yielded benefits to the people who were the subjects of such research (Joyappa & Martin, 1996). PR was thus conceptualized as a collaboration for radical social change, enabling the leverage needed for action by oppressed and marginalized groups, pursuing answers to questions of daily struggle and survival, and breaking down traditional boundaries and conceptions of power and knowledge production (Hall, 1992). The key components of action research became education, research, and action, with a particular emphasis on action leading to social transformation.

Hall (1992) believed there could be no singular method of PR because “the issues and ways of working should flow from those involved and from their context” (p. 20).

What is important in all methods is that they draw out the knowledge from the group and allow for collective analysis of this knowledge. PR methods can vary to include: community meetings, video documentaries, surveys, storytelling, and more.

A central feature of PR is its construction as a social process by which people, individually and collectively, try to understand how they are shaped and re-shaped, as individuals and in relation to others in a variety of contexts (Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998). It is research that is done by themselves, for themselves. It emphasizes a research process in which each individual examines their own knowledge and how this knowledge shapes their sense of identity and agency. PR is also reflexive, dialectical, and critical (Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998).

Cooperative inquiry, builds upon the features gained from PR, by casting both the participants and the researcher not only as researchers but both as participants. If, as Heron (1996) suggested, a researcher is not also a subject of the research, he/she generates conclusions that are not properly grounded in personal experience or that of the participants. Additionally, while many forms of research grounded in the participatory paradigm are committed to democratization of content, involving all participants in decisions about what the research is seeking to find out and achieve; cooperative inquiry is also equally concerned with the democratization of method, which involves participants in decisions about research design, and its management and the conclusions drawn from it (Heron, 1996). As Heron (1996) stated, “the democratization of research management is as much a human rights issue as the democratization of government...” (p. 21).

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) emerged from the field of critical legal studies, in which authors such as Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, and Kimberle Crenshaw argued that racist ideology and assumption were imbued in our political and legal structures and thus served to maintain the dominant power of White European Americans (Lynn & Parker, 2006). The following tenants define CRT:

- (1) It promotes the centrality of race and the notion racism is endemic to American culture and society (Lynn, 2005).
- (2) It challenges the traditional claims of neutrality, objectivity, meritocracy, and color-blindness as those camouflaging the self-interest, power and privilege of dominant groups in American society (Solorzano & Yosso, 2005).
- (3) It interrogates the deeper meanings that underlie contemporary social problems through contextual and historical analysis (Pizarro, 1999).
- (4) It is interdisciplinary—in particular, critical race studies in education are often influenced by different epistemological traditions (Lynn & Parker, 2006).
- (5) It recognizes the experiential knowledge of people of color is critical to unveiling and ultimately transforming racial oppression (Ladson-Billings, 1999).
- (6) It works toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal to eliminate all forms of oppression (Solorzano & Yosso, 2005).

While CRT was initiated as a lens for examining legal structures, it evolved to being used as a lens to examine issues related to immigration, globalization, colonization, and eventually, education (Lynn & Parker, 2006). Several articles have been written that

link CRT to education, such as Ladson-Billings's (1999) "Just what is Critical Race Theory and what's it doing in a *nice* field like education?" in which she articulated how CRT could be used to examine curriculum, instruction, assessment, school funding, and desegregation. Parker and Stovall's "Action Following Words: Critical Race Theory Connects to Critical Pedagogy" discussed how CRT can move beyond a theoretical lens used to uncover racialized practices in education, to action that impacts the lives of people of color (2005).

A number of CRT scholars focus on the lives of marginalized students. For example, Delgado Bernal (2002) used CRT to explore the cultural wealth Mexican-American students bring to school, how schools devalue and ignore this cultural wealth, and ways in which this cultural wealth could be leveraged by schools to improve student achievement. While CRT scholars illuminate the ways in which schools have continued to oppress students of color, they have also conducted research about the kinds of learning environments that support students of color (Lynn & Parker, 2006).

The challenge to move CRT beyond a theoretical lens more recently has extended to research methodology. Parker, Deyhle, and Villenas (1999), editors of the book *Race is..Race isn't: Critical Race Theory and Qualitative Studies in Education*, explored the significance of race in conducting qualitative research with communities of color. The CRT framework emphasizes the importance of the process of research as much as the product. As Pizarro (1999) stated:

In short, much of the work of critical race theorists informs us that we cannot arrive at any degree of social justice if the means we employ in pursuing this goal are not also imbued with the principles of justice...CRT does not provide us with a method, but it questions traditional epistemology's top-down tendencies and, in

so doing, gives us the rationale for a method of *los de abajo*² that is grounded in social justice. (p. 61)

Ladson-Billings (2000) discussed how CRT challenges “traditional epistemology’s top-down tendencies.” She outlined the benefits of a CRT approach to qualitative research to include: (1) the explicit rendering of the researcher in his or her work, (2) the deeply personal use of social science to help “break open the mythical hold that traditional work has on knowledge” (p. 272), and (3) the raising of questions about the relationship between power and knowledge, particularly the knowledge about people and communities of color.

Parker and Lynn (2002) argued “research that has attempted to call attention to the concerns of disenfranchised groups has relied heavily on antediluvian and sometimes culturally inappropriate methods of investigation and exploration” (p. 13). They went on to state the epistemology, or what counts as knowledge, and the methodology of such research methods often fail to address the importance of minority representation in the research process. Included in the authors’ discussion of CRT and research methodology was the importance of examining the “positionality and privilege of Whiteness in terms of who gets to tell the critical race story” (p. 14) and recognizing White subjectivity. Parker and Lynn concluded, “struggles for education equity and social justice can form the basis of critical race praxis” (p. 18).

Solorzano and Yosso (2002) defined a critical race methodology as one which:

- (1) foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process;
- (2) challenges the traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of students of color;

² *Los de abajo* is defined by Pizarro as those people who, by virtue of their status as the oppressed, reveal social injustice and demands, of scholars, to as who we research for and why.

- (3) offers a liberatory or transformative solution to racial, gender, and class subordination;
- (4) and focuses on the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of students of color. (p. 24).

These authors drew attention to the power of White privilege in constructing stories about race and how such stories have been distorted and have silenced people of color through negative assumptions about people of color and positive assumptions about Whites and the use of deficiency models. Solorzano and Yosso suggested critical race methodology in educational research could change the ways communities of color are studied and written about.

Lopez and Parker (2003), editors of a collection of articles raising important questions about epistemological racism, further explored the link between CRT and qualitative research methodology. Tyson (2003) called for the deconstruction of White racial ideology that informs a normative research stance. Both Carter (2003) and Buendía (2003) discussed the role of racial identity and personal narrative in writing and conducting research on race. Esquivel (2003) explored the invisibility of marginalized communities of color in the research process, and Parker (2003) examined the role that CRT can play in helping to enhance research methodologies and race-conscious policies in higher education. Marx (2003) explored how CRT can be used as a tool by White scholars conducting qualitative research; questioning if it can inform White researchers in constructing anti-racist forms of qualitative research and be used to create research which moves us toward a more just society.

The Intersections of CRT and PR

While there are distinct theoretical overlaps between CRT and PR, there are only a handful of studies I have found that deliberately have brought the two together and are

featured in a single edition of *Urban Review*. Stoudt (2009), drawing from feminist philosophy, CRT, and participatory action research, examined the role of language and discourse in investigating privilege and utilizing counter hegemonic research approaches to do so. Stoudt argued to make changes within the institutions that maintain privilege and injustice requires “a research approach that could critically enter active institutions, navigate politics, establish respectful relationships, provide spaces to interrogate common practices, and build enough cultural trust and awareness to collaborate in change” (p. 8) and that the framework to do this effectively is provided by participatory action research.

Ayala (2009) used CRT, mestiza consciousness scholarship, and PAR to inform two different research projects in which she engaged students from college and high school as co-researchers. Ayala described a necessary and explicit “wrestling with the power dynamics that operate from within and outside” (p. 71) the research group. She concluded that using PAR to “challenge models of research that reinforce hierarchical arrangements and hegemonic power structures [allows for] those once marginalized by research to become the knowledge holders, collectors, and actors” (p. 71).

Torre (2009), who also engaged students as co-researchers, explicitly outlined a set of theoretical intersections between CRT and PR which includes the expansion notion of “expert” knowledge, the multiplicity of identities that each individual holds, and the political nature of knowledge production (p. 111).

Implications for the Research Design

Like Torre, I sought to work within intersections between CRT and PR, and I identified five key intersections that framed my research design.

1. CRT and PR are committed to social justice.

2. CRT and PR challenge traditional research paradigms used with marginalized and oppressed populations as these further the injustices perpetuated upon these populations and maintain dominant structures of power and privilege.
3. CRT and PR recognize the lived experiences of the oppressed are legitimate sources of knowledge, and in fact critical to research for social change.
4. CRT and PR explicitly address issues of power and knowledge, to include the research process and the relationships between the researcher and the researched.
5. CRT and PR call for the explicit rendering of the researcher in his or her work.

Both CRT and PR are characterized by distinct approaches that inform my research design. CRT requires a methodology that prioritizes the narratives of those who have been oppressed by a *racialized* social and political system, so we can better understand the forces at work in their oppression. CRT supports an approach that interrogates the racialized role of the researcher and the influence of this on the research process. While both CRT and PR recognize that each individual holds a multiplicity of identities, a CRT approach to research explicitly examines these identities and the potentially conflicting nature of these identities. And finally, PR explicitly articulates methods which engage “the researched” as co-researchers in the research study.

Informed by the intersections of CRT and PR, the research design I created borrowed largely from the phases of Pizarro’s (1999) proposed method for Chicana/o social justice research. The phases that framed my research study were: (1) identifying and recruiting research collaborators, (2) project definition, (3) data collection (4) data

analysis and interpretation, (5) research process analysis, and (6) products of the research. Further definition and description of these phases is discussed in Chapter III.

This research design guided the process of engaging a group of Latina immigrant students participating in a community college bilingual early childhood program in defining the problem to be studied, crafting the research questions, identifying the data collection techniques, data analysis, and communicating the findings. While the research collaborators would determine the research questions they wanted to explore in the project definition phase of the study, my analysis of the research design was guided by the following research questions:

- Can I, as a critical researcher with multiple positions of privilege and power, effectively engage students from a traditionally marginalized population as research collaborators?
- a. What are the differing challenges of the design for myself and for the research collaborators?
 - b. What are the issues of power and knowledge and how are they addressed?
 - c. How do our multiplicity of identities shape the research process?
 - d. In working within the intersections of CRT and PR, what are my responsibilities as a White critical researcher?

It was my hope that this research design would transform traditional researcher-subject relationships by challenging traditional relations of power and knowledge in the research process. Perhaps most importantly, it was fueled by my desire to create an experience in which the research collaborators were empowered by the research process.

Nosotros Hacemos Camino al Andar” (We Make the Way as We Go)

The work of Myles Horton and Paulo Freire had a significant impact on my views of education. While these two men chose very different pathways in which to do their educational work, they held a common belief that popular participation is the foundation

of liberation and social change. They also believed such participation was “realized through an educational practice that itself is both liberatory and participatory, that simultaneously creates a new society and involves the people themselves in the creation of their own knowledge” (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. xxx). These beliefs brought the two of them together in a unique collaboration in which they decided to “speak a book,” (p. 3) later titled, *We Make the Road by Walking*. The title of the book was taken from Freire’s use of the phrase in their initial discussion about why they decided to speak a book and how they would go about it. The phrase is based upon the adaptation of a proverb by the Spanish poet Antonio Machado, in which one line reads “se hace camino al andar,” or “you make the way as you go” (p. 6) and was symbolic of many aspects of the book’s content, as well as the generative approach to creating the book.

I have long been guided by the goal of engaging in educational practice that is liberatory and participatory and it seemed appropriate it was this, as well as the generative approach modeled by Horton and Freire, which guided my dissertation journey. A journey, which as it unfolded, beckoned me with an opportunity for a unique collaboration in which I would engage those deemed as “subjects” in traditional approaches to research as research collaborators. It was a collaboration that reflected both liberatory and participatory goals and demanded a more generative approach than found in the typical dissertation journey. It presented an opportunity to use my privilege and power to attempt to do more than “pay lip service” to social justice ideas by creating a space for other voices to be heard, an opportunity for other values to be upheld, and for other knowledge to be legitimized, and to do so within the context of the academy.

Engaging in a dissertation project in which I needed to surrender to an unfolding process provided a rich learning experience as I am more apt to attempt to control process. Jarworski (1996) spoke of the “integrity of surrender” (p. 35) when one is committed to a higher purpose. Of his own surrender he shared the following:

Instead of controlling life, I ultimately learned what it meant to allow life to flow through me. Without the control, there are more intense highs and lows, and I felt much more at risk than ever before. But this sort of vulnerability goes with the path I’m describing—the path that reveals itself as we walk (p. 35).

The vulnerability and risk he spoke of was something I had to embrace in this process: to trust the instincts guiding my path and the others who walked it with me; to believe the path would reveal itself as empowering and meaningful; and to stand outside of dominant practices. But such risk and vulnerability was only a fraction of that which is faced in the everyday lives of the students in the bilingual early childhood program, and the strength and determination I have witnessed in each of them fueled my commitment to this process.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In 1948, the Report of the Commission on Higher Education cast community colleges in a significant role of providing educational opportunity for underserved populations when it proclaimed:

If the ladder of educational opportunity rises high at the door of some youth and scarcely rises at all at the doors of others, while at the same time formal education is made a prerequisite to occupational and social advance, then education may become the means, not of eliminating race and class distinction, but of deepening and solidifying them. It is obvious, then, that free and universal access to education, in terms of the interest, ability and need of the student, must be a major goal of American education. (as cited in Bragg, 2001, p. 99).

The social changes of the 1960s again emphasized the idea education was a vehicle for social equity and increased enrollment of students of color at community colleges strengthened their role in providing access to higher education. Today, the open access mission of community colleges is reflected by the greater than 50 % of total post secondary enrollment of students of color in community colleges (Prentice, 2007), many of whom might otherwise be turned away because of financial concerns or poor academic preparation (Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

Despite increased access, the gaps in college access, persistence, and success based upon race and class reveals the continued role of institutions of higher education in maintaining and reproducing social inequities. For students like those in the bilingual early childhood program it is not just their race and class that make it far less likely that

“the ladder of educational opportunity” will rise to their door, it is also their identity as Latina immigrants and English language learners.

The fact that community colleges serve approximately 55% of all Latina/o post-secondary students (Lamkin, 2004), coupled with a U.S. Latina/o population growth of more than 50% in the last two decades (Guzmán, 2001), has helped bring attention to issues related to the access, persistence, success, and/or transfer of Latina/o students in community colleges (e.g., Bunch & Panayotova, 2008; Fry, 2004; Kohler & Lazarin, 2007; Lamkin, 2004; Lopez, 2009; Solorzano, Villalpando, & Osequera, 2005). But significantly less attention has been given to similar issues in relation to post-secondary Latino/a immigrant students, and in particular those who are English language learners (ELLs). Yet community colleges play a significant role in the education of immigrants and ELLs and it is likely they will continue to expand this role in the foreseeable future.

Almost two-thirds of the projected Latina/o population growth will be accounted for by new immigrants and their descendants (Passel & Cohn, 2008). In 2005, 55% of all immigrant undergraduates and 59% of all legal permanent residents were enrolled in community colleges (Erisman & Looney, 2007). During this same year, immigrants constituted approximately 12% of the total United States population. According to population projections by the Pew Research Center, by 2050 nearly one in five Americans will be foreign-born (Passel & Cohn, 2008).

The high numbers of immigrants also influence the percentage of our population who speaks a language other than English. The 2000 U.S. Census revealed that 18% of the population reported speaking a language other than English at home and over 50% were Spanish-speaking. Among these, a little less than half reported they had limited

English proficiencies (Shin & Bruno, 2003). Immigrants, especially women, lacking English proficiency are “disproportionally trapped in lower income professions such as assembly line, restaurants, and cleaning jobs” (Dávila 2008, p. 358). Research indicates that college education offers a means for increase wages. Kane and Ruse (1995) estimated a range of 6-8% wage effect for every year of college coursework completed ranges, but acknowledged there are gaps due to racial differences.

If a college education is the hope for economic mobility, immigrants have little cause for hope. Currently two-thirds of documented immigrants, ages 25 and older, have no more than a high school education. While education levels vary among specific immigrant populations, those from Latin America are among the lowest with almost 75% never attending college (Erismán & Looney, 2007). While there are several factors that influence this, limited English proficiency is one of the most significant barriers to college attendance.

In this chapter, I will review significant research studies from the last two decades as they relate to the access, persistence, success, and transfer of Latina/o, immigrant and ELL students. I will begin with a brief overview of what the literature reveals about Latina/o educational achievement and the connection to immigrant status and English proficiency. Next, I will review the research studies on immigrant students in higher education, after which I will review research related to English as Second Language (ESL) adult students. Finally, I conclude the literature review with an examination of bilingual education as it relates to educational achievement of students who are English language learners (ELLs). Because research is extremely limited on bilingual education programs in community colleges, my literature review will primarily focus on the

research that has evolved from studies of bilingual education in the K-12 educational setting.

A Note on Terminology

Hispanic, Latino, Latina/o. The term “Hispanic” was first used officially by the U.S. Census Bureau in 1970 to refer to “a person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race” and the term “Latino” was later added in 2000 as a descriptor to refer to the same populations (Cresce, Schmidley, & Ramirez, 2004). The use of Hispanic and Latino as “umbrella terms” has been a source of debate in the United States (Gimenez, 1997, p. 226) due to the politics associated with these terms and the differing preferences among persons living in the U.S. of Latin American or other Spanish origin. Gimenez (1997) argued against the use of an umbrella term at all, stating that researchers should instead:

...acknowledge the existence of qualitative differences in history, culture, class and social stratification, and racial/ethnic compositions of populations that ought to be publicly named by their real historical names, and understood (through social research) and treated (through social and health policies) in their own right (p. 236).

While philosophically and conceptually I am in agreement with Gimenez, most of the literature still utilizes Hispanic and Latino as umbrella terms. For the purpose of this literature review, I am utilizing the term Hispanic only when it is required to reflect a specific title or demographic of a research study. The term Latino, when used as an umbrella term, is also problematic as it is a masculine pronoun referring to both males and females. In my research, I have found that authors influenced by critical race theory, and/or Latina/Latino theory (LatCrit) more commonly use Latina/o as a preferred term.

For this reason, and because I do not want to marginalize through terminology the very population I am engaging as research collaborators, I will adopt this term.

Foreign born. My use of “foreign born” refers to persons born outside of the United States to parents, of whom neither are a U.S. citizen, unless otherwise specified.

Native born. My use of “native born” refers to persons born in the United States.

Immigrants. My use of “immigrants” refers to persons born outside of the United States who reside in the United States to include naturalized U.S. citizens, permanent residents, and undocumented residents, unless otherwise specified.

Inequities in College Access and Educational Attainment

A student’s pathway to college is influenced by many factors to include family income, parents’ college experience, aspirations, academic preparation, and high school completion. Once in college, a student’s persistence to degree completion is also influenced by a multitude of factors to include (but not limited to) college readiness (as defined by whether or not a student will need to take developmental level coursework), part- or full-time status, integration to college life, financial need, and work and family responsibilities.

The inequities which characterize the college access and degree completion of Latinas/os reflect the higher percentage of risk factors, or those factors which negatively correlate with their access to college and degree completion, that are prevalent among Latina/o youth. Many of these factors are even greater among Latina/o immigrants than those who are native born.

Latina/o College Access and Educational Attainment

An analysis of the most recent National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS), which tracked and surveyed (repeatedly) a nationally representative group of students beginning in 1988 with 8th grade and ending eight years after scheduled graduation of high school in 2000, revealed persistent inequities among Latina/o students as compared to White students in their pathway to college (Swail, Cabrera & Lee, 2004).

The authors of this analysis maintained the importance of income in academic achievement is its relation to a family's ability to live in neighborhoods with higher average home prices and thus, have greater access to schools with more funding to create rich learning environments. Over half (53.7%) of the Latina/o students represented in the NELS database, came from families with annual incomes of less than \$25,000, as compared to the average of the NELS population at 29% and White students at 23%.

Students whose parents attended college are much more likely to attend themselves (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000). Seventy-two percent of the NELS population had at least one parent with some college coursework, 30% of whom had acquired at least a bachelor's degree. Among White students, almost two-thirds (74.8%) had at least one parent with some college coursework and 33.7% of whom had acquired at least a bachelor's degree. Among Latina/o students, only half (49.4%) had a parent who attended college, and of these, 14.1% acquired at least a bachelor's degree.

Other statistics found in the analysis of the NELS, as they related to the pathway to college, continued to reflect the aspiration and education gap between Latinas/os and Whites. While almost two-thirds of the Latina/o students aspired to go to college when surveyed in the 8th grade, only 55% aspired to attain a bachelor's degree—20 % below

the national average. Higher percentages of Latina/o students, than White students, were “not qualified” or “minimally qualified” (calculated using GPA, NELS aptitude scores, and ACT and SAT scores) for college entrance. Latinas/os had the lowest high school graduation rate of any group, and, with the exception of African Americans, were the highest percentage of students who received a GED rather than a traditional diploma. Latinas/os were also more likely to delay enrollment in college after high school.

Factors Influencing Latina/o Student Persistence and Success in Higher Education

There is a great deal of literature on factors influencing student success in community colleges. In a study of factors influencing graduation among students at community colleges, Bailey et al. (2005) found delayed enrollment after high school graduation, taking remedial courses, enrollment in an occupational major or having no major, and interrupted enrollment, and race/ethnicity, all had a negative impact on graduation rates at urban colleges enrolling large numbers of students. Sullivan (2007) also noted a significant percentage of Latina/o students are enrolled at large urban colleges and exhibit many of the characteristics described in Bailey’s research and thus presented a trend of lower academic achievement. Many other factors have been identified as contributing to lower college participation and achievement among Latinas/os. These include delayed college entry, poor academic preparation, lack of financial resources, lack of social capital, part-time attendance, and family and job responsibilities (Bagnato, 2005; Fry, 2002; Swail, Cabrera & Lee, 2004).

Swail, Cabrera and Lee (2004) found that Latina/o students who attended college were less likely to maintain continuous enrollment and less likely to earn their degree within four years in comparison White students. Fry (2004) reported that more than 75%

of Latina/o students entering college never attain a bachelor's degree and nearly two-thirds entering do not earn any type of post-secondary credential. Fry painted the stark reality of the achievement gap between Latina/o and White college students when he wrote: "The best-prepared Hispanics fare worse than whites of equal preparation. The least-prepared Hispanics fare worse than their least-prepared white peers" (p. 4).

Exploring the potential barriers for transfer from community college to four-year degree programs among Latina/o students in a single institution case study, Ornelas and Solozano (2004) found lack of financial resources and family and job responsibilities to be factors. Additionally, these authors found that among Latina/o students self-doubt was a barrier to transfer, and among administrators and counselors cultural deficit thinking was a barrier.

A great deal of research has been done on factors contributing to student persistence in higher education. Tinto's (1993) model of college student integration has been credited for consistently predicted academic persistence (Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997). Tinto theorized that persistence increases when students are integrated into the college social and academic communities. Social integration consists of student interaction with peers and faculty and participation in extracurricular activities, where academic integration involves grade performance and intellectual growth.

Although Tinto's model has provided a foundation for understanding student persistence, a limitation to the model is student integration is viewed as the extent to which an individual student adapts to the cultural norms and values of the university (Castillo et al., 2006). This approach to persistence can be problematic when applied to Latina/o students who may experience conflict with university social and cultural norms

and face systemic barriers to integration. Predominant cultural values held by Latina/o's often conflict with those reflected in academic institutions and can result in cultural denigration. Cultural denigration, when it occurs and is internalized by Latina/o students, can cause low self-esteem and further contribute to low achievement (Marsiglia & Guy, 1994).

Tinto's student integration theory also does not account for contextual factors, such as discrimination, that may attribute to attrition. Hurtado and Carter (1996) found Latina/os were more likely to report more experiences with hostile environment, discrimination, isolation, and a sense of low social status as a result of their group identity. Researchers have also found Latinas/os' perception of the university environment as unwelcoming was related to negative persistence attitudes (e.g., Fry, 2004; Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, & Rosales, 2005). A national longitudinal study based on data from the U.S. Department of Education's National Education Longitudinal Survey also found discrimination was a major reason for Latina/o students not completing college (Fry, 2004).

More than a decade ago, Olivas (1997) criticized the "disappointing quality of Hispanic data in longitudinal and large-scale sample projects" (p. 471) in relation to the lack of research on Latina/o student characteristics and achievement, especially those in higher education. While significant progress has been made relative to the scope of research that specifically examines Latina/o student characteristics and achievement, the same criticism might now be made concerning immigrant student characteristics and achievement in higher education.

Immigrant College Access and Educational Attainment

There are distinct challenges to gaining a comprehensive and accurate picture of the characteristics and educational achievement of immigrant students. One such challenge is the limitations of key data sources, as outlined by Erismen and Looney (2007) in what is probably one of the most comprehensive and current studies of immigrants in higher education. The data these researchers attained from the Office of Immigration Statistics provided basic numbers and demographic characteristics of immigrants in the United States, but these data did not include undocumented immigrants. U.S. Census Bureau data distinguishes between native-born and naturalized U.S. citizens, but the category of foreign-born includes naturalized citizens, legal permanent residents, temporary and humanitarian migrants, and undocumented residents (Erismen & Looney, 2007). The National Center for Educational Statistics includes immigrant status in its surveys of K-12 and postsecondary students, but data on foreign-born students include foreign-born children of U.S. citizens and potentially exclude undocumented immigrants (or at the least does not distinguish these within the foreign-born category). As Erismen and Looney highlighted, “the population we call ‘immigrants’ varies depending upon the data source” (p. 11).

The literature related to access and achievement of immigrants in higher education is extremely limited (Conway, 2009) and the studies that do exist have limitations. A majority of the literature has focused on students who have spent time in the U.S. K-12 educational system versus those who entered the U.S. as adults (e.g., Fry, 2003; Lopez, 2007; Vernez & Abrahamse, 1996). There are research studies that do not distinguish findings based upon those students who have spent time in the U.S. K-12

educational system and those who have not (e.g., Chase & Mahoney, 1996; Gray, Rolph, & Melamid, 1996). Other research studies do not account for or provide limited discussion of the differences that might exist based upon immigrants' race and ethnicity or country of origin (e.g., Conway, 2009; KewelRamani et al., 2007). Despite these limitations, the literature that does exist provides a context for a general understanding of the access and educational achievement of immigrants in higher education.

Erisman and Looney's (2007) study highlighted national demographics of U.S. immigrants and discussed the barriers to higher education faced by legal immigrants. These researchers paid particular attention to this access as it related to those immigrants entering the U.S. as adults. Their study yielded some compelling statistics, among these that adult immigrants from Latin America have the lowest levels of educational attainment; 44% having not graduated from high school and another 30% having only attained a high school diploma or GED. They also found that immigrants entering the country before the age of 13 compare favorably with native-born students with regards to educational attainment.

This finding was echoed in an earlier study conducted by Vernez and Abrahamse (1996) using data from the 1980 NELS. These authors concluded race and ethnicity were more important factors in educational attainment and performance than nativity and suggested there was no need for special educational programs or policies for immigrants. However, these researchers did not analyze data that were disaggregated by the age of the student at arrival in the United States. The possible impact such an analysis might have had on their conclusions is suggested by Erisman and Looney's findings that among immigrants arriving between the ages of 13-44, those 13-19 had the lowest levels of

educational attainment. Additionally, when Erisman and Looney examined the educational levels of immigrants, ages 18-24 in 2005, 70% had graduated from high school in comparison to 86% of their native born peers. And while almost half of native-born students in this age range had attended some college, only one-third of their immigrant peers had. It is also important to note that two-thirds of immigrants within this age group were from Latin America and, as compared to other immigrant subgroups and native-born peers, had very low educational attainment (59% earning a high school degree or equivalency). Erisman and Looney also found significant differences in the educational attainment among immigrants who were naturalized citizens and those that were not. These findings suggest future studies examining educational attainment of foreign-born students in the U.S. educational system as they compare to native born, might need to include age of arrival, country of origin, and citizenship as factors for analysis.

Erisman and Looney also used the age group of 18-24, a traditional age for college attendance, to examine differences in college enrollment as an indicator of barriers that might exist relative to immigrants' access to higher education. While overall, immigrants were only slightly less likely to be enrolled in college than native born in this age group, there were significant differences between naturalized citizens and non-citizens. Naturalized citizens were enrolled at a higher rate than their native born peers at 42%, and 22% of non-citizens were enrolled in college. The researchers suggested, "citizenship plays a crucial, albeit not fully understood, role in providing access to higher education" (p. 15).

Both Vernez and Abrahamse (1996) and Bailey and Weininger (2002) found that immigrants are more likely than their native born peers to begin their post-secondary education at a community college. Bailey and Weininger determined that foreign born students that graduated from a foreign high school were more likely than those that graduated from a U.S. high school to attend a two-year college than a four-year college. This choice may have to do with the increased need among immigrant students for ESL courses, which are more often provided at community colleges (Conway 2009).

In addition to language difficulties, immigrants face other challenges in accessing higher education including unfamiliarity with the U.S. higher education system (Erisman & Looney, 2007; Louie, 2005). Research on immigrant youth parallels that of Latina/o youth, in that they are more likely to come from low-income families and less likely to have a parent who attended college (Camarota, 2007; Erisman & Looney, 2007). There are also distinct challenges to immigrants who have completed their secondary schooling outside the U.S. Particularly related to access, immigrant students may be frustrated with the time and money it takes to have their high school credentials evaluated, which is a requirement for college enrollment. In many cases, institutions of higher education require an official copy of a transcript, which is not always possible (Gray, Rolph & Melamid, 1996). Additionally, while naturalized citizens and legal permanent residents are typically eligible for in-state tuition, most nonpermanent residents are not eligible for financial aid and many, depending upon the state and institution, do not qualify for in-state tuition. Colleges offering ESL courses as non-credit disallow students taking these courses from receiving financial aid.

Despite these challenges, there are a couple of studies which suggested once in a community college foreign-born minority students do as well, if not better, than native-born minority students in performance, graduation and transfer. Bailey and Weininger (2002) conducted a study on the performance, graduation and transfer of foreign-born and native minority populations at the City University of New York (CUNY). These researchers found regardless of where immigrants attended high school, they earned more credits and were more likely to complete an associate degree than native-born students entering the same programs. These findings were echoed by Conway's (2009) study of the persistence among native and immigrant students at a large urban community college. It is notable that both of these studies did find that Latino/a immigrant students continued to lag behind most other immigrant groups relative to educational attainment. Bailey and Weininger also noted that while foreign-born students were more likely to successfully transfer than native-born students there was an exception to this among female immigrant students who attended a foreign high school. These students were the least likely of any population to transfer on to a bachelor degree program.

As Conway (2009) discussed in her findings, "regardless of the success of any particular student group, the overwhelming result is that too few community college students persist" (p. 342). And while immigrant students may experience similar factors influencing their persistence and success in higher education with other student groups, there are unique factors as well.

Factors Influencing Immigrant Student Persistence and Success in Higher Education

Despite the numbers of immigrants attending community colleges, the unique needs of these students remain largely unstudied. I could only identify a handful of studies focused specifically on college experiences of immigrant students. While persistence of Latina/o college students has been linked to academic and social integration, these studies (e.g., Gonzales & Ting, 2008; Hurtado & Carter, 1996) do not specifically examine the impact of the “immigrant experience” on college persistence and success.

Immigrant students, especially those who recently have come to the United States, face many psychological and emotional stressors. The process of immigration often involves leaving loved ones behind resulting in feelings of grief, pain, and guilt (Brilliant, 2000). Higher levels of stress are associated with the process of acculturation, becoming acclimated with a new culture. Stress levels are particularly heightened among undocumented immigrants who live in constant fear of deportation (Dozier, 1993). Students may experience cultural conflict with dominant American values such as those for independence and individuality and how these values translate into expectations for academic behaviors (Brilliant, 2000). Many also encounter various forms of explicit and implicit discrimination (Dozier, 1993). Students may also grapple with unfamiliarity with the teaching styles of American schools.

Immigrant students are also more likely to have greater work and family responsibilities with one-third having dependents and three-quarters working part or full-time while attending college (Erisman & Looney, 2007). While obligation to family was

found to be a significant academic motivator among college immigrant youth, greater time spent on fulfilling family demands detracted from their academic achievement (Tseng, 2004). Tseng (2004) found immigrant college students in New York spent at least 15 hours a week more on family responsibilities than their native-born peers and these responsibilities presented challenges to succeeding in school.

Sy and Romero (2008) conducted a study examining the different types of family responsibilities among Latina college students and how these responsibilities affected their college experience. This study revealed that Latina youth attending college felt they needed to be self-sufficient (i.e. not contribute to the financial burdens of the family). Additionally, while the family often supported the idea of pursuing a higher education, it was expected that that these women also fulfill her family caretaker role. This study included both first generation and second generation Latinas (either they or both their parents had been born in a Spanish-speaking country) and focused on the experiences of younger, more “traditional aged” college students. In my literature review I was not able to find any similar studies specific to non-traditional Latina college students.

Immigrant students also face significant academic challenges. One study, using interviews from 130 immigrant students, examined the learning conditions needed to support immigrant and minority students in California’s community colleges and identified several academic challenges related to language and academic support (California Tomorrow, 2002). Language barriers included lack of bilingual services (tutoring, admissions, counseling, etc.) and students having trouble understanding their teachers. The interviews with students revealed that despite the variety of skills these students held (some already teachers, nurses, lawyers in their own countries), immigrant

students were commonly treated as having limited knowledge because of their accented English. Overall, there was little awareness of the needs of immigrant students beyond ESL classes and most institutions did not provide additional academic supports for this population.

Great variation exists among community college's responses to the need of their immigrant population. Gray et al. (1996) found a predominant perception among college administrators of immigrant students' success as compared to other student groups and that this was used to justify the lack of focus on understanding and attending to the specific needs of these students. While these authors indicated some colleges have responded with specific support services to address the cultural adjustments, citizenship difficulties, and discrimination immigrants' experience, the predominant focus tended to be on their status as an English language learner.

English Language Learners and College Access and Educational Attainment

Immigrants are more likely to speak a language other than English at home, and almost two-thirds of Latin American immigrants report they do not speak English very well (Erismen & Looney, 2007). Limited English proficiency is one of the most significant factors influencing immigrant access to and educational attainment in higher education (Erismen & Looney, 2007; Gray, Rolph & Melamid, 1996).

Immigrant students are not the only group of students who comprise the population of those with limited English proficiency. A majority of ELLs in K-12 schools are native-born (Kohler & Lazarin, 2007). From the decade previous to 2005, Kohler and Lazarin (2007) found a 56% increase of ELL enrollment in K-12 public schools and nearly four-fifths of these students were native Spanish speakers.

While it seems obvious that English language proficiency would be a significant determinant of academic achievement in school, it is difficult to generalize relative to the academic achievement of ELL students because of the variations in classifications and assessments across districts and states (Kindler, 2001). What has been revealed by more than one study (e.g., Bohon, Macpherson & Atilas, 2005; Erisman & Looney, 2007; Fry, 2004) is that it is an important indicator for the likelihood of Latinas/os dropping out of high school.

While the numbers and percentages of ESL students are readily identified in K-12 schools, it is unknown what the numbers and percentages are at the post-secondary level. Because of the open access policies of community colleges, it is difficult to ascertain what percentage of their enrollments constitutes this population (Bers, 1994). In many cases, students are not required to disclose whether or not English is their first language during the college admissions process. Entering students may not be required to take English placement tests as a prerequisite to taking courses offered at the community college and ESL tests are typically taken on a voluntary basis.

The best indicator of the growth of the ELL student population at community colleges is the increase in ESL course offerings and enrollment in these courses. In 1995, the U.S. Department of Education reported ESL was the fastest growing area of instruction in adult education, and a survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics found 69% of ESL courses were offered through public education institutions to include schools, colleges, or universities (Kwang & Collins, 1997). While this study did not specify percentages specific to ESL course offerings at community colleges, an NCES brief (1998) reported of individuals taking ESL classes, 42% did so as

part of a college program. Another study by the Center for the Study of Community Colleges found that ESL course offerings at community colleges had grown 15% in 1998 from a similar study conducted in 1991 (Striplin, 2000).

There is limited research that examines the access and educational attainment of ELLs in higher education. Most of the literature on these students in higher education has been found in the area of ESL with a primary focus on instructional theory and practice or findings specific to a particular program (see ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education for Limited English-Proficient Adults). This gap in the literature prompted a study by Chisman, Wrigley and Ewan (1993) whose goal was to provide a comprehensive picture of ESL services to adults and determine how well these services were providing educational opportunities to adult ELL students.

English language learners and ESL programs

Chisman, et al. (1993) defined seven major goals that guide the various services adult ESL programs provide, which include: “survival” ESL, English acquisition, ESL for academic study, ESL for employment (vocational ESL or VESL), workplace education, ESL for citizenship, and ESL for family literacy. These goals mirrored what the authors found as motivations for ESL participation among students. Another study of ESL learners in Iowa found seven reasons for participation in ESL classes to include: self improvement and increased ability to participate in U.S. society, ability to assist children with schooling, increasing functional English literacy, becoming empowered, helping people in one’s native country, improving employability, and improving reading and writing skills in English (Beder & Valentine, 1987).

Provision of ESL programs is by far the most predominant way community colleges are specifically serving language minority students with limited English proficiency. And while research shows Latinas/os have always been supportive of these programs and their contributions to improving retention of Latina/o second language adult learners, there is limited research on how successful ESL programs are in meeting the learning goals of the students (Rance-Roney, 1995).

There are many criticisms of the programs' effectiveness in meeting the needs of adult ELL students. Chisman, et al. (1993) found that while ESL programs were relatively successful in enabling immigrants with very limited English begin to deal with the language, literacy, and cultural challenges of living in the U.S., they do a poor job of adequately improving their language skills to the point which they can take full advantage of educational, economic, and social opportunities of American life. For ELL students with goals of transitioning to post-secondary studies, the ESL coursework they take is rarely offered as credit, much less transferrable for credit towards a degree. Additionally, ESL course content is more likely to be geared toward the needs of adult education ESL students whose primary needs are English acquisition for entry-level employment and navigating basic daily life, versus preparation for seeking a post-secondary degree (Blumenthal, 2002). Thus, these students are caught in a cycle of taking coursework that requires a time investment for which there is no clear payoff in terms of credit accumulation toward either a degree or transfer to a more advanced course of study. Such a cycle can be discouraging and lead to students' attrition from the pursuit of a post-secondary degree altogether (Blumenthal, 2002; Rendón, 2002).

There is little national data documenting retention and persistence rates of students who begin their postsecondary coursework in ESL and continue to regular college coursework (Ignash, 1995). One study found that a third of ESL adult students left their program by the end of the second month (Brod, 1995). The study did not identify any reasons for this attrition or if these students might have returned to the program or another program at a later date. Another study, conducted at Miami Dade Community College (FL), revealed that 15% of ESL students who started at advanced-level ESL graduated with an associate's degree, and less than 1% of those who started at beginning-level ESL achieved an associate degree (Ignash, 1995). It is a limitation of this study, and in general the data collected on ESL students, that these statistics were not correlated with the intended goals of the students.

Factors Influencing English Language Learners' Persistence and Success in Higher Education

Theories that examine student persistence in higher education have primarily been drawn from experiences of students whose first language is English (Hagedorn, Maxwell, Chen, Cypers, & Moon, 2002). In a review of the literature on minority groups, Nora (1990) found very little research related to student persistence among various groups of language minority students. He stressed the need for research that examined factors explicitly linked to the academic success of these students. Additionally, there is little research on the impact of various college policies and practices, such as assessment, placement, and provision of bilingual services, on the educational opportunity and equity outcomes of language minority students (Bers, 1994; Ellis, 1995).

There is some research on factors influencing the persistence and success of language minority students who are in ESL programs. Based upon informal evidence from the field, Chisman, et al. (1993) defined three primary categories influencing students' persistence and success. The authors defined the first category as "student barriers" (p. 55). These barriers include a lack of confidence in being "college material," work and family obligations, lack of financial resources, lack of knowledge of the educational system and related support services, and inadequate preparation in higher literacy skills needed for academic study. A second category were barriers from the programs, which included discouraging attitudes, lack of deliberate development of educational plans for students in ESL, and reluctance of academic and vocational teachers to work with ESL students until fully proficient in English. Another barrier to transition was the systemic barriers, which included the fragmentation of ESL services and funding issues. These systemic barriers were identified in a study conducted by Ignash (1995), in which curriculum design, level of integration of ESL programs with the academic college, and funding were variables that impacted ESL student persistence.

Another factor that has drawn criticism of the effectiveness of ESL programs is the fairly homogeneous approach to English and literacy instruction. Adult ESL students are very diverse in their first language literacy backgrounds and schooling, but are commonly grouped based on their English literacy and oral proficiencies. The failure to assess and subsequently differentiate curriculum based upon first language literacy is one factor attributed to student failure. Auerbach (1993) cited three different studies in which adult students' lack of first language literacy proved to be a barrier to successful participation in monolingual ESL classes.

The language and academic support ESL programs traditionally provided (and tested for) does not take into account the linguistic and educational backgrounds of language minority students transitioning from U.S. high schools to community colleges, termed *Generation 1.5* (Bunch & Panayotova, 2008). Blumenthal (2002) argued that Generation 1.5 students could demonstrate great oral proficiency with informal spoken English, but struggled with academic English. Often these students are placed in traditional ESL courses or those designed for monolingual English students in need of remedial work (Bunch & Panayotova, 2008).

Another criticism of ESL programs is their reliance on monolingual English instruction. Auerbach (1993) stated many ESL instructors “insist that their students use English as the sole medium of communication; teachers devise elaborate games, signals, and penalty systems to ensure that students do not use their L1 (first language) and justify these practices with the claim that use of the L1 will impede progress in the acquisition of English” (p. 10). Such practices are contradictory to the need to improve skills in a native language before developing higher-level English skills needed for college academic content. Numerous experts in second language acquisition (e.g., Cummins, 1981; Krashen, 1981; Ortega, 2009) have indicated development of native language literacy skills is essential to the acquisition of second language literacy skills. Similarly, Rance-Roney (1995) argued in the case of Latina/o students from communities in which the use of Spanish was significant, English language instruction alone was not enough to ensure acquisition of adequate levels of academic English to succeed in college.

It is not just the pedagogy of monolingual English instruction that is criticized, but the ideology and politics embedded in promoting such pedagogy. According to

Auderbach (1993):

Acquiring a second language is to some extent contingent on the societally determined value attributed to the L1, which can be either reinforced or challenged inside the classroom. As Phillipson (1992) says, "The ethos of monolingualism implies the rejection of the experiences of other languages, meaning the exclusion of the child's most intense existential experience" (p. 189).

Prohibiting the native language within the context of ESL instruction may impede language acquisition precisely because it mirrors disempowering relations. (p. 16).

Traditional ESL programs are criticized for their assimilationist approach to educating language minority students, which sublimates students' native language and culture to that of the dominant mainstream and ignores the political and social realities within which language minority students exist (Auerbach, 1993; Bunch & Panayotova, 2008; Marsiglia & Guy, 1994). Such marginalization of language minority students, given the importance of academic and social integration in student persistence, points to a troubling aspect of ESL only approaches to serving ELL students in community colleges.

The Unknown Potential of Bilingual Education Programs in Higher Education

Relatively little research has been done on bilingual education programs in higher education and its potential for expanding access and educational achievement of English language learners, as well as immigrant and Latina/o students. To better understand bilingual education in higher education, it is necessary to examine the literature on bilingual education within the context of K-12 education in the U.S.

Models of Bilingual Education in the U.S.

ESL programs evolved independently of bilingual education programs in the U.S., but comprise an integral component of all bilingual education models (Bonaparte, 2001). While an individual participating in an ESL program, especially at the post-secondary level, may achieve bilingualism, the focus of such programs is to provide access to English and academic content, taught from a second language perspective. What distinguishes bilingual education from ESL instruction is the use of both the student's native language and English for instruction.

Even within the K-12 research, there are different models utilized and differences in the associated distinctions among the various models of bilingual education. This has led to some of the challenges with the research associated with exploring the educational benefits of various models (Thomas & Collier, 2002). While there are many different models, they typically fall within three primary categories of programs: transitional, maintenance, and enrichment. Each of these models is informed by different philosophies about the primary purpose of bilingual education.

Roberts (1995), in an article reviewing the primary categories of bilingual programs in the U.S., defined transitional bilingual education programs as those which provide "content area support in the native language while teaching students English" (p. 373) with the ultimate linguistic goal of moving students from their native language to English. Roberts' definition of the maintenance model highlighted its similarities to the transitional model in its supports for native language and eventual transition of students to English content classes, but distinguished this model as one which provides continued language instruction in both languages, supporting a goal of bilingualism. Finally,

Roberts classified enrichment programs as serving both native and non-native English speakers in which the goal is to have both groups studying content in both languages.

It appears factors defining the primary differences within the various models of bilingual education include the amount of the student's primary language (L1) used in instruction, the goals, structure, and content of the programs, and the social perception of the programs (Roberts, 1995). However, identification of what programs are associated with each model has varied, which has contributed to the contentious debate on bilingual education.

Bilingual Educational Debate

The debate on whether or not to adopt bilingual education programs is not one that can be easily isolated to a pure examination of the models that best support English language acquisition. While proponents of bilingual education have been able to justify bilingual education in pedagogical terms, understanding the opposition to bilingual education must be contextualized in its ideological roots. The debate on bilingual education is fundamentally linked to larger political and social issues such as nationalism, globalism, cultural identity, immigration, and the goals of public education. An overview of the history and politics of bilingual education, in addition to the research, provides a greater context for understanding these issues.

History and politics of bilingual education

Language education in the U.S. has historically been linked to cyclical fluctuations in policy shaped by changing political, social, and economic forces (Auerbach, 1993; Crawford, 1989; Ovando, 2003). During the 19th century, due to large numbers of immigrant communities promoting language and cultural loyalties and the

decentralized and locally controlled nature of public schooling, bilingual education was allowed; a number of states even passing laws authorizing bilingual education. Ovando (2003), characterizing this time period as “permissive,” stated that it is important to keep in mind that 19th century bilingual education was not set up to actively promote bilingualism, but did tolerate linguistic pluralism.

The late 19th century, influenced by resurgence in nativism and anti-foreign sentiments, signaled the decline of bilingual education and an increase in assimilationist policies. English-only school laws were promoted, immigrant English literacy tests adopted, and naturalized citizenship requirements of English proficiency were stipulated. Additionally, public schooling was increasingly controlled by established citizens who were active in promoting the idea that all immigrants should be assimilated into one linguistic and cultural mold (Ovando, 2003). This assimilationist ideology gained momentum in the 20th century.

World War I, the increase in immigration from southern and western Europe, and the growing role of immigrants in the labor movement contributed to xenophobic attitudes and blame placed upon “foreigners” for the nation’s political and economic problems (Auerbach, 1993). This period was marked by the standardization and bureaucratization of urban schools, in which many implemented Americanization classes to assimilate immigrants into mainstream society; subverting immigrants’ ancestral cultures to that of the more desirable dominant U.S. culture (Ovando, 2003). English was associated with patriotism and being a “good” American, and English-only instruction became the norm over instructional methods that allowed the use of students’ native language (Auerbach, 1993). This sink or swim method, also known as submersion,

characterized attitudes of educators and policy makers who felt it was up to language minority students to make the linguistic and cultural adjustments necessary to achieve in school, and thus, the schools did not assume responsibility for implementing culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogies (Ovando, 2003).

The changing attitudes on the value of linguistic diversity can again be tied to several historical and political developments in the 1950s and 60s. World War II brought up the need for military personnel trained in foreign languages. The launching of the *Sputnik* led to the creation of the National Defense Education Act in 1958, in which a primary goal was to raise the level of foreign language education in the United States. The 1965 Immigration Act terminated the national origin quota system and eased restrictions on immigration. At the same time, the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the creation of the Office for Civil Rights had an impact on establishing federal legislation protecting the educational rights of language minority students (Ovando, 2003).

In 1968, the passage of the Bilingual Education Act (1968), Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, was specifically aimed at providing equal educational opportunity to language minority students and initially provided funding for programs supporting language minority children in schools with high language minority concentrations and high poverty (Fitzgerald, 1993). This act also included programs at accredited post-secondary trade, technical and vocational institutions in its authorization of funding to establish bilingual education programs (Friedenberg & Bradley, 1984). Despite the name of the act, the initial BEA did not require native language instruction, but it was the first major effort to address the educational needs of language minority students and “specifically identified the education

of ‘children of limited English-speaking ability’ as ‘one of the most acute educational problems in the United States’ (BEA, 1968, Sec. 701)” (as cited in Wiese & Garcia, 1998). Crucial to developing teaching pedagogies for language minority students, was recognizing that learning could start by building upon their home cultures, languages, and prior experiences without a pre-requisite English proficiency (Ovando, 2003). The demand for linguistic and culturally responsive pedagogies, and the subsequent development of bilingual programs in elementary schools throughout the U.S., was a result of substantial political pressure from the Hispanic community (Fitzgerald, 1993; Ovando, 2003).

The 1974 Supreme Court case *Lau v. Nichols* (414 U.S. 5637) was cited by Ovando (2003) as: “the most important and enduring legal symbol through which the civil rights of language minority students will continue to be deliberated in years to come” (p. 9). This class action suit was filed by Chinese students who claimed discrimination of educational access because they could not understand the instruction of their English-speaking teachers. By unanimous decision, the justices concluded that equal treatment of non-English speaking and English-speaking students did not constitute equal educational opportunity. In spite of the impact this decision would have upon the development of bilingual education in the U.S., it did not prescribe specific curricular content or methodology to achieving equity of educational opportunity for language minority students and thus programs with diverse goals, of supporting linguistic and cultural assimilation or pluralism, could satisfy the spirit of the law. It did however, abolish the sink or swim practices of the past, making submersion programs illegal in the

U.S. It also led to the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974, which stipulated that:

No state shall deny equal educational opportunity to an individual on account of his or her race, color, sex, or national origin, by . . . the failure of an educational agency to take appropriate action to overcome language barriers that impede equal participation by its students in its instructional programs (20 U.S.C. § 1703, in Lyons, 1992, p. 10). (as cited in Ovando, 2003, p. 10)

In 1974 the Bilingual Education Act was reauthorized and for the first time bilingual education was defined to include instruction given in the native language as it was deemed necessary for effective education of language minority students (Crawford, 1989). While this definition of bilingual education was influenced by proponents of native language maintenance, the BEA was not intended to support maintenance of native language, but it was an acknowledgment of the role native language could play in supporting a transition to English (Wiese & Garcia, 1998). The 1974 reauthorization of the BEA identified Native American children as an eligible population and provided grant monies for the study and development of bilingual teacher preparation programs. At the same time, the 1974 Vocational Education Amendments (P.L. 93-203) called for “increased concern for disadvantaged persons including those with linguistic and cultural differences” and included funding for a small number of post-secondary bilingual vocational education programs (Friedenberg & Bradley, 1984, p. 7). Additionally in 1974 was the passage of the Equal Education Opportunity Act of 1974 which articulated the failure of an educational institution to take “appropriate action to overcome language barriers that impede equal participation by its students in its instructional programs (EEOA, 1974, Sec. 204 (f))” (as cited in Wiese & Garcia, 1988, p. 4) was a denial of equal educational opportunity, it did not prescribe a specific remedy or define equality.

In 1975, the Office of Civil Rights, increased pressure on school districts to provide for meaningful instruction to language minority students by the issuance of the 1975 *Lau* Remedies. If districts failed to provide effective programs for language minority students they could forfeit federal funds. The *Lau* remedies specified practices for indentifying, assessing, and teaching language minority students (Ovundo, 2003). While the *Lau* remedies provided guidelines for advancing students to levels of English proficiency needed for monolingual classrooms, it also supported versions of bilingual education programs that fostered bilingualism and biculturalism.

The support for native language instruction was significantly weakened in the next three reauthorizations of Title VII (in 1978, 1984, and 1988), reflecting public pressure to focus federal funding on English language acquisition and assimilation into the mainstream by boosting monies for English-only programs (Crawford, 1989). The 1978 reauthorization stated native language would only be used to transition students into English. The 1984 reauthorization allocated funds to language programs that used no native-language instruction. While transitional bilingual education received funding (albeit reduced) these programs were to be restricted to instruction in native language for the purpose of transitioning students to English only instruction. In contrast, developmental bilingual education, defined as that which provided for structured English instruction and native language instruction to achieve dual-language competency while advancing subject matter skills, received no funding (Wiese & Garcia, 1998). The 1988 reauthorization lifted all funding restrictions for alternative methodologies to bilingual programs (English-only methods) and a majority of the funding was reserved for such

programs. Additionally, students were limited to a three-year enrollment period in bilingual education programs (Fitzgerald, 1993).

These legal shifts were reflective of the political return to a “melting pot” ideology, influenced by increased anti-immigrant sentiments. The formation of anti-bilingual education groups, such as English First and English Only, and ballot initiatives designed to curb illegal immigration coincided with reactions against massive immigration from developing countries to the U.S. in the 1980s and 1990s. During this time the debate on bilingual education raged and was focused on proving whether or not it was more or less effective than structured English immersion programs on students’ academic achievement. The published bilingual education studies were subject to attacks from all sides of the debate (see Baker, 1987, 1999; Collier, 1992; Crawford, 1990; Krashen, 1996; Rossell, 1999; Willig, 1985) and offered contradictory evidence as to whether or not bilingual education programs were more effective than structured English immersion programs in achieving English language proficiency and academic proficiency in content areas.

In 1994, that the BEA reauthorization reaffirmed a value for the linguistic and cultural diversity of language minority students. This authorization gave preference to programs that promoted bilingualism as well as those that enhanced indigenous languages. The 1994 Reauthorization was the strongest version of the Bilingual Education Act in promoting the goal of bilingualism for English language learners, rather than simply the transition to English (Wiese & Garcia, 1998). However, the reauthorization did not end the ongoing political debate over bilingual education as evidenced by the 1998 passage in California of Proposition 227, which determined that

English should be the primary language of instruction for language minority students. This was followed by the renaming of the BEA in 2002, with the passage of the No Child Left Behind legislation, to the English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement Act. This was a devastating blow to proponents of bilingual education. While the act still allows states and local educators with the right to choose the most appropriate models to educate English language learners, the title and revisions to the act made it clear that the primary objective is English acquisition.

Despite research in the last 20 years that demonstrates the effectiveness in bilingual education programs in supporting both the acquisition of English and academic content achievement among language minority students, as well as supporting their cultural and linguistic identities, the history of bilingual education in the U.S. suggests that the debate of bilingual education programs will continue to be more broadly situated in political, social, and economic contexts.

The benefits of bilingual education

The political debate on bilingual education served to heighten the need to be able to clearly articulate support for bilingual education within both pedagogical and political contexts in which members of the public can understand and endorse (Ovando, 2003). Common limitations of various studies conducted were the inability to control for all the variables that influence student success (student background), program “treatment” variables, the hundreds of variations in actual program implementation, the use of cross-sectional versus longitudinal student data, and the limits of measures used to evaluate student achievement (Collier, 1992). However, there are several research studies that have effectively demonstrated the benefits of bilingual education.

A significant research study supporting the effectiveness of bilingual education programs was an eight-year longitudinal study examining the types of bilingual programs and their impact on Latina/o educational achievement conducted by Ramirez, Yuen, Ramey and Pasta (1991). Their primary purpose was to examine the amount of instruction conducted in students' first language (L1) and subsequent impact on academic performance. The findings demonstrated the greater amount of L1 instruction support for language minority students, combined with balanced L2 support, the higher academic achievement in L2 attained in each succeeding year in comparison to matched groups being instructed in L2 only. The effectiveness of bilingual education was also supported by Rolstad, Mahoney, and Glass, (2005) in their meta-analysis of 17 studies from which they concluded bilingual education was consistently superior to English-only approaches in promoting academic achievement of language minority students. Lucas, Hentz, and Donato (1990) specifically examined the effect of bilingual education on the achievement of high school students and found that teaching subject content in their native language actually seemed to improve and accelerate their English proficiency acquisition.

In 2002, Thomas and Collier reported similar findings of a five-year study (1996-2001) focused on analyzing the types of program services provided to language minority students in public education and the impact of the programs. Not only did their findings affirm the English language and other academic gains of students in enrichment and dual language programs over that of students in structured English immersion programs, but these programs met the goal of preparing students who are academically proficient in their native language as well. These researchers also found students in enrichment and dual-language programs were less likely to drop out than those attending segregated,

remedial programs and outperformed comparable monolingually schooled students in academic achievement in all subjects after 4-7 years of dual-language schooling.

While the debate over bilingual education is often focused on student gains in academic and language proficiency, the rationale for bilingual education is multifold. The underlying principles of language acquisition and literacy development support the idea of literacy development in the first language, transfers to literacy development in a second language (Krashen, 1981). Additionally, academic knowledge (problem solving, reading for information, calculations) transfers across languages. The research of Franquiz and Reyes (1998) illustrated another benefit of accepting and promoting the use of bilingual students' full range of linguistic resources in learning. They found when students' multiple cultural and linguistic strengths were valued in the classroom, language minority students were able to more fully participate and engage with learning. Additional benefits of bilingual education include addressing issues of cultural and linguistic identity and social equity.

Education plays a significant role in identity development and bilingual education is no exception. What is an important aspect of bilingual education is its role in supporting the identity development of language minority students. Bilingual education supports the maintenance of students' cultural identities by recognizing the importance and equal worth of the students' heritage language and culture (Wright & Taylor, 1995). Delpit (1995) stated, "the linguistic form a student brings to school is intimately connected with loved ones, community and personal identity" (p. 122) and Zimmerman (2000) articulated if a child is allowed to stay in touch with the language of her or his personal history, he or she is able to develop a healthy cultural identity. Research has

shown development of a high level of competence in one's native language can be an important part of identity formation and can help one retain a strong sense of identity to one's own ethnic group (Cho, Cho, & Tse, 1997; Feuerverger, 1991). Additionally, bilingual education enables a healthy sense of biculturalism and avoidance of the state of "bicultural ambivalence," or shame of the first culture and rejection of the second culture (Cummins, 1981).

The role of education is inextricably linked with issues of social equity. Various measures of social equity through economic and social indicators (alcoholism rates, health care status, crime rates) are strongly correlated with educational attainment. Increasing educational access and achievement for language minority students has larger implications for society. Christina Bratt Paulston (1980) wrote:

It makes a lot more sense also to look at employment figures upon leaving school, figures on drug addiction and alcoholism, suicide rates, and personality disorders, i.e., indicators which measure the social pathology which accompanies social injustice rather than in terms of language skills... The dropout rate for American Indians in Chicago public schools is 95 percent; in the bilingual-bicultural Little Big Horn High School in Chicago the dropout rate in 1976 was 11 percent, and I find that figure a much more meaningful indicator for evaluation of the bilingual program than any psychometric assessment of students' language skills. (as cited in Hakuta, 1986, p. 221)

Over thirty years later, an empirical evaluation of bilingual programs for this purpose has been largely overlooked.

While the controversy of bilingual education continues to be dominated by arguments of the pedagogical effectiveness of bilingual programs, it is fueled by the politics of immigration. Language education in the U.S. has historically been linked to cyclical fluctuations in immigration policy shaped by changing political, social, and economic forces (Auerbach, 1993; Crawford, 1989; Ovando, 2003). It is also reflective

of the tensions between linguistic and cultural assimilationist and pluralism ideologies (Ovando, 2003). As the debate over bilingual education continues, proponents need to be able to clearly articulate the multiple benefits of bilingual education including those directly impacting language minority students participating in such programs as well as the societal benefits. Institutions of higher education, with bilingual education programs, need to be able to contribute to the research findings on bilingual education.

Bilingual Education in Higher Education

Rivera (1990) argued the underlying rationale for bilingual education for children applies equally to language minority adults. Levine and Nidiffer (1996) suggested that bilingual education, along with ESL and other forms of academic support, could improve Latina/o retention and college completion. But in contrast to the widespread adoption of bilingual education programs in public schools across the nation, implementation of such programs in higher education has been much more limited and the related literature equally so.

Little is known about post-secondary programs that claim to be bilingual. The passage of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Act in 1984, and subsequent amendments to the Act in 1992 and 1998, did provide funding for community colleges to provide bilingual and ESL services and vocational programs to adult ELLs. While there are some evaluation reports on these programs (e.g., Fleishman, 1988; Friedenber, & Bradley, 1984) data have not been compiled in such a way to define a comprehensive and detailed understanding of what is being offered as bilingual education at community colleges. Predominantly, what is offered to adult ELLs in community colleges are ESL programs,

Vocational English as Second Language (VESL) programs, bilingual staff support, and bilingual resources (Fleishman, 1988; Thomas, 1994; Bonaparte, 2001).

Similar to ESL programs in higher education, there has been little empirical research conducted on VESL programs (Ketzenberg, 2010). What is known about VESL programs primarily comes from a series of ERIC digest reports and discussion of the various models in adult ESL literature. Common to VESL is a focus on developing workplace literacy skills, as well as instruction geared towards training students for a specific vocation. One of Ketzenberg's (2010) critiques of VESL programs is that they are predominantly training students for low wage, "dead-end" vocations.

The most comprehensive picture of bilingual education in community colleges is limited to an unpublished study by Bonaparte (2001) that included a survey administered to 128 Hispanic Serving Institutions and associate members of the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities. It was clear from her study that most bilingual programs in higher education are at community colleges. In examining how bilingual education is practiced in community colleges, Bonaparte defined bilingual education in community colleges as that which "involves the use of native language to teach selected content courses needed to advance in the study of a career while taking other courses in English as a Second Language or courses taught in English which would help the student develop proficiency in English" (p. 43). At some institutions instruction occurred in both English and native languages and the colleges provided for support services in the native language. Of the 106 responding institutions, less than one-third offered bilingual services. Of these, 65% provided instruction and support services in Spanish; 60% offered college content courses in Spanish; 55% offered short-term bilingual

vocational/technical certificates; and 9% offered bilingual associate degree programs. When asked, 38% defined their programs as transitional, for the primary purpose of moving students from Spanish to English language usage, while 17% of said they offered these programs for the explicit purpose of advancing bilingualism.

Bonaparte's study also revealed five goals for providing Latina/o-oriented bilingual education programs in community colleges. These included improving students' English proficiency, increasing access to college, facilitating content learning, preparing Latina/os for the workforce, and being responsive to the Latina/o community. Bonaparte's study defined distinctive features that should guide institutions if they intend to effectively implement a bilingual education program. These features included college administrative support through staffing and internal and external resources, bilingual faculty and staff who support the program and advocate for students inside and outside the program, bilingual academic support services to retain and graduate students, and working closely with the local Latina/o community.

One of the significant findings of Bonaparte's study was identification of lack of evidence that shows the impact of bilingual education programs on the success of students in higher education. Despite the fact all of the institutions participating offering bilingual programs strongly supported their "effectiveness," less than one-third of the institutions could actually support their bilingual program with data.

An exhaustive search of published literature revealed one peer-reviewed study that provided specific insight into the potential impact of bilingual higher education programs on the persistence and success Latina/o language minority students. While their study was based upon a teacher preparation program for Latina/o/a candidates,

Weisman, Flores, and Valenciana's (2007) research explored participants' perspectives on the impact of being in a program structured as a "bilingual-bicultural learning community" (p. 191). Four major themes were identified from the participants' experiences: mutual trust, Spanish as a resource, sense of family, and transformative relationships.

Weisman, et al. described the importance, to Latina/o students, of building relationships of mutual trust, both with the instructor and with other students in the learning community. This type of relationship was fostered because the instructor and students shared a common bilingual-bicultural background and facilitated greater comfort in speaking and socializing in the class. One participant related: "I noticed that there was no tension or misunderstandings and we were constantly helping each other to succeed in our educational and professional endeavors. This is something that I never felt throughout my bachelor's degree [program]" (Weisman, Flores, & Valenciana, 2007, p. 200).

The use of Spanish, both in formal and informal instruction, was critical to the students' learning experiences in the program. Students articulated a greater freedom in their ability to express themselves because they did not have to translate to convey their thoughts, and they felt it enhanced their willingness to participate in dialogue and their ability to construct knowledge. The research also indicated that the removal of English language barriers established a greater sense of comfort and community within the group.

Weisman, et al. cited the importance of "extended family" within the Latina/o community and the concept of a bilingual-bicultural learning community emerging as an "extended family" was prevalent among the participants. This type of relationship fostered "transformative relationships" or those in which strong connections and

supportive networks enabled students to help one another to overcome personal and academic challenges of successfully completing the program. The results of this study suggest the potential of bilingual education programs in higher education to support the success of Latina/o language minority students.

Conclusion

As my review of the literature reveals, community colleges will continue to play an important role in providing educational opportunity to Latina/o immigrants, many of whom are English language learners. While education levels vary among specific immigrant populations, those from Latin America are among the lowest with almost 75% never attending college (Erisman & Looney, 2007). Unfortunately, equity of educational achievement for these students has not been realized, and research on student persistence and retention reveals greater attention must be given to issues of access and the unique needs of these students once enrolled in a community college. Barriers to enrolling in and completing post-secondary educational programs include lack of information about post-secondary institutions, work and family responsibilities, financial need, psychological and emotional stressors, and limited English proficiency.

Immigrant students who are English language learners commonly have only one pathway to accessing college level courses, which is attaining a pre-requisite level of English proficiency, typically through ESL programs. While ESL has been the fastest growing area in adult education and a majority of these courses are offered by institutions of higher education (Kwang & Collins, 1997), there are no comprehensive studies documenting retention and persistence rates of students who begin their postsecondary coursework in ESL and continue to regular college coursework (Ignash, 1995). The

handful of studies that exist indicate that adult ESL programs largely fail to adequately improve the language skills of students to the point in which they can access and persist in achieving post-secondary degrees (Brod, 1995; Chisman, et al., 1993; Ignash, 1995). Factors that influence these low levels of persistence included students' lack of confidence in being "college material" and lack of knowledge of the educational system and related support services (Chisman, et al., 1993).

Additional criticisms of ESL only approaches to educating language minority students are the failure to differentiate curriculum based upon first language proficiencies, absence of curriculum and instructional approaches which address the development of students' first language needed to successfully acquire literacy in a second language, and an assimilationist ideology underlying the programs. Not only does it seem that ESL programs fail to build the confidence and knowledge needed to persist for English language learners, but the English-only pathway to college can further marginalize language minority students. The messaging of English-only pathways to college is one that can further devalue the linguistic and cultural heritage of language minority students.

There has been much debate on the politics and pedagogies of English-only versus bilingual education in K-12 schools, but conspicuously absent in this debate are institutions of higher education. While studies in K-12 schools have demonstrated the effectiveness of bilingual education programs in not only supporting second language development but also in affirming students' linguistic and cultural identities, such programs are rarely available in post-secondary institutions and little is known about the effectiveness of those that do exist.

CHAPTER III: THE STORY OF OUR RESEARCH JOURNEY

Introduction

Chapter I told the story of how I arrived at a place in my dissertation journey in which I wanted to explore how I, as a White researcher, could act in ways compatible with a social justice agenda through the research process. I wanted to create a space for those whose voices are traditionally marginalized to be heard, to provide an opportunity for their values to be upheld and for their knowledge to be legitimized, and to do so within the context of the academy.

In this chapter I share the story of how the research process unfolded. Embedded within this story are elements found traditionally in a method chapter. I begin with my story of navigating the dissertation proposal and institutional review board processes and my initial fears and hopes as I entered the research process. Then, chronicling and analyzing the phases of the research design, I address the differing challenges, the issues of power and knowledge, and how the multiplicity of identities shaped our experiences. Included also are my reflections on what I had to learn as a White researcher through this research process and from my research collaborators.

“So You Think You Can Dance?”

The title of a popular television show, “So You Think You Can Dance?” echoed in my head as an apt metaphor as I reflected back upon my formal entrance into the research academy as a doctoral candidate. The tenor of the question is issued as a challenge to prove you can dance through a series of performances before a panel of

judges and a public audience. The dissertation process reflects this challenge and the first big performance in which I would be judged was that of my dissertation proposal defense.

Discussed among those hoping to achieve their candidacy are the horror stories of others who have gone before them: of students who were inadequately prepared, of committee members with personal agendas and elitist attitudes who take their role as gatekeeper to the academy to the extreme, and of students who never returned. Given a few of the stories I had heard from others about their dissertation proposal defense experiences, I felt very fortunate to have had a different experience. My dissertation advisor provided coaching in advance of the proposal defense to ensure that I was ready for my performance. He objected to the use of “defense” to describe this process because it reinforced traditional power inequities between the student and committee members. He referred to it as a “presentation,” and he structured the experience to feel like a rehearsal among colleagues rather than a performance before judges. Despite this, I was still a bit nervous. After all, this was the first time I would be sharing “my dance” with those who were, with the exception of my dissertation advisor, virtual strangers to me. All of them had vast experience and expertise, and I was just a novice. Adding to the complexity was the alternative choreography of my dance. In reviewing the challenges of participatory or action research dissertations, Herr and Anderson (2005) stated: “Committee members and IRB’s are often stymied by the cyclical nature of action research as well as its purposes, which transcend mere knowledge generation to include personal and professional growth and organizational and community empowerment” (p.1). My dance was also, in its essence, challenging the elitist practices of the academy,

the very academy to which my committee members belonged. While I had deliberately chosen committee members whose own research challenged traditional practices, I wondered what kind of reactions they would have to my proposed research design.

On the day of my performance, my knowledge and my proposal were presented and tested, but the conceptual framework that informed the study was not. My committee members were open to the potential beauty of the dance I proposed and were enthusiastic about approving me to move on to the next stage of my performance. Feelings of exhilaration, having successfully completed my dissertation proposal presentation, were soon replaced by absolute stage fright as I contemplated all of the challenges to executing the dance I had created.

Stage Fright

My concerns that if my dissertation committee would understand and support the journey I was about to embark upon were unwarranted, but other concerns that had been looming on the horizon were brought to the forefront. Herr and Anderson (2005) wrote: “Because of the emancipatory goals of most PAR [participatory action research], many beginning researchers find it attractive but also intimidating” (p. 100). Grappling with the challenges of conceptualizing the research design was intellectually exciting for me, but facing the realities of implementing this design with real people and real consequences was a bit terrifying.

One of my prevalent fears was that students would not be interested in participating in the study. I knew that agreeing to participate would require a willingness to take a risk. As I had struggled with my own uncertainties and commitment to an unfolding process, I felt sure that this might be an issue for the students as well. My own sense of vulnerability in starting this research process would probably be magnified for

an already vulnerable population. I was also aware that for many students becoming a college student had already entailed overcoming fears and taking risks, but they had done so because of the perceived benefits to their lives. I worried about whether or not they would perceive the benefits to participating in the research study worth the risk.

When I had asked my dissertation advisor, “What will we do if none of the students want to participate?” he replied, “What will we do if all of them want to participate?” This was something I hadn’t even considered. While the idea of facilitating this process with a large number of students was initially a bit daunting, I also found the idea exciting. In fact the idea of starting with a large number of participants was comforting because a greater concern of mine was whether they would sustain their involvement throughout the duration of the research study.

I was worried that the potential span of time needed for the research study would not only present a challenge in initially recruiting participants but also would influence their abilities to sustain their commitment to the study. Balancing their work, school, and family responsibilities already challenged these students, and I felt very uncomfortable asking them to take on more. While I hoped that students engaged in the research study would be motivated by its intrinsic value, I could not ignore the fact that my own motivations for doing a formal research study were prompted by my goal to achieve my doctoral degree.

If my only motivation for doing a research study was to achieve my doctoral degree, I certainly would have chosen to do something much less complex. So while the topic and methods were something to which I was passionately committed, I would be less than honest if I didn’t admit that I wasn’t very interested in engaging in formal

research beyond that required to complete my dissertation. In fact I remember commenting to my dissertation advisor that part of my anxiety about entering the research phase of the dissertation process was that I was intimidated by the idea of “doing research.” His comment back to me was something along the lines of, “Erica, you’ve been ‘doing research’ for as long as I’ve known you.” His reframing of research as another mode of the critical inquiry process in which I was continuously engaged helped reduce some of my fears about my capabilities as a researcher, but it did not change the underlying motivation I had to do this type of research.

In reflecting upon my concerns about the time commitment needed for the research study and my motivations for the research study, I was reminded that PR not only developed as a result of activists concerned for addressing issues of the marginalized and oppressed, but as a deliberate reaction against elitist approaches to research which rarely yielded benefits to the people who were the subjects of such research (Joyappa & Martin, 1996). While the research design was intended to ensure that I was not the only beneficiary of the research, I realized that there was a disparity in the benefits that I would be receiving and those I was offering to the students. This prompted my desire to offer a benefit similar to mine to students participating in the research study.

As I was in essence earning college credit for conducting the research study, I thought, “Why shouldn’t the students, participating as researchers also have that opportunity?” I discovered through my research that other researchers working with students as researchers had incorporated an opportunity for college credit as part of the process (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Ayala 2008). Before putting this idea forth to the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I needed to get approval from my own institution so I

put together a proposal for an independent study, which articulated specific learning outcomes and activities for students engaged in the research study. Upon completion of these learning outcomes and activities, I proposed that students would receive credit that could be applied towards their degree requirements. As all of the students in the program had an equivalent course option to fulfill this credit requirement, I did not feel this would unduly influence their decision on whether or not to participate, but it did provide equity to the benefits all of us would receive through the research study. My institution approved the proposal. While being able to offer this benefit made me feel more comfortable about soliciting participation in the research study with this benefit, I still had fears about being able to recruit students.

My fears weren't limited to recruiting students to participate in the research study. I also was worried about my ability to facilitate a research process in which the research collaborators would take ownership of the research process. I wanted to be able to create a space in which the students felt they could exercise their power to make decisions about the research and the research process. Additionally, I wanted to establish a context in which the students recognized their role as knowledge-holders through the research process and felt an equal sense of responsibility for the entirety of the research study. Asking others to share an equal responsibility for the research study is a risk. Guishard (2009) spoke to this when she shared her experiences with engaging youth as co-researchers. The youth researchers initially were empowered in their role as interviewers, but turned to her as the authority when it came to the phase of analyzing and interpreting the data. She stated, "My efforts to maintain transparency, shared decision-making,

interpretation and analysis in keeping with the principles of PAR [participatory action research], were rejected” (p. 96). I wondered if my efforts might also be rejected

Compounding the potential for the student participants to turn to me as the authority in the research process was my role as the director of the bilingual early childhood program. I worried that the positional authority I held as director would be a challenge to developing the students’ sense of authority in the research process. I also was concerned that asking students to be critical of their experiences within the institution and program might be uncomfortable or unwelcomed as it could risk making themselves more vulnerable (Ayala, 2009).

My concerns didn’t stop there.

I was worried about language barriers. I did not speak Spanish. I assumed there would be varying levels of English proficiencies among the students participating in the study. Early in the research process, I reflected upon the potential limitations and challenges to the research process because I did not speak Spanish. I was worried about meanings getting lost in translation and about what I might miss when conversations among the research collaborators were in Spanish. But I also wondered if it might balance the power and knowledge within the context of the research space, as I could not participate as a knower at all times in this process simply because of the language differences. Because I would have to rely upon them to translate when dialogue was in Spanish, it would give them control over what and how they included me in the conversation.

I also wanted the students to have control of determining the research purpose and outcomes, guided by what was of value and meaning for them. But the research study

needed to be worthy of dissertation research. Fortunately for me, the scant research on post-secondary bilingual degree programs meant there was a great deal of latitude with regards to being able to develop an original topic for the focus of the research study. Additionally, in the course of preparing for my research proposal I had interviewed an academic advisor, who worked with some of the students in the program. This interview yielded greater insights into potential topics the research collaborators might be interested in exploring including the challenges these students faced in successfully navigating the system of higher education, fears related to immigration status, and cultural values and the ways in which these were both supported and challenged by their experiences. I was eager to see if these topics would emerge with the research collaborators, as I had hopes that the focus of the research study might include an interrogation of the students' experiences to better understand oppressive forces within institutions of higher education upon primary Spanish-speaking, Latina immigrant students.

Ultimately, my concerns related to developing a worthy research study were less about whether or not the topic would be worthy and more about my own skills in guiding the research process. As a novice researcher venturing into waters largely uncharted, I felt adrift with questions about my own abilities to guide my research collaborators through this process effectively. I had already discovered through my interview with the academic advisor that conducting research interviews took much more skill than I had ever imagined. Using the data from this interview to practice data analysis and interpretation, my skills seemed emerging at best. If this was where my skill levels were, I wondered what I thinking when I concocted this plan to guide a whole group of novice researchers through a dissertation research study.

While all of my fears, concerns, and anxieties were wrapped up in the potential to fail, I knew that even “failed” attempts could be documented and used as a basis for dissertation research that further informed a process of research which was contextualized in the intersections of critical race theory and participatory research. So it wasn’t the potential to fail in successfully completing my doctoral studies that was the primary cause of my “stage fright,” but rather it was the idea of failing to achieve some measure of social justice through this research and ultimately failing the students involved in the study

More than anything, I wanted to engage these students in a research experience that was empowering for them, and all of my hopes were fueled by the tantalizing possibility of creating this kind of experience. I wanted for all of us to be engaged in a meaningful learning experience. I wanted the students to emerge from this research study feeling that their voices had power and that their knowledge had value. I wanted this research study to be a vehicle for social justice; that they would have the opportunity to determine what was of most value for them to research in the context of their experiences and to generate a product that they felt would benefit their community.

I imagined that the product of our research might be a presentation of the research findings to other students involved in the program or perhaps to other community stakeholders. And while I realized that English language proficiencies would likely present challenges, I nurtured the hope that the student participants would be involved in written product required for the dissertation. With the model I found in *Participatory Action Research: From Within and Beyond Prison Bars* (Fine et al., 2004), a chapter co-authored by university-based researchers and inmate based researchers, I couldn’t help

but dream of achieving a similar outcome. While I was not personally driven to author a published article, I wanted this for the students. For me it was a method of legitimizing their knowledge within the context of the academy. Toward this end, I also had visions of the students sitting with me and sharing the experience of the dissertation defense.

The vision of the students sharing the experience of the dissertation defense was wrapped up in my desire to apply the principles of social justice specifically to the ways in which dissertation process is conducted. My search of dissertations written by doctoral students who had utilized participatory research methods did not reveal any that documented the inclusion of the research participants in the dissertation defense. But I felt that if the students were involved in this final stage of the research journey, it would not only affirm their ownership of the research and provide another experience in which their knowledge was legitimized in the context of the academy, but might also enable them to “see” in their future their ability to continue their own educational journey to this place, if they so desired. Herr and Anderson (2005) proposed that a dissertation defense structured as a participatory panel with the doctoral candidate and his/her participants would be “an excellent way to demonstrate democratic validity as well as provide a venue that is congruent with the spirit of most action research” (p. 88). However, my hopes for such an outcome were dampened in my interview with the academic advisor, who shared strong doubts about the willingness of the potential participants to be involved in this stage of the study if travel was required. She said:

I think they might be part of the presentation but it would be really hard for them to travel. There are issues with travel, even if documented, but also with family and work. The time, having to take this additional time off work, their families, it may be more difficult to travel. And also, even the students that I’ve built a relationship with, I still don’t think they’d be willing to travel with me because school is one setting and their personal

life is another and so what they do outside of school is, all of a sudden you're meshing the two.

I was a bit deflated by her perspective because I also had hopes for a process that would “mesh” school (i.e. the research study) and our personal lives; that the sharing of personal and intellectual intimacies as co-researchers might open the door to relationships that crossed the boundaries of our social positions and extended beyond the final stage of our research; that those who could take time from work and family responsibilities, might see our traveling together to the dissertation defense as the encore in our research journey celebrating, and perhaps even strengthening, the relationships we would have built. I wondered if I was being unrealistic in my aspirations for the outcomes of this research process.

Reflecting upon her continual self-doubts about her decision to conduct action research as the methodology for her dissertation, McIntyre (1997) said, “the attraction *to* was greater than the fear *of*” (p. 23). Despite all of the fears and self-doubts by which I was buffeted, I also found that my commitment to do this type of research did not waver. Overcoming the temporary paralysis of stage fright, I was ready to dance. But to do so, I had one other hurdle to overcome before I could begin and that was gaining the approval of the IRB.

Dancing to a Different Kind of Music

I stumbled a bit through the IRB approval process. I was challenged by questions that were designed with traditional research approaches in mind. As with my proposal, I could only respond to questions about the research questions and methodologies with a broad framework that described an unfolding process in which students participating in the study would determine more specifically the research questions and data collection

methods. At one point my inability to respond with specificity to these questions had me consider the idea of doing two different IRB proposals: one, for initiating the research study in recruiting students and working with them to develop the study questions and methodology and a subsequent proposal that would clearly define these. Ultimately, I decided that waiting for a second IRB approval had the potential to disrupt the flow of the process and hoped for the understanding of the nature of participatory research from the IRB.

I inwardly cringed every time I was asked about my research “subjects” as the term felt dehumanizing and objectifying to participants. Had I been able to, where the form I was completing asked for a listing of the “co-investigators,” I would have listed all of the students. Of course not only would this have flied in the face of tradition, but it wasn’t possible as I had yet to recruit students for the study. This brought forth the question of what to call the students participating in the research study. The literature wasn’t much help as the label various authors (e.g., Atweh, Kemmis, & Weeks, 1998; Weis & Fine, 2004) used to refer those they had engaged in participatory research was either “participant” or more generally descriptive of their respective roles relative to the research study: student, student researchers, teachers, parents, inmates. “Participants” seemed too passive a description for the role I imagined for the students. Additionally, I didn’t want to refer to them as “the students” or even “student researchers” because it reinforced an imbalance of power relations of “teacher-student” or the “academic researcher” versus “student researcher” I wanted to redefine. Conversely, using “co-researchers” was problematic as it implied equal power relations and therefore seemed to insinuate that the power differences between the students participating in the study and

myself were irrelevant or would disappear. After much internal debate I finally settled upon the term “research collaborators.” As my experience with effective collaborations has involved the explicit negotiation of roles, as well as recognizing the diversity of expertise each person brings to the collaborative process, this term seemed most aligned to the philosophy informing the research design.

I did feel my proposed relationship with participants, as research collaborators, was also ideal for responding to the IRB question of how I would “minimize the risks and the chance of harm to the potentially vulnerable subjects”:

The methodology of engaging the participants as research collaborators is a measure taken to minimize the risks and chance of harm to these potentially vulnerable "subjects," many of whom who are "economically and educationally disadvantaged." The research process is designed to include, at the onset, their identification of measures needed to feel safe from risks and chance of harm such as the "space" for meetings, establishing necessary guidelines for confidentiality, and creating the "norms" for creating safe dialogue and processes for alerting the investigators to any discomfort with the research study and for resolving these.

The process of developing a consent form was also challenging. I was limited in my ability to clearly spell out what the students could expect should they choose to be a part of the study. Again, I had to rely upon describing the broad framework for the study and their roles as research collaborators, but I worried that this might not meet the standard for fully informing “the participants” of what to expect in the research process. I also created more than one draft of the consent form as I wrestled with whether or not I should have multiple consent forms to represent various stages in the research study. Ultimately, I decided that the traditional emphasis of the participants right to withdraw at anytime during the research process was sufficient. But what I think what I found most problematic about the consent form process was that it predefined unequal relations of

power as we entered the research process. While I could not ignore the positionalities of our roles coming into the process, my hope was that these would be redefined through our work together. My desire to create a sense among research collaborators of their agency in this process was undermined by the necessary requirement of informed consent. In hindsight, I think I should have proposed the use of two consent forms. One that asked for their consent to participate in the initial phase of the research, and a second that we co-constructed based upon their decisions about the time commitments, research questions, and research methods.

I also struggled with the traditional safeguards to protect the anonymity of the research participants. While I outlined a plan to use pseudonyms to disguise the identity of the college and the participants in the data, this would only prevent those outside of our local community from specifically identifying who the research collaborators were. As Herr and Anderson (2005) stated, “Close working relationships between the research and the participants as they collaborate make it fairly nonsensical that others local to the site would not know who are involved in the research” (p. 123). This was particularly true of my key informant, who was the sole “assistant bilingual coordinator” to the program and would be identified as such in the research. This turned out to be the one area of concern that the IRB had about my proposal and they requested further clarification on how I would protect the anonymity of participants. I responded to this concern with the following:

The risk associated with this is minimized by the design of the research process which gives "authority" to the participants to determine what is shared from the study and how. It is important to recognize that these participants, (to include the KI) as immigrants, live in a political context in which they are highly aware of the potential risks associated with voicing their opinions. It is why it is critical that they are involved in

determining the focus of the study, the experiences they want to explore, and what results they are comfortable sharing with a larger audience.

With a collaborative research stance, the research collaborators would be engaged in a process in which they were able to make decisions, assessing their own vulnerabilities, as they related to what would be shared, how, and to whom. And in fact, my hopes for the outcomes of the study in which the research collaborators would want to be involved in sharing their research results with the larger community was in direct conflict with the ideal of total anonymity to protect participants from risk. Speaking to this issue, Herr and Anderson (2005) stated: “Ironically, then, where some see risk, others see the very process of bringing the data back into the community from which it was generated as a benefit both for the researched and the community” (p. 123).

It was in the IRB approval process I realized the inherent contradictions of this process in upholding principles of justice. While on the one hand, the rules and guidelines exist to protect vulnerable populations against exploitation through research conducted by those in positions of power, I found that they also reinforced and perpetuated traditional research approaches that oppress and marginalize those very same populations. Having later read about some of the challenges IRB’s have presented to those doing participatory research, I felt fortunate that those members of the IRB who reviewed my proposal were able to reconcile the muddiness of participatory research with the traditional paradigms that inform IRB scrutiny (Herr & Anderson, 2005). With IRB approval, I was ready to enter the first phase of my research design.

The Invitation: Phase I Recruiting Research Collaborators

Phase I of the research design was the recruitment of research collaborators, and this was the phase about which I was most concerned. While my role as director

positioned me as an insider to the research setting, as a White monolingual researcher I was an outsider to the population from which I was recruiting. Even my role as director, providing students with some familiarity with who I was, positioned me as an outsider to their role as students. I did not feel they knew me well enough to even be willing to accept an invitation from me to come learn about the research study, let alone agree to participate as a research collaborator. Thus, critical to my plan for recruiting students in the program as research collaborators, was first recruiting someone who had insider status with the students.

Recruiting Abilene

I met Abilene over four years ago when another instructor had recruited her to assist us in conducting a community needs assessment for the bilingual early childhood program. At that time her insider status, as a primary-Spanish speaker, Latina immigrant, and early childcare educator, was instrumental in our ability to assess the educational needs and goals of this population. Abilene's intelligence, background in early childhood education, enthusiasm for the project, and ability to connect with members from her community, prompted me to hire her as an independent contractor to assist in the development of the program. Since the implementation of the program she has served as an assistant to the coordinator of the program, taking the lead on recruiting students, helping orient them to the program, and providing ongoing support as they moved through the program. Because of my close working relationship with Abilene, I felt comfortable asking her if she would participate in the research study and confident that she would want to.

I scheduled a meeting with Abilene to discuss the purpose and structure of the research study and the role I envisioned for her in the research process. Parallel to her role in the program, I wanted Abilene to take the lead in issuing the invitation to students in the program to come to the recruitment meeting. Because of her relationships with the students, the trust they had for her as an “insider” and as the assistant, and her ability to communicate with them in Spanish, I felt the students would be more receptive to learning more about the research study if the invitation came from her. I also wanted Abilene to serve as my co-facilitator in the research process; to help me structure the activities we would engage the research collaborators; to share in the implementation of these activities; and to reflect upon how the research process was evolving. I believed that her knowledge of the program and the students, her own journey as a primary Spanish-speaking college student, and the shared culture and language she had with the students gave her insights that would enhance our ability to further structure and facilitate the research process. Additionally, I felt her involvement in the research study would contribute to her knowledge of the dissertation process, knowledge that might facilitate her ability to envision herself participating in this process in the future.

As I expected, Abilene was enthusiastic about the research study and needed no convincing to participate. She had clarifying questions about the design of the study, a bit confused as to what the role of “research collaborator” would entail for the students. But as we discussed all of this she had no trouble immediately jumping in as my co-facilitator, offering opinions about potential challenges to the process. She had concerns about language issues and wondered if we should limit our recruitment to those students

who were comfortable speaking English. I shared that this paralleled my original thoughts about recruitment but explained my rationale for being more inclusive.

In the initial stages of developing my research proposal, I thought I would establish a small number of research collaborators to be recruited from students currently participating in the program, which would be more “manageable.” I considered recruiting five to seven students who represented diverse backgrounds and experiences, but who were also more developed in their English language proficiency. The later criteria would reduce the challenges of language issues influencing the research process. However, this approach seemed contradictory to an inclusive and participatory approach to research, and even more so, the deliberate selection of students who had greater English language proficiency embodied the practices that silence and marginalize language minority students—the very issue that framed the general area of investigation. Thus, I decided to extend the invitation to participate in the research study to any student who was active in the program and place no limitations on the number to be selected. It was my hope that the research collaborators would represent a wide range of the demographic diversities among students participating in the program so that I might better understand the diverse perspectives that informed their experiences.

Given the “risk” in participating in the unknown, Abilene did not think we would be successful in getting students who were newer to the program to even attend the recruitment meeting. But she was confident that those students who had been involved longer in the program, those with whom she had developed stronger relationships would likely be more willing to participate.

I gave Abilene a list of students (and contact information) who were active in the program for her to call and invite to the “recruitment meeting.” We looked at a calendar and set a date for the meeting that was an evening the week before classes began. This timing would allow students to make a final decision as to whether they wanted to participate in the credit option for the research study or proceed with class they had already registered for. We decided to hold the meeting on campus as students were familiar and comfortable with meeting at campus for their classes.

Abilene and I met once more prior to the recruitment meeting to plan the structure for the meeting. I knew it would be challenging to provide students with a clear understanding of what the research process would “look like.” Primarily, this was because I didn’t know what it would look like, as the research design was informed by a commitment to an unfolding process, which would evolve with the research collaborators input. Because of this ambiguity, my focus in the recruitment meeting was to articulate (1) my belief that they had knowledge from which others could learn; (2) that the purpose of this research design was not only intended to enable others to learn from their experiences, but that it would be a learning experience for all of us involved in the study; and (3) a description of the phases of the research process in which they would be decision-makers in each phase of the study.

Abilene and I decided we would start the meeting by providing an overview of the purpose of the study, the phases of the research design, the benefits to participating, and potential outcomes of the research. We also decided that I would share this in English, but I would stop frequently for her to ask if there were questions and to provide clarification to any questions in Spanish.

Because I felt it was important to provide students with a better sense of what the research meetings might look like, I wanted to structure an activity that would parallel one they would experience if they decided to participate in the research study. The activity would entail students discussing in small groups a question we posed, documenting their responses on a piece of chart paper, and sharing their responses for larger group discussion. I wanted to highlight the use of dialoging about their experiences as a primary method for the research process.

I wanted the question to be one that was engaging and safe for students to discuss.

I had three possible questions I had drafted:

1. Why do you want to become a teacher?
2. What was the path that led you to your work with children?
3. What are your memories of school as a child?

Because some of the students might have different career goals than becoming a teacher and some might not be working with children, we decided that the third question would be the best to use for the activity.

After the activity, Abilene and I planned to provide students with a copy of the consent form and review this. We then wanted to open it up to any questions students had. We would conclude by working with the students to set a date for the first research meeting. We did not intend to ask students to make a decision at the recruitment meeting on whether or not they wanted to participate. Instead, we wanted to give them time to think about it, discuss it with each other, and leave it open for them to choose to participate by attending the first research meeting.

With the agenda set for the meeting all that was left to do was to hope and pray that students would come.

The Recruitment Meeting

I had a lot of anxiety about the initial recruitment meeting. Who would come? How would I do in explaining the study? Would they understand it? Would it appeal to them? Would they be willing to take the risk to commit despite the 'unknown'?

Excerpt from Research Journal, September 1, 2010

Abilene and I met a half hour before the meeting was scheduled to begin. She told me she had over twenty students who she confirmed were coming to the meeting. She also said there were a few students who could not attend the meeting but might still be interested in the research study. I knew from past experience with these students that the grapevine among them was strong, and it was likely that even students who did not attend the meeting would get information about it from other students who did.

Abilene and I reviewed the agenda, set up the tables so that students would be sitting together in small groups, and put out the snacks I had brought for everyone. And then we waited. The first group of students arrived a few minutes before 6:00 p.m. Their faces were familiar to me, but their names were not. They exchanged hugs and greetings with both Abilene and I and settled down at a table. They called me over to answer some questions about upcoming classes, and as we talked more students began trickling in. By 6:15 p.m. we had nineteen students in the room, and Abilene and I decided to go ahead and begin.

Our agenda didn't go quite as planned. During our initial overview of the research study no one had questions, but as soon as we started the small group activity, students called either Abilene or me over to their tables to ask questions.

*When will we meet?
Can I still take the professionalism class if I participate in this?
Can I be part of this if I don't speak much English?
If we get credit for this, which class in the degree will it replace?*

While we did continue with the activity, it was clear from the questions that students were less focused on the activity and more concerned with the time commitment and structure of the research study. Because of this I quickly wrapped up the activity, spending far less time on it than I had planned and moved on to addressing the questions that were coming up in the small groups.

We spent more time on determining upfront the structure (time commitment, meeting days/times) than I had expected. I thought this might be something that would be finalized during our first [research] meeting, but in hindsight I can see why this would be so important for them to understand before committing more time to the study.

Excerpt from Research Journal, September 1, 2010

I had not anticipated making decisions about the research meeting days, times, and place during the recruitment meeting. I had assumed we would do this at our first research meeting with the students who had decided to participate making these decisions based upon their schedules and needs. But some of the students made it clear in the recruitment meeting that they wanted to establish the time commitment for the research meetings before making their decision to participate. It was in expressing this need, and subsequently negotiating these decisions that they took their first steps in owning the research study.

As I had envisioned meeting twice a month for a period of approximately two semesters, I started the conversation about the duration of the time commitment with this suggestion. A few of the students did not hesitate in expressing a strong preference for structuring it differently. They felt it would be better, in terms of their own ability to participate, to structure it like a “class” with weekly meetings that would conclude at the end of the semester. One student shared this would also make it easier for them to

explain it to their families. So I asked for a show of hands for those preferring this proposed structure for the research study and everyone raised their hand.

I think it felt more comfortable to commit to something that was framed within a semester, rather than feeling a need to commit to something longer term—they have many obligations, family, work, school, and my sense that pushing for a longer time commitment was a barrier to their willingness to participate. While I am unsure that MY goals for the study can be completed in one semester, I realized that I have to start where they are. I think we can complete a lot in this timeframe, and if there are pieces unfinished, it is my hope that by the end of the semester, some (if not all) will be willing to continue on with the work if there is more to be done. It will take time to build the community, the personal investment.

Excerpt from Research Journal, September 1, 2010

I also had not anticipated establishing an arbitrary end time to the research study as I felt we needed to leave it open-ended based upon my desire for the research collaborators to be committed to the research study until it had come to a natural conclusion. I was also concerned that one semester was a tight timeline for achieving the goals of the study, but I felt I had to set aside my concerns about this and honor the needs of the potential participants. Later, when I reflected upon my concerns, I realized that one measure of the success in engaging my research collaborators in a research study that was meaningful to them would be whether or not they were willing to extend their commitment to the study beyond the time frame they initially established.

With the time commitment for the research study established we moved on to negotiating the specific place, day, and time. I did not know if the students would feel more comfortable meeting at a community space, in a private space (someone's home), or at the campus. We generated a few possibilities, but the place we ended up choosing was a classroom at our valley campus. This campus is smaller than the main campus and also more aesthetically appealing with classrooms with windows overlooking the

courtyard space of grass, trees, and picnic tables. Additionally, several of the students lived in the valley area. The decision about place was arrived at quickly and with unanimous agreement, unlike the decision about the day and time.

Once we agreed to meet weekly, we had to figure out a time that would work for everyone (if possible). It turned out that Wednesday night, the night I thought would work for everyone, did not work for one of the women who was taking a developmental English class that went until 7. I did throw out that we could meet at 7 p.m. but most groaned at that. Saturday morning, another possibility I thought would work, did not work for a few students who were taking a class at that time. So the other possibilities we considered were Monday nights, Friday nights, or Saturdays at noon. Everyone except three students wanted the Saturday option. The three students who did not want the Saturday option were among those taking a class Saturday morning. They felt that having two additional hours on that day for being away from their family was too much. Other students in the group responded they also had family and that you had to make a sacrifice. I tried to go back to the alternative weeknights as an option, but the majority of the group felt that everyone was available on Saturday (not true of other nights with class conflicts) and nobody—including the 3 that didn't want to do Saturday—really wanted to do a Monday or Friday night. The group took over—debating amongst themselves (Abilene monitored and provided me with some translation since much of this conversation between the students switched to Spanish). Their final decision—no day/time was going to work best for everyone, but Saturday the best option for most. If the women that had concerns about being away from family too long on Saturday they would have to make a choice: participate in the study or, choose to take the class they were registered for another semester (I am pretty sure they are not going to participate).

Excerpt from Research Journal, September 1, 2010

I felt bad that we couldn't find a time that would work for everyone relative to honoring their respective commitments to family, job, and school. Ironically, the student who expressed the need to "make a sacrifice" ultimately made the decision not to participate in the study because of family commitments, and two of the students taking a class on Saturday mornings did decide to participate. At the same time, I was encouraged by how the students took ownership in resolving the problem. While I had started the

conversation with my own suggestions, the debate and negotiation continued amongst themselves, with no attempts to engage me as the authority to make the final decision.

Reflecting Back on Initial Perceptions

Despite all of my attempts to articulate a process in which they would be the architects of the research study, I later discovered that the students' initial perception was that I had an agenda for both the content and outcomes of the research study. Reflecting on their initial perceptions of the research study, the women shared that there were fears about what my *real* (or hidden) agenda was in bringing them together for this research study.

It was interesting, hearing their initial perspectives of the research study. In spite of my attempts to articulate a process in which they would be making the decisions about what the research study would focus on and how we would collect data to explore this, they believed that I would be using questions or evaluations that I had already developed to "get information" from them. That when they decided to participate, it was with the belief that this would be more about sharing what "I wanted to know" than what they wanted to learn about from their own experiences.

Excerpt from Research Journal, December 11, 2010

"Behind the scenes" of the recruitment phase, students who had attended the recruitment meeting discussed whether or not they wanted to participate. One of their concerns was that I might ask them to evaluate their instructors.

Valentina: We don't want to say anything bad. We was happy with our teachers so what will we say? So we was thinking about that. We were like, no problem, they want to help the program, but they want us to talk about the teachers and we happy with them...

Solymar: We thought that you were going to ask for exams [evaluations] and say, OK this [teacher] doing good in class or this one's not...

Valentina: We thought you were going to get information from us and we weren't sure how [it would be used].

Excerpt from Meeting Session Audio Recording, December 11, 2010

This conversation also revealed that they had a perception that the scope of the research study would only include their experiences in the courses, rather than a more global context of experiences as primary Spanish-speaking, Latina immigrant college students. Valentina said, “It was after a couple of meetings that we understood you meant we could talk about everything.”

I also largely failed in convincing the students that the research process would be a learning experience. They envisioned their role as “giving information” but did not foresee how the process would contribute to their own knowledge.

Victoria: We hear comments, ‘Oh, no, I am not going to do this because we won’t learn anything.’

Valentina: We talked, and we decided that this probably won’t help us, but it will help other people.

Alexis also shared that she did not think the research study would be a success.

Alexis: I really thought it would be just one time, or two, and then you guys were going to give up. So I was like, well we can try it, but its not going to be there, you know? All the way. I thought that. It wasn’t going to take off the way it did.

While most of the research collaborators did not have confidence that they would gain anything personally from participating in the research study, a couple of them did have a differing perspective.

Vividiana: I thought it would be what you said. An opportunity to step back and think about our experiences with the program and learn from the whole thing.

Cristy: I was not scared of you because we always hear about, “You’re really important to her.” So when they say, “Erica is going to be there,” I was like, you can see how she talks and how she acts, how she is really feeling. Like human...so it was more like [an opportunity] to see how she is as a human.

Vividiana was the only research collaborator who initially felt the process of reflecting upon their program experiences would be a learning opportunity. For Cristy, the learning

opportunity was the chance to connect with me outside of my role as program director and to see who I really was as an individual.

While I failed to recognize that the students might be suspicious of my intentions and skeptical of the personal value of the research study, I did realize that my role as director and their role as students would be another challenge in establishing a context in which the research collaborators recognized their role as knowledge-holders through the research process. When we were reflecting on the initial perspectives of the research study, Reyna shared, “For me and Eugenia, we were so scared, because it is *Erica*.” Alexis, with the blunt “truth” I had come to expect from her, summed up the sentiments of many in the group: “I think a part of us is that we were scared of you. We were like, OK, she’s so stuck up because of all of this education, higher education. What is she doing with us?”

Alexis’s comment, “What is she doing with us?” not only revealed a perception that someone with my educational background would not value their knowledge, but also her own doubts about their role as knowledge-holders. These issues of power and knowledge also presented a challenge in creating a space in which the research collaborators would feel comfortable in asserting their power in the research process. That said, the initial recruitment meeting did give me hope that we would be able to create such a space.

Creating our Research Space: Phase II Project Definition

The phase of the research process that I felt most comfortable with in terms of my own facilitation skills was the one in which we would be building community and creating the context for the research study. As both a teacher and a leader one of my

skills has been my ability to create an environment of trust and collaboration, and this was the environment I wanted to create for our research space.

Getting Started

Abilene and I met early to review the agenda for our first meeting. The primary goal for this meeting was to begin developing our community of researchers by getting to know each other and establishing protocols for the group. I was far less anxious about the first research meeting than I had been about the recruitment meeting. The plan for the day mirrored the getting-to-know-you activities that I was comfortable facilitating from my days as a classroom teacher.

While I still didn't know how many students were planning to participate, I hoped (based upon discussion with Abilene) we might have a group of around fifteen. We ended up with ten students who showed up to our first research meeting. Two of the students that showed up had not attended the recruitment meeting but had heard about the details of the research study from other students that had attended this meeting. There were two others who had attended the recruitment meeting and told Abilene they could not attend our first research meeting but wanted to participate, but in the end they did not choose to do so because of family commitments.

I opened the meeting welcoming the group and outlining the agenda of getting to know each other, reviewing why we were here, and establishing protocols for the group. Abilene shared (in Spanish) that I would be facilitating in English, and she would reiterate my comments in Spanish as needed, and they were welcome to converse in Spanish as well. I brought construction paper and magic markers for each of us to create a table-tent nametag with drawings in each corner of the nametag to represent two things

in our life important to us, one achievement of which we were proud, and one goal we had for the future. A few women asked clarifying questions of the activity both in English and Spanish, and while we all worked on completing our nametags, conversation flowed in both languages.

All of us shared our nametag drawings and what they represented beginning with Abilene and me. There were many commonalities shared. Everyone had identified family as important and most identified their education as either important and/or as an achievement of which they were proud. While it was clear that the women already knew about each other's families (e.g. who was married, how many children they had and what ages they were), the discussion that emerged from sharing pride in educational achievements yielded new insights about each other.

Alexis: I was so nervous and scared to start the program but Abilene kept saying, "You can do this."

Lola: You were scared? I was just excited. I couldn't believe I was going to be able to take college classes.

Because the dialog was organically turning toward reflections on their first experiences with college, a topic I had thought to introduce in our next meeting, I decided to follow their lead rather than shift the conversation to group protocols as I had originally planned to do after introductions. "What expectations did you each have when you first came to this college? What fears?" I asked of the group. As the conversation continued to flow naturally among the women, I realized that a sense of community already existed among them that had been developed through the program. While it seemed all of the women had good relationships with each other, I could also tell there were stronger friendships between some of the women that extended outside of their school time. Additionally, all of the women had a strong connection with Abilene. Not

surprisingly, Abilene's name came up several times in their reflections on their initial expectations and fears. In fact when I later asked how important Abilene was to their participation in the research study, they all agreed that it was critical. Reyna said, "You'd probably be sitting here alone if it wasn't for her."

Our time rapidly flew by and I concluded our first meeting with a final review of the consent form. All of the women signed their forms, officially becoming my "research collaborators." I was pleased with the dynamic of the group we had. While in the months to come I would learn much more about each of these women, my initial impression was that the commonalities among them would enhance our research process as much as the diversities. All of the research collaborators had joined the program within the first year it started and were nearing completion of their early childhood coursework. Seven of the women were currently working with children in an early childhood center or public school setting. All of them were mothers, about half single mothers and the other half married, and their ages ranged from early twenties to early fifties. Also, they were all born in Mexico but there were differences in the ages in which they had immigrated to the United States. Some of the women had come to the United States with their families, and some had come on their own and left family behind in Mexico. Oral comprehension of English was fairly high among all of the women, but there was a great deal of diversity in their speaking, reading, and writing proficiencies in English.

While the pre-existing relationships between the research collaborators facilitated their trust in and safety with each other, we still needed to create our "research space": one in which safety and trust were established among all of us within the context of the

research study and one in which the women would have confidence in their role as research collaborators. An important step to creating this space was developing the norms and protocols to guide our research process and interactions.

Establishing Protocols and Norms

Heron (1996) emphasized the importance of including the establishment norms and protocols as part of the participatory approach in order to guide interactions that will increase participants' ability to listen to, respect, and critically examine diverse perspectives. While my research design included establishing upfront our group norms and protocols, I hadn't considered the distinction between "norms" and "protocols." Though these terms are often used interchangeably, I have developed my own working definitions based upon my reflection of how protocols and norms were developed for our research space. My use of protocol refers to a process and/or a behavior expectation as it specifically relates to the research process; whereas, my use of norm refers to patterns of behavior or values that characterized the group culture. Had I entered the research study with such clarity in these definitions, I think my initial facilitation of norms and protocols would have been different. As it was, my goal to establish "norms and protocols" resulted in the establishment of protocols and the norms for the group emerged more organically.

We began the second meeting with a discussion about the norms and protocols we would establish for our research group. My description of norms and protocols focused on the "rules" we wanted established for our group to guide the research process and our interactions. I began the discussion of protocols with one of my concerns about process, which was language. While my observations of both non-verbal and verbal responses led

me to conclude that the research collaborators understood much of what I said in English, sometimes there were gaps in understanding the details or nuances either because of my word choice or phrasing, or even because I spoke too fast. Abilene had already continued the pattern we had established at our recruitment meeting of reiterating what I said in Spanish when she felt there might be confusion about what I had said in English. I asked if we should continue this practice and the research collaborators felt this would work, and they would indicate when a Spanish translation was needed for something said in English. I also articulated that I wanted everyone to be able to share in Spanish if that was easier, and since I was the only one that didn't speak Spanish, Abilene would provide me with a translation of what was being said while someone was sharing in Spanish. It wasn't a perfect system, but I hoped we would manage to make it work.

A couple of the research collaborators felt strongly about establishing expectations for attendance especially as it related to receiving college credit for their participation. Parallel to their experience with college courses, they felt that we needed to set a maximum number of absences that would be allowed. While I was a bit surprised that everyone agreed with this, I think having this guideline helped them in the juggling act of balancing all of their commitments. With family, work, and school commitments pulling at most of them being accountable to an attendance requirement helped them be able to prioritize our meetings. We also decided that if someone was going to be absent from the meeting, she should let another group member know so that we wouldn't wait for or worry about her.

While the issue of confidentiality had been discussed in the context of the consent form, we revisited this. Since research protocols required the use of pseudonyms, I had

each research collaborator choose her own pseudonym. After some laughing debate the research collaborators selected the following names: Alexis, Solymar, Valentina, Lola, Eugenia, Reyna, Gloria, Victoria, Vividiana, Cristy, and Abilene. It took us a bit longer to determine a pseudonym for the college. After discarding several suggestions, the group agreed upon Colegio de Tierra Hispana, which loosely translates to Hispanic Land College. The reason they liked this name is that it captured the reality of our college being located in an area heavily populated by Hispanics, but also the use of a Spanish name reflected their identity as primary Spanish-speakers.

While pseudonyms would be used for sharing our research results with a larger audience, we needed to discuss guidelines for sharing during our research process. We decided that it was acceptable for us to share the types of activities and discussions we were having with others outside of the research group, but that it was not acceptable to share specific details of what a particular research collaborator shared. We also agreed that if there were any conflicts, these needed to be aired within the group, not to others outside of the group. We all agreed that it was important to have a space in which everyone felt safe expressing their opinion, even if it was one with which others did not agree. To facilitate our ability to reflect on how the process was going, we would do a “check in” at the beginning and end of each meeting and any concerns about the process should be addressed during these check-ins. To support our reflections on the research process, I also asked each research collaborator to keep a research journal, as I was doing, with their own notes that could be shared with the group during our check-ins. I also emphasized that I was a learner in this process, and I needed their honest reflections, especially when the process didn’t feel like it was going well, to inform my facilitation.

Abilene and I also developed our own protocol as co-facilitators. After each meeting, we would process our observations of the meeting, sharing what we thought went well and any issues or concerns that we had. Utilizing our reflections, we would then plan the agenda for the next meeting. We also always met prior to each meeting to review the agenda for the day.

Overall, the protocols we established seemed to work for our group, and what didn't work was revisited and modified. The check-ins at the beginning and end of our meetings generally generated positive reflections on the process, but also created a space for the research collaborators to bring up concerns. While rare, there were a couple of issues that emerged.

During one of our early meetings I utilized the strategy of unfinished sentences for our check-in at the end of a meeting. Each of us took time to complete one of the following unfinished sentences:

Today I enjoyed...
Next time I hope that we...

When we all shared our responses with the whole group Valentina stated, "Next time I hope that we allow everyone to share their own opinions." Asking for further clarification of what Valentina meant to convey with this statement, we discovered that she was upset because she felt that she had not been allowed to fully express an opinion during our dialog without being interrupted, and because her opinion differed from the majority, she felt shut down in expressing this opinion. In response one of the research collaborators shared that she felt the interruption was not intended to stifle an opposing opinion but rather was reflective of a dominant conversational style in which they often talked over and interrupted each other. Others agreed with this, but also then

acknowledged that they needed to “self-monitor” a bit more to ensure that everyone was given the opportunity to fully share their opinions.

During this conversation I shared that it was my observation that some of the research collaborators felt quite comfortable jumping into the whole group dialog and contributed often, while others were quieter and listened more than they talked. I asked how we might make sure that those research collaborators who were quieter were given the opportunity to share if they didn’t feel comfortable jumping in to the conversation. The group decided we needed to be more conscious of checking in with those who had not shared and inviting contributions from everyone. I was grateful for Valentina’s willingness to bring this issue to the attention of the group. The discussion that resulted reinforced the role of the research collaborators as participants in facilitating the dialog and creating the space in which everyone could contribute.

It was interesting to observe how there were times in which the research collaborators looked to me to be the authority in the research process and other times in which they assumed this authority. One example of this was reflected in the issue that emerged regarding meeting attendance.

The first time the protocol for attendance was revisited was during a check-in at the end of one of our meetings. Reyna shared with the group that she had recently been diagnosed with cancer and would be undergoing chemotherapy and radiation treatments. She was concerned that the treatments might interfere with her ability to attend all of our meetings, but she wanted to continue her participation in the research study if the group would allow for her absences. This conversation took place in Spanish; she had prefaced it by saying she could not share in English because it was “too emotional.” While

Abilene quietly translated for me, it was the research collaborators who responded to her request by assuring Reyna that her potential absences would be acceptable.

While in these initial stages, I worry about the fact that I might be directing the group too much, that we have a power dynamic in which the RCs are looking to Abilene and me to lead the group, there have already been moments when a shift occurs, and this was one of them. Without hesitation, the RCs said, “We will make this work. If you have to be absent more than what we agreed, it is OK.” There was no checking in with me (visually or verbally) to see if I thought it was OK. It was their decision to make this exception to their rule about attendance. Not only did the RCs express support for her continued participation in the study regardless of if attendance became an issue, but they wanted her to know that they were there to support her in any other way she needed.

I am not sure I can adequately express my reflection on this moment and its representation of the group dynamic. I was on the “outside” of this conversation, not just because it was all in Spanish but also because this was about them, about their community.

Excerpt from Research Journal, September 18, 2010

While in this situation the research collaborators asserted their authority to grant an exception to the attendance protocol; however, another situation arose in which some of them wanted me to enforce the protocol.

One meeting day in October the only research collaborator who had arrived by noon was Alexis. This wasn't too unusual as Alexis was always the first to arrive and everyone else typically trickled in shortly after noon. At a little after noon Abilene received a call from Solymar explaining she couldn't make it because she was sick. By 12:15 we decided to start making calls to the rest of the research collaborators. As we were doing this Vividiana and Valentina arrived. We reached Lola on the phone, and she said she was on her way but had been delayed because she found out last minute that she needed to bring the children with her. Victoria, Cristy, and Reyna weren't going to make it, and we weren't able to get a hold of Gloria and Eugenia. With over half of our group missing, I expressed concern about our ability to proceed with the planned agenda and

asked if they felt we might need to cancel our meeting. Alexis made the comment that I needed to “be tougher” about enforcing attendance. I shared that I was uncomfortable taking on that role because it had been a group decision to set the guideline about attendance and because I wanted participation to be guided by their commitment to the research study and to each other. I made the suggestion that we have a conversation about attendance at the next meeting when (hopefully) everyone one was there. As we wrapped up this discussion, Lola, Eugenia, and Gloria arrived, and we decided to proceed with a modified agenda, holding one planned agenda item for the next time because it was one we felt was important to have everyone’s participation on.

At the next meeting I started the discussion about attendance by sharing what had happened at our last meeting. Several research collaborators shared reasons they were absent or late. There was general acknowledgement that absences couldn’t always be avoided but Valentina, who drove the farthest to our meeting, stated that group members needed to call if they knew they were going to be absent so that we could make a determination in advance on whether or not we might need to cancel a meeting. I also brought up the fact that as a group it seemed like we wanted to honor the importance of everyone’s participation by not starting until everyone was there, but that this was challenging when so many members were arriving significantly late. From this discussion emerged a group commitment to be more conscious of arriving close to our start time. Additionally, Alexis, who always arrived on time, also proposed that if the group had to wait for everyone to arrive to start then the group should also be willing to stay past our scheduled end time as needed. Everyone agreed that this was reasonable. Two of the research collaborators expressed that the start time was hard for them because

of other commitments in the morning, and after checking in with everyone, we decided to shift our start time to half an hour later.

For the rest of the meetings that semester, research collaborators honored these commitments. Either Abilene or myself always received a phone call if a member was going to be absent. While it was rare to have a meeting in which every member was there, it was usually just one person who was absent. There was not a single meeting we had in which everyone arrived by the time we had scheduled to begin the meeting. But if a research collaborator was running late, she called or sent a text message to another research collaborator to let the group know she was on her way. Alexis remained the only research collaborator who consistently arrived “on time.” The rest trickled in on average between five and fifteen minutes afterwards.

The value and associated behaviors around time emerged as one of the group norms that developed more organically and were reflective of the research collaborators influence on establishing the culture for our research space. While in other arenas in my life I place a high value on starting meetings on time, it became clear to me that this was not as important to the rest of the group (even Alexis). Rather than immediately starting with the planned agenda at our start time, the first fifteen minutes became a time in which a more social check-in occurred while we waited for everyone to arrive. Additionally, I discovered the research collaborators were not that concerned about ending the meeting on time. If we were in the middle of an activity or conversation, there was no sense of urgency around wrapping it up in order to leave. In fact even when I did manage to achieve a natural stopping place by the time we were scheduled to end, many of the research collaborators often hung around for a while longer.

Another norm that emerged was the accepted presence of children during our meetings. I was actually pleased that no one who initially brought their children to the meeting asked me if it was acceptable because I felt it signified their ownership of the space. Among the research collaborators there seemed to be no question that the presence of children would be accepted. While I had initially worried the children might be a distraction or inhibit conversation, I learned the norms of home life with children were transferred to our research setting. The children were enthusiastically welcomed by all of the research collaborators as they arrived, and when we settled down to begin our agenda, their mothers would set them up with something to do off to the side. Any infants who were present were often passed from woman to woman as conversation flowed without interruption. The children did not interrupt conversations with bids for their mothers' attention, but waited until we formally took a break. During those break times they were often showered with attention by many of the research collaborators. When I shared my observation of how seamlessly the children were integrated into our setting, many of the research collaborators shared (with pride) their perspectives of the Mexican cultural values related to children and child rearing practices.

Another norm that developed was breaking for food and communing. I had, in the first couple of meetings, brought food for all of us to eat while we had our meeting. By the third meeting other research collaborators were bringing food and a new pattern around food developed. Rather than helping themselves to the food at the beginning of the meeting (which would have seemed natural as we started around noon) and eating while they "worked," by unspoken agreement the research collaborators waited until we took our break mid-meeting. The break, which for the first couple of meetings had been

a brief time for all of us to take care of personal needs, expanded as work was put aside for time to commune during the meal. My long established pattern of providing food at any kind of meeting was as much about meeting basic needs (i.e. hunger) so we could focus our energies on work, as it was an expression of caring and value for the people I was feeding. And while I believe this also held true for my research collaborators, it was their influence that made the time for food about coming together as a community.

While the research study was designed as an opportunity for the research collaborators to share and explore their experiences, the time each week in which we took a break from “research” and socialized while eating our meal opened the door for a different kind of sharing that strengthened our relationships and sense of community. Gathering around the tables where we had set up the food, there was a sense of coming together for a different purpose of simply communing. While conversation between everyone occurred as we loaded up our plates with food, early in the research study, once we sat down we tended to socialize during our meal in small groups: Abilene and me (in English) and among the other women with their closer friends (in Spanish). These conversations primarily were about the events of our personal lives. After a few meetings, primary socializing still occurred in smaller groups (in Spanish), but other research collaborators overheard the conversations that Abilene and I were having and often joined in. Over time, I observed how the predominance of small group conversations was replaced by whole group conversations, which were primarily conducted in English so I would be included.

One of the things I am enjoying is how, during the breaks, I am getting the opportunity to interact more with the RCs. Before, their conversations during breaks were primarily in Spanish and with each other. But the last couple of sessions, they have been speaking more in English over the

breaks because they are including me in on their conversations. And it is fun because we are talking about other aspects of our lives—somewhat frivolous ones. Some of the RCs and I were talking about issues of weight, fitting into clothes, gaining weight, losing weight, what body parts we gain weight in first, how we feel about this, etc. This led into a conversation about age and the RCs asked my age and then we were asking everyone what their age was. I joked that some of the RCs weren't even "ripe" yet (under 30) and that it wasn't until you hit 30 as a woman that you were at your prime. This brought forth a lot of laughter from everyone and those of us that were older, teasing the younger ones. And of course we laughed a lot when they asked me if the recorder was still on and I said yes...they did wonder what someone else would think of these conversations.

Excerpt from Research Journal, November 6, 2010

What started as a norm around taking a break for food became so much more. As “frivolous” as some of these conversations were, they were also powerful as they reflected the personal connections we were making with each other as women. These connections, fostering a sense of trust and community, provided the backdrop for deeper and more critical conversations around other social issues. Additionally, the shift from small group to whole group conversations during this social time reflected our development as a community. It is hard to determine if the community we were building during our research time influenced the community reflected during our social time or vice versa, but it was clear that we had formed an identity as a group that was uniquely the result of our research space.

Parallel to the pattern of sharing and language during our social time, this pattern emerged during our research time. Initially, there was much more dialog in Spanish, but very quickly English became the primary language used in our discussions. When someone didn't have the words in English, she would often ask the others in Spanish for the English words and then continue sharing. While there was nothing I had said to prompt this shift (and in fact, repeatedly reinforced that it was okay to share in Spanish),

it primarily occurred for two reasons. One, they noticed (despite Abilene's translations on the side) that I had trouble being part of the conversation when it occurred in Spanish. Second, those who had more limited English-speaking skills, felt safe in practicing their English. I was surprised, and some of them also surprised themselves, at how well they could articulate their thoughts in English. They give themselves less credit than they should with regards to their English proficiencies, but this is because of the many negative experiences they have had with White, monolingual English-speakers. Their willingness to share in English was a reflection of the safety and trust they felt in our research space.

While the organic development of our norms combined with our formal establishment of protocols worked out well, I do think I would have structured the process of developing both norms and protocols differently. In my research I found little in the literature on participatory research that provides specific guidance to the process of establishing norms and protocols. While my approach did not negatively impact the process, I think it was a missed opportunity to more deeply explore the initial fears and hopes of the research collaborators as it related to the research process, and engage all of their voices in the creation of our norms and protocols.

Rather than facilitating a whole group discussion on “what norms and protocols do we want to establish,” which resulted in one or two members made suggestions about protocols and the rest of the group agreeing, it might have been more effective to have the research collaborators, in small groups, generate responses to (and record on chart paper) the following questions:

1. What hopes do you have entering this research study? What fears?
2. What do you want our meetings to look like and feel like?

3. What might we need to consider to support the participation of all members?
4. How might we support our abilities to listen to, respect, and critically examine the diverse perspective of each group member?

Then each small group could have shared their responses with the larger group and from these responses discuss and come to consensus about the norms and protocols we wanted to adopt for our group. I also think it would have been helpful to have the norms and protocols written up on a piece of chart paper that was posted for everyone to see at each meeting. It would have served as an explicit reminder of our commitments as we went through the process.

Identifying Our Research Question

The protocols we developed did provide a foundation for our research space in which each research collaborator would be valued for the knowledge and experience she brought to the study (Heron & Reason, 1997). Building upon this foundation, Abilene and I structured activities to engage all of the research collaborators in sharing their knowledge and experience in order to create the context, the research purpose and questions, for our research study.

Following up with initial reflections about their experiences beginning the program that had emerged in our introductory activities, Abilene and I had the research collaborators break up into two groups to discuss the following questions:

- What feelings did you first have when you heard about the program?
- What was it like first coming to Colegio de Tierra Hispana?
- What expectations, fears, or challenges did you have when you started the program?

Each group documented responses to these questions on chart paper, which we then posted on the wall and discussed as a whole group. The conversation generated a variety of perspectives and issues. Research collaborators shared their initial feelings, all

excited, many afraid, about joining the program. Some shared the doubts held by family and community members about their decision to join the program. They had their own doubts about their role as a college student, especially those research collaborators who had not attended school in several years. Additionally identified was their prevalent fears related to language. A few of the research collaborators shared early experiences of living in the United States and the paralyzing fear they had to overcome just to go to the grocery store and have to use English. Research collaborators also discussed varying levels of support they had from family and the challenges of balancing family and work responsibilities with school. From this conversation another topic emerged in which I learned about some of the differences between the values and need for education and work living in villages in Mexico versus living the United States.

Sharing of initial experiences in the program led to discussion of the instructors, program structure, and the changes they had undergone through their experiences in the program. I was excited by some of the initial themes that were emerging in these conversations. Entering the research study with a critical race lens, I had hopes that the focus of the research study might explicitly explore their experiences as primary Spanish-speaking, Mexican immigrant students in relation to institutional structures that oppress, conflicts with dominant cultural values, or identity conflicts.

I find that I am less interested in focusing on the programmatic aspects of their experiences (the design elements, curriculum, instruction) for our research. While even their initial sharing of some of these experiences has provided me with affirmation of what we are doing “right” to support students in the program, and even considerations of what we can change, I am far more interested in what I guess I would term as more “global” aspects of their experiences. The issues around family, role of education, aspect of their abilities to “negotiate” and “navigate”—in the workplace, at home, and at school—the differing cultural expectations, and their identities as mother, student, employee, wife, etc., are far more intriguing

to me. That said, I need to facilitate a way in which they take the lead on determining what's of most interest for them to research.

Research Journal Excerpt, September 18, 2010

I was challenged by how to transition from the broader discussions of the variety of issues that were important to the research collaborators in the context of their experiences to defining the questions that would guide our research study. Abilene and I discussed a few ideas before settling on a more creative approach to facilitating this.

With the chart papers listing the issues and topics we had discussed placed on the walls as a reference, we asked the research collaborators to pair up and gave them the following scenario to discuss:

Imagine there is a reporter from a local paper who would like to do a story about the experiences of primary Spanish-speaking Latina immigrants attending community college. This reporter has heard about our program and would like to interview you. Whom do you want to read the story? And keeping this audience in mind, what questions would be most important for her to ask you?

After their paired discussions, we came together as a whole group to share the responses to these questions and Abilene and I documented these on chart paper. Most of them had identified more than one audience for the story. Two pairs had identified the “whole community” with a particular emphasis on the Spanish-speaking community. Another pair identified “Hispanics” and also included those working in early childcare centers. And another pair identified “administrators” of the college and the “Hispanic community.” There was both diversity and overlap in the questions they had generated. All groups had a close variation of the question, “In what ways did the bilingual degree program impact your life?” Other questions listed were: What are the opportunities the program has offered you? How do you think a bilingual degree program has impacted the community? What are the benefits of a bilingual degree program in a country of

English speakers? How is your language valued through this program? What obstacles have you had to overcome and how have your experiences helped you overcome obstacles? What is the impact of the program on this college?

As we looked at the questions, right away Lola said, "I think the most important question to us is the impact of the program." It was interesting how this was the emerging theme with all of them. There was little focus on the challenges of the program or a critique of the structure of the program—all things we had discussed previously. For them, the story they want to tell is how the program has made a difference, and as we discussed, why it was so essential for all of the "audiences" to hear the difference it could make...not just on their lives and the lives of future students, but how the existence of such a program makes a difference, in their sense of "worth," and on their role as students, teachers, as parents, and as community members.

Research Journal Excerpt, September 25, 2010

While we agreed that some of the other questions generated might serve as sub-questions to guide our data collection, the overwhelming consensus was to develop a research question that focused on the impact of the bilingual degree program on their lives. The final draft of the research question was: What is the impact of a bilingual early childhood degree program on the lives of primary Spanish-speaking, Latina immigrant students participating in the program?

There were many times throughout the research study I questioned my skills as a facilitator, and I definitely questioned whether or not the approach we used to develop our research question was the best one. At the beginning of the research process, I had shared that there was little research on post-secondary bilingual programs or primary Spanish-speaking students' experiences in college, which was part of the rationale for the research study. From my own literature review, I knew that we had a great deal of freedom in following their research interests in the context of their experiences so in developing my research design I hadn't considered the need to include the research

collaborators in exploring existing literature as a method for generating potential research topics. While the language issues would have been problematic for many of the research collaborators to engage in such an activity, I do think it would have been beneficial for me to provide a more detailed review of the existing literature as a method of supporting their knowledge of the context of our own research study.

While I did feel that the approach I used resulted in a research question that prioritized their interests, I did wonder if the research collaborators' reluctance to problematize their experiences in the program was at all influenced by my role as director of the program and theirs as students. I questioned my role as a critical researcher; should I have done more to guide them through a process that resulted in a research study more aligned to a critical race agenda? This was a nagging question that persisted throughout the research study and one I did not find resolution to until nearly the end of the process.

I also questioned some of my facilitation techniques. The use of chart paper, magic markers, small groups, and "pair-sharing," were standard techniques I relied upon as a teacher and I utilized them frequently in our early meetings. Reflecting back, I realized there were unplanned benefits to this approach. Maguire (1987) shared that in developing her approach to working with the women in her participatory project she had been afraid that "acting too much like a 'trainer,' using flip charts, magic markers, and standard facilitation techniques might intimidate some group members" (p. 171). She decided to avoid this approach, but in her analysis of the research process she felt this decision was a mistake because of the lost opportunity to structure activities that "would have made equal and meaningful participation more possible" (p. 172). The smaller

group activities often allowed for more equal participation of all of the research collaborators than did our whole group discussions. It also created a more intimate and safe space for sharing between collaborators; one in which they freely utilized their native language and therefore were also not influenced by any concerns for how I might judge what was shared. The latter was important as they were still in the initial stages of building trust with me.

Identifying Researcher Perspectives

With our research question developed, we were almost ready to move to the data collection phase but prior to doing so I wanted to engage the research collaborators in constructing their own individual researcher perspectives. To support the validity of our research, and their role as research collaborators, I felt it important for the research collaborators to be engaged in identifying the biases, values, and personal background that might shape interpretations of the research. I had not found any examples in participatory research studies of working with participants to explicitly develop researcher perspectives so I drew from my own experience to guide this process. While the outcomes I had intended as a result of this process were not fully realized it generated unanticipated outcomes that enhanced the research process.

Today, I shared with the rest of the RCs some of my story. I shared a “researcher perspective” that I had written in part as an example of what a researcher perspective might “look like,” but also because I realized that I had learned much about them from their sharing of their experiences through this research study, but had not given them the same opportunity to learn about me through my life experiences.

My researcher perspective shared my story of disability and how it influenced my values and the way I walk through the world. When I finished reading my researcher perspective, there was a silence. Then Vividiana said she was really glad that I had shared this. That my experience with “being other” was similar to what many of them had experienced and in many ways it helped to know we had this in common.

That she had her own understanding of what it was like to be judged, stared at, etc., because of difference. Alexis then shared about her experience coming to the United States with her family (her husband and daughter) and because she had papers, unlike some others that had come, that she had felt that this was now her place, her home. And then, they got call from the government (immigration?) asking for her husband to come down to the office. She took her husband and in one day he was taken from them—she came back home without him—they deported him to Mexico. She got very emotional in sharing this story, which is not typical for Alexis—she is much like me in her practical, “tough-it-out” ways. She shared how her daughter blamed her for “taking Daddy away” and how hard that was. The point of her story was that it was then that she had her sense of having a new “home,” a “place” in this country that was hers that was secure. That even though she was a U.S. citizen, she was “other.” Many of the other RCs clearly related to the idea of being other.

My sharing my personal story not only seemed to be appreciated in terms of giving them an opportunity to understand me, but also opened a door to their own sharing with each other—more deeply personal stories.

Excerpt from Research Journal, September 25, 2010

I remember feeling very vulnerable sharing this aspect of my life with them.

Much like Alexis and her story about her husband, I tend to avoid talking about it. The emotions of frustration and grief associated with my disability lie close to the surface, and I feel exposed when sharing these emotions with others. My sharing this with these women deepened the trust and the connection we had with each other. It occurs to me that this is an important lesson in research. As researchers, we often ask participants to trust us, to be vulnerable in the sharing of (and being judged for) their deeply personal experiences without risking the same vulnerability.

After sharing experiences of “being other,” I discussed how my researcher perspective was developed from examining my personal experiences, how these shaped the values and biases I held, and how these impacted my researcher lens. In order to begin to generate ideas for writing their own researcher perspectives, I had the women break up into two groups and start to talk about their backgrounds and how these shaped

the values they held. The door that I had opened with the sharing of my deeply personal story fostered such sharing between the research collaborators. While these women had known each other for over two years (some longer), many of them heard aspects of each other's lives that had not previously been revealed. Across their experiences that have shaped them as women, they recognized the uniqueness of some of their stories but also found many commonalities.

Not only did this sharing strengthen the sense of community among the research collaborators, but also for some of the women it was the first time they had explicitly reflected upon how their background shaped the person they were today. Cristy said in her reflection of the research process, "We realize how we are as women, when we did that [researcher perspective]. I never thought about why I am like that...that made me really think about, 'oh my God, that is why I am like this.'" While the process of having the research collaborators develop a researcher perspective was successful in the ways that it deepened the sharing and reflection on personal histories and strengthened our sense of trust and community, the product resulting from this process was not quite what I had envisioned.

There was a great deal of variety in the written researcher perspective that each of the research collaborators created. Some of the women focused upon writing about a couple of significant events in their lives, others provided a more comprehensive narrative of their life story. I was disappointed that some of the stories that were shared verbally were not captured in the written product. Additionally, the connections they had made in their conversations to the experiences they had and their influence on the values they held were not, for the most part, reflected in their researcher perspectives. And none

of them had made an explicit connection to how these experiences shaped their researcher lens. If we had spent more time on this process, I know the research collaborators could have made these connections, but feeling the pressure of limited time I made the decision to move on to the next phase of our research process. This would not be the only instance in which time constraints influenced my decisions in facilitating the research study.

Becoming Researchers: Phase III Data Collection

With the development of our research question, the next phase of the research study was data collection. In order for the research collaborators to be equal partners in guiding this phase of the research study, I needed to structure opportunities for them to gain knowledge and skills related to conducting a research study. As I still considered my own status a novice researcher, this phase of the research was one in which we were all engaged as learners in the research process, a shared journey of becoming researchers.

Negotiating the Method of Data Collection

Prior to introducing the research collaborators to various data collection methods we might consider using for our research study, I felt I needed to provide a context for understanding the qualitative approach of the research design. I began with an explanation of what characterized quantitative versus qualitative research. After much laughter over attempts to enunciate these two words, the research collaborators were able to demonstrate their understanding of the differences between these two research approaches when we made comparisons to their knowledge of the types of assessments utilized with children. I also reviewed the purposes of the research design to include my desire to prioritize their narratives and that doing so required a qualitative approach to

data collection. Assured that the research collaborators understood and supported a qualitative approach, I moved into an overview of different types of data collection methods we might utilize to address our research question.

I had been unsuccessful, after several hours of research (and Abilene's assistance), in finding a Spanish resource that provided a comprehensive overview of various qualitative data collection methods. However, I was able to find such a resource in English that also included the advantages and potential limitations of each method that was described. Together we reviewed these methods to include open-ended questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, and journals and then debated the method or methods they wanted to utilize.

I have to admit, I was a bit surprised where the group wanted to go with this. They liked the idea of being able to include the perspectives of students who were not part of our group. Alexis pointed out that we probably would just include those students that were more "senior" in their status in the program because newer students were not necessarily in a place yet of seeing the impact of the program (this was based upon their previous discussion of how much they had changed as a result of their participation in the program). They also liked the idea of a questionnaire—with 1-2 open ended questions that they could ask other students to complete. We reflected on advantages and disadvantages of each method. RCs felt that other students could participate with anonymity using this method (versus an interview) and this would be an advantage in getting "honest" responses. I asked if there was any concern about getting more "surface" responses (students just not wanting to write a lot) with a questionnaire and Victoria said that we could use the questionnaire as an initial data collection method and then use that to determine if we wanted to do a follow-up focus group. We discussed both the idea of a follow-up focus group with the RCs, or even with other students, based upon the survey results.

Excerpt from Research Journal, September 25, 2010

Our conversation reflected a great deal of enthusiasm for getting started on the data collection phase of the research. While I didn't want to do anything to squelch that enthusiasm, when I had time to reflect on their ideas after the meeting I had a couple of

concerns about the proposed methods. I realized that the inclusion of other students in the research study, not as research collaborators but as research participants, would require the development of a new consent form and an amendment to the research protocol which would have to be reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board. This would significantly delay our timeline for data collection and analysis. Additionally, when I discussed the proposed methods with my dissertation advisor, he shared his concerns about constructing a valid questionnaire and its effectiveness in soliciting the depth needed in participant responses to address our research question. He recommended that we start with a method that first explored the experiences of the research collaborators and then if our subsequent analysis of the data supported the need, we could use these data to design a questionnaire to give to other students in the program.

Through my conversation with my dissertation advisor, I also realized that I had only provided a context of qualitative research and had failed to specifically discuss the attributes of narrative research, which I had previously determined was part of the framework that informed the research design. This brings forth a couple of challenges I faced in this research process. One challenge I had was in keeping up with the process. While the weekly meetings provided the advantage of continuity and momentum, there was limited time for my own reflection on the process and doing so within the context of revisiting my original proposal. There was more than one instance during the research study in which I felt I missed a step or opportunity because there was so much to process on multiple levels. Another challenge was in negotiating my own role as authority in the research study.

At this point, I do not know what the RCs would say to the challenges of the design. I speculate that initially, a challenge was in having a clear

vision of their role in this process. It has been my own challenge as well; allowing for my role and theirs to unfold as part of engaging in the process. As the instigator of the research study, my challenge has been in needing to be a “leader” in this process, at the same time, trying to create space for the RCs to also take ownership. What I am finding is that in our differing roles, we each bring knowledge that is equally valuable and allows for ownership of different aspects of the research study.

Excerpt from Research Journal, October 2, 2010

While I wanted the research study to be one in which the research collaborators felt authority and ownership, as well as one that leveraged their knowledge and experience, my own knowledge was also important to the research study. My knowledge of research methods was an example of this. I knew that narrative research aligned with the conceptual framework informing my research design in which the narratives of those who have been oppressed are prioritized. While inclusion of the research collaborators in choosing a method was also a critical element of the research design, I felt strongly that it needed to be one that maintained the priority of a narrative approach. In reflecting upon how best to negotiate my own role as authority in the research study, in this case and when it came up later in the research process, I decided the best approach was for me to be transparent in my thought processes with the research collaborators. This also supported my desire with the research design to explicitly address issues of power and knowledge in the research process.

At the next meeting, I shared my own reflections and concerns about the methods we had discussed, and I also shared the feedback from my dissertation advisor. I think what was beneficial about sharing all of this openly is that the research collaborators recognized that I was as much of a learner in this process as they were. And my concern that reconsideration of data collection methods based upon this feedback would take away from their sense of authority were unwarranted. As Alexis stated, “I think we

ought to listen to him, after all, he is an expert on research.” Implicit in Alexis’s acknowledgement of the outside expertise specifically “on research” was her ability to accept this expertise without diminishing the expertise she and others held in other areas. Alexis’s statement also reflected her sense that the group still held the decision-making power. Following her statement, Vividiana reminded the group that part of the reason they had decided to participate in the research study was because they wanted to share their experiences; therefore, it made sense to start with them rather than with students who had not chosen to participate in the study. As they had previously discussed the idea of a focus group, they decided to proceed with this method of data collection with themselves as the participants of the focus group. Because the research collaborators were unsure as to whether or not we would have enough data from our focus group, we left open the possibility of collecting additional data from other students in the program if the need was determined. However, after I engaged the research collaborators in a practice focus group to generate data we could use for data analysis, they had a different perspective of the volume of data that would result from the focus group method.

Practicing Data Collection and Analysis

One power inequity that exists in traditional researcher-researched relationships is that the researcher holds the knowledge of the research process and therefore has the authority in the data collection and analysis processes. While utilizing their existing knowledge and experiences to determine what should be researched supported the research collaborators’ role as authorities in the research process, they also needed to develop their knowledge of research in order to participate fully as research collaborators.

To support this knowledge development, I engaged the research collaborators in a practice focus group.

I wanted the practice focus group to not only support the research collaborators' knowledge of research methods, but also to provide an opportunity to critically dialog about an issue that was important to them that might help inform future dialog of the issue in the context of the research focus. As language had already emerged as a central issue to the research collaborators, I developed the following prompt to begin our practice focus group: How has being a primary Spanish-speaker shaped your job experiences?

The dialogue was fascinating—the RCs have many insightful observations and were thoroughly engaged in the topic. What was interesting, is that the conversation took some interesting directions—from discussion that the discrimination they experienced often had less to do with the language barrier than with “being Mexican,” to cultural differences in educating children, to perceptions that their English-speaking supervisors were threatened by the fact that they spoke both Spanish and English.

Excerpt from Research Journal, September 25, 2010

The dialog, which emerged from this structured opportunity to practice our data collection method, opened another door. It was the first conversation we had in which the research collaborators shared with me their critique of racialized relations between Whites and Mexicans. For them to feel safe in sharing this critique, as well as their resentment for their English-only speaking supervisors, represented the deepening trust they were developing with me.

The practice focus group also gave us the opportunity to address any process issues. When I worked on transcribing the audio recording of the practice focus group, a few issues emerged. Abilene had established the practice of quietly translating for me anything that was shared in Spanish and had done so during the focus group.

Unfortunately, this practice, which worked fairly well for our conversations, was

problematic in the audio recording as her voice overlapped that of the speaker and neither could be accurately transcribed. I was also doing my own transcription and as a monolingual English-speaker I could not transcribe the Spanish-speaking portions. And finally, there were places during the dialog when more than one research collaborator was speaking, and again, because of the overlapping voices I could not accurately transcribe each voice. Because these issues were reflected in the transcript I had prepared for the research collaborators to review at our next session, I decided to get their feedback on how we might address them when we did our research focus group.

I did not transcribe the entire practice focus group. In addition to the places in which Spanish was used that were not included in the transcript (just a notation of “Spanish contribution”) I only transcribed the first ten minutes of our conversation. The purposes of providing the transcription of the practice group was to give us the opportunity to explore this form of data and to do some practice analysis and the ten-page transcript was more than adequate for doing so. Even with only a partial transcript, the research collaborators were very surprised at the amount of data that came from the focus group. Vividiana immediately pointed out they probably didn’t need to be concerned about not getting enough data through the research focus group if this was the amount of data we had from just ten minutes of the practice focus group.

Ideally, I would have liked to use the transcript to engage the research collaborators in exploring more than one type of narrative analysis method so that they could then choose the method that they wanted to use for the research study. However, I knew if I wanted to honor the time parameters the research collaborators had established for their involvement in the research study, we simply did not have adequate time to do

this. Sharing my thoughts on this with the research collaborators, I suggested that we practice with the holistic content analysis method. While holistic content analysis is most commonly used with individual interviews, this method was one that I felt the most affinity with through my own practice with data analysis and was also one that I felt would work well for our research purposes.

I provided an explanation of the steps we would take based upon the Lieblich's (1998) approach to holistic content analysis. The first step was to read the text, listening carefully for the impressions and particular patterns emerging from the reading (Lieblich, 1998). Because Lieblich indicated that there are "no clear directions for this stage" (p. 62), I took the liberty of adding an element to guide our analysis, which was to highlight words or phrases that spoke to us for any reason, and to write any questions in the margins that emerged when reading. Rather than having each of the research collaborators read the transcript individually, I chose to read aloud the transcript line-by-line, pausing to ask if any words or phrases seemed important to anyone or if there were any questions that emerged. There were three reasons I chose this approach. The first reason was that I was now confident that while some diversity existed, everyone was fairly proficient with their oral comprehension of English, but I was not sure of the levels of proficiency with reading English. The second reason was that this approach allowed me to model and coach the metacognitive thinking I wanted them to engage in as they read the transcript. For example, after reading aloud Alexis's first statement in which she said, "In my experience and in my job being a Hispanic person has not given me an opportunity to be a good teacher in my center," I asked if any questions came to mind when reading this statement. When no one in the group responded, I shared that one

question that came to mind for me was “When you use the term ‘Hispanic’ what does that mean to you?” I also shared that I had underlined “has not given me an opportunity to be a good teacher” because that struck me as significant. The research collaborators quickly picked up this type of probing into the text for meaning as we continued our reading.

The third reason I chose this approach was that it was one that leveraged the unique role they had as research collaborators researching themselves. Typically, the process of using the holistic content analysis approach is one that solely engages the researcher(s) in the initial analysis and interpretation of the meaning of the text from the participant interview with the possibility of following up with the participant later in the process to ask additional questions and clarify meanings. In our case we benefitted from having multiple readers to enrich the perspectives we were bringing to our analysis, but also because of their role as both the researcher and the researched, the “follow-up” and interpretation could occur in tandem with our analysis. The power of this approach is that it allowed us to avoid the potential to distort or misrepresent the intended meaning of the dialog. Of course we did need to be cautious that we didn’t allow concerns for how others might judge what was said influence this analysis process (an issue that didn’t emerge until much later in the research process).

Because I wanted to demonstrate how our perspectives shaped our “reading” of text, I had deliberately chosen the question of, “When you use the term ‘Hispanic’ what does that mean to you?” to launch our reading of the transcript because I suspected that there were multiple definitions associated with this term. Lola said for her it referred to all Spanish-speaking peoples living in our state, but for Vividiana it referred to all Spanish-speaking peoples living in the United States. For clarification, I asked if that

included Anglo Spanish-speaking peoples; it did not. In contrast Valentina and Alexis used the term Hispanic interchangeably with Mexican. Further conversation revealed that they rarely used the term Latina to self-identify (largely influenced by the predominant of the use of Hispanic in the region we live in). They also used the term Mexican to describe anyone born in Mexico regardless of U.S. citizenship, and the term Mexican-American to describe anyone (such as their children) born in the U.S. to Mexican parents. Interestingly it was Valentina's daughter, who was sitting by her mother, who brought up the issue of how the term Mexican was also used by other kids to "tease" her.

The conversation that resulted in response to one question about the use of one word lasted for more than fifteen minutes. As we continued with our reading of the transcript, our process of highlighting important phrases and generating questions led to deeper interpretations of the data. Everyone, including myself, was surprised at how quickly the time arrived for our session to end. We had only made it halfway through the transcript for our initial reading. After the meeting, I met with Abilene and shared some of the issues that had arisen with transcribing our practice focus group. To address the audio recording of two voices overlapping when she was translating for me what someone shared in Spanish, we decided she would not provide such translation during the focus group. While we could have proposed that we pause after someone shared in Spanish for her to then translate, we felt this would interrupt the flow of conversation. As co-facilitators of the focus group, both Abilene and I would be responsible for asking follow-up questions, but she would take the lead when sharing was in Spanish. We also decided to propose to the rest of the group that we needed to be more cognizant of one

person speaking at a time during the focus group to address the issue of not being able to distinguish what was being said on the audio recording when more than one person was talking. And finally, we also decided that we would use two audio recorders during the focus group and that Abilene would take the lead on transcribing the sections in Spanish and I would take the lead in transcribing the sections in English.

Abilene and I also discussed the agenda for our next meeting and decided that rather than continuing with the initial reading of the transcript where we had left off, we could continue with other steps in the process of rereading the first part of the transcript for the purpose of identifying the special foci or theme that we then would follow in the story (Lieblich, 1998). Abilene suggested that I explain the idea of identifying a theme and then we could have the research collaborators work in smaller groups to complete this and then come back together as a whole group and share. As a group we could then take each theme and find examples of it in the transcript. I liked this idea because it would be interesting to see the differences that might emerge among the groups in their analysis, but we could also work together through the process of following the theme through the story.

After providing directions (in both English and Spanish) for this activity at the next meeting, we broke into three smaller groups to explore possible themes. There were differences in the themes that the groups identified. Two groups followed a theme of “it’s not language, it’s culture” and another followed the theme of “bosses being threatened by us.” While their identification of actual themes was at a fairly concrete stage in which the themes were those obvious at the surface of the text, I could readily identify with this stage as a novice researcher who still struggled with mining the data for

those deeper, more complex, and more global expressions of the potential themes in the data. Additionally, the research collaborators were working with transcripts in their second language. Despite this challenge, they were quick to find multiple examples of how these different themes were supported in the transcripts. They were highly engaged in this process, several of the research collaborators calling out line numbers and then reading aloud the phrase or section they found that related to the particular theme.

Erica: So let's look at the transcripts for examples of how bosses are threatened by you.

Lola: Like Voice 4 on line 29. 'We work at the same center and they don't see the potential in us.'

Gloria: We have another one on line 74 and 75. 'She didn't want me, she knew I could do it but she didn't want me like more on a higher level. She was kind of scared.'

Vividiana: And before that on line 73. 'I could do the paperwork in Spanish and English for parents. That helped her. But it didn't make me a better, get a better position.'

Often such a reading was then followed by research collaborators giving additional examples from their experiences that paralleled that in the text or expanding upon their feelings about the particular experience shared in the text.

What I saw emerge from this practice focus group was more than burgeoning understanding of the data collection and analysis process. For the research collaborators, there was excitement and even awe for the process of seeing the focus group dialog transformed into data. This aspect of seeing their stories and their voices in a transcript that was academic research material lent a sense of legitimacy to their experiences. I think for the first time they had a genuine understanding of their role in this research study and felt pride for what they would be contributing.

I had hoped that this research study would be an empowering experience for the RCs, and I believe this hope will be realized, as reflected in Lola's

comment today, “I feel so much pride in being part of this.” What I hadn’t considered, was how it would also be an empowering experience for me. It doesn’t seem right that with all of the benefits I receive from the privilege I have, that in this too, I gain. Clearly, there are those benefits to my dissertation, but in addition, is the affirmation and the pride I can’t help but feel, for my role in creating this program that has clearly made a difference in the lives of these women. Additionally, there is the joy I have in being a “member” of this community we have created: when I am drawn into their circle, when I receive a kiss on the cheek or a hug for a greeting, when I am trusted with their stories, and when I share in their laughter.

Excerpt from Research Journal, October 2

As this journal excerpt reflects, I too felt pride, and my sense of pride warred with a sense of guilt. While I had created a research design in which my research collaborators would share in the benefits gained from the research, I was confronted with the inequities that would still persist. As a researcher exploring my own positionality in the research process, I couldn’t delude myself into thinking that I had somehow subverted the structures that privileged me as the primary beneficiary of our research study. And while recognizing this would not change these circumstances, it did prompt me to share with my research collaborators excerpts from my research journal of reflections on the benefits I was deriving from my participation in the research study.

While I came to this research design with the belief in the legitimacy of the knowledge that comes from the experiences of marginalized populations and the importance of creating a space in which that knowledge can be shared, I have to admit that my focus was much more on what “others” could learn, than on my own role as a learner.

I was at a party the other night, and I was conversing with a group of women, one a Latina immigrant, another an African American woman, and another Latina, but born and raised in the United States. The women, all mothers, got into a discussion about their children in relation to expectations for educational experiences at home and at school. There were some distinct differences of opinions and I shared the thought that perhaps some of these differences were due to culture—an insight that I had gained from a discussion of a similar kind with the RCs. My comment was immediately affirmed and we all engaged in more dialogue about this. In another conversation, the African American woman was sharing how

important it was to her to be a “strong woman” role model for her daughters. I again responded with something that I had gained from my discussions with the RCs.

I share this because I realize that what I am learning from the RCs is about more than just that which answers research questions. It is their knowledge that is expanding my perspectives in other arenas of my life; it is informing the lens with which I view the world.

Excerpt from Research Journal, October 2, 2010

After sharing this excerpt and others from my research journal, I asked the research collaborators if they would be interested in keeping their own journals about the research process. As the journaling of my experiences with the research process had already assisted my own self-discovery and learning, I thought the research collaborators might also benefit from this practice. The research collaborators were open to this idea and at the next meeting I provided them each with a colorful researcher notebook, as well as a matching folder in which they could use to hold all of our related research documents.

Having completed the experience of data collection and analysis through our practice group, we were almost ready to move to doing the “real” focus group. We had two additional pieces to finalize and that was crafting the questions we would use to guide our focus group and identifying the process for the focus group to engage in discussing these questions. Reviewing our research question, we decided to utilize some of the other questions we had generated in the process of developing this research question as questions to guide our focus group. The research collaborators also added a couple of other questions to explore. We also decided to conduct two focus group sessions to give ourselves enough time to explore these questions and others as they emerged in the focus group. The first focus group would be guided by questions related to their perspectives on what impact their participation in the program had upon each of

them. In the second focus group we would explore their perspectives on whether or not the impact of the program extended beyond them as individuals.

Abilene and I would serve as the facilitators of the focus group asking those questions we had developed as well as those that emerged for us from the responses to these questions. In response to hearing the challenges of transcribing when more than one person spoke at a time, the group agreed we needed to be cognizant of having one person speak at a time during the focus group. Abilene also had another suggestion for the process. She proposed that everyone spend some time reflecting on her responses to the focus group questions before the next meeting in which we were conducting our first focus group. She felt that this would facilitate more thoughtful responses, as well as make it easier for responding in English (as it takes more time for native Spanish speakers to mentally translate responses to English). The research collaborators and I were willing to try this approach. At the same time, I made it clear that research collaborators could participate in their native language as needed during the focus group.

With the finalization of our focus group questions and the processes for the focus group, we were ready to conduct our first focus group.

Shared Ownership of the Research Process

Prior to entering the research study, I had identified the term “research collaborators” to refer to the students who would be participating in the research study. This term reflected my approach of doing research “with” the students and the collaborative relationships I wanted to foster between all of us as we conducted our research. It also was reflective of my desire that the students, as research collaborators, would develop confidence in their role as knowledge-holders and researchers. It was

during the data collection and data analysis phase that I not only observed their growing confidence in their role as research collaborators, but my own as well.

Initially I would not have categorized the first focus group as a success in attaining such outcomes. And in fact it initially undermined my confidence in my role as facilitator and in their roles as research collaborators.

What happened? That is what Abilene and I spent an hour processing after our meeting. Today was the first of two planned focus groups and I have to say I was disappointed...After a review of our protocols for the discussion group, I started with the first question (How are you different now as a result of your participation in this program?)...and silence. Then Alexis started by sharing how her Spanish and English written skills improved. And then another awkward silence. And then Vividiana shared but ended up reading some of what she had written “to prepare” for the focus group discussion. While the RCs gradually seemed to warm-up to the focus group discussion, the dialogue was not as rich as it has been in previous sessions. Previously, I have felt like a traffic cop trying to direct conversation so that everyone had an opportunity to speak and be heard, as many were jumping into the conversation and had so much they wanted to share. This time, I felt like I had to pull contributions from them—trying to get them to share and expand upon what they contributed.

Research Journal Excerpt, October 16, 2010

With our typical delay in getting started as we waited for everyone to arrive, and the time we took for our meal together, conducting the focus group took up the rest of our scheduled time. As the research collaborators were getting ready to leave I reminded them to take time to write their reflections of the meeting in their research journals. Once the research collaborators left, I turned to Abilene and asked, “How did you feel it went?” Abilene’s response affirmed that I was not the only one that felt the focus group had not gone well. She too felt the dialog had a certain stiffness and lacked the flow and engagement of previous discussions. She also noted that some of the topics that had previously emerged in our conversations were not reflected in our focus group.

I did not have the answer to the question of “What happened?” I was in a place of

not knowing and *needing*, not just wanting, the input of my co-facilitator and research collaborators on the research process. This conversation started with Abilene after she shared her perspective of how she felt about the focus group session and I asked her, “What do you think happened?” Between the two of us we generated several possible causes of the disappointing results of the focus group. A couple of our more vocal research collaborators seemed distracted due to family issues and this might have influenced the dynamic of the whole group. Perhaps there was some “stage fright” that caused them to be more self-conscious about sharing. Additionally, we started right away with the focus group without any precursor dialog as a “warm-up.” We wondered if it had been a mistake in having them reflect on the questions in advance as some of them seemed to overly rely upon sharing from notes they had made. The protocol of having one person speak at a time might have inhibited the natural flow of conversation between them.

We also reflected upon our own roles as facilitators. I shared that I felt like I wasn’t asking enough follow-up questions and those that I did ask were leading. Abilene shared that she was struggling with the duality of her role in the research process. While she was to be acting as a co-facilitator, there were times in which she was responding to questions from her own experiences as a student or as the assistant coordinator to the program. She asked my advice on if or how she should be contributing. We spent some time discussing how she might share reflections on her own experiences as a student as a way of facilitating deeper dialog. While we also generated possible changes we might make when conducting the second focus group, we agreed that we needed the research collaborators’ perspectives on the first focus group and their input on how we should

proceed.

At our next meeting, we began by asking the research collaborators to share from their journal reflections about our last meeting. It turned out that only half of the women had written in their research journal so I opened it up to sharing from their research journal or just sharing any reflection they had about the last meeting. Alexis began by sharing that she felt a sense of pride walking away from the last meeting. For her, discussing the impact of the program on her life affirmed how much she, and the others, had accomplished over the past two years. Vividiana and Lola shared that they realized they wanted to become more active in promoting the program to others within their community so others could experience the positive changes they saw the program had on their own lives. Gloria spoke to how being a part of the research study, made her feel important; how she saw that they were “women of the world” and role models for other women like them.

It was good for me to hear their positive perspectives on the results of focus group. I had been so focused on what went wrong, that I hadn't given much thought to what went right. These comments affirmed that the women's participation was no longer strictly based upon how the research study might benefit the program but in which they were deriving personal benefits from the process itself. The opportunity to step back and reflect upon their experiences in program, generated a great deal of pride at how much they had overcome and achieved over the past two years. It was also evolving their identity as “change agents” within their community. It seemed my hopes that the research study would result in an empowering experience for the research collaborators were being realized.

At the same time, I wondered if the research collaborators were only sharing positive reflections because they didn't feel safe criticizing the research process. But just as I was about to try to probe for any critique they had of the focus group, Valentina spoke up with her assessment of the last meeting: "I really like it Erica, but I feel like it was taking too long, that I feel boring. That was last time only." Valentina's comments opened the door to other research collaborators agreeing with her assessment and their subsequent speculations about what went "wrong."

Lola: You know what happened? You notice, I talk too much. But you notice, [last time] I so quiet. And you know why? Because the way we talk, our voices are like (sounds indicating talking over each other). But last time, you were like, no voices like that, and we had to go one at a time.

Alexis: Because we were recording.

Erica: We had one person speak at a time because we were recording for the transcripts, but this seemed to interfere with your natural conversational style.

Lola: Yes, like she be saying something and I am going to interrupt, and then she says something and interrupts, and I interrupt.

Cristy: But sometimes we don't want people to interrupt because we have our own opinion that we want to finish. It was nice that we can have that choice too.

Valentina: I was like lost sometimes. I think that, I don't know about the rest [of you] but for me, when I read the words and think about it at home, and I come in with my ideas, but it's like, not really my thoughts. It was like you were not really giving your ideas that you have in that moment. They want to know from our experience. We cannot study and think, 'Is this the right answer to this question?'

Lola: You gotta just answer right away.

Vividiana: But it is nice, for me at least, to be able to think about what it is that I want to say. I need to write all my ideas so when I say it I can make sure that I share what I wanted.

Excerpt from Meeting Session Audio Recording, October 23, 2010

Our turned to what we needed to do in the next focus group to address the multiple perspectives shared about the first focus group. In the end, they decided we

needed a balance. We needed a space in which it was okay for the research collaborators to “jump in” to conversations, supporting a back and forth dialog, but we also needed to make sure that we balanced this with allowing someone to finish their thoughts and “checking in” with individuals that hadn’t contributed to see if they had something to say. They also decided to put away the questions, and any written reflections during the focus group discussion, but that at the end, we would revisit these to see if there was anything that was left out.

Looking back, this conversation revealed a new dynamic in the relationships between the research collaborators and myself. My surprise at how quickly the research collaborators identified the issues of the first focus group made me realize that I was not fully trusting in their capabilities to be partners in *guiding* the research process. I had, with Abilene’s assistance, served as the primary facilitator and while I had provided the research collaborators with opportunities to provide input into the process, they had followed where I lead. But I think the continuously evolving trust and community we were developing, as well as the confidence they were gaining in their role as research collaborators, created a space in which they were asserting themselves as active participants in shaping the process. Not only were they able to voice diverse perspectives of how effective the process was but also amongst themselves they generated the solutions to address the diverse needs of the group.

The implementation of their suggestions for conducting the second focus group resulted in a more natural flow of conversation. The research collaborators were responding to each other rather than just to the questions I asked. Additionally, they engaged in monitoring the dialog. When two people started to speak at the same time,

they would stop and one would indicate to the other, “you go first.” They were also taking the lead in checking in with those that had not spoken. This new level of shared ownership of the research process alleviated my anxieties about whether or not I was facilitating the process in the right ways because I could trust my research collaborators to help identify and resolve any issues that emerged.

While the energy and participation of the second focus group was much improved from the first, I still felt we were not yet generating deeper and more critical dialog about their experiences. As I prepared the transcripts from our focus group sessions, I felt somewhat disappointed that the data were seemingly not as rich as I had hoped they would be and that stories shared previously in our exploratory conversations leading up to the focus group had not reemerged during the focus groups. I attributed this to my own inexperience in facilitating focus groups. As I read the transcripts I noted multiple places in which I had missed the opportunity to ask clarifying questions and to probe more deeply into the experiences the research collaborators shared. But what I hadn't realized when I had developed the research design was that the approach of doing a group analysis of the data would not just support the process of unearthing the deeper meanings of the data we had collected, it would also generate additional data.

Discovering the Power of their Voice: Phase IV Data Analysis and Interpretation

When I had originally defined the phases of the research study, I had combined data collection and analysis into “Phase III.” But when our group shifted from data collection to data analysis there was such a distinct transformation in both the process and the content of our interactions that I felt strongly it emerged as its own unique phase in the research study. What also characterized this phase of the study was my own

discovery, as well as theirs, of the power of their voice.

When I started the data analysis process, I had initially organized all of us into small groups in which each group was reading the transcripts from the focus group discussions for the purpose of identifying themes emerging from the transcripts and follow-up questions we wanted to ask. But when I observed that this process was generating dialog in response to the themes and the questions they were identifying, I suggested that we continue the process as a whole group. And what happened from that point on, felt like magic.

First of all, the research collaborators took the lead in facilitating the dialog. And to be honest, they did a better job of it than I did. I had already noticed in the transcripts how too often I asked questions that were leading or missed opportunities to ask the questions that would probe more deeply. Not so of them. Below are some examples of the questions they asked of each other as we went through the transcripts.

In response to reading Alexis's comment, "So because of this program, I am going ahead. I am not going back," Solymar asked, "In what ways?"

In response to reading Vividiana's comment, "I am not scared and I feel more confident," Alexis asked, "You feel more confident? In what ways?"

In response to reading Solymar's comment, "I felt it was too late for me to study," Vividiana asked, "Why did you talk about it was too late for you?"

Cristy asked Solymar, "Do you think people believe more in you now that you believe more in yourself?"

Solymar asked Vividiana, "Why was it a dream? Can you explain why it was a dream?" in response to her comment that going to school was like a dream.

A particularly memorable moment for me was when Christy asked a question about a comment that Gloria made, and Abilene, because Gloria wasn't there that day, offered her perspective of what she felt Gloria meant. Alexis's response to her was that

we should still mark the transcript with a question mark to come back to when Gloria was there, “because you’re explaining it to us in your way, with your knowledge, and it might be different from her.” This comment was powerful for multiple reasons. One, it reflected Alexis’s confidence in being able to assert herself as an authority in the research process. Despite Abilene’s position as co-facilitator of the research process, Alexis objected to Abilene’s attempt to speak for Gloria. On previous occasions when Abilene had voiced her interpretation of their experiences there had been no objections. And while this might have signified agreement with her interpretation, what Alexis also articulated was a new understanding that the knowledge an individual brings to the data analysis, influences the interpretation. And finally, as a result of Alexis’s assertion it became an established part of the analysis process that it wasn’t acceptable for one individual to provide an interpretation of another’s experiences without “checking in.” The power of all of this for me is that it affirmed an important aspect of the rationale for the research design. That in engaging the research collaborators in the process of collective analysis and interpretation, I was more likely to avoid the distortion and silencing of persons of color that can occur when White researchers unilaterally do the analysis and interpretation.

Through the data analysis and interpretation process, it was quite clear that my research collaborators were not silenced. In taking the lead in facilitating the dialog, they began talking, listening, and responding to each other, rather than waiting for cues from me. And in doing so, I learned more about these women than I had in the previous two and a half months of weekly meetings with them. Reading the transcripts together and probing for deeper meanings, data analysis and interpretation became intertwined with

further data collection. The dialog that emerged during this phase of the research finally reflected the depth I had been hoping for in the development of stronger, more detailed explanations of their experiences. Their reflection on the data also took our conversations in new directions about workplace injustices, social isolation, schooling inequities, language devaluation, cultural values, and racial discrimination. And it was through these conversations that I came to realize the power of their voice; a power that had been there all along once I learned how to listen for it.

Internalizing Their Legitimacy as “Knowers”

The dialog shared during our analysis phase opened the door to another learning experience for me as a White researcher, which was about fully understanding what it meant to recognize the researcher collaborators’ role as knowledge holders through their lived experiences of oppression. One of my blind spots as a White researcher was how I unconsciously cast myself in the role of “the facilitator of enlightenment,” respective to supporting the research collaborators in developing a critical analysis of their experiences. In doing so, I assumed that they didn’t already have a critical analysis of these experiences, but their dialog during the analysis phased not only helped me to recognize that the research collaborators already had a critical analysis of their racialized experiences (and didn’t need me to facilitate this), but they understood these experiences in ways I hadn’t even considered.

While my study was designed around the belief that “the lived experiences of the oppressed are legitimate sources of knowledge,” I came to understand the boundaries I had imposed on this belief. And that despite my knowledge of and commitment to the

principles expressed in critical race theory, I discovered I was guilty of the White subjectivities and assumptions that I had critiqued others for.

There was a specific moment during the research study that I was confronted with a deeply ingrained assumption of my own superiority. Paulo Freire observed that when oppressors join the oppressed in the struggle for liberation, “they almost always bring with them the marks of their origin: their prejudices and their deformations, which include a lack of confidence in the people’s ability to think, to want, and to know” (2005, p. 60). If anyone had suggested to me at the onset of this research study that I lacked confidence in my researcher collaborators’ ability to think and to know, I would have vehemently denied it. But I did.

There is a concept in CRT called interest convergence. Pioneered by Derrick Bell, its premise is that Whites only support advances for racial justice to the extent that it benefits them to do so. I was introduced to, and fascinated by this theory in a course I took on CRT, and I felt fairly confident in my knowledge of this theory and how it informed my critique of race issues. Until Alexis.

One day, I came to our research study session having just attended a symposium that I had helped organize on Whiteness and public schooling policies and practices. One of the keynote speakers drew attention to a policy that on the surface seemingly was implemented to benefit students of color. But in reality primarily served to maintain the privilege of White dominant culture—a current example of interest convergence theory played out in our local school district. I sat in the audience of mostly people of color, feeling a sense of solidarity as we nodded knowingly at the truth of his words. Fueled

with righteous passion and conviction for the “cause,” I later departed the symposium to meet with my research collaborators.

As we settled in to continue our analysis of the transcripts, I shared that I had gone to a symposium that morning about race and schools. Because some of the research collaborators seemed interested, I expanded a bit on the topic. That the speakers were addressing the issues of why inequities persisted in schools between Whites and students of color—from a paradigm that critiqued the structure of schooling as one that perpetuated inequities—because to truly change the structure of schooling in a way that would address the inequities required Whites to give up power and privilege. So as I am talking, in the back of my mind I was thinking, “How in the world can I explain this in terms that they will understand?” Now, in part, I was thinking this because of the language proficiencies, but this question was also a result of my own continuous struggle to understand and articulate the principles of CRT, and if I struggled with this, how could I expect them to understand?

I paused in my explanation, trying to think of an example I could provide them with that they could relate to when Alexis matter-a-factly said, “That is what I was saying about why a program like this is needed for other professions, but is not available. They [referring to Whites] are okay with a program like this because they benefit from it too. They need us to take care of their kids.” Now if I was a cartoon character, I would have been flipped upside down with my eyes popping out of their sockets and my head surrounded by a frenzied swirling of exclamation and question marks. Alexis not only “got it,” she got it in a context that had completely escaped me, and moreover, she had

previously tried to articulate her knowledge of this in our focus group, and I had utterly missed it.

Alexis: You know one thing that I notice is that we are in this field, we are targeting the people that are in early childhood working, but if there was more out there, more professional programs, where we can do nursing or be a doctor, it would open a huge door for a lot of people because not everyone wants to be what we are doing and this is just including this field, you know? But there's a lot of people who want to be lawyers and doctors, and if they had the opportunity to do it in Spanish it would be so big.

Focus Group Transcript Excerpt, October 23, 2010

When my brain caught up with Alexis, I said, “So that is why you believe that programs like this are not offered to become a doctor or a lawyer? Because if they were offered, it would actually allow people like you to compete with Whites for high paying, high power jobs that would threaten their power and privilege.” “Yes,” she said.

The conversation made me realize how ingrained my Whiteness is. Here I am, attending this symposium, thinking I “get it”—I am this morally superior White person, because I get it; only to, in the same day, be confronted with the reality that as much academic knowledge of critical race theory that I may have (and how long and hard it was for me to get this) it is put to shame by very fact that my White ideology led to the assumption that I needed to explain this “theory” to those who “know it”—not in an academic context—but in their own lived experiences. Alexis made a leap in her observation that I didn’t even see. Humility. That is what one of the speakers said is essential for White anti-racists. Humility. And Alexis brought this lesson home to me today.

Research Journal Excerpt, November 6, 2010

I don't think I will ever forget what I learned from Alexis that day. Another lesson in humility! A reminder that I will always have “blindspots to [my] own whiteness” (Allen, 2005, p. 62). Additionally, Alexis's analysis of why the bilingual early childhood program was “allowed” was one that I had never considered, in spite of all of my academic knowledge of CRT, but she saw it clearly from the knowledge source of her lived experiences. It made me realize that previously I had more of an abstract and

intellectual connection with the *idea* that the experiential knowledge of people of color is critical to unveiling (and ultimately transforming) racial oppression (Gloria Ladson-Billings, 1999). But this experience enabled me to internalize the legitimacy of my research collaborators as “knowers.”

Internalizing this shifted my perspective of the research study in a few significant ways. With newfound humility I realized that these women did not need me to facilitate dialog that would further their understanding of their racialized experiences. This was confirmed in a subsequent conversation we had on the terms “White” and “Mexican” and the connotations and feelings associated with each of these terms. When I asked if they had had such conversations before the matter-a-fact response was, “Not with a White person, but with Mexicans, yes.” As early as our practice focus group, their articulated understanding of oppression emerged, but one I had glossed over at the time. Rereading these transcripts with a new lens, I “listened” more deeply.

Alexis: In my experience and in my job being a Hispanic person has not given me an opportunity to be a good teacher in my center, to always being left behind and thinking that I don’t know how to do it or that I don’t know what to do. That I don’t know what to do with the kids. So that’s one of the disadvantages of me being a Mexican.

Alexis’s comments revealed her understanding of the racialized experience of “being a Mexican” as one in which her knowledge and intelligence is assumed to be less than her White co-workers and therefore she is not given the opportunities to advance in her workplace. Vividiana furthered the critique when she followed Alexis’s comments with her observation that “they need us, but they don’t want to give us the opportunity—a good one.” She, along with several of the other research collaborators, understood her supervisor’s oppression as a result of being “scared” that if she was given opportunity she could advance beyond the position of her supervisor.

Victoria: We speak two languages, where they don't. They only have the English. And we do both languages and we can communicate with a lot of people and they are scared of that.

The research collaborators also understood that their Spanish-speaking abilities and work ethic were assets that were used to benefit their White supervisors, but did not result in parallel benefits for them.

Vividiana: You know it helped her too that I could speak two languages, that I could do the paperwork in Spanish and English for parents. That helped her. But it didn't make me a better, get a better position.

Victoria: They just give us all the hard work, but here it is, we do the work and when they have opportunities they give it to other people.

Cristy: But the thing they don't want to see is that we live in the real life. They just want to see, everything is pretty, everything is beautiful, we're like OK, because we're the one's in the back working everything so you can go and talk.

My recognition of their legitimacy as knowledge-holders also transformed my reading and interpretation of the data. As I poured over the focus group transcripts, transcripts that now also captured the dialog we had during our analysis of the focus group transcripts, and even revisited the audio recordings that preceded our focus groups, I realized there was depth to these that I had previously not recognized. Part of the challenge of being able to “read” the meaning of the research collaborators’ comments was their struggle to fully express themselves in the English language. As I got to know my research collaborators, became more aware of their stance, and came from a place of appreciating their role as knowledge-holders, I was able to better interpret the intention of their word choices, which was not obvious to me at the surface. For instance, I had a different reading of Cristy’s final comments in the practice focus group than I did when I first analyzed them. Below was my new interpretation of Cristy’s comments:

But the thing they don't want to see is that we live in the real life.

White people don't want to know that we know the reality of our situation.

They just want to see, everything is pretty, everything is beautiful,

White people just want to pretend that their discrimination doesn't exist.

we're like OK, because we're the one's in the back working everything so you can go and talk.

We don't buy this because we are the ones doing the unacknowledged hard labor from which White people reap the benefits.

I was excited that the research study was affording me with an opportunity to know what the marginalized already know (Harding, 1993), and the research collaborators were also highly engaged in having such conversations about race with a White person they had come to trust.

Vividiana: It is like Alexis says, these types of conversations you have with your community, but that day was you asking her and us talking to you and being really open. Sharing what we feel.

Excerpt from Meeting Session Audio Recording, December 11, 2010

While the research collaborators were willing to share this knowledge with me, it hadn't emerged as the focus of what they wanted to share with the audiences of our research study. Our conversations revealed their ability to interrogate their racialized experiences, and yet this interrogation was not deliberately applied to our data analysis. With a research *design* informed by the intersections of CRT and PR, I had not facilitated the research process with the explicit intention of utilizing a CRT lens for the research *study*. I had been averse to imposing a CRT research agenda on the research collaborators, wary of undermining their authority and ownership in the research study. But had I been too cautious in asserting my own knowledge of CRT to guide the research study? Had I instead undermined the potential for them to produce critical research? These questions would continue to nag at me even months later as I read the notes from my dissertation advisor scrawled across my draft chapter. In response to the section in

which I wrote about how I worked with the research collaborators to develop their researcher perspectives, he wrote: “ Did they [the research collaborators] know about the CRT lens at this point?” No. In the margins of my description of the data analysis phase he asked, “Were they looking through the CRT lens at all?” No.

As time had almost run out for our weekly meetings, I grappled with the questions of if and how the CRT lens should be applied at this stage to the research study. But there was something, just beyond my ability to name, about the experience of internalizing their legitimacy as knowers that made me uncomfortable with leading the research collaborators in utilizing the CRT lens to analyze and interpret the data. I didn’t know why it didn’t feel right, but I paid attention to the tension it generated. It wasn’t until the final stage of the research when I had nearly completed writing the draft of this chapter that I was able to identify the source of this tension.

We Are Just Womans: Phase V Process Analysis

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) refer to the phenomenon of “falling in love” with research participants, and I had fallen hard. I felt a sense of mourning as I prepared for our final weekly meeting. These women had become part of my life, and while I knew we were not saying final goodbyes, I intuitively knew that the sense of community we had developed would not be recaptured once we ended our weekly meetings. For our last weekly meeting I wanted to bring a sense of closure to the analysis phase of our research study. I also wanted to take time to reflect upon the research process as a whole with the research collaborators while the experience was still fresh in their minds. Additionally, I wanted to do something to acknowledge and celebrate these women who had touched my life.

In the weeks prior I had been immersed in my own independent analysis of the transcribed dialog from these sessions. At one point I joked with the research collaborators that I was having trouble recalling their real names because of the strong association I had with each one of them through the pseudonyms used in the transcripts. I began to know the transcripts so well that I carried their voices inside of my head, replaying over and over the specific ways in which they narrated their experiences. While the research collaborators often had poked fun at the ways in which they expressed themselves in English (through the unique experience of reading and hearing their dialog translated verbatim in the transcripts), I was frequently captivated by the beauty and power of their narratives, and I wanted them to hear this beauty and power as well.

I began our meeting by reporting back to them a summary of the central themes they had identified through the data analysis process. For each theme I referenced from memory the stories they shared that supported the theme, making sure that these reflected contributions from each of the research collaborators. When I concluded my summary, Alexis stated simply, “Wow.” As I looked around the room at the faces of the research collaborators, I saw pride. Immersed in the “parts” through the analysis process, they hadn’t seen the whole. As Vividiana said, “You grab all the ideas that we come up with all of these two or three months, and you focus on the ideas that, yes, this is what it is.” With the affirmation by the other research collaborators of “yes, this is what it is” we validated that the research question we started with was still relevant, and the constructed themes that emerged from our analysis answered this research question.

We continued our meeting with reflections on each stage of the process. The research collaborators now felt confident in trusting me with the initial perspectives they

had when I had asked them to be a part of the research study. There was a lot of laughter as they revealed what they really felt about me and about the research study. We discussed the few “bumps in the road” that we had along the way, in particular those lessons learned about respecting diverse opinions and effectively facilitating our focus groups. Gloria offered an insight to the lessons we learned about our research process. “These lessons are ours. If there is another research study like this, it won’t be the same. It will be different.” I realized the truth of her words then and again as I documented the story of our research study. While others might be inspired to follow this research design, what we learned about and from the process was unique to the way the process unfolded for us.

These women agreed to participate in this research study primarily motivated by the desire to “give back to the program” and the hope that the research would help others in their community. But much like myself, they hadn’t expected how much they would learn about themselves through the research process. Similarly to their experience in the data analysis process of being focused on the parts and not really seeing the whole picture until the end, the research collaborators had been so focused on each step they needed to take in their journey as a college student that they hadn’t really stopped to turn around and appreciate how far they had come. The opportunity to reflect upon their initial fears and challenges and the influence of the program on their lives further developed their sense of accomplishment, confidence, and pride. Several of the research collaborators commented that this experience helped to renew their commitment and energy in moving forward with their educational goals.

The research process also uncovered the ways in which they had already made a difference in the lives of others, and for several of the women it fostered a new sense of purpose as an advocate for their people. Additionally, both the telling of their stories and being part of shaping the story to be told through our research validated their sense of agency.

The research collaborators role as knowledge-holders was also validated through the research process. Seeing their dialog transformed into rich data and analyzing these data for deeper meanings, all within the context of academic research, lent a sense of importance to the knowledge they had. And to their surprise, the research study also validated their knowledge of English. A few of the research collaborators commented that they were proud at how well they were able to participate in the process in English. Not only did seeing the transcripts with their dialog, most of it in English, validate their knowledge of English, but so did the process of analyzing these transcripts. The space we had created allowed them to feel comfortable taking risks in speaking English, and for most of them, it was the first formal extended learning experience in which they had participated in predominantly in English.

Included in their final reflections of the research process was the relationship they had developed with me. Alexis described the “big connection” that was created through the process between me and them: “It is like you opened your arms and said, ‘Come on.’” With the program they had developed connections in which they could depend upon each other for support and through the research process they all felt like they now knew that if they needed anything in the future that I would be there for them. Vividiana said, “You now feel like a friend.”

Despite the differences in language, race, culture, economic status, age, academic credentials, and our respective roles within the program, we somehow managed to create meaningful and authentic connections. I wanted to honor the connection I had made with these women through this research study with a small gift. I finally settled upon giving each of them a magnet at our last weekly meeting that had a quote by Ralph Waldo Emerson, which I felt captured the essence of both their journey and spirit: “What lies behind you and what lies in front of you, pales in comparison to what lies inside of you.” To my surprise the research collaborators also had a gift for both Abilene and me, which also reflected the connection we made as women: gift cards to Victoria’s Secrets.

Cristy said in her final reflection of the process: “Before when we look at you, sometimes we think because you don’t speak Spanish that we have nothing in common, and we are so different in culture and everything so you just think, ‘What are we going to talk about?’ So it’s interesting to know that we are just womans. We are going to talk about some of the same things, in the same ways, it doesn’t matter what culture, what language.” I have yet to use the Victoria’s Secret gift card I received. It lies propped against the mirror of my bedroom dresser, a visual reminder of the memories I hold of that day: of the pure enjoyment and sense of community I felt with these women in that moment; of the gratitude I had for the opportunity to hear and learn from their stories; of our light-hearted discussion of our respective ages and the different milestones in our lives we associated with being in our twenties, thirties, forties, and fifties; of the laughter and teasing as our conversation meandered from the effects of age on our bodies to our sage advice on men, relationships, and more. There were no barriers to this conversation. When someone shared something in Spanish, Abilene naturally repeated it in English for

me. Generational differences only added to the spice of the conversation. There was no line drawn between Anglo and Mexican and no positions of power and authority between “director” and “student” which inhibited our pure enjoyment of teasing each other, poking fun at ourselves, or revealing the more intimate details of our lives. It was simply a group of women, sharing stories, laughter, gossip, and wisdom.

The Stories to Be Told: Phase VI The Products of Our Research

Pizzaro (1999) cautioned, “with regard to the ‘product’ of the research, we must also recognize that it may actually not be writing at all” (p. 71). Entering the final stage of the research study I realized the truth of these words. While the research collaborators expressed interest in seeing the written product and tentatively agreed to meet additional times, as I needed, to provide feedback on the written product, they had little interest in being involved in the actual writing of the research. However, another product also resulted from our research and that was presenting our initial findings at a conference. In contrast to the written product this was instigated by the research collaborators, and while not all of the research collaborators chose to be a part of it, those who did took a great deal of interest in being involved in the creation of this product.

Writing Our Stories

I admit to not only initially feeling disappointed by the research collaborators’ lack of interest in being involved in the written product, but also feeling as if I had somehow failed in meeting the final vision for my research study, one that included all of us triumphantly crossing the finishing line together. While I did wonder if their desire to be involved more with the written product would have been stronger if I had been able to generate the written product in Spanish rather than English, I think their lack of interest

largely was because the research collaborators felt the “products” of our research had already been achieved in what they had personally gained from the process of the research study. I felt uncomfortable asking for much more of their time because I didn’t want to push their involvement in the research study past the point of when it no longer held personal meaning and value for them. Ironically, I later realized that I shared a sense of the written product as being anticlimactic to the experiences we had already shared through the research process. But this feeling only affirmed a guiding principal for the research design, which emphasized the importance of the process of research as much, or even more than, the product.

In my role as director, research instigator, and doctoral student, they perceived the written product, as well as how the research results would inform the program, as my part of the work to be completed. They also had a great deal of trust that in my writing I would faithfully represent their voice in developing the story of their experiences. In the following months, I vacillated between confidence and doubt in my ability to translate their voice into a written product worthy of their trust and representative of their narratives.

It’s been a while since I’ve written in this journal, although not because the research has been on hold, but because my regular meetings with the RCs ended. I’ve been reading and re-reading the transcripts and have begun the process of pulling the narratives together under each of the themes that speak to the research question the RCs developed. I’ve been struck so many times by the beauty and the power of the RCs narratives. It is ironic that sometimes the way they structure the language because of their challenges in grappling with the English language becomes what is almost poetic. Vividiana’s use of “trespassing barriers” and Lola’s phrase “we walk with our face up” caught my attention, and generated an idea of using their phrases as frames for the themes. I want readers to be caught up, as I am, in the power of their voice and their stories. Additionally, I want to pull these together in a way that captures the sense of interaction that occurred in our research process. These were stories

shared together, built upon each other, and when I read the transcripts, I am taken back to being in that space with them, of experiencing the interchange of conversation, the community, and I want readers to feel that as well.

Excerpt from Research Journal, January 31, 2011

One of the ongoing internal debates I had as I went back to the transcripts to “follow in the story” (Lieblich, 1998, p. 63) the themes we had identified in the analysis phase was how to share the data analysis and interpretation. I wanted the research collaborators’ voices to be a strong feature of how the story was told. Seeking inspiration from other narrative studies, the examples I found reflected the construction of a single narrative for each of the individual participants and this did not seem to fit the structure of the co-constructed narrative and shared storytelling that emerged from our dialog. So instead, I pulled together all of the dialog that related to a particular theme from the focus group transcripts, layered in the dialog from our analysis of the focus group transcripts, and organized this so that the research collaborators were retelling, in their own voices, the story.

As a novice researcher I don’t think I fully comprehended how intertwined the writing process was with continued analysis and interpretation. As the collective story emerged I often found myself questioning whether certain aspects of this was reflective of all of the research collaborators or only those who had contributed to the dialog that built the story. I also struggled with developing an interpretation of the narratives. With no more weekly meetings with the research collaborators the opportunity to delve deeper into interpreting the narratives with them was limited.

I was stuck. With questions swirling in my head regarding the direction I needed to take, I was paralyzed in continuing the writing and interpretation process. And right at that time, I received an email from Valentina:

Hello. How are you? I miss you. When are we meeting again?
Love,
[Real name] (aka Valentina ☺)

It was a sign that it was time to call for reinforcements. I called Abilene to see what her schedule was to determine a couple of potential dates we could reconvene our research team. I decided to drop in at the end of a class that the research collaborators were taking that spring to issue the invitation.

It was so good to see all of them. They told me how much they are enjoying the class they are taking this semester. It is a Spanish literature class that will count for their Humanities requirement. It is, for many, the first class they have taken outside of the bilingual EC courses or ESL/Developmental English courses. So it was a new risk—having a college instructor who was not part of this program but they are really meeting the challenge. (The instructor loves them of course).

Excerpt from Research Journal, February 19, 2010

After exchanging hugs and catching up on each other's lives, we arranged to meet in three weeks after their class ended on Saturday. In preparation for this meeting I put together the narratives I had constructed from their dialog for each of the themes. I also developed a list of questions I had for them as it related to the global impressions and interpretations of the narratives.

I was curious to see who would participate given that we were now meeting outside the time structure for which they had already received college credit for their participation. I was disappointed that Cristy, Lola, Reyna, and Eugenia did not attend. Cristy did intend to make the meeting but had to stay home with her sick infant. Lola had struggled the most to get away from family obligations to attend our meetings, and I

suspected that without the excuse of having to attend “class” she was unable to do so. I was not surprised that Reyna and Eugenia chose not to attend. Overall, their engagement and interest in the research study had been less enthusiastic than that of the other research collaborators.

After the ritual of taking time for social interactions had been completed, I handed out the copies of the narratives. As I read each of the narratives, there were only a few comments made by the research collaborators. While the structure of the narratives were new, they were familiar with the content from our analysis, and their comments were limited to affirming and even retelling the stories reflected in the narratives. They expressed a sense of amazement at seeing in writing how the data were woven together to create the narratives. As Vividiana stated proudly, “This came from us!” This response affirmed my desire to ensure that as I continued to develop the narrative, layering in the interpretation, that the final written product would still provoke the reaction of “this came from us.”

Critical to creating such a final written product was sharing the emerging interpretations and global impressions with the research collaborators for their feedback. This process of checking in with the research collaborators helped clarify aspects of the story that were shared by all of them versus those that were experienced differently by certain individuals. Additionally, their feedback shored up my confidence that the interpretations and global impressions I had developed were truly reflective of their experiences. The lens I was seeing the data through came from a place of knowing them.

While I was not developing an individual narrative for each of the research collaborators, I wanted readers to have the opportunity to gain an impression of each of

the women as I had come to know them. To assist with the process of writing an individual profile for each of the research collaborators, I asked them to write down a list of adjectives or descriptive phrases that they would use to describe themselves. As each research collaborator then shared what she had written, I invited the others to share anything they would add to the description. Not only did we have fun with this activity, but also it turned out to be another affirmation as to how well we had gotten to know each other through our research study.

This meeting gave me the confidence and insights I needed to continue the writing process.

My meeting with the research collaborators really inspired my writing. I was stuck, struggling with how to put together the storylines...I was unsure about how to appropriately insert my voice in the narratives. I wanted to make sure to honor their voice, and didn't want it to only be me imposing my interpretation of the text I was pulling together. I was uncomfortable with this especially because this process was in part to ensure that it was their voice that was crafting the research. I have now written for almost two days straight, inserting my narrative in between the texts, much more confident that my "voice" is the thread that is weaving together their story.

Excerpt from Research Journal, March 14, 2011

For What Purpose and For Whom?

To me there are two stories. There is the story I want to come from their voice, of their experiences in the program, and of how they want to tell this story based upon our analysis/interpretation of the data. And my voice is a supporting role in facilitating the reader's understanding of this story. Then, there is the story that I want to tell of our experience with the research process. My voice leads this story and while I want there to be space for their voice in the research story, I believe that this needs to be more about what I learned, as a White researcher, from engaging in this research process.

Excerpt from Research Journal, March 14, 2011

With discovery of the second story that needed to be told, my narrative of the research process, I turned my attention from writing their story to writing mine. Included

in this process was my examination of my responsibilities as a White critical researcher working within the intersections of CRT and PR. As I continued my writing, I kept circling back to the question of if and how CRT should be utilized in the interpretation of their story. While there were places within the narrative in which I could impose my own interpretation utilizing the CRT lens, this was not the lens with which the research collaborators had interpreted their experiences in the program. And I asked myself, “Why was that?” Earlier in the data analysis process I had assumed it was because I had failed to lead the research collaborators in developing this type of lens to analyze and interpret the data. But my experience with internalizing their legitimacy as knowers made me realize the assumption that they needed to “develop” a critical lens was faulty. While they may have lacked the academic terms associated with CRT, their ability to name their oppression and oppressors had been demonstrated on more than one occasion in analyzing contexts outside of their experiences at the college. Understanding this now led me to once again confront my reluctance to facilitate the analysis process in such a way that encouraged the research collaborators to apply this lens to our research study.

This reluctance partially stemmed from the difficulty of defining my role as a White researcher working within a design in which I was engaging the marginalized as researchers of their own experiences. The issues of power and knowledge in my researcher role were challenging to navigate. In every respect an inequitable balance of power existed between myself and the research collaborators because of socioeconomic, cultural, racial, linguistic, and educational differences. Within this context I also was attempting to further redefine traditional relationships of power and knowledge between the researcher and the participants by avoiding “traditional epistemologies’ top-down

tendencies” (Pizarro, 1999, p. 61). Because of this I found myself hesitant to assert my knowledge in the process of defining and implementing the research study. But I wondered if this decision resulted in a lost opportunity to engage the research collaborators in critical research.

Lather (1986) suggested that critical research can be measured by its catalytic validity or “the degree to which the research process reorients, focuses, and energizes the participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it” (p. 272). Reflecting on this in the context of our research process I had two insights. The first insight was that I also was a research participant. My participation in this research process resulted in my own reorientation to knowing reality; this knowing gained from the critical dialogs with my research collaborators. The second insight was that the story my research collaborators *chose* to tell was because they had an intimate understanding of their reality, and they wanted to transform it.

The critical dialogs I had with the research collaborators revealed their understanding of the oppressive forces shaping their lives. So much so that their critique of whiteness is only shared amongst their own with a cautious exception made for a White researcher they came to trust. To present such a critique to a larger audience does not feel safe for a group of women intimately familiar with the fear of “living in the darkness.” Having this critique sometimes wars with wanting to be accepted by White dominant culture, to be perceived as someone of value, to be recognized as someone other than the negative image of Mexican immigrants produced by the dominant culture. And while they may nurture some small hope of the White community acknowledging

their value, these women also know that Whites are invested maintaining their power and privilege and will likely respond negatively to any critique that threatens this.

While the CRT lens could have been utilized for me, and others like me, to better understand the forces of oppression within the context of post-secondary education for this particular student population, this was not representative of the story they wanted to tell. They do not perceive telling such a story to benefit their community, and in fact from their perspective it could endanger the very program that offered women like them a form of resistance to the oppressive forces in their lives. Knowing this shaped their response to the question: For whom is the research for and for what purpose?

It is for other women like them: women balancing the responsibilities of family and work and desiring “to be more” in both these arenas; women struggling with self-doubt and lack of confidence because of the oppressive forces in their lives; women who dream of transforming their reality but don’t know how or are too afraid to do so. It is for me, and others like me, who have the privilege and power to work against institutional structures that reproduce and maintain power inequities such as English-only post-secondary educational opportunities. And it is for them: a validation of their agency and their advocacy in both living the story of their experience and telling the story of their experience.

I also realized that while CRT had not been applied formally to our analysis and interpretation of their focus group data, once again I had been guilty of missing how their analysis and interpretation named CRT experiences without the academic language. As I reread the narratives a framework of CRT became evident. With this guiding framework

for the stories they told, I spent the next few months reorganizing the narrative and connecting it to the literature that grounded it in academic concepts related to CRT.

Telling Their Story

At one of our meetings in the previous semester, Vividiana shared that her husband was a member of an organization that was sponsoring a statewide conference on bilingual education. She said, “I think you should present our research at this conference.” As other research collaborators nodded their heads in agreement, I laughed and said, “Oh no, if you guys want our research presented at the conference, then you will be the presenters.” It was decided that Vividiana would take the lead and work with Abilene and myself to develop the presentation proposal. If the proposal was accepted, we would then work with any of the other research collaborators who wanted to be involved in the conference to develop the structure and content of the presentation.

In February we submitted our proposal, and in March we were notified that our proposal had been accepted. Abilene and Vividiana contacted the other research collaborators who had originally expressed interest in presenting at the conference to schedule a planning meeting. Two of these research collaborators decided not to participate due to work and school demands. The conference “team” consisted of Abilene, Vividiana, Cristy, Victoria, and myself.

The conference team met in April to develop the structure and content of our presentation. In advance of this meeting I had emailed the team a copy of the chapter I had been working on that presented their research findings. When we met, we first reviewed the chapter for their comments and feedback. The team members mostly highlighted aspects of the chapter they really liked. When I asked if there was any part of

my narrative that was inaccurate or misrepresenting their interpretations of the research, they all felt that I was “right” in what I was writing. Victoria added, “And we finally get to hear your voice.” Her comment reminded me once again how sophisticated their knowing really was.

Moving on the presentation planning, we decided to provide a brief overview of the program and the research process and then present the five central themes that had emerged from our research. We created a power point presentation to guide our sharing of the themes. Each slide had an excerpt from our focus group dialog that reflected the themes. For each theme, we identified stories we wanted to share that came from the data and the presenter who would share it. As we concluded our meeting, we decided to meet one more time to practice the presentation.

In May, the conference team came together for our practice session. In advance of this meeting I had sent out the power point presentation with notes on the stories we had identified and presenters who would be sharing the stories. When we met it was clear that Abilene, Cristy, Victoria, and Vividiana had spent a great deal of time preparing. Each of them had written their own notes about what they were going to share. As we started the presentation this became problematic because they were reading from their notes rather than just telling the story of their experiences. When I shared this observation Vividiana and Victoria revealed they were nervous they would “forget their words” in English because of being anxious about presenting at the conference. I said, “It’s a bilingual conference. If you forget your words in English, share it in Spanish and someone else can translate for those in the audience that don’t know Spanish.” Abilene then made the suggestion that rather than focusing on “presenting” to the audience, that

we approach this much like our research process in which we engaged each other in dialog about the experiences they wanted to share. I could act as the facilitator asking each of them guiding questions to prompt their sharing of a particular experience. I thought this was an ingenious idea because it not only took the pressure off the research collaborators in terms of remembering everything they were supposed to share, but it also would be reflective of the structure of the research process. Everyone else also felt more comfortable with this format and it was with this structure we used to complete the practice of our presentation.

On the day of the conference the team members arrived excited and nervous. As our presentation wasn't scheduled until later in the day we spent our morning attending other sessions. What was fascinating for me was how much they were identifying with the content of bilingual education in the context of working with younger students. Not only were they excited about what they were learning in relation to their role as teachers but also how it related to understanding their own experiences of learning English. During lunch as we processed some of what we had learned our discussion turned to thinking about the implications of this in shaping the bilingual early childhood program. After lunch it was time for our presentation.

They were wonderful. Their stories shared the power of their experiences with the program and the impact of bilingual education at the post-secondary level. We had about 20 people in the audience and they were all very receptive and appreciative of the presentation. The RCs were funny, authentic, and “on the mark”—great in telling their stories, and they didn't seem at all nervous. At the end of our presentation when we were answering audience questions, a woman in the audience raised her hand and identified herself as a teacher that Vividiana used to work with as a teacher assistant in her bilingual classroom. She shared that when she knew Vividiana then she never spoke English. And that now to see her, in front of a group of strangers, speaking English, and reflecting confidence,

it really spoke to her about how much Vividiana had grown and the impact of the program.

It was truly a remarkable thing to be part of, to share this experience with them. They were bursting with pride at the end of our session. I was too.

Excerpt from Research Journal, May 12, 2011



The Conference Team

The tangible products of the research study were the conference presentation and my dissertation, as well as the way the research informed changes in the program (discussed further in chapter VI). Additionally, I am committed to getting an article published that captures the results of our research study, not because I am personally motivated to author such an article but because I want this for my research collaborators. I want them to have this final acknowledgment and recognition of the importance and value of their knowledge and their voice.

Less tangible as “products” was what we gained from the research process. For the research collaborators it was an opportunity to reflect upon, affirm, and celebrate their journey over the past three years. In naming their experiences they recognized their roles as knowledge-holders, role models, and change agents. And through the process of transforming dialog to data, data to research findings, and research findings to a written product, we all discovered the power of their voice.

CHAPTER IV: THE RESEARCH COLLABORATORS

Ten students in the bilingual early childhood program, along with the assistant program coordinator, joined me as research collaborators for the purpose of creating and implementing a research study on the experiences of Latina immigrant, primary-Spanish speakers in a community college bilingual program. Guided by a desire to help others in their community, the research collaborators developed the following research question to guide our study: What is the influence of a bilingual early childhood degree program on the lives of primary Spanish-speaking, Latina immigrant students participating in the program? Data was collected through the transcribing of audio-recordings of two focus group sessions with the research collaborators as participants of these sessions. Together we used a holistic-content analysis approach to analyze the data. Just as our reading of the transcripts was informed by our knowledge of each of the individual personalities, backgrounds, and even language proficiencies, it is my intention for our readers to “hear” the unique voice of each of the research collaborators that forms the community narrative shared in Chapter V. In this chapter, I provide an introduction to each of the research collaborators through my construction of a “profile” developed from my observations, the research collaborators’ researcher perspectives, and stories shared in our weekly sessions.

Abilene: Passionate Warrior, Nurturing Den Mother

Abilene, currently in her late 30s, has recently remarried. She has one teenage daughter from her first marriage and now also has three stepchildren. Abilene came to the United States when she was 25 years old. Her mother and two of her siblings

eventually also relocated to the United States, while her father and two other siblings still live in Mexico.

Abilene had known that the English language would be one of her biggest barriers, but she also began to recognize that her accent and appearance, markers of her immigrant status, were barriers more difficult to overcome.

I realized that due to these barriers it would be difficult for me to get a job in the field where I worked in my home country of Mexico. In the United States it didn't matter how well educated or experienced I was in the field, my appearance gave me a job as a housekeeper.

Despite her education and experience as a teacher in Mexico, Abilene was frustrated when the only job she could initially get in the United States was working as a housekeeper. While she eventually transitioned from working as a housekeeper, to working as a nanny, and then as a teaching assistant in an early childhood center, she was troubled by the injustices she observed in her working environment; those experienced by the Mexican immigrant children and her Mexican immigrant co-workers. Abilene wrote: "By this time I started to see the world in a different way; I began to feel that I had to fight to make a change for my people and myself."

Her "fight to make a change" led to continuing her own educational journey as a college student and becoming a leader in the bilingual early childhood program. Abilene's experiences as a student influenced her role as a leader and her experiences with leadership influenced her role as student.

I feel like I can't fail because a lot of you guys depend upon me. I feel like I have to set a trail for everybody, like I was walking in front of you and then just saying, 'OK come on, this way, this way (laughing), follow me.'

Abilene is like a den mother, a leader and protector of "her girls," she nurtures them, pushes and prods them to keep on the right path, and proudly boasts of their

accomplishments. She has also become a self-described “warrior” for her people.

Abilene’s passion for her work with the bilingual early childhood program is as much about providing primary Spanish-speakers with access to and opportunity through post-secondary education, as it is about growing “our own” bilingual teachers for Mexican immigrant children.

Abilene is an articulate and confident speaker and in a room full of people she commands attention. She laughs easily at herself, even at her tendencies to be “a bit of a dictator.” If a meeting or a class is not being organized effectively, she does not hesitate to step in and assert her opinion as to what needs to be done differently. Abilene’s voice is most often fueled by her passion and conviction.

Alexis: Self-Reliant, Blunt, Tough, Street-wise intellectual.

Alexis presents a tough exterior to the world and it is only those whom she allows the opportunity to know her, who will see both her strength and her vulnerability. As a young child, Alexis was in a car accident that left her with severe scarring to her face. The stares and taunting by other children created a sense of shame and isolation: “I started to hide from everybody because I felt embarrassed and afraid of them for making fun of me.” When Alexis moved to the United States with her family at the age of fifteen, she was further isolated. Her parents felt she was too old to go to school so they found her a job instead. But she spent much of her time alone, isolated by language barriers and the persistent shame of being “ugly.”

Alexis’s life changed when she became a mother. Married at 18, and with the births of her two children, there was “no room for her sorrows,” as she embraced loving and being loved by her family. But when her children were young, Alexis’s family was

ripped apart when her husband was deported back to Mexico. She in essence became a “single mother” and with only herself to rely upon, for the next two decades she focused all of her time and energy doing whatever she needed to do to support and nurture her children. Currently in her late 40s with two grown children, her identity as a mother is still sacrosanct, but Alexis now also relishes her identity as a college student and as a “Mexican professional.”

Alexis has struggled in college, but this is because of her lack of formal schooling. While she is extremely proficient with her conversational English and Spanish, she had very limited reading and writing proficiencies in either language. She is highly intelligent and this has been reflected in her phenomenal leaps in academic proficiencies, as well as her sophisticated analysis of her experiences and critiques of social structures.

Alexis holds high standards for herself and others, and while she has little tolerance for fools (among those her White supervisors), she is pragmatic and is willing to endure unsatisfactory situations if it gets her what she needs. She exhibits a high degree of self-reliance, forming her own opinions and making her own decisions. And Alexis can always be counted upon for her blunt assessments of the rest of the world.

There is a sense that Alexis holds herself apart from others, only allowing a select few to be part of her inner circle. Knowing Alexis as I do now, I think she would be surprised at this perspective of her, because I think what she projects is an unconscious protection against the rejection she still fears stemming from her childhood experiences. I can admit that Alexis initially intimidated me. Her tough-as-nails attitude and my sense that she was weighing and measuring my worth, caused a certain anxiety that she would

dismiss me as someone she found lacking value. While I am fairly certain she is largely unaware of this, there is something about Alexis that makes others, including myself, want to earn her respect.

Cristy: Mother-to-be Mediator, Little sister Seeker.

Cristy first came to the United States when she was sixteen and then again when she was eighteen. She is married and, for most of the duration of our research study, pregnant with her first child. Of the research collaborators, she is probably the most comfortable with the English language, and (perhaps related) she is also one of the only research collaborators who has White friends.

Cristy is often seeking to understand the “why” of things. When puzzling out the behaviors and motivations of others, she tends to assume the best of people and tries to frame her understanding by theorizing about the unknown factors motivating the behavior.

My Auntie and me went to Sonic and she was kinda like, ‘How can this guy be working at Sonic? He has citizenship, his first language is English, and he doesn’t have nothing to stop him. He can be going to college and he doesn’t have that dream, he just wants to work at Sonic.’ And looking at her, I am like that’s not a bad thing to be working at Sonic, but not because you are stuck there, you know what I mean? Maybe he doesn’t have nobody to hold his hand like the way you guys are doing. Maybe that’s the answer. They don’t have nobody to say, ‘OK, it’s not that hard, go step by step.’

It is this aspect of her personality that generated her appreciation for the activity of developing a researcher perspective. In exploring what values inform her “researcher perspective,” Cristy reflected upon the role of her mother in her life, the relationship between her parents, and the impact of this on her own identity as a woman.

Today I know that we have the right to be treated like any other human being without caring about gender, and also we have the right to express

our opinions, to have the voice to make my own decision, and to be valued and respected. Our strength isn't measured in muscles, but in the way we confront our problems. A woman doesn't need man to be complete; a woman is as complete and competent as the man.

[Translated from Cristy's Researcher Perspective]

Taking after her mother, Cristy does not like for others around her to be unhappy or hurt. She often played the role of mediator in our group. When there was potential conflict brewing as a result of differing opinions, Cristy stepped in to validate the perspectives of each individual and even demonstrate how the perspectives weren't that far apart.

Cristy is in her early twenties and, as one of the youngest of the research collaborators, was often treated like a little sister by some of her older peers. This was especially notable with the advice and teasing she received from the experienced mothers as she anticipated the arrival of her first child. She also received a great deal of teasing when her over usage of "like" and "you know what I mean?" became evident in the reading of our transcripts. Cristy received all teasing with good humor.

Eugenia: Jokester, Defender, Complex Rebel

Eugenia, in her mid-twenties, is a divorced mother of two young children. Through Job Corps Eugenia was able to receive training to become a nurse's assistant and for two years worked as a nurse's assistant at a facility for the elderly. While she enjoyed her work as a nurse's assistant, her hours had been cut and were no longer enough for her to support her family. A contact at her place of employment, who had a daughter with special needs, arranged for Eugenia to interview for an educational assistant position at the high school her daughter attended. For the last three years,

Eugenia has worked as an educational assistant for children with special needs at this high school.

Of all of the research collaborators, Eugenia is the least known to me. In small part I think this was due to her numerous absences from our meetings, but even when she attended, she rarely contributed to the dialog. Her primary motivation for joining the study was because her friend Reyna did, and to me, she seemed largely disengaged from the research process. For the most part, Eugenia only talked during the social times; and when she did it was mostly with Reyna and always in Spanish. However, on more than one occasion she was quick to jump in to the dialog with teasing comments directed at other research collaborators.

On the surface Eugenia appeared somewhat cavalier about life in general. This impression was formed by her attitude of disinterest and the fact that she was a bit of a jokester. But what makes Eugenia complex is that more than any other research collaborator she rarely revealed her “true self.” It wasn’t until late in the research study that I got glimpses of what laid beneath the surface.

While Eugenia seemed to understand the conversations in English, the fact that she always spoke Spanish led me lead me to believe that she just didn’t speak English. But on the one occasion she chose to share at length, in English, I not only discovered this was a bad assumption, but it is one that that Eugenia deliberately promotes. Eugenia holds a deep distrust, even dislike, for monolingual English, White people, especially those in positions of power. She revealed that her negative experiences have led to the deliberate strategy of pretending she cannot understand or speak English with White

people. It is her way of rebelling against the discrimination and marginalization she has experienced.

Sometimes they think I don't speak English because I can't, but when I need to open my mouth, I can go. You say I don't speak English, OK, I don't speak English, but I can understand everything you say...

She even seemed to have a hard time understanding my own motivations, as a monolingual English speaker, in starting the bilingual early childhood degree program.

This was revealed in her researcher perspective when she wrote: "You are a very special person because you don't even speak Spanish, and you continue to support us."

Eugenia's rebellions extend to her work with the children with special needs. She deliberately subverts the expectations of other employees as to the boundaries she should draw between herself and the students.

The other Wednesday, I am going to go to McDonalds and I buy three [cheeseburgers]. I buy one for me, and the others I share with the students. And that teacher, she told me, you're not supposed to buy for the students. And I told her, I not supposed to but if I want, what can you do?

Eugenia deliberately crosses these boundaries because of the passion that Eugenia feels for the students she works with. I was surprised by the passion she revealed for working with students with special needs, but now understand it comes from a place of knowing what it feels like to be labeled "stupid." As she described how others treated both her and these children at her school, a new picture of Eugenia emerged for me. Eugenia is a rebel fueled by strong emotions of anger and resentment caused by her mistreatment by others. But she also demonstrates her capacity to care deeply for others and is a defender and champion of others, like her, who have been ill treated by society.

Gloria: Listener Poet, Graceful Believer

Gloria spent the early years of her childhood living in Mexico. Her family raised her in accordance with Christian values that have remained central throughout her life.

We would gather every afternoon and every Sunday to read the bible to my siblings and cousins, she also told us stories based on the bible. This is how I learned to have moral values like love for God, love for others, honesty, respect for my parents and to be obedient.

[translated from Gloria's Researcher Perspective]

When Gloria completed the sixth grade, her father moved their family to a boarder town in Mexico to be part of a new church. Gloria began working as a teacher's assistant in the church, and because she desired to become a teacher, she asked her father if she could take the teacher training courses that were available in the city of Chihuahua.

He denied my request. At this time traditions were that women weren't suppose to leave their parents house until they got married. I got a job in a library where I found out about adult education and decided to enroll, here is where I finished my high school. Later I met a good man. We were compatibles in a lot of ways. I had to make the decision of getting married or going to college. At the time, marriage and school didn't go together. Even though I passed the admissions test I decided to put my education on hold.

[translated from Gloria's Researcher Perspective]

Gloria and her husband moved to the United States and for the next two decades spent her time raising her children and taking care of their home. When her children were fully-grown, with families of their own, she took on a job of working as a teacher's assistant in a childcare center. Currently in her early fifties, Gloria has lived in the United States for over twenty years, but she struggles to speak English. She is, however, quite proficient in reading and writing English and in her native language, she speaks and writes poetically.

Regardless of the language being spoken, Gloria is a listener, not a talker. When she does speak, she does so with just a few words that express the absolute essence of the ideas she wants to share. She has a presence of quiet grace, which compliments her life of faith.

Lola: Opinionated Social butterfly, Open-book Whirlwind

Lola was the only research collaborator that I did not receive a researcher perspective from. In many ways this reflects her tendencies as a college student. Lola is our social butterfly. She has an absolute love for the social aspects of being a college student and enjoys the learning itself because it is fun. But what she does not find as fun is the reading and writing requirements and tends to drag her feet on completing these. With Lola, I didn't need a researcher perspective to gain more information about her personal life. She is an open book and freely discloses all sorts of information about her life to anyone that wants to listen.

Lola is in her late twenties, married, and has three children. She came to the United States with her husband and has a large family in Mexico. While she has only been here for a few years, she has strong oral proficiencies in English perhaps not surprising given her love for talking. However, she has very limited reading and writing proficiencies in English. Even in Spanish Lola tended to avoid reading when she was growing up. It wasn't until she took her early childhood literacy class that she discovered all reading wasn't boring.

Valentina let me borrow a book. Remember you let me borrow a book? And I thought, 'Oh no, that is boring; it doesn't have pictures' (laughter from the group). But I thought about what the teacher says, start reading, so I start reading and by the third page, I was like, OK, I need to finish it now. I want to know what happened to those kids. And I remember that

was at work and they were calling me, and I was like, no, no, no I need to finish this (more laughter from the group).

Apropos of her personality Lola always makes a grand entrance; mostly because she invariably has a story she just can't wait to tell about what happened on the way to her arrival destination and also because she is always late. Lola laughs about her inability to make it anywhere on time, and in fact, when we shifted our meeting time to a half hour later to accommodate a change in one of the research collaborator's schedule, Lola decided it was better to "tell herself" that the time was still the same because that way she might make it on time. (That only worked for about two meetings.) Usually she laid the blame for her lateness with her husband or her children. More often than not, Lola came to our meetings with her infant in one arm, a diaper bag over one shoulder, pushing a carriage, and with two other children trailing behind her.

Lola's emotions are as loud as her personality. She is free in expressing them and can, in one minute, go from ranting about the clerk at the gas station to laughing about something that happened in class that week. She does not shy away from expressing her opinions and can be pretty blunt in doing so, even when she herself is the target.

We all have kids. And we've been raising them like minus 10. And now I am learning all of these things I didn't know and I have three kids and I am like, oh, what? (laughter) So I don't know how I raised those [kids]. I was blind, and now I know these things. So now I guess the little one is going to get lucky.

Lola's exuberance for life is reflected in the animated way she speaks. She is a natural storyteller, drawing her audience in with exaggerated expressions, narrative sounds, and humor. She is a whirlwind of energy that is contagious to those around her.

Reyna: Practical Independent, Quiet pride Closer

Reyna, in her mid-twenties, is a single mother of one daughter. She came to the United States as a teenager with her parents. Her father, having only completed a sixth grade education, worked hard to achieve a license to sell and buy cars, eventually owning his own business. Reyna inherited his work ethic and worked a number of different jobs, such as a dishwasher, a hotel maid, and a cashier to support herself and her daughter. She was also able to earn her GED and a certificate in business office technology and secured a job working in a human resources office. From there, she earned her educational assistant certificate and began working in the public schools as a teacher assistant.

Reyna is very practical about her career and educational decisions. While she enjoys working with children, she was also motivated by the schedule, which would allow her to have the same vacations as her daughter. Her primary motivation for continuing her schooling was so that she could receive a pay raise for her job. Whatever her primary motivations, Reyna has a quiet pride in doing her best at whatever she does. While she doesn't seek or need the approval of others, she gains satisfaction when her supervisors recognize her work ethic and professionalism.

While Reyna's verbal English skills are on par with Cristy and Alexis, in contrast to these two, she is more likely to converse in Spanish. In fact because most of her contributions to the conversations were in Spanish, I did not realize how advanced her English skills were until much later in the research study.

Reyna was much more reserved towards me at the onset of the research study. Rather than speak directly to me, she initially only spoke to the other women in the study. Similarly to Eugenia, she also had a hard time comprehending why I, as a monolingual

English, White person, would be motivated to help Latina immigrant women. But she warmed up to me, eventually communicating with me in English; a sign that she began to trust me. She later wrote in her researcher perspective, “Thank you Erica for believing in us.”

Whether in English or Spanish, Reyna played the role of “the closer” in our meetings. She would often sit and listen to everything that was said, and then, just as we were wrapping up our meeting, would finally say, “I have something I want to share.” While sometimes these contributions related directly to the discussion, her closing comments were as likely to be independent of anything previously shared. This was very reflective of her independent nature.

Solymar: Kind-hearted Traditional, Humble Perseverant

Solymar, currently in her early forties, has lived in the United States for over two decades. After completing the sixth grade in Mexico, Solymar worked as a nanny while continuing to go to school in the evenings until she completed the equivalency of a ninth grade education. She continued to live in Mexico for a few years but struggled to find work opportunities and eventually made the decision to move to the United States.

When Solymar came to the United States, she was able to live with a cousin and his wife and work in their convenience store. She remembers only being able to say “thank you” and “come back soon” in English at that time. Solymar’s desire to learn more English led her to take a class in English at a local community college. However, her cousin, “a strange man” did not “allow” her to continue with the English courses. While Solymar did not reveal too many details about her situation at this time, it was

clear that it was less than ideal when she described how her cousin's wife helped her to move away without her cousin knowing.

Solymer's move to a new city, far away from her cousin, initially left her with no place to stay and no transportation. She eventually found work as a laborer at a farm and also continued with an English class at a nearby community college. Shortly after she met a man and became pregnant with her first child and was unable to continue work and her English class. For a time Solymer raised her son on her own until she met and married another man. Solymer and her husband, working two shifts, were eventually able to buy their own home, and they also welcomed their daughter into the world.

For several years, Solymer was content with life, but great tragedy struck when her son was killed.

Everything became dark in my life. I felt that my life didn't have any sense and I didn't want to live. I tried to find peace but I wasn't able to find it.

[translated from Solymer's Researcher Perspective]

For her daughter's sake Solymer battled the darkness, and today has found peace in the knowledge that her son's spirit is always with her and her daughter is the light that helps her persevere.

In spite of her multiple experiences of being subject to loss and cruelty at the hands of others, Solymer has a kind-hearted nature and still looks for the best in all people. She is much more traditional than most of the research collaborators; conservative in her political views and reluctant to be critical of those in authority positions. Despite my own informality, Solymer's desire to demonstrate her respect for me had her calling me Ms. Volkers throughout the research study.

While Solymar's oral comprehension is fairly high, she still struggles greatly to express her thoughts in English. And while this was a factor in her more limited contributions to our conversations, Solymar is also more generally reserved and private. She is also a very humble person and was a bit bashful about acknowledging her accomplishments.

Valentina: Tactfully honest Risk-taker, Regal Businesswoman.

Valentina grew up in a small town in Mexico and was actually a childhood friend of Abilene. When she was a teenager she became a teacher in small communities where schooling was limited because of their rural nature and the small numbers of children. Valentina did not come to the United States until her mid-twenties. Here she found work as a housekeeper and eventually established her own house cleaning business.

Valentina takes pride in her identity as a businesswoman. She enjoys owning her own house cleaning business because of the autonomy it gives her. Once, when Abilene remarked that many Mexican women cleaned houses because they did not have other options available to them, Valentina was quick to defend her "choice" to do so.

I do this because I want to. I set my own hours. I am my boss. I do not have anyone telling me what to do. I make more money than if I was a teacher.

Unlike the other research collaborators Valentina is not in the early childhood degree program with the goal of being a teacher. However, she still feels that her learning, especially gains in academic skills, is beneficial to advancing her professionalism. But perhaps more meaningful to her is what she is learning about children that enhances her parenting.

Valentina, currently in her late thirties, is a single mother of two daughters. Her eldest daughter, who is just entering middle school, often accompanied her to our weekly meetings. Unlike the other children that accompanied their mothers on occasion Valentina's daughter sat at the tables with the rest of the research collaborators listening intently to the conversation, sometimes even contributing. Her daughter's maturity and self-confidence are reflective of Valentina's success in raising daughters who are secure in their own identity; much like her.

Valentina enjoys new challenges and sees herself as a risk-taker. When she started the program, she did not share many of the fears that other research collaborators had but embraced it as a new opportunity to challenge herself. I think her risk-taker personality is also reflected in her willingness to be the first one to voice a dissenting or potentially controversial opinion. I could always count on Valentina to be tactfully honest in her reflections upon the research process. When something didn't feel right she would bring it out into the open, paving the way for others to feel more comfortable in an honest examination of what the problem was.

Valentina has a regal bearing in the way she carries herself. I was guilty of initially translating this as standoffishness, but quickly discovered that her regal carriage was reflective of her quiet confidence and that hidden behind this was a bit of shyness mixed with a loving and playful nature.

Victoria: Vivacious Shepherdess, Compassionate Extrovert

Victoria, who is in her mid-thirties, moved with her husband to the United States just three years ago. She did not speak any English and she did not know anybody. This is difficult for me to imagine because Victoria loves to talk (in English or Spanish) and

loves to be with her friends. Victoria has a vivacious personality that is as infectious as her smile. She projects warmth and compassion, which lends to an impression of easy acceptance of all people. These qualities make her an ideal foster mother.

Victoria puts in my mind the image of a shepherdess gathering up little lost lambs, guiding them to a place called home, and guarding against any lurking wolves that might threaten her flock. Over a year ago Victoria applied for and received her foster care license. She did so because she wanted to “help brothers and sisters not to separate from their families.” She is currently fostering five young siblings that have suffered many traumatizing experiences. She carries an incredible burden in dealing with all of their psychological issues, as well as having to deal with “the system” and the jailed parents, who despite all their abuse and neglect still have visitation rights.

Victoria was dealing with all of this during the height of our research study. There were days when she was preoccupied and tired, and thus was not her usual talkative self. Fortunately, Victoria’s parents recently moved from Mexico to be with their daughter and help her with the children. But even with this help Victoria found that she needed to quit her job in order give her full attention to meeting the children’s needs. In spite of the challenges Victoria regards these children as “little miracles”; but as for the rest of the research collaborators it is Victoria who is perceived as miraculous.

Unlike the other research collaborators Victoria had attended college in Mexico, and was more comfortable with the academic expectations of being a college student. Still, it is quite incredible to me that having no English reading, writing, or oral skills when she arrived to the United States she has already advanced through the first level of

developmental English courses. Victoria was also able to successfully apply for U.S. citizenship, and is currently assisting her parents to also become U.S. citizens.

Vividiana: Empathetic Dreamer, Artistic Caretaker

Vividiana, currently in her early thirties, came to the United States with her parents when she was a child. She entered the seventh grade and promptly felt overwhelmed with her lack of English language skills and no access to bilingual services. Just as things were starting to look up when the school hired a certified bilingual teacher to help her and some of the other students, Vividiana's parents decided to move back to Mexico. In Mexico Vividiana no longer attended school, but instead was working as a field laborer in the apple orchards. But Vividiana still dreamed of school and having a better future for herself.

With limited work opportunities Vividiana's parents eventually realized they had made a mistake in moving back to Mexico, and Vividiana's mother convinced her father that they needed to move back to the United States. But this time Vividiana was unable to resume her schooling, as the family needed her to work. While Vividiana tried to get her GED she lived in a state that did not allow undocumented immigrants to pursue this educational pathway. It wasn't until 2006, when she came to live in a new state with her husband and her two young children, that Vividiana was finally able to acquire her GED.

Vividiana husband, who has a college degree and is also an educator, has played a significant role in supporting Vividiana's education, encouraging her, pushing her, and assisting her with her studies. While Vividiana began the program while working in a childcare center, an injury to her knee became an opportunity, as she made the decision to

pursue her degree as a full-time student. She has just recently successfully passed her citizenship test and completed the ceremony to officially become a U.S. Citizen.

If there is a “teacher’s pet” personality among the group it is Vividiana. But only because she is so serious in her dedication to her studies and eager to soak up every bit of learning. She is also someone that sought out mentors for her educational journey and Abilene and myself now play that role.

Vividiana is extremely empathetic. She feels the struggles of others and is readily available to offer her assistance when needed. She wraps people up with the soft blanket of her gentle, caring, and considerate nature. She is also an artist, but the pictures she paints are with words. While the research collaborators teased Vividiana when they noticed how much she talked when we reviewed the focus group transcripts, it was recognized that her words often beautifully and accurately captured the sentiments of the rest.

CHAPTER V: TRESPASSING BARRIERS

Introduction

Our research findings are presented through a co-constructed community narrative that is not only reflective of our research process but also of the community that exists among the women participating in the research process. The co-constructed community narrative that emerged from our data was characterized by group identification with particular experiences, speaking as “we,” and “participatory contributions.”

Initially I thought when only one or two individuals shared on a particular topic it was because they were the only ones who identified with the question. But in going through the process of analyzing the transcripts with the research collaborators, and later in constructing the themes with them, I learned that in many instances there was a sense among the women that they felt it was not necessary for each individual to speak to a particular experience when it had already been captured by the story of one individual. As Solymar expressed, “It is the culture that we have the same. Sometime she say something that I, oh, I was going to say that, but she already said it, so I don’t.” This idea of group identification with a particular experience was reinforced with comments such as, “It is like Vividiana said,” or “What I think, it is like Lola said.”

There also were times in our conversation when a question was asked of the whole group, and while there was an affirmative response by the rest of the research

collaborators, it was only one or two women who would expand further using “we” language to speak for the group.

Abilene: Do you feel comfortable [reaching out to others to join the program]?

Several voices: Oh yeah. Yes. Yes.

Valentina: We recommend the program. And we feel like that because we know that we start from the same point. So we start from the same point, in other classes its at different levels so now we can count on each other because we start at the same point so we feel that we can help everyone and they can help us. If somebody doesn't go to school one day we miss her, and say, “Where is she?”

Additionally, there were times in which the women would “speak for” each other.

Cristy: I think for myself, I notice now that to be a mom, like its not the one is pregnant, the one that delivers, like that's not what makes you a mom, that's not everything. With the education you complement this and be a better, not that we are ever going to finish to be a good mother, like now she's [Valentina] ten years longer from the big one [ten years past having her first child] and she's like learning more, you know what I mean? So we're never going to finish being a better mother but she's educated herself because its not just the feelings to be a mom, its going to help us, we need education too.

Cristy first referenced her own experience but then she encompassed Valentina in her response: “like now she's ten years longer from the big one...” or “she's educated herself because...” Cristy's text also demonstrated conscious language choices between “I” and “we” when she was speaking. While many times research collaborators felt comfortable speaking on behalf of the group because of their sense of shared experience, they also were careful to distinguish when they felt they were only referring to their individual experience. For example, Vividiana was sharing from the collective “we” in describing their feelings prior to the program about access to post-secondary education, “Because before, we thought that because we were immigrants...” But she then

transitions to “I” when she begins sharing her specific experiences: “...like now I am going to talk about the way that it happened for me.”

There were several instances in our dialogue when a research collaborator was sharing a particular story and another research collaborator would interject with what I labeled “participatory contributions” to the story. These participatory contributions were not perceived as disruptive interruptions but easily accepted and woven in to the continued telling of the story.

Victoria: And the lady don’t let us talk to each other. We cannot talk

Alexis: in Spanish

Victoria: In Spanish or nothing.

Alexis: Because they don’t understand.

Victoria: Yes, because they don’t understand. So we cannot talk or have a conversation.

Parallel to the pattern of participatory contributions, the co-constructed community narrative presented in this chapter is a layering of the individual and shared experiences of the research collaborators by weaving together each of their voices in the telling. My voice is also part of this narrative. My voice as the director of the program builds upon the context of their program experiences. As the research facilitator, my voice threads in and around their dialog to build upon the analysis and interpretation that is part of their story.

Informing the interpretation of this narrative is the CRT lens. CRT is often used to analyze the structural barriers experienced by historically marginalized populations, but it also highlights the importance of agency and how minorities utilize this agency to address these barriers (Oropeza, Varghese & Kanno, 2010). CRT also examines

intersectionality, or the interplay of the various categories such as national origin, immigration status, race, language, and gender (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

In our narrative the research collaborators share stories of their encounters with structural barriers, but more important to them are the stories of their agency in trespassing these barriers. Throughout these stories the interplay of how their multiple identities, as Mexicans, as immigrants, as language minorities, and even as mothers, has influenced their experiences is captured. While the research collaborators did not have the academic knowledge of CRT to use to label these experiences, a CRT story emerged from their own lived knowledge. My voice places this knowledge within the academic realm of CRT. My narration is not an attempt to “speak for” my research collaborators, but rather it is reflective of my desire to “speak with” them.

A Bunch of Barriers

Cristy: I want to go back to page three. Where she says, “There’s no barriers for me.”

Erica: Yes, I had a question about that too. Are there really no barriers for you? Is that what you feel?

Vividiana: It might be. I still have a long way to go, but there’s not going to be barriers because I am not afraid no more. I feel confident that I can do it. I am not afraid. Since you trespass one, [you] get confident and know what you want to do, know where you are going, know the right road that you go. Even though you are going to have a bunch of barriers, since you trespass one, you can trespass all the other ones.

As Mexican immigrants these women have faced many barriers in their lives.

They can speak to how their Mexican culture is devalued and how “Mexican” has been hurled at them and their children as a derogatory word. They bear witness to employers who take advantage of Mexican immigrants’ immigration and economic status, to pay low wages, and to assign work that is deliberately demoralizing, with the confidence that

fear and powerlessness will keep them from voicing any opposition to such abuses. They are intimately familiar with the threat of deportation, at any time, at any place, sometimes regardless of documentation status. They have watched as White co-workers, less competent and less educated, have been chosen for promotions as they were passed over. They have been made to feel as if they are “less than” because of their native language and accented English. Despite these barriers, and in some cases because of them, these women are determined to advance their occupational, economic, and educational opportunities.

Research supports what these women know about the factors influencing their opportunities for occupational mobility. Most disheartening are their own experiences with the reality of being on the lower rungs of a racialized structure in which their status as Mexican immigrants is one of the primary determinants of their occupational (and related economic) mobility (Bohon, 2005).

Alexis: In my experience and in my job being a Hispanic person has not given me an opportunity to be a good teacher in my center, to always being left behind and thinking that I don't know how to do it or that I don't know what to do. That I don't know what to do with the kids. So that's one of the disadvantages of me being a Mexican.

Vividiana: They need us but they don't want to give us the opportunity—a good one.

Victoria: We don't have the opportunity to grow and they don't see like the potential in us. They just give us all the hard work, but here it is, we do the work and when they have opportunities they give it to other people who just

Alexis: Who doesn't even have a CDA (Child Development Associates) or the training

Victoria: Yes, or training

Erica: And you think that is the language?

Victoria: More than the language it's really like

Alexis: [Being] Hispanic.

These women's experience with "being left behind" regardless that they may hold more knowledge or greater educational credentials (the CDA requiring a certain level of educational training and knowledge demonstration) has given them an understanding of the persistent racial oppression that occurs in their workplaces. Despite this they also knew that their best hope of trespassing this barrier was advancing their educational attainment and English language proficiency.

For these women the bilingual early childhood program provided an opportunity to get around the barrier of language to access a college education. And once they gained access, they credit their experiences in the bilingual early childhood program as pivotal to becoming empowered to trespass other barriers to persisting in the college going experience. Sadan (2004) defined individual empowerment as: "a process of personal development in a social framework: a transition from a feeling of powerlessness, and from a life in the shadow of this feeling, to an active life of real ability to act and to take initiatives in relation to the environment and the future" (p. 133). Vividiana captured this definition in her description of being in a place of "living inside the darkness" to moving to a place of knowing "that we are persons that can do a lot."

Living in a society in which they are labeled as trespassers it is ironic that an accident of language transfer resulted in the research collaborators labeling their own agency as "trespassing barriers." On the surface it might seem that this descriptor reinforces society's perception of the illegality or illicitness of their acts; that as Mexican immigrants they should claim no rights to a better life as trespassers. So their agency, which has not only allowed them to navigate around and through barriers in their lives but to help others in their community do the same, does in effect represent an "illegal"

crossing of the institutional and racialized structures maintained by dominant culture. Trespassing barriers is their form of resistance to the borders of oppression.

Trespassing Barriers to Access

Wiley and Lukes (1996) highlighted how English-only ideologies in the U.S. limit the access English language learners have to college and the related opportunities for social mobility:

Educational language policies such as college entrance requirements are significant gate keeping mechanisms for other social, economic, and political domains. . . . Schools stratify students based on their ability to use the standard [language] by assigning those who speak English as a second language or non-dominant varieties of English to remedial educational tasks. (p. 527)

The bilingual early childhood program was designed to navigate around the barrier of English-only language policies in the traditional pathway to college by offering adult ELLs the opportunity to take college level coursework in their native Spanish language, rather than requiring students to first attain the level of English proficiency typically required to these courses. But the barrier of English-only courses was not the only barrier to access the research collaborators needed to trespass to begin their post-secondary education. These women had many insecurities and fears about becoming a college student. While many of these insecurities and fears stemmed from experiences of being a language minority in the U.S., they also came from a lack of knowledge of the college going process and a lack of resources to navigate this process. For the research collaborators, access was also about coming to believe college was a place in which they would be welcomed and a place in which they could succeed.

College is for people who know

Alexis: I thought, college is harder, college is for people who know and I don't know nothing. Not English, not Spanish. So it was like I tell you, it is ignorance of us, thinking that we can't do it, always thinking, 'Oh no, we can't do it.'

Alexis's perception (shared by other research collaborators) of "college is for people who know and I don't know" revealed both an underlying perception of who college was for and her own belief that she wasn't "college material." While the research collaborators' definition of who college was for included those who were fluent in the English language, it also meant being "smart enough." The doubt these women had about their own intelligence was a barrier to college access. The research collaborators' discussions of language experiences in the U.S. provided insights into how this barrier developed.

As native Spanish-speakers navigating an English-language culture, these women are constantly aware of language as a barrier. All of them have experienced fears about being in new situations that may require using English. When I asked the research collaborators about fears they have had to overcome related to English, Alexis shared how it took her almost a year to just to be able to go to the grocery store. Valentina shared the fears generated anytime they had to go to a place to get information. Abilene added, "You go and you think you have your words, and then you forget your words and end up leaving." Their fears about speaking English were reinforced through experiences of being judged when they did communicate in English.

Eugenia: I get a job [...] and when I get there I am so scared because, my English is like, I'm scared to speak English. And my supervisor, he's a White [...] he says, oh, I don't understand what you said Eugenia because you don't speak English.

Eugenia does speak English, quite well in my opinion, but because she does not speak English fluently and has a heavy accent, her supervisor's judgment that she doesn't speak English silenced her, reinforcing her fears about speaking English and her desire to persist in gaining English proficiencies. Even Cristy and Alexis, who feel comfortable speaking English, have internalized the judgments of monolingual English speakers about their English speaking skills. Cristy, reflecting on why she overuses the phrase, 'you know what I mean?' said: "I think in my head when I talk, I think that people don't understand me." Alexis revealed, "When I hear myself, sometimes I just hear my accent."

The judgments of others not only heightened fears of using English but also contributed to the research collaborators' lack of self-efficacy. All of them have had experiences in which they have encountered people who made them feel as if their limited English proficiency equated to limited intelligence.

Lola: Some people, like the people in the stores, the cashiers, you ask for something, "What? What did you say?" They make you feel like you stupid. Like I just went to buy these sodas over at the [gas station]. Oh this lady, she was so hateful. I don't think she got my English but I asked her if she had the sodas cold and she says, "What, what?" And I am like, "I am talking to you clearly." See they make you feel like they didn't get it, but they do get it.

Repeated experiences of feeling "stupid" undermined their self-confidence and belief in ones' self as a knower. The internalized frame "I don't know English," became "I don't know nothing." As Alexis expressed in the opening quote, an internalized barrier to college was feeling ignorant and not believing in their own capabilities. Reyna had tried taking English as Second Language (ESL) courses but ended up quitting because "it was too hard" lacking the self-confidence needed to persist in her learning of the English language. Solymar, Gloria, and Victoria had taken ESL courses in the past but not with

the intention of continuing to college-level English courses because they did not believe in their capability to do so. In reflecting upon the barriers to college Victoria stated, “I didn’t think I was smart enough.”

While it took time for these women to trespass these internalized barriers, the doorway to walk through and begin their journey in doing so was opened when they heard about a program at their local community college that had been designed especially for women like them.

Who’s going to help me?

While a few of the research collaborators had relatives who had attended college in Mexico, a majority of these women were the first in their family to go to college and no one had relatives who attended college in the United States, with the exception of Vividiana whose husband was a college graduate. Not knowing how to become a college student and lacking a support network for doing so was paralyzing for those women who did have aspirations of attending college.

Alexis: There was a lot of times in my life where I wanted to do some things and I would get ready, and push myself, and say, ‘I have to go do this.’ And then when I got to the place, I was stopping me you know. I was like, ‘But what am I going to do? Who am I going to ask?’ I didn’t know nobody, so instead of going forward, I was stuck right there and I would go home and feel bad and think, ‘I should have. Why I don’t do it?’ It’s ridiculous. Just go in, open the doors and ask. And I didn’t know how to do that.

Vividiana: ...like Alexis says, I walked to [name of community college] and I went back, because I was so afraid. ‘What am I going to do here? Who’s going to help me? Where am I going to ask for help? How am I going to do this?’ I questioned myself a lot and I move back. Instead of going forward, I move back [...] We were scared. I think that is the word. We were scared. We didn’t know how to open that door, we didn’t know how to start going to school [...] And sometimes that is what stops you from going to school. Because you don’t know how to do it.

While the research collaborators did not have people in their support network who could help them navigate college, the existing support network they had within their community was essential to getting the initial word out about the program.

Suspecting that traditional methods of advertising a new program would not be effective because of fears and doubts that potentially existed within the immigrant community, I decided to utilize the strategy of “word of mouth” to communicate the news of the launching of the program. Critical to spreading the word was my belief that it had to come from a trusted source, someone who belonged to the immigrant community. I called Abilene, a student who had assisted us in conducting the initial needs-assessment for the program, and asked if she would be willing to come meet with me to talk about the launching of the program and her potential role with the program.

Abilene: the first meeting I had with you (Erica) I was dying. I was peeing in my pants (laughter from group). You know I was thinking, “How was I going to talk to this lady? She wants to talk to me. She has this big old plan for my people and me and I thought I have to be strong. I have to be ready because she’s going to ask me a lot of questions.” And ask her, I was nervous. I was nervous my first meeting with her because I thought, “How am I going to do it?” But then I thought, “I can do it. I will do it.”

And she did. I hired Abilene to serve as the assistant coordinator for the program and her first task was to get the word out about the program. Abilene began by contacting women she knew, family, friends, friends of friends, and colleagues working in early childhood centers.

Abilene: When I start calling you guys, I felt like, for real, it was like I was calling my family to come over.

While many of the research collaborators found out about the program from Abilene, word spread from those who heard directly from Abilene about the program to other co-workers, friends, and relatives. For example, Cristy found out about the

program from her mother-in-law. Reyna, heard about the program from a friend, and she urged Eugenia to join the program with her. Eugenia was terrified at the idea of going to college, but Reyna wouldn't "leave [her] alone" until she agreed to start the program. The social network that existed within their community, especially those working in the field of early childhood, was essential to getting students to take the first step to come to college. The research collaborators agreed that had they not heard about the program from a trusted source, they would not have believed it was "real."

Once we had a list of students who were interested in being part of the program, we provided them with the knowledge and support needed to become a college student. I had decided the best method for initially doing this was to hold an information session at which students could find out more details of the program and receive information and support needed to apply to the college, access financial aid, and register for classes. Abilene and Alan, the faculty member who taught the first class students would take in the program and also was serving as the program coordinator, were the facilitators of the information session. Abilene and Alan provided an overview of the program and assisted students with understanding the college application process. We also brought in a Spanish-speaking advisor to talk about financial aid, issues of tuition and residency, and explicitly assuage any concerns students might have about documentation status. Because I knew that financial aid would be an issue for some students, I also invited a counselor for a state scholarship organization that was specifically designed to support students who worked in and were obtaining an education in the field of early childhood.

Vividiana: We needed someone to tell us how to follow this road, open this door, there's something here for you. I think about when I started and I didn't know how to go to [name of college] and apply to go to classes, so Alan and Abilene were the ones that were helping us [...] they start

helping us and that is how we start getting our space, into the program and into the college. It was something that we didn't know how to do.

Solyar: You think of everything. You think of introducing us to [state] scholarship and many of us got that scholarship that supports us a year or two years, if you are working with kids, so that really helped a lot. It was a lot of support from the program, from all of you guys that helped us.

Abilene gave them a connection to “one of their own” and became an important person in their support network for navigating the college going process. She knew and understood the barriers these women faced and could speak to them from her own experiences.

Abilene: It was my own life. It was my own experiences. Because everything that you guys were passing through, I already passed through. So when I went and talked to you guys, it was more like talking from my heart. Talking to you from my own experience and I think that's why you feel like, OK, we can trust Abilene because she knows exactly what she is talking about.

I feel like you are my sisters, my community, and I stand up in front of you and I think it is clear to you that she (Abilene) already have this experience and this is what is going on and she felt the whole thing that I am feeling right now. So I am pretty sure that is why, we got connected.

Cristy: When my mother-in-law told me about it, I was like, hmmm. But she say about a meeting because the first thing they did, it was a meeting. So I was like, OK, I'll go and we'll see. And the way she (Abilene) talks, she was like really friendly [...] and she was more like, one of us. So it was like, OK, she knows what we need, she knows what we are going through.

For some women the connection to Abilene was a primary motivator to starting and staying with the program in the initial stages. Alexis shared: “I went with my eyes closed. I didn't know what was going to happen, if I was going to stick to it. You know, I just didn't want to let her (Abilene) down.” For others, Abilene represented what was possible.

Victoria: For me it was like having Abilene for an example. Like she was part of us, and now she was on the other side, and it was like OK, she jumped, well, how can we jump? It's just like that.

Having a role model is critical for those Latino/a students who are less likely to have knowledge of the college-going process. Huber and Malagon (2007) suggested the importance of faculty-student mentorship programs to support Latina/o immigrant students, and while the students eventually developed positive relationships with faculty in the program who provided support in their educational journey, it was Abilene who was perceived as their role model. Unlike faculty teaching in the program, Abilene was a Mexican immigrant. Students in the program not only identified with her because of this but also because she was only one step ahead of where they were in their education. Working on completing her associate's degree Abilene represented a very near and possible future for these students. Additionally, she was navigating the same institutional processes (and barriers) these students were and could draw from her present experiences to help guide them.

Abilene: I feel like I can't fail because a lot of you guys depend upon me. I feel like I have to set a trail for everybody like I was walking in front of you and then just saying, 'OK come on, this way, this way, follow me.'

While the information session gave the students the knowledge and support they needed to get started in college, the driving factor in their decision to attend college was the access that taking classes in their native language afforded them.

**Si usted lo dice en Español la puerta esta abierta
(If you say it in Spanish the door is open)**

With the exception of Cristy, who had already begun taking developmental English and math courses at the college, none of these women felt they would have trespassed the barriers to college if not for the opportunity to start in their native language.

Erica: So how important was having classes offered in Spanish in your decision to come to college?

Vividiana: I think for us it has been everything. Without this we wouldn't have even tried it.

Alexis: I think it was the way to walk into the college. For me I used to dream about it. This was the way to open the door for us to start. Now I am not just taking Spanish classes, I am checking out English classes and math and everything I need to take, but definitely this was what brought me to school.

Solyar: Like I say, it is like a closed door and if you say it in English I won't go. No way. But if you say it in Spanish, the door is open to start.

Victoria: Like having the opportunity was really important in different ways, but it was having the opportunity to have the program in Spanish that was important.

Lola: When I learn, I want to learn everything in Spanish because I want to learn everything. Because I don't want to be sitting there listening to somebody talking in English and I be like, oh, did she say that? Maybe, I am just going to write it. I want to be able to understand everything correctly in Spanish, but if you talk to me in English and I don't get nothing. I am getting it in Spanish and I understand it in my language.

For most of these women Spanish was the only language in which they could respond to the invitation to come to college, as they did not have the English language skills needed to take college courses delivered in English. But just as important was that the invitation to learn in their native language sent a message of "Welcome, college *is* for you." It gave them a desperately needed sense of emotional safety to walk through the door into a world in which they still weren't sure they could belong.

Trespassing Barriers to Persistence

While offering courses in Spanish opened the door to start college there were other barriers the research collaborators faced in persisting in their college education. These barriers included lack of self-confidence in the abilities as learning, a lack of college-level academic skills in their native language, technology, and fears and doubts about learning English. While the structure of the program provided support to the

students in trespassing these barriers, perhaps more important to their persistence was the value the students had for family and community and the ways in which this value became a source of support and motivation for their continued learning.

I don't know Spanish

Being able to learn in their native language did not eliminate the fears and doubts the research collaborators had about their own abilities as learners. These fears and doubts were the result of a series of negative language experiences that over time eroded self-confidence and self-efficacy. It would take a series of positive learning experiences over time to rebuild self-confidence and self-efficacy. Ironically, initial experiences in the program reinforced the existing doubts because of the challenges these women faced even when learning in their native language.

At our college, as is common with community colleges, students are typically required to take a college placement exam which is a general assessment of academic skills to include reading comprehension and writing skills. Depending upon the score students receive on this exam they may be required to take developmental courses designed to improve these key academic skills. However, the exam is administered in English and thus we needed to waive this requirement for students entering the bilingual early childhood program.

While we explored alternatives for a placement exam we might use for testing academic skills in the students' native Spanish language there were a couple of issues with these alternatives. The first issue was that the college did not have a Spanish alternative to the exam and adopting one would entail additional costs. The second issue was that even if we adopted such an exam, we did not have developmental courses that

could support students in improving these academic skills in their native language. The result of this would be that any student testing below a required score for entrance to the program would be denied access with no pathway available to gain access in the future. This was unacceptable to me so I made the decision that the standard for entrance to the program would be a high school diploma or a GED. Since the GED could be attained in Spanish and the college had a Spanish GED program which supported Spanish-speakers in developing the skills needed to pass the GED exam, students who did not have a high school diploma would have an alternative pathway to support their entrance to the program.

As a note to this requirement, I later learned that while students can take college level courses as a non-degree student without having earned a high school diploma or GED, they had to have one of these in order to be classified as a degree-seeking student. The reason this is significant is because students are only eligible for financial aid as a degree-seeking student. And while the bilingual program accepted a copy of the foreign high school diploma for entrance, the college required that any foreign diploma be evaluated by an international transcript evaluation agency. This presents another barrier to access for immigrant students. These agencies require “official diplomas” which can sometimes be impossible to attain and even when attainable the cost of the evaluation is 4-6 times more expensive than the GED examination. Many of the students in the program who had foreign high school diplomas ended up taking the Spanish GED as an easier and less expensive alternative to this process.

So, with the exception of Alexis, all of the research collaborators had completed the equivalency of a U.S. high school education, either through formal schooling in

Mexico, or through taking and passing the GED exam in Spanish. (Alexis had done neither, but she had attended our first information session and with an impassioned plea that she not “be left behind” had convinced me to allow her to start the program with the promise that she could keep up and that she would complete her GED exam within the year.) However, it had been years since most of them had done any kind of academic reading or writing and never at the college level. Adding to their challenge was the fact that they rarely used formal Spanish in conversation and had lost some of their knowledge of formal Spanish language structure and vocabulary.

Reyna: Ok, let me share my experience [...] I never like school. And I am scared. And I went here and I took classes for ESL and math and I can't do it and it's too hard for me and then I quit [...] and then somebody, I am not sure who, told me about this program, and then I am so excited because I am like, OK, this will be easy for me because it is in Spanish.

But, as Reyna continued to share, it was when she got her first paper back with mark-up's, she realized: “I don't know nothing about writing Spanish.”

Abilene: Alexis would come to me and say hey, how in the world in I going to do this if I don't know English and I don't know Spanish—I am in between.

Alexis: I learned that I didn't know how to write Spanish, I didn't know how to spell, and I did not know how to read [...] There was words I didn't even know. I used to go to Abilene and go, what does this mean? I don't even know what that means. And I was reading in Spanish. When you don't learn [language] the proper way you feel like you don't know nothing.

Solyamar: I think that all of us, we needed Spanish [...] We don't know the proper Spanish.

Not only were these women confronted with the realization that they lacked academic knowledge of their own language, they also discovered they lacked other academic skills.

Vividiana: My comprehension was so poor when I start. And when I had to read all this information I didn't know how to break those into little

summaries so it could help me get the idea. And I was reading and reading all of these pages because Mercy, remember, she told us, you need to read all this by next Tuesday and I am going to ask questions. And I am like, oh my god, how am I going to take all this in my brain? My comprehension wasn't that high and she wanted us to understand and get the most important things, but everything for me was important.

Abilene: I noticed that some of you guys, you didn't even read the book. And I start thinking, "Ok, something is going on." And then I thought these gals have been out of school for so many years that it's not been a necessity in [their] life to grab a book and start reading again. And I do remember that we had a meeting and some of the instructors were saying that you were having trouble even reading in Spanish and I said well, "We starting with people that went to school, they learn how to read and write in Spanish, but then there was a break in between, like twenty years, or maybe ten years, that they haven't gone to school at all. And so all that stuff, if you don't practice every single day, it is impossible for you to remember." So it was part of the whole process.

Alexis: And I used to tell Abilene a lot, don't leave me behind. That was my fear. That she was going to tell me, you can't. It was very scary for me and I used to tell her, please don't leave me behind, because I want to go behind you. She would tell me, "No, no, don't worry, don't worry."

Contributing to the challenge of developing critical reading skills was the difference in how they were being asked to demonstrate their understanding of the information they were reading. In a conversation I had with one of the instructors in the program he told me that the students were struggling to develop and articulate in their own words their knowledge of the readings and instead, in their writing, were quoting verbatim the authors of the text. Further investigation revealed that in their schooling experiences in Mexico a greater emphasis had been placed upon using a particular author's words to express knowledge of a concept rather than being encouraged to paraphrase or to articulate their own reactions to the text.

Another academic challenge the research collaborators referenced was technology. Entering the program none of them had a high degree of computer literacy skills, and in fact a few of them had never used a computer. Some of the research

collaborators spent hours at a friend's house struggling to use the computer to type an assignment.

As the instructors, Abilene, and I discovered the various academic challenges the students in the program were dealing with and we scrambled to find ways to support them. As Vividiana recalled, "I remember you told us it was like building a plane in the air." Those students who had limited computer access and computer literacy skills were given options of handwriting the majority of their assignments, limiting the word processing requirement to a few key assignments. Instructors also began to integrate instruction of academic skills into the curriculum, explicitly teaching reading comprehension strategies, writing conventions, and technology skills such as online research. With time and support, these academic skills developed.

Lola: Right now the teacher give us a big book to read and now I take notes, use sticky notes.

Vividiana: So all those skills have developed in these two years. I am still learning, just, you know, it is still hard for me to get all these ideas together. But I think that for me, reading and writing were the most hard. And punctuation! My god, I was terrible. I didn't know how, where you end a sentence, and when you start another sentence, and capitalize. Computer helped me a lot, technology, I love technology. I didn't before. After all this, after all things we've been through, I started learning technology because we didn't know how to use a computer. I didn't know how to type, or how to this and that, and after that, those skills, we have gained those skills too [...] My reading comprehension, my writing, my fears of speaking in front of class have totally changed. I am not scared and I feel more confident.

These women were able to develop these college academic skills learning in their native language. The growth in academic skills also gave these women a new sense of confidence and joy in being a college student.

Valentina: That's what makes this different. Some of us look at this as an opportunity. So we say, "Let's see what this is about. It's in our language

and it will be an opportunity for us.” That’s why I took it at the beginning. And now I love it and I love what I am learning.

Solymer: I thought when I start this, I thought that it was too late to study no? Because of my age. I thought I am too old to, to go to school. I just feel like I need to stay home and do cleaning and attend my daughter. But now I think it is never too late to learn.

Vividiana: Yeah, because we believe more in ourselves [...] You feel like you have more skills [...] You feel more confident. Like, you can do this because you have the knowledge that we’ve been learning.

This confidence allowed them to face their fears of English and transfer academic skills they had acquired in their native language to learning in English.

From Español to English

The curricula of the early childhood courses in the bilingual early childhood program mirrored that of the courses taught in English. The learning objectives of the courses taught in English and Spanish were the same; the only differences in curricula were primarily due to the text resources that were available in Spanish. There were no explicit learning objectives related to advancing English proficiencies nor specified English proficiency requirements as the students advanced through the early childhood coursework. However, because I knew that students would have to attain the level of English proficiency required to take the general education courses needed to complete their associate degree, I did want them to take ESL and developmental English courses. (Students with limited English proficiency usually must take the adult ESL courses in order to advance to the entry-level English proficiency required for developmental English courses.)

While there were those who questioned my decision to deliver the coursework primarily in Spanish because it would fail to “push” these students to gain specific levels of English proficiencies, I maintained my stance that it was more critical to provide

access to college-level educational experiences primarily in Spanish, and I crossed my fingers and hoped that these experiences would ultimately support those students who chose to advance to courses in English. Toward this goal I implemented two strategies. The first was to simply to encourage students to take ESL and developmental English coursework. I worked with the program coordinator to help them to take the placement exam so they could determine what courses they would need to start. We also helped connect them to the department that offered these courses and provided support to register for them. Additionally, Abilene, in her unofficial role as mentor, was a strong advocate in encouraging the students to advance in their English proficiencies.

The second strategy was to work with the instructors on incorporating safe opportunities within their early childhood courses for the students to practice their English skills. This was done in a variety of ways: some instructors had designated class discussion time in which students were encouraged to use English; other instructors provided a menu of assignments related to a specific learning objective that included “English option assignments” such as exploring an English website or designing a literacy lesson using a children’s book in English; in some classes students worked together in groups to define early childhood vocabulary in English or identify key points in a short article in English related to early childhood education; in another class students were encouraged to give a class presentation in English; and those students with more advanced English writing skills were encouraged to write their papers in English.

Alexis: I learned a lot about my language and plus about English [...] I feel more confident. I know I am spelling better in both languages.

Solymar: When I went to school, no, I started more confident, I can speak more.

What the instructors and I discovered over time was that several of the students who had initially claimed to have little to no knowledge of English did so because of their fears and lack of confidence in their English skills. As they gained confidence in themselves through their learning experiences, we began to hear more and more English. And many of the students did begin the journey of taking their ESL and developmental English coursework.

Victoria: Well what I think is when you notice the change in your life, how the program help in your life, you get the ability, the confidence to pass. But if you had to start by taking classes in English, you would run. Maybe now I realize, OK, I started here and step by step and it's when I realize, OK, I am ready for everything. I think for most of us it is the same, because we go, "Follow me" [to English classes].

Abilene: So you think it is like easy for you to go on to English classes because you started everything in Spanish and little by little in English and then transferring to English it will be better?

Cristy: I think that is the difference between the classes in English and the classes in Spanish, you know you are going to feel more comfortable, its going to be in your language. And then later you can get used to another language [...] it helps you get confidence in yourself and then you can start your classes in English and we all know that to get the whole thing, the bachelor's, we need to learn some language and we need to go to some English classes but now we feel more tough, more confident. That even though it is going to be hard, we can do it, because this program gave us the strong. It makes us strong, to go, to keep going and don't look back.

Vividiana: Since I started with my Spanish I can transfer that to my English. Getting one is transferring to the other one.

Alexis: I think that everybody right here, we realize that we know more than what we think in English so if we don't take advantage of that we are never going to find out how much we can do in English. So if we transfer to English, I think we are all ready.

Cristy: It is good to see how she [Alexis] is growing. I bet you if you asked her at the start if she would take an English class she would say, no, I am scared. Now she is like, I know it is going to be hard, but I can do it. Because she's been in this program, and this program has made her strong to now be able to take the class. Look at how she's talking. When she started she was scared to take the class in Spanish, now she's not even scared to take it in English so you can see how she grows already.

When they joined the bilingual early childhood program, many of these women did not do so with the intention of taking English classes. But, as Vividiana stated: “English, the language, is not something that can stop you from dreaming [...] This program makes you believe in yourself, that it’s not the language that is going to stop you, that you can do it.” To date seven of the ten the research collaborators have taken and successfully advanced through at least one developmental English course. It is important to note that these students have bypassed ESL courses in doing so, as ESL courses target a lower level of English development than do developmental English courses. Reyna, who had once quit her ESL coursework because “it was too hard” has now successfully completed the last of her developmental English classes and is currently enrolled in a college-level English course.

Solymar’s statement, “If you say it in Spanish the door is open,” reflected more than the necessity of being able to learn in Spanish in order to take college courses. Learning in Spanish gave them the emotional safety to trespass their fears and internalized doubts about their academic capabilities. Having positive learning experiences in their native language helped them to persist in developing new academic skills. And their success in developing new academic skills in their native language gave them confidence and knowledge they could transfer to English learning experiences.

While having positive college learning experiences in their native language was critical to the research collaborators’ ability to persist in spite of the academic challenges, other factors were important as well. The research collaborators briefly touched upon the positive relationships they had with their instructors and curriculum relevancy, but more significant to their persistence was the cultural capital they brought to the program.

We are like a big family

Yosso (2005) defined six types of capital students of color bring with them to the education setting. Included among these is familial capital, or “a form of cultural wealth engages a commitment to community well being and expands the concept of family to include a more broad understanding of kinship” (p. 79). Familial capital is inclusive of the concept of an “extended family” that includes friends and other ties who are part of maintaining a connection to the larger community, reducing isolation and creating a sense of not being alone in dealing with problems.

Critical to trespassing barriers to academic persistence was the familial capital these students brought to the program. Many research collaborators joined the program with a friend who was already part of her extended family. But the shared culture, language, and status as immigrants quickly facilitated strong sense of community among all of the students in the program. This sense of community was not just important for academic support it also provided a sense of belonging, of not being isolated or alone.

Cristy: With the program, its like, you feel, its not like your mom but it's a...

Vividiana: It's a community.

Cristy: Its like my mother was pushing me. Its like more people involved so you feel like OK, I need to do this so they can see that I can do this too. You know what I mean? Because when I was doing it by myself, the classes I already take, I was going but you feel lonely. You think, OK maybe one day I am gonna get there but you feel like nobody is with you, you're going on this road by yourself. And with this program you feel like, OK, it's a lot of people going with me and if I fail somebody is going to pick me up.

Vividiana: We have support and that's what we needed.

Alexis: It feels very comfortable because we can count on each other. Like if I don't know something I can call her, even go to Cristy, and whoever is in the program, how do I do this, do you understand how to do it and we'll talk about it and we'll find a solution.

Victoria: I don't know what to do here? I don't know where I need to go? I can go and ask everybody else. I have more people I can ask what I can do than to just be alone.

Vividiana: This is like a family and I think we have been grabbing hands from each other and going together and I think that if we were not a group, I think it would be hard... I think it made it easier for us because like she said we didn't feel lonely we feel like we're on the same road.

Valentina: We are working together. We are like a big family.

Cristy: And I think too, it's because most of our families are not here so we don't have our families here. If we were in Mexico, we have moms, aunties, whatever, pushing us or saying, "What are you doing?" [...] So you feel that pressure on you and you keep going to school. But here you're like just calling, so they don't see you. But when you feel like, I not saying that everybody worry about me or everybody care about me, but you make connections with people...

Vividiana: If somebody doesn't go to school one day we miss her and say, "Where is she?"

Research has shown that families, in particular parents, are an important factor for Latino/a students in their pursuit of a post-secondary education (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000). But the research collaborators, adult women with children of their own, did not necessarily have this type of family support. The support that families could provide, for those among them who had parents and older siblings, was typically limited by distance and/or unfamiliarity with the college-going process. So these women became each other's extended family: checking in on one-an-another, providing emotional and academic support, and pushing each other to keep going.

For some of these women the social aspect of their experiences in the program was just as important as the academic aspect. A few of the research collaborators shared that through the program they had developed their first friendships since coming to the United States.

Victoria: When I came to Albuquerque I don't know anybody else, just my husband and I stay at home all day long alone. So it was just terrible [...] then we get to college and it was the first time I started to have

friends here. That before that I was alone with just my husband. So it's really like opened all the doors, that here I have like a family, friends, and everybody that is here [...] so that's my experience, two years ago I was alone, now when I start the program I have all these friends.

Alexis: Before my world was so small that I didn't have no friends, I didn't speak to nobody outside of my kids, my husband, my family. That was it. That was my whole world. And now, it's so much big.

Solymar: I used to have a lot of problems and when this happened, this program started, my life changed because I used this, this as my social time. Because, and I have all of you guys, we like a family, we don't look like strangers, we family. Even the teachers, family, you know? So I feel very, very comfortable. It's like therapy for me.

Lola: It's like my social time. See I don't have friends outside. Just co-workers and friends here. But I don't have friends outside, to only go party and friends like that. So to me it's like I come and learn, plus social.

Cristy: It was kind of nice because I wasn't feeling lonely because I had my friends, but it's like you need different kinds of friends. So I didn't have friends that they like the same thing I like. Like to get an education or to be with kids. I have friends to party, I have friends to do this, to do that, but this program makes us have friends that we talk about kids and we like to educate and we like to share, how do you do this, how do you do that. The things that you cannot talk to with another friends. So it was nice.

The social network these women developed did more than just provide support to trespass barriers within the academic context. Their personal and professional friendships are sources of support that sustain them as they continue to navigate the barriers they encounter in other areas of their lives.

To be a mother, more

It wasn't surprising to me that a theme related to family emerged from our research study given the value these women prioritize for family. This cultural value for family, also called *familismo*, is characteristic of many Latina/o populations (Vega, 1990). *Familismo* refers to family closeness and interdependence (Durand, 2011) and requires an individual family member to put the needs of the family first, even if it means

making personal sacrifices (Sy & Romero, 2008). This responsibility is heightened among the women because Latina/o culture typically defines their primary role as the caretaker of the family (Cammarota, 2004). Family responsibility has been commonly associated as a negative factor influencing Latina/o's persistence and success in post-secondary education (Erisman & Looney, 2007; Fry, 2004; Ornelas & Solozano, 2004; Tseng, 2004). And while a handful of studies identified how family obligation and support assisted in the persistence of Latina/o students, the studies I found were limited to traditional age college Latina/o youth in the context of parental and sibling support and did not extend to older adult women with children of their own.

While challenges do exist in balancing responsibilities between family and school, the research collaborators perceived their cultural value for family more significantly as a source of capital in their college going experiences. They revealed a perspective of the program that I had never considered prior to our research study as it related to their value for family and the curriculum of the program. Supporting their ability to persist in the program in spite of the academic challenges and the challenges of balancing the responsibilities of family, work, and school was the relevancy of the curriculum to their role as mothers.

The research collaborators expressed pride in their cultural values as it related to their beliefs about raising children. During the times when we had six or seven young children in the classroom with us, I was struck by how easily the children entertained themselves and did not interrupt the conversation among the adults. When I shared this observation with the research collaborators during one of our breaks, they immediately launched into conversation about their cultural practices in raising children. Their

discussion of raising their children to be polite to adults and to not interrupt adult conversations was reflective of the literature on Mexican immigrant family values. Durand (2011) discussed the high value among Mexican immigrant families for raising children who are “well-mannered and respectful of authority figures” as part of an overall value for nurturing *respeto*, or harmonious interpersonal relationships characterized by respect for self and others (p. 259).

The research collaborators discussion included their observations in how their cultural values influenced children behaviors different from other (White) children, reflecting pride in how their cultural practices differ from dominant White cultural practices. The cultural values around children came up in another conversation when they discussed how their “home style” of raising children connected to their practice as teachers.

Lola: Yeah, I want to say that us Hispanics, we teach different. So we have a schedule you know? [...] but I notice that my circle time is different. More like home. We dance all over the classroom and everything. Next door they keep them in a little space and if you need to dance this is where [laughter from others]. Us Hispanics, I am over there dancing all over the classroom. Like it's so much different, because it's more like a home you know? Like we're no rushing. Eat, hurry up, we have five minutes, go wash your hands and hurry up. You know we eat, then we sit at the table laughing and eating more, and you know, drinking some water, some juice and this and that. It's more like a home. But in the other class it's like you need to hurry up we have five minutes. You need to eat, drink the water; you don't want it, go throw it away, and go lay down now. Us Hispanics, we're more like a home. [...] We kiss them and love them.

The transference of their role as mother in creating the home environment to their role as teacher in creating a classroom environment reflective of the values in their home is one they are proud of. Thus, they found that the curriculum of the early childhood program, which included the diverse ways in which the teacher supports the development

and learning of children, not only reinforced their practices as teachers but their practices as mothers. But the research collaborators also strongly identified with the ways in which the curriculum also enriched their role as mothers.

Because of the priority these women placed on their role as mothers their perspective of the influence of the program was framed in a context of how the content enriched their knowledge and skills as mothers.

Valentina: Like we [Solymar and Valentina] are not working with kids. But we here. And I think that is proof that it is teaching us something about our family, our kids [...] I want to learn more about kids because I have kids. Now you have time to stop and think and say, "Am I doing the right thing?" Now you have the tools, you can explore, because of the program [...] the program changes a lot, the way that we see children [...] And I think we can have more patience. Like for me, before I was exploding with one little thing and now I stop and think. I still have my temperamento, but now I stop and think and then, "Do I say this or not?" So now I think the kids will be like more confident to tell me, and they can tell us how they feel and how they want even if it is something that they did wrong.

Vividiana: With this education that we are getting, the knowledge about how the development of kids are, you can understand why they are acting like this so you can be more patient with them because you know that it is something that they have to go through, their development and their growing. And before this program, even though being a mom is hard, but you didn't know their development, how they develop their skills, how they have to go through all this, so now we have this knowledge. It's easier for you to understand your kids and be more patient and be a better mom than what you were before.

Lola: As a mother I am so different. Before I used to yell at my kids for no reason. But now before I yell at them I think, OK, maybe my three-year old is doing this because she sad [...] There's a class where they teach us to do observations, that if I see her crying, I don't know if she's sad, or mad, or have some other emotions. So, I need to go and ask her [...] So as a mother, it help me more.

The academic knowledge Valentina, Vividiana, and Lola gained about children's socio-emotional needs enabled them to become more reflective and responsive as mothers. Rather than reacting instinctively to their children's behavior, they are now able

to step back and take time to think about the underlying causes of the behavior and respond intentionally. They have more patience with “misbehaviors” because they can understand these in contexts of environmentally and developmentally appropriate behaviors. What they have learned from their early childhood classes also reinforced their knowledge authority in their role as a mother.

Lola: And with my husband [...] he'll tell me something about the kids, and I am like, “No, you are wrong. I know my kids because I am going to school.” Like the other day, we were in the car and the baby is crying and he's like “Give him a bottle, he is crying.” And I go, “Roberto, do you know why he is crying?” And my husband goes, “Yeah he's hungry, just give him the bottle.” And I go, “Roberto, I just give him a bottle like 20 minutes ago.” And he's like, “No, no, no, he's crying just give him the bottle.” And I go, “Roberto, stop.” So we stop on the freeway and I get out and there was a toy over there on the side on his bottom, hurting him. See, for a mother, to be a mother, more [...] I learn that the kids always don't cry because they're hungry. So yeah, to be a mother, I learned a lot.

While traditionally the Mexican mother's role in the family has always been that of the primary caretaker, patriarchal views of gender roles still persist among Mexican immigrant families and commonly reinforce the husband's authority in decision-making (Durand, 2011). Lola's story revealed how she references her school knowledge to support her knowledge authority of her children with her husband in a decision-making process.

These women's perspective on what it takes to be a “better mother” changed as well. Before intuition and their own past experience guided their practice as mothers. And while they do not dismiss the value of these, they appreciate how their new knowledge compliments their intuition and experience.

Gloria: Yo creo que nos ha influenciado el programa porque digo que ya las cualidades pues si innatas que todas las madres tenemos, verdad, a veces no son suficientes. Y este programa nos ha proporcionado conocimiento, preparación y yo pues ya no tengo a los pequeños pero ahora yo puedo alentar a mis hijos sobre la educación, a sus propios hijos.

Gloria: I believe that the program has influenced because I already say that the innate qualities that all the mothers have, in truth, sometimes they are not enough. And this program has provided knowledge, preparation and while I no longer have a little one, now I can encourage my children on education with them, his own children.

Cristy: I think for myself, I notice now that to be a mom, its not the one is pregnant, the one that delivers, like that's not what makes you a mom, that's not everything. With the education you compliment this and be a better [mother], not that we are ever going to finish to be a good mother. Its not just the feelings to be a mom, its going to help us, we need education too.

Gloria and Cristy are two women in very different places in their journey as mothers. Gloria has adult children with their own children. As a mother she is sharing the knowledge she has gained to help her children with their own parenting. Additionally, she felt that she is able to be a better grandmother. In contrast, Cristy was pregnant with her first child when we had this conversation. Like Gloria, she has come to realize that her education will enhance her skills as a mother. While she recognized that this would be an ongoing learning experience, she also felt more prepared for having her first child.

Cristy: I think before we was like, "Well, we going to learn making mistakes." And now I am like, I have a little bit of knowledge now so maybe I won't make that much mistakes.

Like Cristy, Victoria also became a mother during the research study, but in a very different way. Victoria did not have biological children, but she and her husband had been serving as foster parents for a couple of years. Towards the beginning of the research study, they agreed to serve as the foster family of five young siblings.

Victoria: I want to say that what's really important is all the change, the way the classes preparing me to be a mom. That was important. Because I don't have any clue. Now I feel confident in the way I talk with the kids. I feel confident in how I can redirect them. Otherwise we do the same thing in the way we were raised. And now I have different knowledge [...] like right now I have different experience than my parents have with

me and they are like, “Victoria you are so different than the way we were with you” [...] they notice in the way that I talk to the kids and everything.

Victoria recognized that previously her own knowledge of parenting came from the way she was raised, but that she is now able to parent in different ways with the knowledge she gained from the program. This is especially important to her because of the backgrounds of the children she has adopted. Victoria stated, “The kids, they come with problems, more problems than the common kids.” She feels more confident in her abilities to respond to these problems with the knowledge she has, but she also knows she has other resources now to support her.

Victoria: And to take it [the learning] to my family. I go to the books and read when I have questions when I don’t know what to do and I go back to the notes I have take at school and all that.

Victoria also talked about how valuable it has been to be able to come to class and share with her instructors and peers some of the challenges she has faced with the children and to get their input on how she might address these.

In addition to the knowledge they have gained from the content of the early childhood program, their experiences as college students have given them new ways to support their children’s education. Alexis shared how she has gained knowledge from her own recent journey as a learner and how this gave her new insights to support her daughter’s experiences as a learner.

Alexis: With my daughter when she was going to school she used to tell me, “Mom, I do not understand what they’re saying.” And I was like, “How can you not understand? Why you not understand? If they’re explaining it to you, you should be able to understand.” And now that I go to school, I am like, “Maybe you not ready to learn that.” That was my other answer later on. “Well, maybe you are not ready to learn that, maybe it’s going to come to you later on, when your mind is ready to learn. It doesn’t matter how many times they explain it, maybe you won’t get it until your mind is ready to learn.” And she’s like, “Oh mom, I

didn't know you could speak like that because before I used to get very upset [...] and now I know that they learn in different ways, as we do.

From their own experience of being a college student, they also now serve as role models for their children. Solymar shared how her daughter, currently in middle school, sees how much her mother enjoys being a college student. Not only has her daughter been a cheerleader (Solymar: She tells me, "Mom, you have to get going to get to school"), but she is motivated in her own schooling as well:

She (her daughter) told me that she has been working hard...she is increasing her grades, because she wants to get a scholarship [to go to college].

Alexis, with her new experience as a college student, encouraged her daughter to go to college: "I feel more comfortable talking to her and telling her 'You got to go back to school.'" Towards the end of the fall semester, Alexis made arrangements to take her daughter to the college and help her get enrolled as a student. She also decided to take the college placement exam with her daughter, to help make her feel more comfortable doing it. Alexis, sharing this experience with me, said:

She goes, "Mom, the fact that you are doing it, that's a big challenge. That's a big risk. Because you make me feel so comfortable going in the room. If my mom can do it, I can do it."

Alexis is extremely proud that she now has the knowledge and confidence to help her daughter in this way. Lola is also proud about how her role as a college student pursuing a "profession" has changed her daughter's perception of her career possibilities for the future.

Lola: She (her daughter) know I am going to school and I am teacher too, now her mind change. It didn't affect just me, it has changed her too. Now she's thinking, "Mommy I want to work as a forensic scientist" and I am thinking, "Oooh, OK". It's changed her too because she saw her mama changing diapers and she thought, "I am going to work flipping

hamburgers,” but now she sees me professional and she wants to be a professional.

I knew that all of these women placed the highest priority on their role as a mother. As Alexis shared at the beginning of the research study, “I will do anything for my children.” This sentiment is shared by all of them. But while I had been focused on the ways in which this priority might conflict with their role as college student, they placed a greater value on how being a college student and how their learning supported the priority they placed on their role as mother. Instead of perceiving time spent on school as taking away from family responsibilities, education was a vehicle for enhancing how they met their responsibilities as a mother. Thus, their familial capital motivated them to pursue and persist in their post-secondary education.

We Walk With Our Face Up

Trespassing the initial barrier of their fears about first attending college was significant for these women. But it was persisting in spite of the academic challenges, and the subsequent growth in linguistic and academic skills, that resulted in replacing the internalized “I don’t know” and “I can’t” to “I know,” and “I can.” The opening dialog to the theme of “trespassing barriers” was prompted by our analysis of Vividiana’s statement, “There’s no barriers for me,” and it evolved into powerful reflections by the research collaborators about this internal transformation.

Cristy: I want to go back to page three. Where she says, “There’s no barriers for me.”

Erica: Yes, I had a question about that too. Are there really no barriers for you? Is that what you feel?

Vividiana: It might be. I still have a long way to go, but there’s not going to be barriers because I am not afraid no more. I feel confident that I can do it. I am not afraid. Since you trespass one, [you] get confident and know what you want to do, know where you are going, know the right

road that you go. Even though you are going to have a bunch of barriers, since you trespass one, you can trespass all the other ones.

Valentina: I think there's not only the barriers that people have for us, I think there are barriers that we have for ourselves are the ones that stop us, not the ones that people has for us. The barrier is still there, that people have for you, but if you don't have it for yourself, you feel confident to do what you really want to do.

Vividiana: But that is what I said, just passing that barrier, getting that you are not afraid to do anything.

Cristy: Because people think barriers are in life, they're not in life, we put those barriers in front of us. We think they are there, you know what I mean? We think, that door is not gonna open. It opens if you think it is going to open. So we do the barriers. So people think that life put the barriers, then it's not meant to be. If it's not meant to be then, oh no, I can't do it.

Valentina: That people will still have barriers, the change is in us.

Vividiana: The barriers that we have is us. It is not like anyone is putting in front of us the barriers. It's us. Our fears.

Valentina: That we stop...

Vividiana: And when you get over that fear, then there's going to be no barriers for you, even though there's going to be a lot of things hard in life, going through college, being a mom, being a professional, but you can move on because you are not afraid.

Valentina: So this is just the beginning to make us stronger.

Solymar: And what you say about barriers. We made more strong. We can do it. We feel more confident and we can pass them and then another one and another one.

Alexis: Because of this program, I am going ahead. I am not going back. I am not going back to what I was doing, laying at home feeling sorry for myself and I was not going to do that ever again. I am just going to keep going to school. There's no stopping me [...] Whatever they give me, I am taking it because I am not stopping right here. It's not a stop sign now [...] Now I feel like I can go through everything. I feel like who's going to stop me from going through those doors.

Victoria: I think it's when you notice the change in your life, how the program help in your life, you get the ability, the confidence [...] it's when I realize, OK, I am ready for everything.

Lola: Now we walk with our face up.

These women are aware that they will continue to face barriers in their journey. There will always be, as Valentina stated, “the barriers that people have for us.” Previously such barriers seemed insurmountable, a “stop sign” that halted them in their tracks. As Cristy also expressed there was a tendency, when encountering such barriers, to accept them as another kind of sign, a sign of destiny that it was “not meant to be,” and a self-fulfilling prophecy based upon their lack of self-efficacy and sense of agency. While the program opened a door to trespassing an institutional barrier, these women had to find the inner strength to walk through that door and in doing so they began to trespass the internalized barrier of fear and self-doubt. With each subsequent trespassing of barriers, barriers of academic proficiencies, of navigating institutional processes, of language, and of isolation, these women gained confidence and became “more strong.”

Over and over the research collaborators used the words “pride,” “proud,” and “confident” when discussing the influence of their experiences in the program. The confidence they gained in their identities as college students was strengthened by the confidence they also gained in their roles as professionals through the content knowledge and credentials they acquired from being in the program.

Gloria: Yo soy diferente ahora porque tengo mayor conocimientos. Yo creo que este conocimiento me hace crecer como persona, como ser humano, y como profesional en muchos aspectos.

Gloria: I am different today because I have more knowledge. I do believe this knowledge makes me grow as a person, as a human, and as a professional in many ways.

Lola: Before I used to be scared to talk and now I go to my boss and say, “I need this for my class and I need that.” Like before, when I used to go to another co-worker, she used to step on me and I was like oh, OK. But now, I don’t step on my co-workers, but now I tell them, “You know I think the best ways for the kids is to do this.” Really professional, and they are like “OK.” Now I am more open to talk, now I am not afraid to talk no more. I am more likely to say what I want and what I need and what my kids need. Before I used to be scared.

Victoria: Without this I wouldn't have had the opportunity to start working more and I am more professional now in what I am doing, like taking care of the kids.

Solymar: When before we were going to ask for work, you not confident enough, you're not, how you say, segura? Confident. Because you don't have the preparation. You have the feelings, that you can work with children, but you don't have the experience. So now it's with a lot more confident when you go to ask for work [...] Before I feel not confident because I have nothing to show them that I can work with children. Now I feel confident that I have something. Before I just had my GED and nothing else.

Gloria: My boss, she say, "Gloria, I am so proud of you. You are getting your CDA." And I say, "Me, too."

Alexis: I got my certificate and I think that as a professional I am doing a lot better. So because of this program, I am going ahead [...] I became a director. The classes that I took, the knowledge that I got, all of the certificates, that's why I was able to do that.

So it was in probing further Vividiana's comment, "there's no more barriers for me" we discovered it wasn't reflective of her belief that there were no more barriers, but that the feelings of fear and self-doubt that had once dominated the way she and the other women walked through life were now overshadowed by feelings of confidence and pride. This confidence and pride is linked to a new sense of their own agency in trespassing barriers they will encounter in the future. As reflected by Alexis's comment, "I feel like who's going to stop me from going through those doors," these women no longer allow others to dictate what doors they can or cannot walk through.

The Dream Becomes More

Barriers of discrimination due to language, race, culture, and immigrant status discouraged these women from career and academic aspirations. It was not that they didn't dream of attaining something more from life, but such dreams seemed like such an impossibility that they had to be set aside in order to focus on the realities of their daily lives.

Vividiana: Since I was a little girl, I saw my uncle, he was in school, he was attending college and I wanted, I wanted that so bad. He finished his career in Mexico and he moved over here and after a while my parents moved over here. But my dreams were not going to make come true because we moved to the United States. And at that time, I feel like, another language, everything was different over here and I and I dropped school...and so my dream, it was just a dream.

While Vividiana had a specific dream of going to college most of the research collaborators' dreams lacked such substance because they couldn't conceptualize a vision of a life alternative to what they currently lived. As Cristy said, "That people don't even think about it, they don't even have their dreams and goals." For many of them entering college wasn't about fulfilling a dream of earning a degree or opening a door to a new career, but rather it was a way to attain a credential that would allow them to get higher pay for the work they were already doing.

When Reyna started the program, she was working as an educational assistant. She found out from a co-worker that if she took college courses she could increase her pay. Reyna shared, "When I started, it was just because I want more pay. Now I think different." Upon completing the first four courses in the program, Reyna applied for the state child development certificate, which provides opportunities to be a lead teacher in an early childhood center. Shortly after doing so, Reyna was promoted to being a lead teacher. In seeing how advancing her education provided her a new career opportunity Reyna reflected upon how her educational aspirations have evolved through her experiences in the program.

Reyna: My last semester I took math, English, I took like 12 credits last semester [...] I spoke with one advisor, and they told me, "OK, you need this [class] and this [class] and this [class]." And I am like, "OK, I can do it." I want to. But when I started, it was just because I want more pay.

All of the research collaborators agreed that Alexis's story of academic and professional growth was the most powerful. Prior to the program Alexis's educational aspiration was to earn her GED, but even this she saw as an "impossibility." Alexis, upon hearing about the program, lobbied Abilene and me to be part of the program even though she had not yet earned her degree. She convinced us that she would keep up with the academic requirements and she would also work on getting her GED. Within one year of joining the program Alexis earned her GED. She also received her child development certificate and transitioned from being a teacher assistant in an early childhood classroom, to opening and being a director of two early childhood centers. Alexis, who previously did not dare to dream "of more" has dreams of earning her early childhood degree and advancing to further degrees to fulfill a new career aspiration. This was a common narrative among the research collaborators.

Alexis: And I think I see that if I keep going bigger things are coming. That's the most exciting part [...] Now it's like, it's not just this and that's it. We can keep going forever and learn different things all of the time [...] Now I want to be a speech therapist and help special needs kids.

Lola: When I started I just wanted my CDA because over there where we work they require the CDA to be the teacher. So I was like, OK, I'll get my CDA like other teachers, other co-workers do. They just want to get the CDA to be the teacher. But now, my first classes, and second and third class, I was like, oh no, I want to get everything I need to be a teacher for elementary school because I want to be first, second, third grade teacher. So now that I start the classes, I like them and I love them and I was like, I don't want to stop at my CDA, no! That's nothing. I want to go for my associates and bachelor's and everything. Now that we have these classes in Spanish, if it requires it to get it in English, we're going to have to try, because I don't want to stop, I want to be a second grade teacher [...] Yeah, we all want, we are hungry for more. And we are just waiting for you guys and Abilene to tell us this is next. When the classes almost done, we're like, OK, Abilene, what's next? We want more. I don't care if I am in school on Saturdays, nights, I want more. We want to go for more.

Vividiana: Well, what I think, it is like Lola said. It was a dream that was there...when I got into all of this, I am trying to get my associates. Now I

want to go forward. I want to get my associates and then after that I know I am going to want to get my bachelor's, and then my master's, and if I can, my doctor's. Now I know that everything is possible. If you pass that barrier that was stopping you from starting school at first, there's no more that you cannot just pass. So the dream, it becomes more, like you don't want to stay there, you want to keep going and get everything you can. So for me it's like changing my dream to getting more than a bachelor's, trying to grow more as a professional and as a person.

The dreams the research collaborators now articulate have substance; they no longer a vague dream of wanting more, they are informed by specific career and educational goals. Their experiences as college students have given them an ability to conceptualize a vision of themselves continuing on the pathway they have begun, as well as the confidence to believe they can achieve these dreams. These expanding dreams are also representative of their self-efficacy. It is not just that they have the dreams of new educational and career aspirations, it is that they believe that they have the *right* to these dreams because of what they can contribute to the larger community.

Alexis: I really think this program has the potential to show how we're professionals and that we can give so much to this United States, as a professional, as a Mexican professional, so that way they don't think that we are all bad.

Solymar: We need people to believe in us Hispanics, at the same time teach others how much we have to contribute to the community, to the country.

Victoria: The point is like to show them that we are here for more, to do good things, not only to come and destroy and all the bad things that they put on us. I think that we can contribute a lot of things to this country; that is why we are here.

Cristy: We're not just waiting for them to help us [...] We're giving back something.

Lola: See, we not ignorants. What we are is people that they need to trust in so we [can] show what we are. Because we have that inside. We just need someone to give us the opportunity like you guys, so we can take everything we have inside, out.

Because of their own experiences of being marginalized by others, some of these women have hopes that their accomplishments can help counter the negative stereotypes that exist in the White community about Mexican immigrants. But ultimately, whether or not the White community recognizes what they have to give, they have come to believe in their own value and potential to give back to their community and this fuels their dream of more.

Vividiana: I think the thing that we supposed to know is that we are of value and that we are persons that can do a lot outside and not be inside in the darkness without anyone knowing that you're someone. That you're going to be helping others. That you're going to be doing much more than what you did in the past. That you have a lot of things to give. To your community, to your family, to your friends. Because you are of value. As a person, as a professional, as a human being.

I can't imagine what it is to live "inside in the darkness"; to not know that I have something of value to contribute "as a person, as a professional, and as a human being." But I know that all of these women have lived in that place. But it is their journey from a place of fear and self-doubt to a place of confidence and self-worth that has fueled these women's desire to help others find this place.

Crossing Borders

Crenshaw (1989) described a ceiling of discrimination that separates those on the floor above who are not disadvantaged by various categories such as race, class, or gender, from those who reside in the basement "stacked—feet standing on shoulders—with those on the bottom being disadvantaged by a full array of factors" (p. 151).

Crenshaw continued this metaphor to illustrate how those who are burdened within the intersectionality of multiple disadvantaged identities are left in the basement with no opportunity to "crawl through the hatch" in contrast to those with singular disadvantages

who are closer to the ceiling (p. 152). The women participating as research collaborators are representative of those who are at the bottom of the pile in the basement due to the intersectionality of their multiple disadvantaged identities. But given the centrality of their identity as Mexican immigrants, it is perhaps more apt to use a metaphor of “borders” rather than hatch in a ceiling describe their experiences.

The first literal border crossing these women experienced in their lives was crossing the U.S. border from Mexico in the hopes of improving their life circumstances. While in doing so they left family and friends behind, it was common for them to share resources they had gained with those on the other side of the U.S. border. Also common was their commitment to helping others navigate the barriers so that they too could cross the U.S. border and have the opportunity to improve their lives. These acts of “crossing borders,” and of sharing resources across the U.S. border and helping others cross this border, have been transferred to borders of a different nature; those borders established by dominant culture.

Since coming to the U.S., these women have encountered the borders of discrimination, subordination, and exclusion that protect dominant culture’s power and privilege. As the narratives of these women illustrate, crossing these borders is made even more insurmountable because of the effects of multiple subordination due to their identities as Mexican immigrants, as Latinas, as Spanish speakers, as Spanish speakers of Mexican dialect, and as English language learners. But these women have also utilized the knowledge and capital that comes from the intersectionality of their identities to help others in their community navigate the barriers to crossing these borders. While the

research collaborators labeled their individual agency as trespassing barriers, it is their agency on behalf of others in their community that I have labeled as “crossing borders.”

Opening the Door For Others to Follow

Parallel to the hopes that crossing the border from Mexico to the U.S. might offer opportunities for a better life are the hopes that attaining a college education will also offer opportunities for a better life. But as the research collaborators revealed, there are many barriers to crossing the border that separate those who have and those who do not have a college education. Perhaps as frightening as approaching a U.S. border crossing to enter a foreign country, not knowing the language, not knowing if you have the right papers, not knowing if you will be turned away, is the experience of coming to college as a primary Spanish speaker, a Mexican immigrant, and a first-generational college student; not knowing the language, not knowing if you have the right papers, not knowing if you will be turned away.

From their own experiences of being a first-generation college student, an English language learner, and a Mexican immigrant, these women have used their linguistic and cultural heritage to become the agents for helping others in their community trespass barriers to college. As Abilene stated, “That the same way that I told them about the program, now they [the students in the program] are messengers.”

Solymar: There are people that want to help, want to serve, but they can't because they don't know, like me. We need to open the door, for [them] to get in and start.

Victoria: I have friends who don't have papers and they tell me, “You go to school?” And I say, “Yes and I have friends at school who don't have papers so immigration is not like going to define if you have the opportunity or not. You need to decide if you are going to take advantage.” And I share about the program we have. And she's like, “Are you sure?” I explain about what we are doing and there's a lot of people and it's not only going to be you. You are not the only one there. It's

open for everybody and its in Spanish and you are going to have a lot of experiences, and you need to go and enroll.

As Gloria said: “I think that Abilene and Erica offer the space and we, for the people behind us, have made it [bigger].” Not only have they opened the door for others by helping address questions about college processes but they also have become advocates, role models and mentors.

Valentina: There’s people hiding that don’t know that there’s opportunity [...] they hiding because they don’t know, they afraid about laws, about everything and they need to know that education is for everybody [...] We show them that there’s a space for everyone that wants to be educated.

Victoria: I am ready to help the other ones and show them they have opportunities. The same opportunities, we just need to take the opportunity and other risks. It’s a risk, but take the risk [...] It’s like I have now the commitment, like if I can help you, I am going to be there.

Vividiana: If you see people like us, if you see womans that don’t speak any English [...] definitely you’re going to feel like telling them, “You know what, I am in this program. My English it was not that good and my Spanish wasn’t either and this program has changed my life, has changed me as a person and it’s going to help you.” So you’ll try to encourage them to come to the program. I think we feel really confident in that, in telling people or other womans to come to this program because it’s helping... We can tell them, we have this door [...] My sister-in-law, she was not ready for school and I told her, “You know, you want to be a teacher, you like kids, you have a daughter, it’s going to be for your daughter and for your knowledge as a professional.” And she’s looking at me, how I was before and how I am now and she’s looking at it different, in a positive way. And she’s going to start in January, she’s going to start with this program. I have a friend and she’s going to start in January because she has seen the difference that it make on my life and that is why she is thinking of joining the program. Because they can see the positive way it is making in my life and they like it. So it is another thing that is helping, for the community and for the families, to see that you are now different, as a mom, as a professional, as a person, and you can give that message without saying anything, just looking at you, how you act, how you are now.

Captured by Vividiana is the unique perspective these women brought to their advocacy of the program due to their identity as mothers and Latinas with a strong value for *familia* and community. While they believe that a college education affords them

with increased opportunities for economic and career mobility, they realize it does not come with a guarantee of trespassing the racialized barriers to achieve such mobility. So in contrast to dominant culture's advocacy of post-secondary education as a locus for individual achievement, the research collaborators more frequently framed their advocacy of the program within the context of its influence on their personal and professional growth and the ways in which this allowed them (and therefore would allow others) to enrich their family and community.

While a college education in and of itself does not come with a promise of trespassing racialized barriers, the experiences of being in a bilingual program, and in particular a bilingual program in which they are being prepared as professional educators, has fostered the research collaborators' belief that they can help transform these barriers for others in their community.

We Have a Mission

Research on bilingual education and language identity has emphasized the connection between language and racialized cultural experiences (Cummins, 1986; Peirce, 1994; Yosso, 2005). The research collaborators reflected upon their own experiences of language and racial oppression and how the bilingual program has influenced their role as strong advocates for bilingual education but also a mission to become bilingual educators.

It's not allowed: The silencing of our voice, the shaming of our language

Victoria: And the lady [her supervisor] don't let us talk to each other. We cannot talk

Alexis: in Spanish

Victoria: In Spanish or nothing.

Alexis: Because they don't understand.

Victoria: Yes, because they don't understand. So we cannot talk or have a conversation.

Alexis: It's not allowed.

Victoria: It's not allowed. And when I tell them, "I know it's not my business but you're not supposed to do that," they are like, "Victoria, shhh, we cannot lose our job."

The other research collaborators nodded knowingly as Victoria, joined by Alexis, relayed her story of being silenced in her workplace. I was shocked to discover White employer forbiddance of speaking Spanish with their co-workers was a common experience among the research collaborators and other members of their community. In contrast, the research collaborators were matter-of-fact in revealing the situational realities of power and language. Forbiddance of speaking Spanish is used to silence opposition to unethical workplace practices. It is used as a means to prevent collective action, to isolate primary Spanish-speaking employees, and to keep them submissive. It is also motivated by White monolingual fear, fear reflective of their oppressor status and the obsessive worry that any conversation in Spanish allows the oppressed to talk negatively about the oppressor.

Alexis: Everyone else that does not speak Spanish thinks they are talking about them and that's why they put a stop to it.

Erica: As if you didn't have something better to talk about (laughter from group).

Alexis: It is true no? We talk Spanish not because we are having a conversation about how stupid you are because you can't speak Spanish (more laughter from group).

While there was anger and outrage at the instances of overt silencing of their voice, it was the more covert experiences that insidiously created and reinforced feelings of shame for their native language.

Cristy: It's not fear, but it makes me feel not comfortable to speak Spanish. Because if we speak Spanish at our jobs, people look at us, and think, "They're talking about us," or "They're saying something they don't want us to know." And it's really hard for us to not sometimes speak in Spanish because we know we speak Spanish and people think, "They are speaking Spanish because

Alexis: Because they don't want us to understand."

Cristy: Yes.

Alexis: "Because they are talking about us."

Cristy: Yes, and it's hard when we say something in Spanish and they put their eyes on us

Alexis: Yeah, they look at us.

Cristy: Yeah, they look at us like so weird and then I try to explain what we are saying so they don't think we are in the wrong... I push myself to speak English more so they don't look at me weird.

Being made to feel as if they are "in the wrong" when speaking their native language was compounded by the fact that being identified as a primary Spanish speaker corresponded with being identified as a Mexican immigrant. Regardless of documentation status this identity often results in being treated as trespasser to the U.S. and thus being subjected to heightened suspicion by co-workers and others. Even Alexis, with all of her righteous anger, found as her English improved it was more advantageous to only use English in her workplace. This lesson was also reinforced by her early experiences in U.S. schools in which she was punished for speaking Spanish.

Alexis: When I went to school, the first time when I came here I was four, five years old and remember I told you that I had to go to the corner because I didn't know the language? So that was awful for a school to do to a child, just leave her right there, she has nothing to do with us. And then I wasn't allowed to speak with my sister because she was in the other corner, and we could not speak Spanish.

For these women it was not just in speaking Spanish that they were made to feel as if they were in the wrong. It was also being told that their Spanish, the Mexican dialect, was "the wrong Spanish."

Abilene: I put Nelsy last year in one of the electives, and one of them was Spanish. And I thought, “OK Nelsy, this is going to be easy for you because it is Spanish.” So Nelsy goes to the first class and she comes home and says, “Mommy, I don’t know if this is going to work.” I’m like, “What do you mean? This is Spanish. I mean, come on Nelsy.” Well, the month pass by and she keeps having trouble with that class and I am like, what the heck? Nelsy keeps coming home crying and every time. She failed the first test. She got an F. And I went and talked to the teacher and I said, “OK what is going on? Nelsy is bilingual, Spanish is her first language, what is going on?” Well, she said, “It is because, I learned my Spanish at [university] and we’re going to speak Spanish in my class the way I was taught.” And I told her, “Do you realize that my little girl, her background is from Mexico and we talk very different than you guys?” And she said, “Well if the test says a desk, it’s a popitro or escritorio, I want her to relate to escritorio.” And I said, “Yes, but do you realize it is a popitro too?” And no, she say, “For me it is going to be escritorio.” And I say, “But Nelsy knows it can be a popitro or an escritorio.” And she says, “But then she will get it wrong.” And to make this story short, Nelsy end up with a D in the class. And I was so angry.

Lola: But it is no different at work. My co-worker, we do the colors in English and Spanish and I go “Morado,” and she goes, “No, it’s púrpura.” And I go, “No, it’s morado.” I go, “That’s not the right Spanish. That’s not the right Spanish the kids need to learn. They need to learn the right Spanish.”

Erica: How does that make you feel, as a parent or an individual, when you are in essence being told, your Spanish is the wrong Spanish?

Abilene: Oh, you want to cry.

Vividiana: Oh, it hurts, because that is our first language.

Alexis: Very frustrating.

Abilene: Sometimes you feel like, you know this poor thing, at the end of the year, she is thinking, “Spanish is not the way I want to learn because this is not good for me.” So she end up thinking, “OK, Spanish is not good, I failed the class and I don’t want to take it again.” And that’s not the answer I want for my daughter, so you really feel so bad.

Lola and Abilene’s stories of being told their Spanish was “not the right Spanish” revealed the racialized structure that preferenced White European Spanish over their Mexican dialect. Even as native Spanish speakers they were made to feel as if their knowledge of the Spanish language was inadequate when in fact it was the dialect that was devalued because it was Mexican.

Abilene's story also revealed the struggle the research collaborators with young children faced in nurturing and maintaining their children's connection to their native language. In discussing their desire for their children to speak and be proud of speaking Spanish stories were shared about how they supported this in their homes.

Vividiana: Our rule, from the door, inside, everything in Spanish. Anything in English, I am not going to understand. If you want something, you want water, you want something to drink, you have to tell me in Spanish...I am really happy with my kid. He is like, "Mommy, whenever you speak Spanish to me, please call me Brendón, because that is my name in Spanish, not Brendon, because it's Brendon in English. I am really happy because of the Spanish he is learning. He is learning the Spanish that I know.

Despite the women's desire for their children to learn and value their native language, they were aware of the threats to this living in a society in which their language is a marker of being a Mexican immigrant. Valentian's daughter, sitting at the table with us during one of these discussions, shared her own experiences of other children teasing her for being a "Mexican" when her knowledge of the Spanish language was discovered.

Alexis: You really go through that with the schools. My daughter told me one time, "Mom, please don't get mad at me, but can you please not have the radio in Spanish when you come pick me up?" And I was like, "What?" She goes, "It's very embarrassing for them to think that you're a Mexican." I'm like, "I am a Mexican and I'm sorry if you don't like it but you gotta get used to it"...But it was embarrassing for them. Because what did they hear in school? Only bad things.

Lola: My oldest daughter, I talk to her in Spanish, and she's like, "No Mom, talk to me in English." I don't want them to lose the Spanish.

Vividiana: You know we were talking about this in Alan's class, about being bilingual. And I was saying a story about my aunt and my cousins because one of them was born here and the other two born in Mexico. They moved here when they were still little and now they don't speak any Spanish at all. And they would get embarrassed speaking in Spanish and you know they could have problems with the teachers. And it is very sad when they come here and seeing my kids and that they are speaking both languages. And I was saying, and I think it was Maggie's friend? Sylvia. And she told me, "That's parent's fault." Well yes it can be like parents are not so, they don't feel like it is important for them to learn to speak

Spanish, but the other thing is where they live. The community is a White community and why do they need Spanish? But now I feel like, they should teach their kids because they are Hispanic, they are Mexican, they come from Mexico. How you come from Mexico, your culture is Hispanic and you don't know any Spanish? That is sad. And even here in [state] you see this. People that you are like, "Do you speak Spanish?" And they don't.

Valentina: But they didn't feel proud. They feel embarrassed for their language and that's the reason they didn't speak. And I think as a parent, for real, we have to support our language. Because like for me? My little one, she didn't want to, in the past, she could not speak Spanish really well because she went to daycare. And she didn't want to sometimes and I told her, "No, you have to. This is the nice that we have, you can speak both languages." And now she speaks Spanish better and her English is perfect.

Vividiana: It makes a difference with where you live. If you get that support from a parent...

Valentina: Yeah, as a parent ...

Vividiana: But as a parent if you are working with them but you are not getting the support from school, you're getting these reports that your kid is not acting well or your kid is speaking Spanish and is having trouble with the other kids because he is speaking Spanish, then you feel like, "What do I have to do?" If I tell him to speak Spanish he is going to get in trouble, so you just let it go. I think for them it is easier to let it go. Not for me, I think differently, but for them...

Valentina: They feel pressure, from the school, the community...

Vividiana: And the kids, they are the ones that do not get it...

Valentina: And they realize, when they grow up that they lose something important. If I let it go, if I say something in Spanish and I let her say back in English, then she doesn't learn Spanish. But I say, "No, you have to learn Spanish because you have Grandma and Grandpa that doesn't speak English, how you going to do over there [in Mexico]?"

Memmi (1965) discussed these psychological affects of linguistic dualism in exploring situations of "the colonized." He stated:

The colonized's mother tongue, that which is sustained by his feelings, emotions, and dreams, that in which his tenderness and wonder are expressed, thus that which holds the greatest emotional impact, is precisely the one which is the least valued. It has not stature in the country or in the concert of peoples. If he wants to obtain a job, make a place for himself, exist in the community and the world, he must first bow to the language of his masters. In the linguistic conflict within the

colonized, his mother tongue is that which is crushed. He himself sets about the discarding this infirm language, hiding it from the sight of strangers. (p. 107)

These women have battled this reality in their own homes and even in their own hearts. Pride for their native language has warred with experiences that have taught them and their children the shame of their native language. But their experiences in the bilingual program provided the research collaborators with reinforcements to fight this battle.

That they start as we did

Given all the negative experiences these women have had with being a primary Spanish speaker, they had more often perceived their Spanish language as a barrier rather than an asset. But, as research supports, being able to learn in their native language messaged a valuing of their native language and thus affirmed their cultural and linguistic identities (Auerbach, 1993; Cummins, 2000). Valentina said, “What it means is that there is a space for us here.” The research collaborators’ own experience with finding “a space” through their experiences in the bilingual education program has fueled their desire to create that space for others.

The research collaborators expressed a great deal of passion around issues related to bilingual education and honoring their Mexican dialect. We had more than one extended conversation about the lack of bilingual teachers in the schools, and the fact that many of the bilingual teachers that are in the classroom either use a local state dialect of Spanish or European Spanish.

Alexis: It is ridiculous. That is what I am telling you. In 2010 to have to have kids help other kids instead of teachers.

Vividian: But that’s something, you know, I think the parents, because when I was working it was in a school that was mostly English speaking students and the school was located in a White community and they have

bilingual. The little ones, five and six-year olds speaking Spanish. And that's something that really it makes me feel like, why? In our community, they don't have that. It's a necessity for everybody, but for our community, because they come from Mexico, they need support, they need help to keep developing and keep going forward.

Lola: My daughter always helps kids that don't speak English, so they always put her as a teacher.

Victoria: But I think they always have an assistant that speaks Spanish, maybe not a teacher, but an assistant.

Lola: Like in her school, there is one teacher that speaks Spanish.

Alexis: But even have tutors. They could pull the kids and have them work with a tutor. It doesn't necessarily have to be teachers, because they don't want to pay that much. But tutors run higher price too. It's hard. And I am telling you because I had tutors for kids. They used to go everyday, and I would pay two or 300 hundred a week. But I had to have a professional tutor to help them to be ready for school and because I did not feel like I could help them. And it was expensive.

Vividiana: It is very expensive. That is why I say it's a lot of need. How come? Because of money.

Alexis: I think it has to do a lot as a community. Because we don't get together and support everybody. The way I see it right now, it's ridiculous.

Vividiana: That's why we need to go forward. So we can do something.

Alexis's outrage over the fact that primary Spanish speaking students do not have adequate support in the schools was incited long ago by her own inability to help her children. Several of the other research collaborators also had personal experiences that mirrored this. They have seen how Mexican children, their own included, have been marginalized and denied access to the kind of educational experiences they need as primary Spanish-speakers. The lack of bilingual teachers, especially those who speak with a Mexican dialect, is extremely troubling to these women. But they now identify their own linguistic heritage as a valuable asset in addressing this issue.

Vividiana: There's a lot of people that already speak Spanish here, but it is not the same thing. Our kids that come from Mexico and they have the accent that is Español and when they speaking to them, even like us when we are speaking in English, they are like, what is she saying? Even

though we think that we say it right, but they don't get it. And it is the same thing for the kids that speak Spanish, even though it can be teachers that speak really good Spanish, but they don't have the accent that the kids needs to understand.

Solymar: The teacher, even though she is from here, she use her, how you say dialecto?

Vividiana: Dialect

Solymar: Dialect, so our kids, they don't know.

Alexis: Yeah, because our language is one way, [state] language is another way. It's a different Spanish, sometimes you're like, what? And us, showing our kids different ways, they get lost. They're like, OK, which one is the right one?

Solymar: Yo pienso que nosotras tenemos una misión. Vamos tenemos trabajo ahí en las escuelas, como Maestras [...] Porque nosotros podemos ayudarlos en inglés y en español. Para nosotros hay un trabajo ahí que hacer.

Solymar: I think we have one mission. We have to go work in schools as teachers[...] because we can help them in English and Spanish. For us there is work to do.

Vividiana: It [the program] has changed us. We are now thinking how to help those kids when we become teachers, how we are going to change their lives, how we are going to motivate them to keep going, to not have doors or barriers that they are not going to be able to trespass. So now we are looking at how we are going to make change in our society, with our community.

Reyna pointed out that it is not just in working directly with the children that they can play an important role.

Reyna: Yo pienso que es muy importante también con los niños, pero también es importante informarles a los padres. Porque hay muchas madres de familia, o sea lo digo por mí, que te enfocas a una cosa o a un trabajo, y ellas piensan que ya no pueden a seguir adelante, ya no pueden hacer nada, no mas que quedarse allí. O sea también nosotros no nada mas podemos ayudar a los niños, también podemos empujar mas a los padres y familia en enseñar los también a ellos... Que empiezan así como nosotros empezamos. Si el mismo miedo que ellos tienen, de que lo teníamos, que no pudieramos hacerlo en inglés, nosotros ya tomando todas estas clases ya maestros podemos empezar con ellos con el español como empezaron con nosotros.

Reyna: I think that it is very important also with the children, but also it is important to inform them, the parents. Because there are many mothers of

families, like me, that you focus on one thing only, like work, and they think that they no longer do it, they no longer can go forward, that there is not any more. Not only can we help the children, we also can push the parents and family in showing them that it is possible... That they start as we did. The same fear that they have, we had; that we could not do it in English, for us already taking all these classes, we as teachers can start with them with Spanish, as they started with us.

Reyna realized that their experiences as language learners in the program could be applied to how they work with families of the children they teach. That other mothers, like them, share the same fears about learning that they had, and they can share their experiences and their belief that continuing their own education is important. As teachers, they have the opportunity to “start” the learning in Spanish with families to help them gain their own confidence as learners.

While having the opportunity to trespass the internalized barriers triggered by negative language experiences was afforded to these women in a post-secondary bilingual program, it was also important that this program was supporting a specific career pathway in which they could become agents of change for helping others in their community trespass similar barriers. But it is not just in becoming a bilingual teacher that the research collaborators are helping others in their community.

Victoria talked about her recent experiences going to a government agency sponsored workshop for foster and adoptive parents. The information was being provided in English, but she observed that many individuals attending were primary Spanish speakers.

Victoria: So what she say, I translate for the people, so I help them in that way. Like, “You sure you understand? They request this, this and this.” I translate English to Spanish, Spanish to English. I know it is not one hundred percent but they get the idea and I make sure the parents and the family is getting what they needing.

With increased confidence in their “bilingualism,” the research collaborators have assisted monolingual Spanish speakers in navigating other types of spaces such as the job market, government agencies, and the judicial system. On multiple occasions they asserted their new bilingual identity by referring to themselves as “bilinguals.” But asserting themselves as bilinguals is not only about increased confidence in the English proficiencies, it also demonstrated increased pride in their native language heritage and their right to both learn and speak in their native language.

When discussing the bilingual program, the research collaborators advocated for the need to offer more than just the early childhood classes in Spanish.

Reyna: But Erica you need to try to do math and history [offer these courses in Spanish].

Victoria: We need to have the whole program in Spanish. Everything in Spanish.

Erica: But you have to move to English eventually.

Lola: But you know what Erica? Ok, we know English, we understand, but we want them in Spanish so we can get the whole thing, everything. That’s OK to take in English, but we want them in Spanish so we can get everything.

What these women identified was their own desire to continue learning content in Spanish. Not because they didn’t know or didn’t want to learn English, but because their learning experiences would be more effective in their native language.

Not only are the research collaborators advocating for the right to learn in their native language, but also they are advocating for right to speak in their native language. While comfortable speaking their native language when within the context of their family and community, the research collaborators had commonly felt discomfort and shame in speaking their native language in English dominant environments. Cristy reflected upon how she now feels differently about speaking Spanish.

Cristy: Now I think they are the ones that don't understand. We not the ones that are doing anything wrong. Before I was thinking, "It's their country and I am the one that is here so I should speak their language because I am making them uncomfortable?"

Erica: Uncomfortable.

Cristy: Uncomfortable...I say uncomfortable because it's long word (laughter from group). Yeah, I am making them uncomfortable and I was feeling uncomfortable too. So now I am like, it's my language. I can explain to you if you feel uncomfortable but it's the way we express ourselves. And before it was not, it was like, I need to speak in English because they don't feel comfortable with me.

Erica: So you feel more comfortable speaking your own language and being OK with that.

Cristy: Yeah, uh huh. And before, no. I push myself to speak English more so they don't look at me weird.

In asserting her own right to speak her native language, Cristy has rejected the feeling of discomfort and shame she once associated with her linguistic heritage. Like Cristy, many of the other research collaborators, with increased pride in their linguistic identities, have gained a greater sense of comfort in speaking Spanish in English dominant environments. In doing so, they have also created a space for others to do the same.

Whether assisting Mexican immigrants who are children or adults, the research collaborators are able to do so effectively because they identify with their experiences. As Reyna stated, "they start as we did." They know the fears associated with crossing borders into "foreign" places and of the barriers of language, of self-doubt, and of a lack of self-confidence, pride, and self-efficacy. But using their own experiences of trespassing these barriers, they are crossing borders by helping others in their community trespass these same barriers. While their agency in crossing borders is perhaps a more quiet and subtle form of resistance to language and racial oppression, it is through this agency that they feel strongly their voices, in Spanish or in English, are no longer silenced.

Conclusion

The students participating as research collaborators are in many aspects representative of the student population served by the bilingual early childhood program. Currently there are 124 students participating in the bilingual early childhood program and an unprecedented 45 students on a waiting list to begin the program in the spring of 2012. As with the research collaborators, the students are diverse in age and English language proficiencies. While all of the research collaborators are immigrants from Mexico, there is a small percentage of students in the program who are immigrants from other Latin American countries. Similar to the research collaborators, most of the students are first-generation, first-time college students but a few students have parents with foreign college degrees and/or their own foreign college experience. All of the research collaborators are mothers and this is true for a large majority of the students in the program. Additionally, most of the students in the program are working in early childhood centers and attending school part-time.

The ten research collaborators are all students who started the program during its first year. All of these women have completed the early childhood courses (11 in total) required for the early childhood associate degree, and seven of them have successfully completed at least one developmental English course. Six of these women have enrolled in at least one general education course (taught in English) required for the early childhood associate degree.

While the persistence of the women participating as research collaborators is not representative of all of the 42 students who started the program during its first year, a large majority of these students have at a minimum completed the coursework necessary

to advance their credentials in the field of early childhood education. Of the 42 students who started the program during its first year 35, or 83%, completed the courses required for the state child development certificate. Thirty of the 42 students, or 71%, completed all of the early childhood courses required for the early childhood associate degree. Fifty percent of the students who started the program during the first year have taken ESL and/or developmental English courses. Almost one-third of these students have achieved the English proficiency required to take college level courses offered in English.

While the success of the bilingual early childhood program as measured by associate degree completion is still unknown, these statistics certainly offer some evidence of its success in supporting these students in attaining career credentials, higher levels of English proficiency, and completion of college coursework towards earning a degree. But more powerful is the story behind these statistics, captured in the community narrative of the research collaborators. Their journey began with the intimate knowledge of what it was to be “living inside a place of darkness” because of fear, self-doubt, and a lack of self-efficacy. These internalize barriers developed because of persistent oppressive and discriminatory experiences as Mexicans, immigrants, and English language learners. While critical access to college was provided through the opportunity to take college-level courses in their native Spanish language, it was in trespassing the barriers to persistence, supported by the program structure and familial capital, that ultimately enabled them to trespass these internalized barriers. The confidence and self-efficacy these women developed through their journey in the bilingual early childhood program has not only facilitated personal, academic, and career growth, but also their agency in helping others in their community trespass these same barriers.

CHAPTER VI: LET THEIR VOICES BE HEARD

We began our research study with the question, “What is the influence of a bilingual early childhood degree program on the lives of primary Spanish-speaking, Latina immigrant students participating in the program?” Each of the themes that were generated from our analysis of the data speaks to how their experiences in the program empowered them as students, as mothers, as professionals, and as advocates. There were aspects of this that were unique to being in a bilingual post-secondary program and aspects unique to the early childhood curriculum. But their experiences also provide insight into a broader context of how community colleges might reconsider the ways in which we more effectively engage and support adult Latina/o immigrant and linguistic minority students in their educational journey.

As Latina immigrant, English language learners, the research collaborators represent a largely underrepresented population in higher education research. We know something of this population through descriptive research on the demographic and educational characteristics of immigrants in the U.S. (e.g. Bailey and Weininger, 2002; Baum & Flores, 2011; Erismen & Looney, 2007; Vernez & Abrahamse, 1996). Research concerned with the disparities in educational outcomes between Latina/o and White students also provide additional insights when accounting for differences between native-born and foreign-born Latina/os. A majority of the literature on Latina/o immigrants’ access and persistence in higher education has focused on students who have spent time in the U.S. K-12 educational system versus those who entered the U.S. as adults (e.g.,

Fry, 2003; Lopez, 2007; Vernez & Abrahamse, 1996). This is also true of the literature on post-secondary access and persistence of English language learners (e.g. Blumenthal, 2002; Bunch & Panayotova, 2008; Louie, 2005). Additionally, the research that focuses on adult ESL students making the transition to college-level coursework is extremely limited (Chisman, et al., 1993).

Within the research that does exist on Latina immigrant, English language learners in higher education, it is rare to hear their voices. The most notable exception to this is the growing body of research on undocumented immigrants in higher education (e.g. Abrego & Gonzales, 2010; Hernandez et al., 2010; Huber & Malagon, 2007; Pérez Huber, 2010; Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortez, 2009). Ironically, while none of the research collaborators were undocumented immigrants, this body of literature provides additional context for understanding their issues of access and persistence.

Our research study contributes to the existing literature in four significant ways. First, it provides insights into the “precollege contexts” (Gildersleeve & Ranero, 2010, p. 22) of Latina immigrant, English language learners, in particular those who have not graduated from a U.S. high school, and how these contexts shape access to higher education. Second, our research reveals the influence of the bilingual early childhood program on empowering Latina immigrant students and the ways in which institutions of higher education can embrace the cultural and linguistic diversity of these students in order to support their academic journey. Third, the research collaborators’ narratives, documenting the influence of the bilingual early childhood program on their lives, calls into question the policies and practices in higher education shaped by dominant language ideologies. And finally, for social justice practitioners who want to become stronger

advocates for the success of Latina immigrant, English language learners in higher education, our research findings underscore the importance of creating spaces for the voices of these students to be heard.

Precollege Contexts of Latina Immigrant, English Language Learners

Of the limited research that has been done on factors influencing college access for immigrants and English language learners, most of it has focused on those who immigrated as children and went through the K-12 educational system (Fry, 2003; Lopez, 2007; Louie, 2005; Vernez & Abrahamse, 1996). While these individuals face challenges in gaining access to higher education, immigrants who come to the U.S. as teenagers or adults face different, and perhaps more challenging barriers (Erismen & Looney, 2007). Unfortunately, there is very little research that provides understanding of the barriers this demographic of Latina/o immigrants face in coming to college.

While some attention has been given to the institutional barriers in higher education to the enrollment of Latina/o immigrants, less is understood about the precollege contexts that shape these students' aspirations and expectations for participating in college life. As Gildersleeve, Rumann, and Mondragón (2010) noted, the interplay of academic preparedness, unmet financial need, and lack of information about college opportunities is readily acknowledged, but there is a failure to recognize (and therefore address) "the root causes of educational inequity: pervasive and persistent discrimination and cyclical oppression in America's educational institutions and society at large" (p. 110). Often the precollege experiences of adult Latina/o immigrants have been marked by the intersections of discrimination and oppression based upon class, race, immigration status, and language.

A “legacy of deficit thinking” has promoted the assumption that Latina/o immigrants do not value education because they are not involved in supporting their children’s education with practices traditionally associated with White, middle-class (Auerbach, 2006, p. 276). However, several studies document the “moral support” for education that Latina/o immigrant parents provide their children through stressing values for education and hard work and encouraging them to excel in their studies and to aspire to college (Auerbach, 2006; Lopez, 2001). Often this support is expressed through *consejos*, or cultural narrative advice and teachings (Auerbach, 2006).

Auerbach (2006), in an ethnographic case study of Latina immigrant parent roles in supporting college access, shared examples of parent’s *consejos* from her interviews:

Gabriel was firm in his *consejos*: ‘What I have told my daughter is in our able to make a lot of money in the future, to be able to live a good life, she has to go to a university.’ José explained, “Like I tell my son, success comes according to the *empeño* (dedication, commitment, effort) you invest in what you are doing. If you are dedicated, then you can achieve whatever you want. If you don’t put *ganas* (will, drive) in to it, you become like us.’ (p. 281).

These narratives empower their children with the confidence and strength to persist in their education. But revealed in my reading of these *consejos* is also the Latina/o immigrant parents’ resignation to their own limited economic and educational opportunities.

Latina/o immigrant parents support their children’s pathway to college through empowering narratives, but the narratives they tell of their own potential to pursue college aspirations may differ. “I didn’t believe I was smart enough,” shared Victoria. “I thought college is for people that know and I don’t know nothing,” stated Alexis. As many of the research collaborators revealed their lack of confidence and self-efficacy, as well as an underlying belief that college was not a place in which they could belong, was

a primary barrier to enrolling in college, and this is a critical aspect of understanding the precollege contexts of adult Latina/o immigrant students.

It is not surprising that adult Latina/o immigrant have doubts about college being a place in which they can belong since they receive persistent messages that they are not wanted, nor do they belong in the U.S. As Chavez (2008) has documented, U.S. discourse on immigrants, in particular Mexican immigrants, is racist and dehumanizing. Such messages are prevalent in the media through the construction of the “Mexican threat narrative,” a discourse that portrays Mexicans (and other Latina/o subgroups perceived to be Mexican) as illegal immigrants seeking to take advantage of free public services, and as drug smugglers and criminals (Chavez, 2008, p. 696). Of this narrative, Chavez (2008) stated:

Virtually gone were references to Mexicans as peons, as docile, as necessary for labor. Replacing this discourse was a narrative in which Mexicans occupied the space of criminal. By conceptualizing Mexican identity as criminal, Mexicans are perceived in the American public mind as having an illegitimate (e.g. illegal) presence in US society. (p. 296).

Studies on undocumented immigrants reinforce their awareness of this threat narrative (e.g. Hernandez et al., 2011, Huber & Malagon, 2007); however, as highlighted by Chavez, it is not just undocumented immigrants who feel the consequences of this threat narrative. The research collaborators, all documented immigrants, revealed how this narrative has shaped community perspectives of Latina immigrants and their desire to promote a counter-narrative to the one that “puts all those bad things on us.”

Messages of not belonging, of not being of value, are reinforced by marginalizing and oppressive experiences in the workplace. The research collaborators shared how employers often “take advantage” and “push them down” because of their Mexican immigrant status and because, as Cristy said, “They don’t have value for you.” Penalized

for being Mexican they are further devalued when they observe White co-workers, less competent and less educated, who are the first to be promoted to higher-level positions.

Layered upon the marginalizing and oppressive experiences of being Mexican, is that which is the result of being an English language learner. King and De Fina (2010) discussed how English proficiency is often used as a measure to label who is a legitimate member of the community. Conversely, these authors stated, “lack of English proficiency and maintenance of a non-English language is often taken as an individual deficiency and a sign of lack of personal commitment to the USA or ‘American’ values” (p. 653). The research collaborators have all repeatedly experienced situations in which they were made to feel deficient because of their lack of English proficiency. What was interesting in the research collaborators’ analysis of their language experiences was their recognition of language discrimination as a stand-in for racism. As Cristy stated when reflecting on situations of being discriminated against at the workplace, “It’s not just the language, it’s the culture.” This parallels findings from King and De Fina’s study of language policy and Latina immigrants. Through interviews, Latina immigrants shared their accounts of language experiences in which they were forbidden to speak Spanish or made to feel uncomfortable when doing so. As the authors discussed, “While language often played a prominent role in such accounts, these experiences were widely interpreted as involving their being targeted due to racial, rather than linguistic, differences” (p. 664).

Regardless of why they were being targeted, the experiences of being forbidden to speak Spanish, of being made to feel uncomfortable speaking Spanish, and of being made to feel stupid when speaking English, were not only devaluing to the research collaborators, but further undermined their sense of belonging, confidence, and self-

efficacy. For some of the research collaborators who were less English proficient, this also resulted in shutting down any attempts to advance their English skills or interact with English-speakers. Others with greater English proficiencies responded by hiding their linguistic identity by speaking only English in English-dominant settings such as their workplace.

The influence of personal and social identity of adult Latina/o immigrants on their educational aspirations is unexplored in current literature. But amidst the discrimination and oppression experienced within the intersections of class, race, immigrant status, and language, Latina/o immigrants are vulnerable to internalizing the stereotypes imposed by the White majority about them and this can result in negative self-perceptions. This precollege context needs to be recognized and more fully explored because addressing issues of academic preparedness, financial need, and lack of information about college opportunities will not clear the pathway for Latina/o immigrants to participate in college if they have already internalized society's narrative that they are not worthy of, that they are not capable of, and that they do not belong on the pathway to college.

Fear and Not Knowing How To Start

The research collaborators' narratives indicated that "not knowing how to start," or lack of familiarity with the college entrance processes was a barrier to enrolling in college for those even tentatively considering getting on the pathway to college. Erismen and Looney (2007) highlighted the barrier of obtaining "college knowledge," or an understanding of college admission processes, to immigrants access to higher education. Research has shown that this information is not readily available to immigrant high school students, but even less likely to be available to older immigrants who have not

attended any type of American school (Erismen & Looney, 2007). Immigrant students interviewed by Erismen and Looney felt the best way to get information about college was to visit the college, but as a few of the research collaborators shared, this is often too daunting a prospect.

The research collaborators have all experienced significant fears navigating spaces critical to their day-to-day lives, such as grocery stores, because of unfamiliarity and not speaking English well, and such fears persist each time they face a new situation. Of going to college, this new unfamiliar situation, Vividiana shared, “We were scared. We didn’t know how to open that door, we didn’t know how to start going to school.” While these women often rely upon family and friends as support networks for navigating such situations, none of the research collaborators had people in their networks who could help them navigate college. Among the women who had even considered the possibility of attending college the lack of support network for doing so was seemingly insurmountable. As Alexis put it, “I didn’t know nobody, so instead of going forward I was stuck right there.”

Research on immigrants in higher education supports the important role of social networks in access to college (Gray, Rolph, & Melamid, 1996; Louie, 2001; Sy, 2006). Latina/o immigrants successful in accessing information about college and navigating through the admissions process most often have someone in their social network, like a family member, friend, counselor, or ESL teacher, who is critical to providing guidance and resources about the college going process (Huber & Malagon, 2007; Ketzenberg, 2010). But many adult Latina/o immigrants, especially those who are recent immigrants

and/or first-generation college students do not have individuals in their social network who can help them with college-relevant information (Auerbach, 2006).

Exacerbated by lack of college knowledge, is the fear of the implications of college enrollment as it relates to their immigrant status. As the research collaborators revealed many undocumented immigrant students are afraid college admission processes could draw the attention of immigration authorities to their undocumented status. This is supported by several studies on the experiences of undocumented immigrant college students (Abrego & Gonzales, 2010; Gildersleeve & Ranero, 2010; Hernandez et al. 2010; Huber & Malagon, 2007). Even among documented students, there can be concerns about this because many immigrant families have members with diverse documentation statuses (Gildersleeve & Ranero, 2010). Fears of deportation often “keep families in the shadows” and they avoid interactions with any kind of governmental institution (Abrego & Gonzales, 2010, p. 148). Because of these fears, it is critical for students to have a person they can trust to reach out to provide them with social support in navigating institutional processes (Huber & Malagon, 2007).

Fear, exacerbated by lack of college knowledge and lack of college knowledge support from a trusted member of their social network, was a significant barrier to be trespassed for most of the research collaborators. These women highlighted how critical it was to have a member of their community reach out to them, to invite them to participate in college, and encourage and guide them along the pathway to becoming a college student. As Cristy said, “She (Abilene) was like one of us...she knows what we need, she knows what we are going through.” Despite their persistent fears, they were able to “take the risk” because they trusted Abilene. Similarly, they now are able to

provide this social support to others in their network, sharing the college knowledge they have gained and guiding them through the college admissions processes. This pattern of Latina/o immigrant students creating a social network of support for others is characteristic of their *familia* capital (Yosso, 2005) and has important implications for institutions seeking to support the academic journey of these students.

A number of researchers have discussed the importance of incorporating the parents of Latina/o immigrant youths into college outreach efforts (e.g. Auerbach, 2006; Gildersleeve & Ranero, 2010; Gray, Rolph, & Melamid, 1996; Huber & Magalon, 2007). Such efforts could also incorporate explicit outreach to the parents as potential college students. Not only would recruiting Latina/o immigrant parents as college students help support their educational aspirations, but also it empowers them with additional ways to support their children's (and other members of their *familia*) academic journey. As Alexis shared, her own experiences as a college student prompted her to not only encourage her daughter to attend college, but she was also able to help her navigate the college admissions processes.

Researchers have also suggested that colleges need to extend their outreach efforts and rather than expect potential students to come to the college, find ways to go to them beyond traditional practices of college fairs and high school visits (Huber & Magalon, 2007; Gildersleeve & Ranero, 2010). As Gildersleeve and Ranero discussed, such outreach may need to include “a consistent and long-standing presence in the community to include schools and culturally relevant community locations” (p. 28). In identifying strategies for college outreach to Latina/o immigrants, researchers also recognized the importance of providing information in Spanish (e.g. Auerbach, 2006;

Huber & Magalon, 2007; Gray, Rolph, & Melamid, 1996). However, our research indicates that more is needed than just someone who speaks Spanish to go out to the community. Latina/o immigrants who may be struggling with fears and self-doubts are taking a huge risk in embarking on the pathway to college, and critical to supporting them in taking this risk is being able to connect with someone they consider a member of their community. Colleges should consider engaging Latina/o immigrant students who know the barriers potential students will face and can speak to them from their own experiences as part of their outreach efforts. As Abilene described:

It was my own life. It was my own experiences. Because everything that [they] were passing through, I already passed through. So when I went and talked to [them], it was more like talking from my heart. Talking to [them] from my own experience and I think that's why [they] feel like, 'OK, we can trust Abilene because she knows exactly what she is talking about.'

While Ketzenberg's (2010) study found that immigrant students involved in the Vocational ESL program found out from secondary social networks (ESL teacher, workforce development system) rather than primary social networks (friends, workplace, church, family), our research results reveal a different story. All of the research collaborators, and most students currently in the program, found out about the program from family, friends, and co-workers. This highlights the importance of valuing the social capital these students bring to our institutions, and valuing the important role that students can have in expanding Latina/o immigrant access to higher education.

The research collaborators, joined by many other students in the program, are now the primary network for guiding other Latina immigrant students to the pathway to college. They share their knowledge of college with daughters, sons, friends, and co-workers, of how to enroll, of who to contact, of taking college placement exams, and of

being able to attend even if undocumented. But it is not just college knowledge they share. They share their *consejos*, the narrative advice gained from their own experiences, as related by Vividiana in what she told another Latina immigrant, English language learner, “My English it was not that good and my Spanish wasn’t either and this program has changed my life, has changed me as a person and it’s going to help you.” One of the changes we are incorporating into our program as a result of this study is to involve veteran students in the orientation for new students to further build this network and sharing of narrative advice.

Latina immigrants also share a cultural value of familism and see family as a central referent (Auerbach, 2006). Because of this value the narrative the research collaborators share to encourage others to come to college has expanded beyond the traditional “to make more money” and “to have a better job opportunities” to include “it’s going to be for your daughter.” Auerbach discussed how Latina/o immigrants often could not serve as educational role models for their children and because of this “they used their experience to warn their children against repeating the pattern and to point the way to the ‘right path’” (p. 282). But as the research collaborators shared it is a great source of pride to now be able to also serve as both an educational and professional role model for their children.

Part of the social capital Latina/o immigrants bring to institutions of higher education is the notion of giving back to their family, friends, and community (Hernandez et al., 2010; Yosso, 2005). One way these students often give back is by serving informally as institutional agents within their communities, sharing their experiences to nurture others who might aspire to starting on the pathway to college.

Institutions seeking to embrace the cultural wealth these students bring should consider the ways in which they might acknowledge and honor this aspect of their community involvement and agency.

Empowering Latina Immigrant Students

The debate on bilingual education often focuses on two outcomes: its effectiveness in terms of academic achievement (i.e. subject matter knowledge students gain in their first language) and its effectiveness in supporting students English language proficiency. While proponents of bilingual education also articulate its role in valuing students' linguistic and cultural diversity, this is undermined when the success of programs are "narrowly defined in terms of immigrant students' level of assimilation, fluency in English and performance on standardized tests" (Garza & Crawford, 2005, p. 599). Additionally, the primary goal of bilingual education programs in the U.S. is to transition students out of L1 instruction into English-only instruction, often resulting in an eventual loss of the native language and reinforcing the perception of their native language as a deficiency (Wiley & Lukes, 1996).

Our research study reveals the importance of a third outcome of bilingual education and that is its role in empowering Latina/o immigrant students. It provides insights into students' perception of their linguistic and cultural capital when the orientation of a bilingual program is that their native language and culture is a valued resource, and when the primary goal is to support their academic and professional growth in their native language. Our research study also highlights the social and cultural capital Latina/o immigrants bring to their educational pursuits and the implications of this for creating empowering experiences for these students in higher education.

Moses (2000) argued for more attention to be given to the role of bilingual education in supporting students' self-determination. Moses defined self-determination as "the capacity to write one's own life story without having to capitulate to social factors that are outside of one's control" (p. 335). He associated two main elements needed for self-determination: a social context in which individuals can make significant choices about their life and one in which individuals can maintain or develop an authentic cultural identity, rather than one internalized due to oppression. Bilingual education supports self-determination because instruction in students' native language supports and values their cultural identities (Cummins, 1981; Delpit, 1995; Zimmerman, 2000) and allows for students to advance academically enhancing the context from which students can make their life choices (Moses, 2000). Our research study not only offers further support for the role of bilingual education in supporting students' self-determination, but also does so specifically within the context of post-secondary bilingual education and with adult Latina/o immigrant students.

Vividiana shared a perspective of how the bilingual program transforms students' experiences of "being inside the darkness" to knowing that "we are of value." The darkness that she and others have lived in was fueled by disempowering experiences because of their linguistic and cultural identities and undermined their self-confidence and self-esteem. As Vividiana said, "Sometimes you lose that so you need to learn to gain the confidence back." While empirical studies of K-12 students have examined the correlation between self-esteem and bilingual education, the results are contradictory (Cavazos-Rehg & DeLucia-Waack, 2009). However, our research collaborators repeatedly attributed their increased self-confidence to their experiences in a bilingual

program. Being able to succeed academically because they were supported in their native language was certainly an important element of the shifting perspectives the researcher collaborators' held of their essential worth. But participating in the bilingual program also provided the research collaborators with a new sense of pride in their linguistic and cultural heritage because they developed a perspective of the ways in which these were resources to help others in their community.

While not explored explicitly with the research collaborators, I think it was important that the primary goal of the bilingual early childhood program was not to transition them to learning in English. The philosophy of the program was informed by the belief that their knowledge of Spanish was already an asset in working in the field of early childhood, and the goals of the program were to capitalize on this asset by providing these students with an education that would build upon the professional knowledge needed in the field and to increase their opportunities for career advancement. Had the primary goal been increasing English proficiencies then the program would have just reinforced negative messages about their linguistic identity. As Nieto (1992) stated in discussing bilingual programs which focus on transitioning students from L1 to L2, "knowledge of another language is not considered an asset but at best a crutch to use until they master the 'real' language of schooling. This is at best a patronizing and at worst a racist position" (p. 164). While I still grapple with the reality that students in the program who wish to continue their educational pathway beyond the early childhood coursework must master English in order to do so (discussed more later in this chapter), the research collaborators did identify that the bilingual program messaged a valuing of their linguistic and cultural identities because it was specifically created for them.

The curriculum of this bilingual program in particular fostered the importance of their role as “Mexican professionals” in early childhood education and the ways in which they were better positioned (than White teachers) to support Spanish-speaking children and families because of shared language and culture. It was also empowering to the research collaborators that the program specifically put them on an educational pathway that would enable them to address the marginalization that they and their children have experienced in the U.S. educational system. This was expressed by their sense of a “mission” to help “our kids that come from Mexico” to “not have the doors or barriers that they are not going to be able to trespass.” Not only does this mission reflect a self-value for their linguistic and cultural identities, but also of the life choices the research collaborators’ feel they now have.

Prior to the bilingual program the research collaborators did not feel they had a great deal of control over their educational and career opportunities. As Cristy said, “people think that [if] life put the barriers, then it’s not meant to be. If it’s not meant to be then, oh no, I can’t do it.” That which once seemed an “impossibility,” as if it was not meant to be, such as getting a bachelor’s degree and becoming a bilingual educator, has become an attainable goal. While they recognize they will still encounter barriers, they are empowered to trespass these barriers. Their sense of self-determination was reflected in Alexis’s comments, “I am just going to keep going to school. There’s no stopping me [...] I feel like who’s going to stop me from going through those doors.”

While it is important not to minimize the structural and institutional barriers that will continue to shape the marginalization and oppression of these Latina immigrants, it is equally important to recognize and support their agency in trespassing these barriers.

For the research collaborators being empowered in their identities as students and professionals not only gave them a greater sense of agency in trespassing the barriers they faced, but also in helping others trespass these barriers. This was reflected in Victoria's comments, "I am ready to help the other ones and show them they have opportunities [...] It's like I have now the commitment, like if I can help you I am going to be there." Their perspective of themselves as role models has become a form of agency within their community for helping others trespass barriers. Their outreach to support other women like them in accessing and persisting in higher education is another form of agency they have exercised. Additionally, their own experiences with bilingual education has fostered their advocacy of bilingual education for others. As Vividiana stated, "We are now looking at how we are going to make a change in our society, with our community."

Our finding of the bilingual program contributing to adult Latina immigrants' sense of agency is unique given the paucity of research on post-secondary bilingual education programs, however Huber & Malagon's (2007) study of undocumented college students highlighted how the students interviewed had created a social network of support to help other undocumented students and were actively involved in advocating on campus and in the community for the educational rights of undocumented immigrant students. Additionally, Chisman, et al. (1993) identified "becoming empowered" and being able to help family and community members as two motivating factors for adult immigrant participation in ESL programs. For students belonging to groups that have traditionally been marginalized and oppressed, institutions can play a role in providing additional knowledge and resources for these students to act as agents of change within their communities. One example of a program that has done this effectively is the UCLA

Migrant Student Leadership Institute. This program drew from migrant youth's lives to develop a curriculum that fostered sociocritical literacies and real-world applications to effect social change that migrant students were interested in advocating for (Gildersleeve & Ranero, 2010). Not only did this program support the agency of immigrant students, but research on the program also suggested it provided effective support for the college going process in ways that traditional programs did not.

While experiences in the bilingual program fostered a greater *sense* of agency among the research collaborators to help others in their community, I believe it was more that the knowledge and resources they gained increased their capacity to act upon an already existing value to give back to others in their community. Yosso (2005) referred to the tradition of "lifting as we climb" as characteristic of the social capital of students of color (p. 82), and this was certainly true of an aspect of social capital the research collaborators brought to the program. In addition to the social capital the research collaborators brought to their experiences in the program was the familial capital, which was critical to their persistence in the program. Students moving together through the program became part of each other's extended *familia*. As Valentina said, "We are working together. We are like a big family." The research collaborators shared how they provided academic support to each other, but just as critical was the emotional support they drew from one another. For some of the research collaborators who did not have many friends prior to the program, the opportunity to socialize with these new friends was an important aspect of their college experience.

Research has identified social integration as a factor contributing to student persistence in higher education (Hurtado & Carter, 1996). Unfortunately, Latina/o

immigrants are more likely to experience a sense of isolation and a lack of belonging on college campuses (California Tomorrow, 2002; Stebleton, Huesman, & Kuzhabekova, 2010). This is in part due to more experiences with hostile environment, discrimination, and a sense of low social status as a result of their group identity (Hurtado & Carter, 1996). Additionally, because of family and work responsibilities, Latina/o immigrants attending college are less likely to be able to participate in some of the traditional activities which foster social engagement such as student organizations (Stebleton, et al., 2010). Hurtado and Carter (1996) suggested, “Perhaps what is most important is that integration can mean something completely different to student groups who have been historically marginalized in higher education.” The results of our research study suggest that more important than social integration with the larger campus community, was the opportunity to build a community with other women who shared their language and culture within the classroom context. As Cristy revealed about her classes she had taken outside of the bilingual early childhood courses, “You feel like nobody is with you, you are going on this road by yourself.”

Our research provides insights to strategies institutions of higher education might implement to support Latina/o immigrant students’ persistence in their educational journey. Creating learning communities or cohort programs specifically designed for Latina/o immigrants not only will help facilitate a sense of belonging and a support network, but it recognizes the social and familial capital these students utilize to persist in their academic journey. This would be an important step in reinforcing Latina/o immigrant students’ value for *familia* as an asset in their educational pursuits rather than a deficit.

Our research collaborators' value for *familia* provides additional considerations for institutions of higher education. Unique to the early childhood curriculum of the program, the relevancy of the content to their role as mothers supported their engagement with the academic material and persistence in the program. This finding is supported by Wright's (2010) study of adult women in a childcare degree program. The students in this program found the learning motivating because it related directly to their own family reflected by one student's comment, "if I learn all this I can transfer it to my own children" (p. 117).

The "family relevancy" aspect of the curriculum has a few potential implications for institutions of higher education. For those institutions interested in creating a post-secondary bilingual degree program, considerations should be given to academic and career pathways that utilize and enrich the funds of knowledge of Latina immigrant mothers. Such programs might include human services, education, and health occupations. ESL programs serving Latina immigrants might also include curriculum that capitalizes on their value for *familia*. While not all academic programs are going to have content that can explicitly address children and families, institutions of higher education can consider other strategies that value the family of Latina immigrant students.

College outreach efforts, to include orientations to college or programs should be inclusive of the whole family, which for Latina immigrant students may consist of children, siblings, uncles, cousins, grandparents and family friends. As Gildersleeve and Ranero (2010) suggested it is critical for institutions of higher education to both expand definitions of family, as well as the opportunities for family to be involved in the

educational process. Institutions might also share some of the wealth of resources on college campuses with the families of Latina immigrant students, such as computer labs, job centers, and libraries. Similar to the concept of community schools in K-12 education, colleges might also serve as a hub where Latina/o immigrant students can access resources needed to support their families, such as health, social, and legal services. Finally, being a role model for their children as a college student was important to the research collaborators. Institutions might consider organizing college activities in which Latina/o immigrant students can bring their children to the campus to see their parents engaged in their role as a college student and parents can share their knowledge of college with their children.

As evidenced by our research study, the experiences of the research collaborators in the bilingual early childhood program affirmed and supported their linguistic and cultural identities and empowered them in their roles as students, professionals, mothers, and advocates. While some of our findings offer implications for more general practices in working with Latina/o immigrant students in higher education, some are very specific to being in a post-secondary bilingual program and as such, offer evidence of the need to provide alternatives to the English-only pathway to college.

Questioning Dominant Language Policies in Higher Education

The idea that students must gain a specific level of English proficiency in order to access college-level coursework is rarely questioned in higher education. Yet the results of our research study about the influence of a bilingual program on primary Spanish-speaking, Latina immigrant students offers evidence that the English-only pathway to college must be challenged. The narratives of the research collaborators not only reveal

the potential of a post-secondary bilingual education program to support increased English proficiencies, but perhaps more importantly its potential to affirm and empower cultural and language minority students.

The failure to question the English-only pathway to college may in part be due to the reality that those in higher-level administrative positions in institutions of higher education are more likely to be native speakers of the dominant language. I'd never really given much thought to my language identity or linguistic privilege until my life intersected with my research collaborators. As a native speaker of the dominant language I am able to unconsciously reap the benefits of being a "legitimate speaker" (Peirce, 1994, p. 4) of the English language. When I speak I am not made to feel as if my intelligence, my status as a legitimate member of our society, or my right to speak is called into question. I do not need to constantly worry about finding the "right words," making others "uncomfy" by speaking my native language, or there not being someone who will understand me in each of the places I must visit in my daily life. In contrast to my experiences, my research collaborators helped me to understand how dominant language ideologies have shaped their lives.

The daily lives of my research collaborators do not allow for the privilege of being unaware of the influence of language on social interactions and how such interactions, reinforcing and reproducing power inequities, are intimately linked to their self-concepts. These women's experiences of being silenced, of being shamed, of being made to feel stupid, both in speaking their native Spanish language and in speaking the English language, undermined their sense of self-efficacy. Not only did this affect their belief in their ability to learn English, but also their sense of self as knowers and learners.

The narratives of the research collaborators' language experiences led me to do further research on second language learners in the larger context of how structures of power mediate the identity of English language learners.

Poststructural theorists of second language acquisition posit the view of language as capital and the site of identity construction (Pavlenko, 2001). Bourdieu (1991) described language as a form of social and economic capital because it provides "access to more prestigious forms of education, desired positions in the workforce, or the social mobility ladders" (as cited in Pavlenko, 2001, p. 123). While immigrants are highly motivated to gain such social and economic capital by acquiring proficiency in the English language, the second language learning environment is "frequently hostile and uninviting" (Norton, 2000, p. 113). Even in a community in which the Spanish language is prevalent, with businesses, governmental agencies and other community organizations providing materials and services in Spanish, the research collaborators are all too familiar with a hostile and uninviting language learning environment, and how "power relations play a crucial role in the interactions between language learners and the target language [English] speakers" (Norton, 2000, p.12). This was reflected in their critique of the common experience with English speakers that make them feel as if they "didn't get" their English but, as Lola stated, "they do get it" and instead respond in such a way (asking them to repeat themselves or pretending they can't understand) that further marginalize them as "illegitimate speakers" of English.

It is not just their legitimacy as an English speaker that is called into question. Shi (2006) stated that several researchers have documented how language is a site for identity construction: when English language learners "find themselves positioned as

incompetent students, workers or adults/parents” it changes the ways in which they perceive themselves (Shi, 2006, p.5). Ultimately these forms of language oppression undermine the confidence of language minorities “that they will be able to match the proficiency in the majority language of the dominant group, [and] they may be reduced to silence in the majority language market” (Shi, 2006, p. 5).

Research indicates that motivation to learn a language and levels of language anxiety are variables that influence second language acquisition, and such motivation and anxiety have also been linked to self-confidence (Peirce, 1995). The presumption of offering up ESL courses as the primary pathway to college for adult English language learners is that they will be motivated (i.e. have the self-confidence necessary) to gain the English proficiency required to access college level courses. But this presumption fails to recognize the larger social context in which adult English language learners may have already internalized inadequacies as language learners due to negative language experiences. As the research collaborators revealed, many of them would have never come to college if not for the opportunity to learn in the native Spanish language because not only did they lack confidence in their English language learning abilities but they had fears and anxieties about speaking English.

Gardner (1985) argued that self-confidence “develops as a result of positive experiences in the second language and serves to motivate individuals to learn the second language” (as cited in Pierce, 1995, p. 1). While I believe this has been reflected in the experiences of the research collaborators, their willingness to engage in second language learning experiences within the college context was precipitated by the self-confidence they gained from positive learning experiences in their native language, within a

dominant English language context. Their narrative offers evidence that institutions of higher education truly invested in the notion of providing educational access to language minority students need to reexamine the English-only pathway to college.

Even among those English language learners who do attempt the English-only pathway to college, there is little evidence supporting the effectiveness of this pathway in fostering the persistence and success of students in attaining the literacy skills needed to advance to college level courses. The handful of studies that exist indicate that adult ESL programs largely fail to adequately improve the language skills of students to the point in which they can access and persist in achieving post-secondary degrees (Brod, 1995; Chisman, et al., 1993; Ignash, 1995). Chisman, et al. (1993) examined factors that influenced these low levels of persistence and found that included among these were lack of confidence in being “college material” and lack of knowledge of the educational system and related support services. These are supported by findings of our research study in which the research collaborators perceived college as a place “for people who know,” and did not believe they were “smart enough” to be a college student. Additionally, they did not know “how to start” college and how to access related support services such as financial aid.

Numerous studies (e.g., Cummins, 1981; Hakuta, 1986; Krashen, 1981) also indicate the development native language literacy skills are essential to the acquisition of second language literacy skills. The results of our study reflect how students felt the literacy skills they gained in Spanish, such as expanding their vocabularies, developing reading comprehension strategies, and improving their academic writing, were skills they could transfer to learning English. However, ESL programs do not provide for native

language literacy development and additionally they usually rely on monolingual English instructional practices, which ignore the use of students' first language in supporting their acquisition of a second language (Auerbach, 1993).

While ESL has been the fastest growing area in adult education and a majority of these courses are offered by institutions of higher education (Kwang & Collins, 1997), there are no comprehensive studies documenting retention and persistence rates of students who begin their postsecondary coursework in ESL and continue to regular college coursework (Ignash, 1995). In a time of educational accountability in which heightened attention has been given to issues of retention, persistence, and degree completion of students at post-secondary institutions, it is striking that similar attention has not been given to these same issues for ESL students. Perhaps because to do so would not only highlight the failure of institutions of higher education to provide educational opportunity to this population, it might also cause a closer examination of the deeply embedded dominant language ideologies shaping institutional policies and practices.

Wiley and Lukes (1997) discussed how institutions' dominant language policies reproduce unequal social status:

The dominant ideologies and the language policies influenced by them tend to be used as instruments of control that result in the reproduction of unequal social boundaries among groups...Access to an elite language education is an essential component of social mobility. Thus, educational language policies such as college entrance requirements are significant gate keeping mechanisms for other social, economic, and political domains. (p. 516-517).

The gate keeping function of educational language policies in institutions of higher education is seemingly evidenced by the low levels of post-secondary completion among Mexican and other Latina/o immigrants. Compared to any other immigrant population or

other ethnic populations, Mexican foreign-born immigrants are on the bottom rung of the ladder of educational attainment (Erisman & Looney, 2007; Pew Hispanic Center, 2009). A report by the Pew Hispanic Center (2009) based upon the Census Bureau's 2006 American Community Survey, revealed that among Mexican foreign-born immigrants, ages 25 and older, only 10.3% had completed some college education, and only 3.6% were college graduates. The statistics in the Pew report did not account for the age of emigration but given the findings of Erisman and Looney's (2007) study, which concluded that immigrants entering the U.S. before age 13 compared favorably with native-born peers with regards to educational attainment, it is reasonable to infer that percentages of post-secondary completion would be even smaller if only looking at those Mexican immigrants who entered the U.S. after the age of 13. Such statistics paint a grim picture for post-secondary participation among Mexican foreign-born immigrants, especially those who emigrated to the U.S. after the age of 13; the population which comprises the majority of students entering the bilingual early childhood program.

The low level of post-secondary participation among this population is hardly surprising. Among those who aspire to a post-secondary education, they must first spend a significant amount of time to achieve the required level of English proficiency. As has been well established in the literature on second language acquisition, acquiring such academic language proficiency in a second language can take between three to seven years (Auerbach, 1993; Cummins, 1981; Krashen, 1981). Ironically, institutions of higher education award college-level credit that can be applied to degree requirements to students who enroll in foreign language classes, and yet rarely is the same option given to

students enrolling in ESL courses who are usually meeting higher second language proficiencies (Wiley & Lukes, 1996).

Research has shown that the length of time that it might take a student to acquire a second language is dependent in part on the literacy levels in his or her native language, but also on the extent to which his or her academic progress in course content beyond English is supported in the native language (Faltis & Wolfe, 1999). Despite the well-supported claim that becoming fluent in English is a process that would be accelerated with concurrent content coursework supported in the native language, English language acquisition is instead treated as a gate-keeping process for access to college content.

Additionally problematic, the gate-keeping function of English language proficiency requirements reinforces perspectives of who college is for. For the research collaborators language is intimately connected to their identities as Mexican immigrants, and English-only policies reinforced their perception that college was not a place for Mexican immigrants. As research on bilingual education in K-12 schools has demonstrated when the native language of students are valued, so too are their cultural and linguistic identities (Cummins, 2000; Delpit, 1992). Our research study demonstrates the same is true for bilingual education at the post-secondary level. The cultural and linguistic identities of the research collaborators were affirmed by the experience of having their language leveraged as an asset in the learning environment. This was not only evidenced by a developed sense of their ability to use their cultural and linguistic heritage to positively contribute to their community, but in their advocacy of the bilingual program as a message to their community that there is a “space for us” at college.

But that space needs to be bigger.

I worry about the transition of students in the bilingual early childhood program to English-only classes. Recently Vividiana shared her challenge in completing an exam in the time allotted in her psychology class because of the time it took her to translate from English to Spanish to English again to correctly answer the questions. Taking my advice to ask the instructor if she might have more time to complete the exam because English was her second language, she was devastated by the instructor's puzzlement over how she could be in the class if she didn't have adequate English proficiency and subsequent refusal to provide accommodations unless she had a documented learning disability that required such accommodations. This response is perhaps reflective of the lack of recognition among college faculty of the challenges ESL students face in college courses and the common strategies that can be used to support these learners, to include extended time on tests (Teemont, 2010). Leki (2006) found that part of the unwillingness to accommodate English language learners in college classrooms with accommodations, such as extra time on exams, was due to a perception that it was unfair to other students in the classroom.

While K-12 education has made great strides in recognizing that "fair is not equal" when providing linguistically diverse students with equitable access to an education, this is an issue that needs greater attention in higher education. Even when second language learners attain the proficiencies needed to advance to college level courses with English pre-requisites, they will still encounter challenges simply because English is their second language. They will have to work harder and study longer than native English speakers, and even then they may do poorly because of assessments that disadvantage ESL students (Teemont, 2010). Unlike K-12 education, instructors in

institutions of higher education are not legally required to provide any accommodations to students for whom English is a second language. As reflected in one study of California's community colleges, there seems to be little awareness of the needs of immigrant students beyond ESL classes and most institutions do not provide additional academic supports for this population (California Tomorrow, 2002).

It is highly unlikely that Vividiana will ever ask another instructor for such considerations. I wanted to cry for her, and I wanted to rage at the ignorance and careless cruelty of the instructor. Our research study and my subsequent and continued interaction with the research collaborators has prompted reflection on the actions I might take to support a more responsive learning environment for ESL students. I urge other professionals in institutions of higher education to consider, as I myself am doing, how to increase awareness among faculty and staff of the challenges these students face in college courses and how we can provide additional academic supports to enhance their success.

Because of these recent conversations with Vividiana, and similar ones with other research collaborators, I have given much thought as to how the program can be structured to provide more support for the students in a successful transition to the general education courses they will need to complete an associate degree. One of the strategies I had considered was to require students, upon completion of the four courses required for the CDA (allowing students to advance their career credentials and pay), to demonstrate progress in ESL or developmental English courses in order to continue with early childhood coursework. This would scaffold their experience with English-taught courses, at the same time they would still taking the early childhood courses in their

native language that are more relevant and affirming. It would also provide continuity of their support network while they are facing the challenges of the English-taught courses. Ultimately, I decided we could encourage but not require this. I didn't want to impose the requirement of gaining English language proficiencies to complete the early childhood coursework. However, I am currently working with instructors in the program to consider how we might gradually transition from a 90/10 model of instruction (90% of instruction delivered in Spanish, 10% delivered in English) for courses taken early in the program, to a 50/50 dual language model for the final early childhood courses. Even in moving toward a 50/50 model, I want to ensure that students with low levels of English proficiencies could still be successful.

At the same time, I have had to reflect on my own carelessness in telling the research collaborators that they would "have to move to English eventually" as it seemed rife with the patronizing and racist attitudes that Nieto (1992) charged as being embedded in bilingual programs focused on transitioning students to the dominant language. My research collaborators are right to advocate for more general education courses to be offered in their native language or even for more career programs to be offered in Spanish. They have a better understanding than most in the difference between the English needed to navigate successfully in the world outside of school, and the academic English required to be successful in college level courses. As Lola said, "OK, we know English, we understand [it], but we want them [the courses] in Spanish so we can get everything." It is not just the "success" measured in grades that the research collaborators were concerned with when advocating for more courses to be offered in Spanish. They want to ensure they are learning everything and not missing content

because of language issues. While I would love to be able to have the students take required general education courses in Spanish, thus far this idea has been met with resistance.

Such advocacy is challenging within the context of deeply embedded dominant language ideologies. While the bilingual early childhood program could not exist without the approval of executive administrators at our college, we still tend to operate “under the radar.” Because I worry about those would oppose the offering of a bilingual program, I have chosen not to publicize the program in our catalog or brochures. I am careful about which audiences I share the triumphs of our program with. Even choosing to term the program “bilingual” rather than “Spanish” was a deliberate strategy to provide cover to the program, as for many it implies that instruction is in both English and Spanish.

We are not the only program serving a primary Spanish-speaking population that operates under the radar. In her dissertation study examining the “unintended social reproduction” of community college vocational ESL programs, Ketzenberg (2010) noted the characteristic of the program studied for “flying under the radar” in which “college staff developed the initiative independent of much administrative scrutiny” (p. 125). Bonaparte (2001), in her case study of how post-secondary bilingual programs were conceptualized and implemented, found that this commonly occurred “in the presence of opposing political activity” (p. 5). Bonaparte also noted that administrators at one institution participating in her study “carefully qualified their responses concerned that they could compromise the college in the eyes of English-only political observers of their institution” (p. 72).

It is not just the eyes of English-only political observers that those of us working in bilingual programs must be cautious of. Amidst a raging war over immigration policy during a historic economic depression, immigrants are under attack. While particular attention has been given to undocumented immigrants, documented immigrants, in particular those from Mexico, are treated with heightened suspicion and resentment in this political context. As the research collaborators revealed, they live with an awareness of a pervasive negative public perception of Mexican immigrants. Unfortunately, a bilingual program that is specifically designed to support the educational and economic advancement of Latina immigrants could all too easily become a target of such anti-immigrant sentiments. While legally the program could not be shut down because it serves Latina immigrant students, continued service to this population of students can be halted under the guise of regulations prohibiting the use of a language other than English in the delivery of post-secondary instruction, as has happened in other states (Bonaparte, 2001).

For post-secondary bilingual programs to continue to survive, or even thrive, we need proponents of bilingual education to include institutions of higher education in the bilingual debate. I also would particularly urge LatCrit scholars to include this in their agenda. The emergence of LatCrit developed because of the lack of representation of Latina/o communities in CRT and other strands of jurisprudence being developed in the 1990s (Valdes, 2003). With its “commitment to the rejection and dismantling of white supremacy and privilege both within and beyond Latina/o communities” through critical legal scholarship (Valdes, 2003, p. 6), it seems appropriate for LatCrit scholars to craft a legal challenge to the inequity of an English-only pathway to college. The extension of

the rights of second language learners gained in *Lau v. Nichols* to public institutions of higher education has never been invoked in a legal context. As Bonaparte (2001) suggested, “Recent activity in the U.S. Office for Civil Rights that Latinos and other language minorities may be able to make claims against colleges receiving federal grants or subsidies if they fail to meet the language needs of adult second language learners” (p. 61).

Being passionate about the “democratizing role” of community colleges in serving diverse student populations (Dowd, 2003), it is particularly troubling to me that dominant language practices not only function as barriers to developing English language proficiency and gaining access to and persisting in college, but that they also perpetuate the multiple forms of oppression experienced by Latina immigrants. As I learned from the research collaborators, language is central to their identity and experiences that marginalize them as native Spanish-speakers also marginalize them as Latinas. While reconsidering the practices influenced by English dominant ideologies is certainly a step in the right direction toward creating environments that embrace the linguistic and cultural heritage of these students, the broader issue is the “fundamentally unequal power structures in which these students are framed as having deficits” (Kanno & Varghese, 2010, p. 324). Bilingual education programs cannot merely be viewed as a solution to “fixing” English deficits if they are to support some measure of equity in educational opportunity.

Conclusion

For me, post-secondary bilingual education is about social justice. It is about providing some measure of equity in access to and persistence in higher education to

Latina/o immigrants, who arguably are one of the most oppressed populations in the U.S. Such access is critical, as it has been well established in the literature that a college degree is associated with higher earnings and broader career choices (Baum & Flores, 2010). Post-secondary bilingual education is about social justice because it demonstrates a value for linguistic and cultural pluralism, and it positions the linguistic heritage of Latina/o immigrant students as an asset rather than a deficit. It is about social justice because it challenges the perpetuation and reproduction of the oppression of Latina/o immigrants inherent in the practices and policies informed by English dominant ideologies. Bilingual education also has the potential to empower adult Latina/o immigrant students in ways that benefit their families and their communities.

For those who need more than an argument for social justice to support post-secondary bilingual education, there is a larger economic context to consider. The significant increase in demand for a skilled workforce over the past few decades has made access to post-secondary education critical. At the same time, it is projected that immigrants will comprise the largest growth in the workforce. Wrigley et al. (2003) cited the work of a national bi-partisan task force that concluded, “How we respond as a nation to the large and growing presence of immigrants in the U.S. and their critical role in meeting our workforce needs will be the key for determining both our future economic growth and how well prosperity is shared among workers” (p. 19). These authors presented several policy recommendations, to include bilingual job training programs. While the authors did not go as far to recommend bilingual degree programs, they did indicate a dire need for more research on best practices in training and education for adult English language learners.

This recommendation supports my own review of the literature establishing a paucity of research related both to Latina immigrant students and adult English language learners' access to and persistence in post-secondary degree attainment. Within the research that does exist, we can conclude that current policies and practices in higher education have largely failed to advance the educational attainment of these populations. What we need a better understanding of is why and how we better support these students. Embedded in such a research agenda, attention needs to be given to listening to the voices of Latina immigrant students. As our research study demonstrates they are not only better positioned to provide insights into the barriers that they must trespass in their educational journey, but it is also my opinion that it is their voices that provide the most convincing data for the need to dismantle these barriers.

CHAPTER VII: DISSERTATION RESEARCH AS AN ACT OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

When I began my dissertation journey I questioned how my commitment to social justice could be translated into my research agenda. Through my involvement with the bilingual early childhood program I became convinced that there was a story that academia needed to hear about the experiences of students who were in this program. While I am sure I am not the only researcher who hopes that telling the stories of the oppressed might somehow transform the institutional structures that perpetuate inequity and oppression, it is problematic when the direct and immediate benefits of the research reinforce the privilege of the storyteller and fails to transform the lives of those whose stories they are.

I could not change the fact that I was the beneficiary of the racialized structures that privileged me and allowed me to attain the status of doctoral student. But I could use my status and privilege to attempt to engage in a research process that prioritized benefits to the research participants. Fueled by this commitment my research design engaged a group of primary Spanish-speaking, Latina immigrant students as research collaborators. Guiding this process was my own reflection on the following questions:

Can I, as a critical researcher with multiple positions of privilege and power, effectively engage students from a traditionally marginalized population as research collaborators?

- a. What are the differing challenges of the design for myself and for the research collaborators?
- b. What are the issues of power and knowledge and how are they addressed?
- c. How do our multiplicity of identities shape the research process?

- d. In working within the intersections of CRT and PR, what are my responsibilities as a White critical researcher?

In implementing this design I learned much along the way about the process, about my research collaborators, and about myself. I also believe that some measure of equity of benefits of the research to the research collaborators was achieved. As I did, the research collaborators had the opportunity to earn college credit toward advancing their degree attainment. As I did, the research collaborators had the opportunity to receive public recognition for their research. As I did, the research collaborators found the research experience enhanced their personal and professional growth. As I did, the research collaborators felt empowered by the research experience. Additionally, we are all still hopeful that our stories might somehow transform the institutional structures that perpetuate inequity and oppression.

While I joined the research collaborators in their commitment to the larger community hearing their story of the influences of the bilingual early childhood program, I also wanted the research community to hear the story of our research study. I believe this story not only contributes to those told by others engaging in alternative research methodologies by working within the intersections of CRT and PR, but in particular it offers considerations for other White doctoral students and scholars seeking to use their power and privilege to transform the landscape of the academy.

The Challenges: Working Within and Outside the Borders

Herr and Anderson (2005) spoke to the “ambiguity and messiness” of action research, and this certainly is reflective of my experiences working within the intersections of CRT and PR. As a novice researcher, I was challenged by the limited availability of literature that described in detail how to effectively engage participants as

research collaborators. As Guishard (2008) stated, “Fostering ethical, respectful, relationships with high levels of input, shared agendas, and decision-making power can be especially arduous for neophyte researchers because few PAR enthusiasts write about the speed bumps and the particulars of the participatory research process” (p. 87). Additionally challenging was the ambiguity that came from the unfolding nature of the process. Unlike traditional research approaches, there were no borders established for the evolution of the research study through a defined research purpose, questions, or data collection methods. Not only was the vagueness of the research study uncomfortable for me because of my own affinity for working within a clearly defined structure, but the uncertainties also heightened the sense of risk among the students I was asking to participate in the study.

While on the one hand operating outside some of the traditional borders was fraught with risk and vulnerability, I also felt constrained by some of the borders I had to work within. I wrestled with how to craft a dissertation proposal that did not address aspects of the research generally expected in proposals. I agonized over how to respond to some of the elements of the IRB requirements that reinforced traditional researcher-subject relationships. I was troubled by beginning with a consent form that undermined shared ownership and power between myself and the students in their role as research collaborators. Additionally, I was unsure how to work within the requirements for confidentiality when I hoped the research collaborators would want to make their ownership of the research public as co-authors or co-presenters of the research products.

Working within time constraints was another challenge to the process. Honoring the desire of the research collaborators to complete the study within a semester period

was difficult to balance with the time needed to build trust and community, to develop knowledge and confidence in our roles in the research process, to explore potential research questions that were of value for the research collaborators, and to complete the data collection and analysis. Because of this time constraint, as well as demands on all of our time outside of our weekly meeting, I feel there were missed opportunities to more fully reflect on the research process, to deepen the research collaborators' knowledge of the historical and political contexts within which we were operating, and to continue the critical dialogs that emerged in the final weeks of our meetings.

While the structure of weekly meetings was invaluable to creating a sense of continuity, building community, and maintaining momentum, I often felt as if I was driving a run-away truck down a steep hill with just enough time to correct my steering to swerve and avoid the big boulders along the way that might prevent us from arriving safely to the bottom of the hill without anyone falling off. It wasn't until then (i.e. the end of our weekly meetings) that I truly had time to engage in a deeper analysis of the journey and in doing so yielded my own insights about the research process that I wish I had been able to explore further with my research collaborators.

Finally, there were the challenges of working within the borders of our own identities. While the research design was intended to transform the border between the researcher and the researched, we did so within a social context of unequal power dynamics due to academic and knowledge hierarchies and racial and linguistic identities. While there were moments in which we were able to transcend these borders, critical to working within the intersections of CRT and PR is not to romanticize the research process as a panacea to institutionalized racism and structural injustice but rather to

explicitly acknowledge the ways in which these influence the process. As Guishard (2008) stated, “Illuminating the micro-politics of the research process it is at the core of what is beautifully unique, transgressive, but at the same time challenging about conducting participatory research” (p. 88).

Identity, Power, and Knowledge

A vast chasm of difference existed between my identity and that of my research collaborators, and because of these differences we each had fears and uncertainties about entering this research project. Among the research collaborators were suspicions and mistrust about my motivations. Despite all my attempts to articulate otherwise, there was a sense that I had a hidden agenda for the research study and that they might be “used” in this process. Valentina revealed this when she stated, “We thought you were going to get information from us and we weren’t sure [how it would be used].” This parallels Chataway’s (1997) examination of the constraints upon mutual inquiry in PAR in which she encountered disbelieving responses to a collaborative research project she proposed to a Native community. She commented, “They expected that I had a preset research hypothesis that I was concealing during a cursory initial consultation period, after which, they said, ‘you will take what you want and we will never see you again’” (p. 751). Additionally, the research collaborators were concerned about a research agenda that might threaten the program that had become so important to them and others in their community.

There was also distrust that I would be genuinely interested in them because of the differences in our identities. As Alexis shared, “We were like, OK, she’s so stuck up because of all of this education, higher education. What is she doing with us?” Christy

also commented on the cultural and linguistic differences, “We think because you don’t speak Spanish that we have nothing in common, and we are so different in culture and everything so you just think, ‘What are we going to talk about?’” What was interesting is that the research collaborators later revealed these same disbeliefs about my motivations in starting the bilingual early childhood program because of my status as an English-language speaker. At one point during a discussion of the program, Reyna asked me, “Why us? If this is not your language, why did you do this program?” Eugenia, while expressing gratitude for my role in starting the program, also revealed her difficulty in reconciling my desire to do so with my linguistic identity when she wrote, “you are a very special person because you don’t even speak Spanish and you continue to support us.”

My identity and position of power and privilege as a White, middle-class, dominant language speaker, holding multiple academic degrees presented a challenge to creating a space in which the women felt empowered as research collaborators. Reflective of the sociopolitical context in which these women lived, most of their experiences with White, monolingual English-speakers were oppressive and marginalizing; there were few (if any) experiences with bridging the cultural and linguistic divide to have a relationship of mutuality with someone like me. To strive to overcome the imbalance of power in our relationships would be counterproductive, as it would ignore the political and social realities the research collaborators lived and fail to create a space in which they could give voice to these realities.

Ultimately I believe that we were largely successful in creating a space in which we were able to bridge the cultural, linguistic, and educational divide and create a sense

of shared power in the research process and relationships of mutuality. Surprisingly, I think one of the most effective strategies in facilitating this was the presence of food and children. Our communal time during meals and the presence of their children created a relaxed and intimate tone for our meetings. Conducting a participatory research project with Latina mothers, Dryness (2008) made the following observation, “Meeting in the home allowed the mothers to be present in their wholeness: as mothers whose children were playing nearby in the other room, and as friends, who cooked for each other, ate together, and shared stories of their personal experiences” (p. 33). While we were not meeting in a home, we were able to bring some of these experiences of home to our research space. Despite all of the differences that existed between my identity and that of the research collaborators, we were able to enjoy getting to know each other as women. The relaxed and intimate tone of these interactions allowed us to share equally in conversations about our personal lives and helped de-emphasize relations of power.

As Chataway (2008) suggested, “The influence of power in the larger societal context never disappears, but it is manipulated and responded to in different ways over the course of the research relationship” (p. 757). Over the course of our research relationship, the research collaborators’ experiences of having me repeatedly solicit and respond to their suggestions in the decision-making process for our research study also helped reinforce a sense of shared power in our relationship. Additionally, I think my own “calling out” of my Whiteness and monolingualism opened the door to creating a space in which, over time, they felt safe to give voice to the oppression they had experienced from other White, monolinguals.

In contrast to their experiences of being excluded, silenced, and delegitimized because of their identities as Latina immigrant, English language learners, this research project created a space that privileged their knowledge and experiences as Latina immigrant, English language learners. The experience of having their dialog transcribed as a source of data to be analyzed facilitated a sense of legitimacy to their role as knowledge-holders. Given the relationship between power and knowledge, it was important that the research collaborators were not just “positioned as receptacles of knowledge for academic researchers to uncover, harvest, and interpret *for them*” (Ayala, 2008, p. 75). Being part of the analysis and interpretation of the data created the opportunity for them to be part of constructing knowledge from their experiences, to be legitimized as knowledge-builders, in addition to knowledge-holders. As Vividiana said with pride after our reading of the themes that had emerged from the research, “This came from us.”

As a final consideration for the issues of identity, power, and knowledge in our research process, I have given much thought to the legitimate critique of a monolingual English speaker engaging native Spanish speakers in telling their stories in the dominant language. This seems counterproductive to working within the intersections of CRT and PR, as it is the language of their oppressors and also a potential barrier to full and authentic participation given the range of English proficiencies. While I did work to create a space in which the research collaborators could share in Spanish, it became clear that my monolingualism was a barrier to my participation in such dialogs. Quickly, the predominant language of interactions transitioned to English while still keeping spaces open for those who needed or wanted to participate in Spanish. I can’t help but wonder at

the missed opportunities in the research study because of my inability to speak Spanish, but it also opened the door to an unexpected opportunity.

After so many experiences of being silenced and labeled as illegitimate speakers of English, the research process actually resulted in legitimizing their knowledge as English second language speakers. While I admit to past misunderstanding of heavily accented English, I am grateful that not once, when the research collaborators were sharing in English, did I not understand what they were saying. Perhaps it was a mixture of the deep listening I was practicing in this research space, a gradual knowing of my research collaborators, and an understanding of the contexts of the dialogs; whatever it was, not once did I accidentally reinforce their marginalizing experiences of speaking English by asking, “What did you say?” or “Can you repeat that?”

Rather humorously, it was the sheer volume of the pages of transcripts, mostly in English, that also reinforced their sense of proficiency as English language speakers. As Alexis viewed the transcripts, she commented, “Wow. I really know English.” When I asked her to expand on that she shared, “Just to read it, I can see I am speaking pretty clearly here. I can be right where everybody is speaking English and be a part of that.” While in our reading of the transcripts there was teasing about some of the “mistakes” in their English, there was some initial concern about whether or not I should “correct” these in the narrative I was writing. But this concern evaporated when they saw, through my eyes, how their way of speaking *because* English was their second language, was both beautiful and powerful.

The inspiration for the structure of the community narrative came from their words: trespassing barriers, college is for people who know, if you say it in Spanish the

door is open, to be a mother more, we walk with our face up. While the research collaborators had come to see their identity as native Spanish speakers and English language learners as an asset in helping others in their community, seeing the themes of our analysis presented this way was perhaps the first time in which their application of the English language was framed as an asset rather than a deficit. In a later conversation with Vividiana about the community narrative, she commented, “At first I thought that maybe all of the mistakes in our English shouldn’t be left in, but later I thought that it was important to leave it because it was us.” It was them. And having their voices, their authentic voices, documented in a final written product that reflected not just their ability to express themselves in English, but as a source of knowledge building, lent a sense of legitimacy to their identity and knowledge as English second language speakers.

If there has been one lesson that I have been continually reminded of in my research journey to live within the intersections of CRT and PR, it is that I am ill equipped to assume the stance of knower nor should I ever aspire to do so. Being White, I will always have blind spots to the ways in which dominant cultural ideologies shape my recognition of and responses to the politics of race, power, and knowledge.

Additionally, amidst the well-versed authors of CRT and PR, I am but a novice. That said the fear of getting it “wrong” should not paralyze action in trying to do it “right.”

Getting it “Right” While Working within the Intersections of CRT and PR

When I read the studies published by noted authors in the field of PR and CRT such as Ayala, Fine, Guishard, Torre, and Stoudt, I wondered at my success as a critical researcher in working within the intersections of CRT and PR. During the initial phases of the research I didn’t explicitly engage my research collaborators in learning about

CRT or direct them in a study that would reveal institutional inequities or how these institutions protect and produce privilege (Fine & Torre, 2004). My discomfort in doing so came from a desire to avoid imposing a particular research agenda on the research collaborators; instead the only goals I articulated for our research study was for us to explore and learn from their knowledge and experiences as primary Spanish speaking, Latina immigrant students in a community college. I also had an unspoken hope that the research process itself would be empowering for the research collaborators.

Throughout the study I was reluctant to position myself as “expert” on anything more than in my role as a coach and facilitator of the research process and methods. To formally introduce the research collaborators to the academic knowledge of CRT seemed paternalistic and counterintuitive to my desire to situate myself as a learner and invite them to speak as experts to their own experiences. In the end, by trusting my instincts and allowing myself to be led by those most directly affected by the issues to be studied, our exploration of the seemingly simple and neat research question of the influences of the bilingual early childhood program, yielded rich conversations about experiences that silenced and marginalized them (and their children), uncovered the forms of capital they brought to their experiences in the program, and helped us understand the ways in which these Latina immigrants enact agency to transform their lives and in helping others in their community. Of such dialogs, Yosso (2005) said, “Those injured by racism and other forms of oppression discover that they are not alone and moreover are part of a legacy of resistance to racism and the layers of racialized oppression. They become empowered participants, hearing their own stories and the stories of others, listening to how the arguments against them are framed and learning to make the arguments to

defend themselves.”

For the research collaborators this experience was empowering because it gave them a safe space to tell their stories of frustration, fear, anger, and triumph. It gave them the opportunity to reflect on and learn from hearing each other’s stories and to acknowledge and celebrate their accomplishments. The research collaborators also felt the research process affirmed their language “as an asset, not as a barrier” and validated their legitimacy in what they have “to give to others.” And finally, all of this gave them renewed energy and commitment to continue trespassing the barriers in their own lives.

These outcomes of our research process parallel those cited by Dryness (2008) who worked with low-income, Latina immigrant mothers on a participatory research project. She highlighted how the coming together of these women to share their stories, or *testimonio*, “reaffirmed each other’s experiences of injustice at their children’s school and supported each other in acts of resistance” (p. 34). Citing the work of Trinidad Galván (2006) she characterized this as having “created a unique *mujerista*, or Latina womanist space,” which supports the uncovering, sharing, and validating of the experiences of Latinas (p. 33). Like the research collaborators, the research experience helped the Latina mothers renew their belief that they could create change and re-energized them to keep going in the face of oppression.

In my final analysis of the responsibilities as a White critical researcher working within the intersections of CRT and PR, I offer the following lessons for others struggling to “get it right.”

Prioritize your stance as a learner in the process. First, no matter how well versed White researchers may be in CRT we have more to learn. Working within the

intersections of CRT and PR isn't just about what we can learn from the lived experiences of the research collaborators but what truths we, as White researchers, can uncover about ourselves through the research process. Being White we will always have blind-spots, unexamined assumptions, and biases and engaging in this work not only means being open to discovering these, but also owning the responsibility of disclosing the truths we learn about ourselves. Second, if we rush in to fill the research space with what we know or what other "experts" already know, we risk silencing those who most need to be heard as experts of their own experiences. If such knowledge is needed to meet the goals of the project (as determined by the research collaborators), then it can be layered in after they have been validated as experts in the research process.

Don't overlook the everyday when seeking social justice. As White researchers we are probably more inclined to associate acts of social justice with organized resistance, the grand unveiling of institutional inequities or the calling out of those complicit in perpetuating oppression. This is perhaps in part due to the fact that to confront oppression we have to step outside our daily lives of privilege, in contrast to those who experience injustice daily. The danger of this is that we may overlook, or even dismiss, the "everyday resistance strategies of Chicanas/Mexicanas that are often less visible, less organized, and less recognizable" (Delgado Bernal, 2006, p. 116) such as teaching their children to be proud of their cultural and linguistic heritage, sharing knowledge and resources with friends and family to nurture their growth, pretending not to speak English, and refusing to stop no matter what "they" do. The same must be said for our own evaluation of the PR project. As Maguire (1987) cautioned, there may not be a revolution. But if we challenge traditional power relationships of the research process

and create an empowering space for those most disenfranchised to name, record, and build knowledge from their histories, then we are participating in the everyday struggle for social justice.

Go Beyond the Boundaries of the Research. I don't think we can make a commitment to do this kind of work without a larger commitment to the people with whom we are working. If we are privileged enough to have our research collaborators open their lives to us and we accept this invitation within the research space, we must continue to honor these relationships beyond the research space. While this might mean maintaining connections with the research collaborators once the research is concluded (should they so desire), I think it is also about how we continue to honor them as we move on with our life. Exercising solidarity, or choosing to be "with the people," means continually examining what that looks like in everyday life (Maguire, 1987). I once joked with the research collaborators that I carried their voices inside of my head. Of course this is inevitable when one is deeply involved in the midst of the research process, but I hope as time goes on and memories become less distinct that their voices still continue to guide how I am choosing to be in the world.

New Voices in the Academy

I began this dissertation journey with an image of myself, another doctoral student benefitting from a legacy of White privilege, poised to open and walk through a door in which I could claim my legitimacy as a researcher as determined by the standards of academia. Today, I can offer another image. On the day of my defense I will be joined by three of my research collaborators who will be claiming their legitimacy as researchers beside me. Latina immigrants who, not so long ago, could not conceive their

role as knowers in the community college context, let alone in the context of the research community. From the research study they have gained knowledge of what it is to do dissertation research, and a sense of the value and power of sharing their experiences and the knowledge with the larger community. From their experiences with the defense, it is my hope that they will also gain a vision of themselves as future doctoral students. These women, whose voices have been silenced in their own language and through painful experiences of speaking English, will not only be heard in the pages of this dissertation but also in the hallowed halls of the academy. They are full of nerves and excitement.

Erica: Don't worry. If you forget your words in English two of the committee members speak Spanish, so you can speak in Spanish and the rest of us will catch up later.

Vividiana: But what are we going to tell them?

Erica: Your stories and what they can learn from your stories.

EPILOGUE

January 6, 2011

Our “hands are full” with emotions and memories of this trip, an experience that far exceeded our imagination.

The afternoon before the dissertation defense “the team” met at the airport. Victoria and Vividiana arrived with their families and this was the first time they would be away from their children for more than a day. Time was spent before our departure exchanging greetings, small talk, and finally goodbyes. While a few tears were shed, we also shared laughter at the thought of how much more appreciation the husbands would have of the day-to-day work we wives do in managing the household and children and how grateful they would be upon our return (the exception to this was Erica who would just be returning to grateful dogs).

Our chatter was non-stop on the flight to Denver and our drive to Fort Collins. We also stayed up late that night, curled up in our pajamas on the couches of the hotel lobby, talking. Conversation was mostly in English primarily for Erica’s sake, but the rest of us enjoy practicing our English with Erica. Vividiana reflected upon how the research study was a turning point for her in speaking English. While she had gained confidence overall in being in the bilingual program, the research study boosted her confidence in speaking English with other English speakers. We all laughed when Victoria teased Vividiana because “she doesn’t let me speak now” and recalled how, at the beginning of the program, Vividiana used to be so quiet and rarely talked in class even in Spanish, and now she couldn’t stop talking—in Spanish or in English.

Erica shared that she thought about this as she sat beside us at our dissertation defense and listened as we confidently shared our stories (in English) to the committee. Little over a year ago, those of us who were students in the program were intimidated at the thought of embarking on this research study with Erica because of her position and her level of education, wondering what it was that we had to offer. On this day she saw how we were full of confidence about what we had to offer. Our committee bore witness to the end results of a research process in which we were empowered as owners of the research and knowledge-holders. We did not hesitate to jump in to share a story or to respond to questions posed by the committee. We were not intimidated nor did we feel “less than” the members of the committee because of positions or degrees held.

We are all grateful to the committee members who not only welcomed our team but also applauded its unique nature. We particularly appreciated our “warm up” conversation with Tim the hour prior to our defense, as well as Norberto’s welcome and comments in Spanish. We carry with us the pride we felt for the honor and recognition expressed by the committee to us, and to the women who weren’t there that day, for the power of our voice, for the courage of our journey, and for the inspiration of our research story. It was, as Abilene said, “A beautiful thing.”

It was not just the defense that the team had traveled to participate in. The next day we all went to the commencement ceremony. As Erica walked across the stage and was hooded, the rest of us were in the stands waving and cheering wildly. Many pictures were taken that day but those we will most treasure are of the four of us, each wearing a piece of the graduation regalia to represent our collaboration in helping Erica earn this degree, as well the pictures of each one of us, smiling widely, decked out in full doctoral regalia, holding the diploma cover. “Because you were a part of earning this,” Erica had said, “and so you have a vision of what you can achieve in the future.”

How ironic it was to hear the president of the college speak at the commencement ceremony of the reality of the “elite” nature of master and doctoral degrees, citing a respective seven and three percent of the population who attain these levels of education. Inviting students in the bilingual program to participate as research collaborators, not just in a research study but also in the dissertation process, was prompted by a desire to change the elite nature of the academy. The questions we peppered Erica with later that evening offered evidence of how our participation in the defense and commencement ceremony nurtured a concrete vision of our future academic journey.

“So Erica, after I earn my Bachelor’s degree, tell me what’s next?”

“How many years does it take to get a master’s degree? What about a doctor’s degree?”

“What are would I need to study for my master’s degree if I wanted to do research on children with special needs?”

While we will cherish our memories of the dissertation defense and commencement ceremony, equally important are the memories surrounding these events.

Our trip was marked by many moments of hilarity. We smile even now as we recall the image of Abilene, Victoria, and Vividiana at the car rental agency bent over laughing as they called out to Erica in disbelief, “Is this the right car?” because the car she had reserved was about three sizes too small to fit all of us and our luggage. We continued our fit of giggles when we ended up being upgraded to a monster of a vehicle that had more technology than we knew how to handle. We never did master the GPS (except to make it announce our current

location, which did little to help us navigate the multiple times we got lost) but at least we managed to finally figure out how to start a car that required no key.

We developed those inside jokes that only we will understand and laugh about; from “It’s Magali’s fault,” to “because I didn’t pack three pairs of shoes,” and “I need my bubble space.” And instigated by Victoria, we schemed and dreamed about the possibility of taking another trip together sometime in the future.

While we shared much laughter throughout the trip, we also shared many conversations of more personal and serious matters: of past pains and heartaches, of family, of health concerns, of cultural traditions, and of relationships. We also discovered more about each other’s personalities such as who among us liked to stay up late and who were early risers, who liked to travel and who were homebodies, and who liked to shop and who was a good haggler.

About three weeks after our trip to Colorado, we met for a “Friday Chicas Dinner,” which we now plan to do monthly. The bulk of our conversation was not about the research study or the bilingual program, which had once served as the common ground between us. Instead we spent time catching up on how each of us spent the rest of our winter break, listening to and sympathizing with the new problems Victoria is facing with her foster children, laughing about the trials of Vividiana’s family getting snowed in for over a week when visiting relatives, and cheering when we heard the news that Vividiana passed her sociology class (the one class she was worried she was going to fail). No longer just a possibility, we also began to make concrete plans for taking another trip together next December. After discussing a variety of possible destinations, we are going to do a little research and make a final decision at our next dinner between going to Puerto Vallarta or Mazatlan. And so, while our research study brought us together as women, it was the dissertation trip that brought us all together as friends.

We hope there are many enduring aspects of our participation in the research study and dissertation defense—the contribution of the research to the field of participatory research, bilingual education, and engaging Latina immigrants in post-secondary education, the ways in which we were influenced personally through the process, and the bonds of friendship that were created.

Abilene, Erica, Victoria, and Vividiana

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