

*Hablemos Juntos* (Let's Talk Together):

Reimagining Early Language Intervention

Capstone Project

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### Abstract

Decades of research has been dedicated to demonstrating differences between low-income children's early language and high-income children's early language: much of this research also indicates differences between racial/ethnic groups. This research, conducted from a middle-class White normative perspective, posits that these early differences are the cause of the achievement gap, and therefore deficits: many researchers and popular discourse argue that for these reasons there is a need for early language intervention programs. Latino families are a fast-growing population in our country, and are a target population for these interventions. I contend that the concept of intervention is colonizing in nature, and that in order to truly work for equity we must rethink the concept as opposed to merely culturally adapting programs. Rather than interventions intended to fix children and families, interventions should create avenues for empowerment so that educators and families may work together to fix schools and society. I provide a framework for such a program, with recommendations for adapting the framework to different contexts.

Keywords: Latino, parents, family, early language, intervention, achievement gap, culturally adapting, equity, liberating, decolonizing, program, curriculum

*Hablemos Juntos* (Let's Talk Together):

## Reimagining Early Language Intervention

With this capstone project, I offer my framework for a program specifically designed for Latino<sup>1</sup> parents<sup>2</sup> at Warren Elementary, a local school where I will be teaching next year. Though the framework I offer is necessarily context-based, I believe many aspects should be generalizable to other contexts, as will become clear in my narration of the framework. The goals of this program are twofold: first, and most importantly, to enhance the critical consciousness and strengthen the cultural competence of Latino parents; and second, to enrich the oral language of Latino children through both school-based activities and parent practices. Prior to discussing the project, however, I find it critical to make plain my core beliefs about education, so that the reader may better understand the lens through which I view this work.

In the United States, the dominant culture is that of White middle-class European Americans (Milner, 2010). Howard (2010) defined culture as:

“a complex constellation of values, mores, norms, customs, ways of being, ways of knowing, and traditions that provides a general design for living, is passed from generation to generation, and serves as a *a pattern for interpreting reality*,” (p.51, emphasis added).

Adding on to this definition, I include race and socioeconomic status (SES) as important dimensions of culture, since these facets of identity are integral to the cultural divides in the U.S.

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<sup>1</sup> *Latino* refers to people from many different cultures (e.g. Mexican, Puerto Rican, El Salvadorean, etc.); while these cultures share the Spanish language and many of the same core values, it is important to avoid making assumptions based on the hypernym *Latino* (Ryan et al., 2010; Orozco, 2008; Reese, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> I use the term *parents* inclusively, to refer to any primary adult caretaker's in a child's life, because of the likelihood with Latino families that adults other than biological parents will be central in a child's upbringing (Caldaza, 2010).

(Ladson-Billings, 2014; Milner, 2010; Tatum, 2003; Delpit, 1995). Our schools systematically disadvantage students and families outside of the dominant culture that is normalized in schools (Ladson-Billings, 2006a; Delpit, 1995). This disenfranchisement by means of a system that purports to offer opportunity, compounded upon historical and contemporary marginalization of non-dominant groups, has created the achievement gap that has persisted for decades: this phenomenon can be more accurately called the opportunity gap (Milner, 2010). I believe that as educators and thus representatives of the dominant culture it is our responsibility to pay back what Ladson-Billings (2006a) terms the education debt, by working actively in ways that counteract the marginalization inherent in our system of education and that help culturally and linguistically diverse students and families feel empowered to do the same (Rios & Stanton, 2011). I believe that we *must* work actively in this way: to be inactive would be to condone and participate in marginalization as an agent of the dominant group (Tatum, 2003). This work, however, is not something educators can do for others - but rather something we should do with students and families: it must be a dialogue based in human dignity and membership in a democratic community, with meaningful and equitable participation by all members (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Freire, 1970/2014, 1974/2013). I believe that every student, parent, and family brings valuable resources, or funds of knowledge, which need to be utilized (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 2005). It is our great task as educators to tap that expertise and work together against the marginalizing system: to adjust the school and curriculum to better fit the people but also to provide access to the culture of power, or the dominant ways of being in our schools and society at large (Rios & Stanton, 2011; Deschenes, Cuban, & Tyack, 2001; Delpit, 1995; Epstein, 1995). In this way, we strive together for equity.

This responsibility is much more a calling than a task, requiring personal ideological commitment. Because identities are intersectional, fluid, and interactive, this work necessitates personal reflection and consideration of one's own identity within the context (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Milner, 2010; Tatum, 2003). To truly succeed, I believe that learning needs to take place within a dialogue built on a foundation of meaningful respect: building trusting relationships within schools and communities is crucial (Gay, 2010; Milner, 2010; Freire, 1970/2014, 1974/2013; Allen, 2007). All people must be supported in strengthening their cultural competence (confidence in one's own identity and the knowledge of and ability to code-switch into the discourse of the dominant culture) and critical consciousness (awareness of societal inequities, their causes, effects, and one's own positionality) in order to take action for change (Ladson-Billings, 2014, 1995). This can be achieved through a classroom environment where participants co-construct knowledge for liberation: freedom from the dominant culture's constraints on thinking and being (Freire, 1970/2014, 1974/2013; McLaren, 2009; Nelson-Barber & Estrin, 1995). I understand co-construction of knowledge to be an emergent process where the knowledge of all participants is equally valued, and the curriculum is created with participants' knowledge, skills, and interests as well as the rules and skills of the culture of power; the dialogue is not only an exchange of ideas but a place for creation of new ideas (Apple, 2000; Kincheloe, 2003, Delpit, 1995). Education in this democratic and liberating form is, I think, the very definition of what is termed culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2014, 2006b, 1995). I believe this is education at its most ideal, and that it is our lifelong task as educators to continually strive for this ideal.

It is for these reasons that I have created this program framework the way that I have. In what follows, I provide a theoretical background and rationale, a framework for the program, materials for the first session, a detailed explanation of my creations, and a discussion of possible limitations and cautions for implementation.

### **Rationale**

In my work at Peabody I have conducted inquiries into various aspects of this capstone project, in response to a need I saw in my teaching work in Albuquerque, New Mexico: less sophisticated oral language skills (and resulting literacy skills) among our Latino students. Some of this work was included in my proposal for this capstone project and is also discussed here. For SPED 3030 (Advanced Issues in Family Interventions), I researched early language interventions for low-income children, focusing on promising intervention models. In EDUC 3630 (Learning, Diversity, & Urban Studies Seminar I), I investigated the deficit thinking that is foundational to our educational system, and built a framework for challenging this pervasive mindset. In EDUC 3220 (Parents, School, and Community), I conducted a qualitative study in which I interviewed two Latina mothers at my school and compared their values and beliefs to the available research. With this coursework, I have built a solid foundation on which to begin this capstone project. Many things have helped me begin to conceptualize the design of this program: my understandings of language interventions, the nuances of the educational system and the way it positions Latino parents, my framework for challenging these positionings, and my findings about the values of parents at my school (as well as the indications in the research). Integrating all of this coursework and producing a program design necessitated additional

research on family literacy programs and Latino parents, which is also included in the following literature review.

In this literature review, I outline my own conceptualizations of these ideas over time. I do this purposefully, because I have come to understand that much of the available work on this topic rests largely on flawed logic, and is inherently disenfranchising to our students and families. I trace the evolution of my understanding both to illuminate the ease with which this flawed logic permeates educator thinking about these important concepts and also to lay bare the logic itself so that others who may be thinking along the same path might be better able to reexamine these ideas.

### **The Necessity for “Intervention”**

Decades of research has been invested in documenting the differences in language exposure between low-income and high-income children (e.g.; Lareau, 2011; Huttenlocher, Waterfall, Vasilevva, Veva, and Hedges, 2010; Dickinson and Tabors, 2001; Hart & Risley, 1995; Heath, 1983). In 1995, Hart and Risely found the famously-quoted gap of 30 million words in language exposure of children by age 3 between those from low SES homes and those from high SES homes. Though the study did not intentionally consider differences by race, the lowest SES sample group was entirely Black, and the upper SES group was majority White - so the differences they documented must also be considered in light of race (Dudley-Marling & Lucas, 2009). Over the years, other research has documented various differences in language exposure along SES and race lines, from quantity of words and frequency of turn-taking to the descriptiveness of vocabulary, variety of syntax, and purpose of language use (Huttenlocher et al., 2010; Lareau, 2011; Heath, 1983). Alongside these documented language differences, there

are consistent historical and contemporary trends reflecting the achievement gap between students of different race, ethnicity, and SES - with Black and Latino students achieving well below their White peers in measures of academic success including standardized tests and high school graduation rates (Milner, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006a). Even though Lareau (2011) and Heath (1983) both specifically discussed the social, cultural, and linguistic values of the differences in families' language, their studies along with many others have been used to justify the idea that poor people and people of color have qualitatively worse language skills than is the norm, causing achievement gaps and necessitating interventions to fix their linguistic shortcomings (Dudley-Marling & Lucas, 2009). Indeed, in my first attempt at a thorough review of the literature on the topic, I too was persuaded by the argument that low-SES children need language interventions.

Concurrent with this work, I investigated the pervasive deficit mindset that undergirds the educational system at large and is the foundation of most existing parent/family intervention programs (Baquedano-López, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013; Valencia, 2010). Educators operating using deficit thinking identify what students and families are *missing* and seek to *fix* or *help* by replacing what is missing (Valencia, 2010). This mindset locates the responsibility for failure within the student or family: students do not arrive with the right type of knowledge and their parents do not care about education and are not involved (Valencia, 2010; Walker, 2010; García and Guerra, 2004). The problem with this type of thinking is that the judgements of how students and their families *should* be is based on middle-class White normalized values, and often the strategies for improvement are based on research conducted within and supporting those same middle-class White values (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Lareau, 2011; Kincheloe,

2003; Apple, 2000). Consider the oft-cited studies used to justify interventions: normalized language practices were used to construct these studies and to measure the language of those who may or may not have conformed to these culturally-constructed ideals (Dudley-Marling & Lucas, 2009).

One key aspect of deficit thinking is its foundation of *pseudoscience* - that which ostensibly is scientific in nature but in actuality is not (Valencia, 2010). The hallmarks of pseudoscience are identifying a problem, conducting research to identify differences, positioning those differences as the source of the problem, and then providing interventions to eradicate those differences in order to solve the problem (Valencia, 2010). Have these intervention-recommending studies in actuality been pseudoscience, used to explain the source of the race/SES achievement gap? The preponderance of the literature, even in works that consider the question of equity, has indicated that specific oral language skills are necessary precursors to literacy development and that if children do not possess these skills they are at a disadvantage and we must therefore teach them these skills (e.g. Hoff, 2012; Huttenlocher et al., 2010; Dickinson and Tabors, 2001; Hart & Risley, 1995). I considered this finding in light of the culture of power in schools and society, and reasoned that if we as educators want students to succeed, we cannot neglect to provide access to valuable language resources that will later lead to literacy resources - but we must do so in a culturally appropriate way (Delpit, 1995).

Once I had reached this conclusion, I began to interrogate existing intervention methods for their cultural appropriateness. The research indicated that *parent-training* interventions - in which the facilitator teaches parents a specific skill to enact with the child - have been shown to be particularly effective for low-SES children (Roberts & Kaiser, 2011; Reese, Sparks, & Leyva,

2010). I rationalized that this might mitigate some of the cultural bias coming from the intervention itself, as it would be direct instruction in the culture of power for parents as well as children (Delpit, 1995). Further, the research seemed promising for *conversation-based* interventions - in which oral language is elicited around shared everyday experiences as opposed to around a book - and that this might also mitigate some cultural bias because it would not be based in shared book reading, which may not be applicable to all families (Leffel & Suskind, 2013; Roberts & Kaiser, 2011; Reese, Sparks, & Leyva, 2010). At this point, I understood the goal of my work to be creating a parent-training conversation-based early language intervention for low-SES Latino children, and I set out to create a more culturally responsive intervention program designed specifically for Latino parents.

### **Abandoning Intervention Models**

The problem with my conclusion, as I have come to realize, is that no intervention program can be asset-based. The sinister nature of deficit thinking is that it hides in the discourse of *helping* and *fixing*: the very idea that there is something that needs to be fixed is the root of deficit thinking - and by definition the root of intervention (Valencia, 2010). Any intervention program will be deficit based by nature, because it positions children and parents themselves as problems (Valencia, 2010). Consider parent-training intervention models: the explicit assumption is that parents must be taught a skill which they do not possess (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Roberts & Kaiser, 2011; Reese, Sparks, & Leyva, 2010). Similarly, conversation-based interventions focus on improving the quality of verbal interactions between parents and their children: again explicitly communicating that what parents were doing before the intervention was of lower quality (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Leffel & Suskind, 2013;

Roberts & Kaiser, 2011; Reese, Sparks, & Leyva, 2010). Moreover, these colonizing interventions exert the culture of power on students and families by proclaiming norms and labeling deficiencies without encouraging critique of the norms themselves, perpetuating disadvantage rather than encouraging democratic participation; a convenient outcome for those in power (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Jimenez-Castellanos & Gonzalez, 2012; Torres & Hurtado-Vivas, 2011; Reyes & Torres, 2007; Delpit, 1995). In addition to this foundational issue with the deficit-based concept of intervention, early language interventions operate within a theory of language and discourse that is insensitive to the cultural differences inherent in communication.

**The research and recommendations are ethnocentric.** In early language intervention programs, the knowledge that facilitators teach parents includes norms of oral language development, skills related to normed conversational interactions between parents and children, and norms of oral language connections to literacy development: all presented to parents as better and more right ways of raising their children (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Leffel & Suskind, 2013; Roberts & Kaiser, 2011; Reese, Sparks, & Leyva, 2010; Dudley-Marling & Lucas, 2009; van Kleeck, 2006). The expert knowledge conveyed to families in such intervention programs is based upon studies carried out within and in favor of the dominant culture's norms: for example, Hart and Risley's judgements of quality language centered around dominant norms of interaction such that direct commands from parents were criticized as negative and simplistic language, while indirect requests from parents were lauded as being polite and preparing children for future opportunities (Dudley-Marling & Lucas, 2009; Hart & Risley, 1995). This expert-knowledge-as-best-practice paradigm is colonizing in nature because

those who produce and promote what is elevated as expert knowledge are necessarily situated within the dominant culture: the power associated with the dominant culture facilitates the positioning of some knowledge as superlative, though in fact knowledge is differently valuable depending on perspective and context (Torres & Hurtado-Vivas, 2011; Reyes & Torres, 2007; Kincheloe, 2003; Apple, 2000). Importantly, it is not only discrete knowledge that is prioritized by the dominant culture, but also the ideologies that accompany knowledge: the ways we conceptualize knowledge and think about the world (Kincheloe, 2003; Apple, 2000; Nelson-Barber & Estrin, 1995). This is a crucial point, considering that language both reflects and constructs the ways in which we interpret our world (Haberman, 2000).

**Language is a cultural construct.** Though all languages appear to share some fundamental characteristics (they have elements that indicate things in the world, for instance, and ways to convey ideas about actions), at its root a language is a mutually agreed upon set of rules which a group of humans use to communicate with one another (Freeman & Freeman, 2014). A sociocultural or social interaction theory of language acquisition suggests an interactive process in which speakers receive and construct meaning of, within, and because of their language: culture and language are inextricable and evolve over time through this process of transmission (Freeman & Freeman, 2014; de Jong, 2011; Anderson, Anderson, Friedrich, & Kim, 2010; Chater & Christiansen, 2009). Theorists in this vein argue that every language, including dialects and languages spoken by non-dominant social groups, is complex and capable of expressing infinite ideas: speakers draw on rich resources that must be considered for their own merits, not compared to the standards of the dominant group (Freeman & Freeman, 2014; Dudley-Marling & Lucas, 2009). Language is not only culturally constructed but itself

constructs culture and identity as a key mechanism for transmitting culture from one generation to the next: both through explicit expression of values and beliefs and through implicit values conveyed in conversational norms and ways of thinking which are embedded into the language itself (de Jong, 2011; Chater & Christiansen, 2009; Duranti & Ochs, 1997 as cited in Mercado, 2005). This underscores the colonizing nature of early language interventions: not only do they seek to replace parents' linguistic practices with those of the dominant culture, but by interrupting the mechanism through which children acquire culture, they potentially replace ways of thinking and being which are culturally significant and thus interfere negatively in children's identity development (de Jong, 2011; Anderson et al., 2010; Chater & Christiansen, 2009; Reyes & Torres, 2007; Duranti & Ochs, 1997 as cited in Mercado, 2005). If we are concerned with equity in our schools, privileging the dominant culture's discourse styles over those of other groups through early language interventions is not a viable option (Reyes & Torres, 2007; Gay, 2002; Nelson-Barber & Estrin, 1995).

### **What Do We Do Instead?**

Lareau (2011) and Heath (1983) began this conversation in the research I initially reviewed: they observed similar language differences across social class, and neither advocated passing judgement but rather took the view of all language as a resource, noting the varied repertoire of language skills that children from different backgrounds possessed. This begs the question: if language differences are valuable, then why must we do anything at all? We must act because the culture of schools is still aligned with the dominant culture: even if individual students find ways to succeed, or individual teachers practice culturally responsive pedagogy, the broad system of schooling the way it is set up in our country will continue to privilege members

of the dominant culture (Milner, 2010; Valencia, 2010; Delpit, 1995). Our education system is built upon the ideals of the dominant culture with inherent deficit views toward those who differ, and these undercurrents affect everything from policy decisions to teacher actions (Nelson and Guerra, 2014; Walker, 2010; Valencia, 2010). Moreover, the dominant culture reflected in schools is also the dominant culture of society: students and parents need to be able to function successfully within these systems, developing cultural competence and critical consciousness to take advantage of the systems as they stand and exercise agency to work for change (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Reyes & Torres, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Delpit, 1995).

**Cultural adaptation is insufficient.** A wide review of the research (including, for example, general parenting interventions as opposed to specifically literacy interventions) produces several movements to culturally adapt programs (e.g. Parra Cardona et al., 2012; Domenech Rodriguez, Baumann, & Schwartz, 2011; Barker, Cook, & Borrego, Jr., 2010). The problem with these efforts, and thus with my original intentions for this project, is that although they recognize the need to align the program with the culture of participants, they fail to see the colonizing nature of the program itself (Parra Cardona et al., 2012; Torres & Hurtado-Vivas, 2011; Domenech Rodriguez et al., 2011; Reyes & Torres, 2007). Barker et al. (2010) advised making decisions about programming in response to parent feedback regarding *treatment acceptability*: that is, understanding that “...not all techniques that have empirical evidence will be acceptable to parents,” for cultural reasons or otherwise (p.162). This statement is indicative of more inclusive thinking about the role of parents in these intervention programs as compared to those I previously reviewed, and yet there is an important flaw: the end goal of the program remains unquestioned (Barker et al., 2010). Similarly, other researchers advocate including

parents through needs assessments and planning committees, but do not question the inclusion of *best practices* and *core components*, highlighting the elitist idea that some ways or outcomes are better than others because they have been judged by the experts as such (Parra Cardona et al., 2012; Domenech Rodriguez et al., 2011).

The trouble with adaptation is that although on the surface the program may have changed, the core goal of the intervention is the same: fix the participants (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Valencia, 2010). The adjustments are made by the researchers, based on their expert opinions, and disseminated to participants: though there is surface level participation, there is no true democracy because participants are not encouraged to engage their critical consciousness to question what norms they are being asked to adhere to, by whom, and for what purpose (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Parra Cardona et al., 2012; Domenech Rodriguez et al., 2011; Barker et al., 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Cooper, 1989 as cited in de Jong, 2011). This lack of consideration for critical consciousness is unfortunately common among practitioners and even researchers who advocate for culturally appropriate programs and instruction: the assumption underlying this crucial omission is that changing features to more closely align with participants' cultures while addressing facilitators' core goals for the program is sufficient (Young, 2010). Adaptation, though, is not enough: because they masquerade as adapting while still asking parents to adopt normative expert recommendations without questioning the norms, these interventions only serve to sustain inequities, which creates an illusion of informed choice instead of fostering empowered families who can navigate and dismantle power structures (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Jimenez-Castellanos & Gonzalez, 2012; Torres & Hurtado-Vivas, 2011; Reyes & Torres, 2007).

It seems as though we are presented with a paradox: the intervention model is inherently disenfranchising, yet students with linguistic experiences outside the dominant culture's norms continue to perform comparably worse on academic measures that are based in those norms. The logically resulting suggestion of a complete reformation of the ideological underpinnings of our current education and assessment system is beyond the scope of this project, but I suggest that an important place to begin our work for equity is in reframing how we prepare our students and parents to successfully participate in the system as it currently exists.

### **Reconceptualizing Intervention for Liberation**

One of the greatest concerns that I have regarding this topic is the dearth of research available that bridges the fundamental gap between the intervention literature (e.g. Leffel & Suskind, 2013; Roberts & Kaiser, 2011; Reese, Sparks, & Leyva, 2010) and the liberation literature (e.g. Ladson-Billings, 2014, 2006a, 2006b, 1995; Freire, 1970/2014, 1974/2013; McLaren, 2009; Delpit, 1995) critically. I have spent the entire course of my graduate studies investigating this topic, and have only uncovered a handful of works addressing the fundamental problems with early language interventions (Valencia, 2010; Dudley-Marling & Lucas, 2009). Many more works are available which bridge this gap while considering family literacy as a whole or addressing parental involvement in schools (e.g. Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Torres & Hurtado-Vivas, 2011; Anderson et al., 2010; Reyes & Torres, 2007; Caspe, 2003). These researchers have presumably concluded before me that interventions by nature do not promote equity, and so present their work under new titles: the term does not describe the types of programs they recommend. However, given the prevalence of deficit thinking in our education system, as well as the feverish implementation of interventions to close the achievement gap, I

suggest that this choice is problematic (Valencia, 2010). The issue is not that critiques are unavailable, but rather that they are obscured and hard to access for someone who is searching for research about *interventions*; moreover, it is problematic that critiques with the recommendation to culturally adapt programs (e.g. Parra Cardona et al., 2012; Domenech Rodriguez et al., 2011; Barker et al., 2010) do result from searching for interventions, so that well-meaning educators implementing such programs may continue to believe that asset-based interventions are a possibility (Baquedano-López et al., 2013). It is for these reasons that I have found it necessary to explicitly reimagine what early language “interventions” look like for Latino families.

In what follows, I describe the context and learners for which my program is designed, and synthesize the literature to outline the principles that are the foundation of my framework. Then I present and discuss the framework itself, and finally offer cautions and limitations for the use of this program.

### **Warren Elementary, Southeastern Metropolitan City, USA**

I have previously discussed the general atmosphere in the U.S. regarding education: deficit-based, intervention-focused, and achievement-gap-centric (Valencia, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006a). As we focus on the symptoms of educational inequity, our country turns a blind eye in both policy and public discourse on the true causes: institutional racism and classism in the form of inequitable funding and social policies that disadvantage particular groups of people, urban districts that operate under increasingly dysfunctional bureaucracy from both above and within, and the resulting opportunity gaps that disadvantage so many of our students and families (Anyon, 2014; Milner, 2010; Payne, 2008; Weiner, 2006; Kozol, 1991). Our country is also

becoming increasingly more diverse, with immigrant and refugee populations settling in metropolitan areas throughout the U.S. in large numbers: in my city, the immigrant population more than doubled between 2000 and 2010 (Ross, 2015). As a result, there is a strong assimilationist mentality in the present discourse: meaning that America is focused on its White middle-class English-speaking norms, and expects its citizens to aspire to those norms as well (de Jong, 2011). This disadvantages students and families whose first language is not English: for example, the Latino population, which grew by 43% between 2000 and 2013; 75% of English language learners (ELLs) in the U.S. are Spanish speakers (Ross, 2015; de Jong, 2011). This mentality is also evident at the state level: though the U.S. has no official language, my state has declared the official language to be English and has mandated that instruction in the public schools be delivered only in English (Tennessee State Government, 1984). There is also evidence that our societal expectation of English proficiency affects adult earning power: even skilled monolingual Spanish-speaking adults are less likely to work in skilled jobs than unskilled adults who speak English (Ross, 2015). In addition to this linguistic prejudice, Latino people face discrimination in many forms: our undocumented families, especially, experience the stress and barriers to access (for example: worrying about deportation, not being able to obtain a social security number or a driver's license, not being eligible to vote) that are characteristic for families in similar situations across the country (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Jimenez-Castellanos & Gonzalez, 2012).

The community in which Warren Elementary is located is largely composed of immigrants. The Latino population has the largest presence in our school, roughly 60% as of 2015: most of these students are native Spanish speakers. In the community, there are Spanish-

speaking businesses, services, and media. Our school has a bilingual secretary who translates documents and interprets for parents, and employs a bilingual Family Involvement Specialist. Since both of these women are bicultural as well as bilingual, they also serve as role models for our Latino children, who see representations of their language and culture positively integrated into our society (Gutstein, Lipman, Hernandez, & de los Reyes, 1997; Nelson-Barber & Estrin, 1995; Sheets, 1995). These are examples of the Spanish language being used in high-status domains (business, school), and are evidence of a potentially less assimilationist climate than is more common around the rest of the state (de Jong, 2011). However, despite these pluralist qualities, Warren's families still exist within the larger dynamics that are at play in the country at large, and are subject to disenfranchisement all the same: for example, all of the ELL programs offered in our state are focused on acquiring English, and do not afford structured opportunities to enhance first language proficiency (Tennessee State Board of Education, 2011). In addition, most of the teachers at our school are monolingual members of the dominant culture, which complicates the power dynamics already at play: staff are representatives of the dominant and school culture in multiple ways (Tatum, 2003; Delpit, 1995). Additionally, our school has a reputation among families for being welcoming and supportive, but many schools are not so friendly: it is typical to find that schools define parent involvement differently than Latino families, placing blame on the parents when the school deems them uninvolved (Ryan et al., 2010; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992).

### **Latino Parents**

I have chosen to focus on Latino parents for several reasons: these parents face many of the same disadvantages that other parents face, including those brought about by the

multidimensional intersections of race, SES, and language; moreover, the size of the Latino population is rapidly growing in our country and is a majority at Warren. Many of our families are immigrants; some are very new to the U.S. and some have been here for many years. The SES of our Latino families varies, though the majority of our families (about 90% as of 2015) are low-income. I know from conversations with parents and school personnel that an appreciable number of our families are undocumented. I am also aware that many of our families do not have cars, but that many take advantage of community resources like the library, and some own their own businesses.

I had originally intended to design this program specifically for low-SES Latino families, but I have broadened the scope to include all Latino families because all are still subject to dominant cultural and linguistic norms in school and society and are thus disadvantaged and potentially disenfranchised. It also seems wise to include all Latino parents to facilitate the forming of close social networks through which parents can share the knowledge and resources they have (Lopez, Scribner, and Mahitivanichcha, 2001). My primary learners are parents for two main reasons: first because of the great impact parents can have on their children's education through support and advocacy, and second because parents themselves can be subject to judgement and blame by the school (Ryan et al., 2010; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992). I believe educators should encourage and help parents to successfully navigate and even change our education system to better serve themselves and their children. Though I am focusing on parents, my program also acknowledges the potential benefits to children and makes provisions for child participation as well.

For the design of this program, I have considered specific core values that are consistent across most Latino cultures. It bears repeating that *Latino* is a general term denoting many hyponyms - Mexican, Colombian, Puerto Rican, etc. - and that it is unwise either to make generalizations about a particular culture from this subset or to make assumptions about particular people even if they refer to themselves as Latino: culture is individual as well as a group characteristic (Ryan et al., 2010; Orozco, 2008; Weiner, 2006; Reese, 2002). As such, I make general recommendations based on the research, with the caveat that individual participants may or may not share these same values.

### ***Familismo***

Most Latino cultures believe that family is all-important (Reese, 2002). Loyalty, trust, support, reciprocity, and connection between family members - even outside the nuclear family - are central (Barker et al., 2010; Caldaza, 2010). For parenting and schooling, this value is important because it underscores the possibility that many family members may be involved in the child's upbringing and education (Caldaza, 2010; Ryan et al., 2010; Reese, 2002). Additionally, families may share homes and financial resources with one another, relying on extended family for support and spending most free time together (Caldaza, 2010). The large size of families present in a communal space also results in differing norms around, for example, conversation: a two-person interaction is a common practice in the dominant culture, especially during shared book reading, while in Latino families the interaction may more typically involve multiple people with less clear turn-taking and less parent-generated commentary and questions (van Kleeck, 2006). This indicates that many of the skills taught by dominant-culture-embedded intervention programs may be inappropriate to expect families to engage in, and that school may

need to change the ways in which we ask parents to interact with their children (Torres & Hurtado-Vivas, 2011).

### ***Educación***

Most Latino cultures share the common value of prizing education both on its own merits and as an opportunity for economic mobility (Ryan et al., 2010; Orozco, 2008; Reese, 2002; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992). Cultural and linguistic differences may make parents' high value for education invisible to the school: for example, parents may believe that their role is to help with education in the home as opposed to being present at the school (Ryan et al., 2010; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Gillanders & Jiménez, 2004; Lopez et al., 2001; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992). Sometimes, parents' ideas about educational involvement may directly contradict what the school believes: some research has shown, for instance, that Latino parents do not feel it is appropriate to begin reading books with their children until the *age of reason*, or age 5, when the child is perceived to be able to understand storybooks - in contrast to the dominant culture's norm of beginning to read to children while they are still infants (van Kleeck, 2006). Additionally, school demands on Latino parents to adjust to the school's conception of what parent involvement should look like (for example, in helping with homework) may constitute an unfair burden on these parents (Torres & Hurtado-Vivas, 2011). Consequently, the school must adapt its conceptions of involvement to value all parent contributions, home-based and school-based, as small as they may appear to be (Ryan et al., 2010; Orozco, 2008; Gillanders & Jiménez, 2004; Reese, 2002; Lopez et al., 2001; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992).

***Respeto***

For most Latino cultures, education extends beyond the idea of intellectual growth: a person who is *buen educado*, or well educated, has both wisdom and character (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992). Polite behavior, deference to elders, and concern for others are paramount in a child's education: parents prioritize these traits equally with academic success (Ryan et al., 2010; Reese, 2002). This value is a strong undercurrent to parenting practices: parents expect that their children will obey authority and elders without argument and behave well in public (Barker et al., 2010; Caldaza, 2010). This may also inform the types of interactions parents have with their children: for example, children are sometimes expected to be seen and not heard, only responding to conversations initiated by the adult (van Kleeck, 2006). Additionally, this value may influence interactions with the school, in which parents likely want to be treated respectfully and with empathy (Parra Cardona et al., 2009; Caldaza, 2010).

***Información***

Research with Latino families in the U.S. suggests that obtaining information to advocate for their children and families is a priority for Latino parents (Orozco, 2008). Parents seek information through networking: they ask people they know who may be helpful or knowledgeable - perhaps from the school, or work, or church (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992). The extent to which parents can take on a more active role in their child's education is directly correlated to the amount of information and familiarity they have with the education system in the U.S.: many Latino parents in the U.S. are immigrants and likely have had very different schooling experiences in their countries of origin (Reese, 2002; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992). This implies that schools must help parents navigate our educational system: if parents know how to

access resources and understand the structures and functions of the system, they are much more likely to be able to exercise their roles in their children's education more actively (Reese, 2002; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992).

At Warren, I have informally observed and identified through parent interviews that at least some of our parents do align with these cultural values. As such, I have considered these core values in the design of my program to ensure that the framework is compatible.

### **The Program: *Hablemos Juntos***

Here, I explain the design principles that undergird my framework, provide the framework itself and a discussion of each feature, and finally consider cautions and limitations.

#### **Principles of Design**

The following principles are synthesized from several key sources. Freire (1970/2014, 1974/2013) built the foundation of the movement toward decolonizing, liberating literacy practice. Baquedano-López et al. (2013) provided a thorough critique of family involvement practices in schools, highlighting equity issues and giving recommendations for future programs. Reyes & Torres (2007) described their implementation of a decolonizing family literacy program, identifying both successes and shortcomings. In order to avoid redundancy and aid the reader's comprehension, for this section these three citations are omitted because these authors have all influenced every idea I offer. In the case that another author's work has also influenced my thinking, that information has been added in parenthetical citations.

**Liberating and decolonizing.** At the heart of the idea of liberation and decolonization is the practice of questioning. As educators and facilitators of such a program, we must question the norms and the power dynamics at play in our work: we must examine our own positions

within these power dynamics and how our own racial/ethnic/class/linguistic identities affect those power dynamics - and for whose benefit (Milner, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006b). We must question society's expectations and accepted knowledge: who produced this knowledge, we might ask, for what purpose, and at whose expense. Not only must we ourselves ask these questions, but it is imperative that we create space for participants to be empowered to do the same (Ladson-Billings, 2014, 1995; Torres & Hurtado-Vivas, 2011; Caspe, 2003). It is our responsibility as educators to encourage participants to question, generate new knowledge, grow critical consciousness, and develop the cultural competence to take action for change (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2014, 1995; Caspe, 2003). It is key to recognize the importance of the relationship between facilitators and participants: we are all able to learn from each other and no person's knowledge has greater importance than another's - yet we as facilitators must be mindful that as members of the dominant group we have access to perspectives that are necessary for the deconstruction of existing power dynamics (Ladson-Billings, 2014, 1995; Delpit, 1995). In this way, we might reconceptualize our 'intervention' as not a way to fix the shortcomings in families, but rather as a way to facilitate the empowerment of families in order to work together to fix the shortcomings in schools and society (Deschenes et al., 2001; Epstein, 1995).

**Emergent and co-constructed.** It is crucial that these liberation-oriented programs focus on the needs and desires of participants, as identified by participants themselves. It is also important to balance the realities of society's power asymmetries and the facilitator's role in creating an environment for empowerment, however this must happen within a framework that encourages participant control and values what participants value (Ladson-Billings, 2014, 1995;

Milner, 2010; McLaren, 2009; Delpit, 1995). For this reason, a program is almost entirely context-dependent: while facilitators may be aware of important issues that must be addressed, there should be no set time or order for addressing these issues. Rather, concerns and ideas should emerge from participants, with the facilitators using their knowledge to coordinate an environment conducive to constructing knowledge and to flexibly plan throughout (Windschitl, 1999). It is for these reasons that the name of the program is *hablemos juntos* (let's talk together): indicating that participants and facilitators approach the conversation as peers, and all learn from one another.

**Asset-based.** Such programs must build upon participants' strengths - and not just in spirit or in discourse, but in practice (Moll et al., 2005). A liberating program must by definition be asset-based, but an asset-based program could still be based in a deficit mindset: to ensure that the program is truly asset-based, it must build upon the strengths of participants by engaging participants in self-study of their own practices in order to identify their own strengths (Valencia, 2010).

### **Fundamental Implications**

**Asset based = bilingual.** For Latino parents, I believe that this principle dictates that the program be bilingual, primarily conducted in Spanish. First of all, language is a barrier that frequently prevents Latino parents from participating more fully in their children's education: conducting the program in their native language would capitalize upon all of the linguistic and cultural knowledge families possess, allowing more meaningful participation (Ryan et al., 2010). Secondly, research indicates that home language is an essentially useful tool in acquiring a second language: building upon children's strengths in this way will not only facilitate

acquisition of English but also emergence of bilingualism, with all of its accompanying benefits (Freeman & Freeman, 2014; de Jong, 2011; Gillanders & Jiménez, 2004). Research also supports the benefits of children and parents learning English together, which can lead to valuable social resources for parents and children (Ross, 2015). Importantly, however, parents may emphasize Spanish as a preservation of culture but encourage their children to speak only English at school - in accordance with assimilationist messages from the dominant culture - without understanding the potential for transferring skills between Spanish and English (de Jong, 2011; Orozco, 2008; Gillanders & Jiménez, 2004). Conducting the program mainly in Spanish but emphasizing the benefits of bilingualism may be one way to incorporate all of these important findings.

**Bilingual, bicultural facilitators are necessary.** In order to conduct a bilingual program, facilitators must logically be bilingual. I do not believe that it is necessary for all facilitators to be completely bilingual; in fact, a situation where a facilitator is actively learning Spanish may create a power imbalance which could counteract the power imbalance inherent in the role of facilitator, since the facilitator acquiring Spanish would need to rely on participants in some ways, communicating explicit value for family knowledge (Freire, 1970/2014, 1974/2013; Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Reyes & Torres, 2007). However, in order for this program to be liberating and decolonizing, participants must trust facilitators, which is easier when both parties share the same language and culture: there is less opportunity for misunderstandings, and an assumed shared worldview (Freire, 1970/2014, 1974/2013; Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Milner, 2010; Martinez-Cosio & Iannacone, 2007; Reyes & Torres, 2007). For this reason, I believe that the majority of facilitators should be both bilingual and bicultural, so that they may

act as cultural brokers: bridges between the dominant societal culture of power and the shared Latino culture (Martinez-Cosio and Iannacone, 2007). Again, I do not believe that this precludes non-Latino facilitators, but simply underscores the importance of mitigating the power imbalance between facilitators and participants by including cultural brokers (Freire, 1970/2014, 1974/2013; Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Martinez-Cosio & Iannacone, 2007; Reyes & Torres, 2007). Ideally, at some future point in the program these facilitators would be parents who had been participants themselves, to further lessen the perceived distance between facilitators and participants (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Lopez et al., 2001).

**The Framework**

What follows is the overall program framework, as well as plans for the first session.

<i>Hablemos Juntos: Program Overview</i>	
Goals	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Strengthen the cultural competence and enhance the critical consciousness of Latino parents at Warren Elementary.</li> <li>2. Enrich the oral language of Latino children through both school-based activities and parent practices.</li> </ol>
Assessment of Program Effectiveness	Ongoing evaluation based on parent satisfaction with program. Also focus on parents' self-efficacy and correlate with children's academic achievement.

Program Features: Alignment with Identified Cultural Values				
Program Feature	<i>Familismo</i>	<i>Educación</i>	<i>Respeto</i>	<i>Información</i>
Flexible dates, times, & locations.	x		x	
Family meal to begin sessions.	x		x	
Childcare with educational objectives, supervised by teachers.	x	x	x	
Co-constructed objectives for educational childcare.	x	x	x	
Bilingual / bicultural facilitators. Ideally eventually parent facilitators.	x		x	x
Co-constructed conversation norms; collaborative circle.	x		x	
Co-constructed session topics & objectives.	x	x	x	x
Collaborative inquiry & co-construction of knowledge.	x	x	x	x
Reflective, collaborative, and humble yet well-informed facilitators.	x		x	x

Other Program Elements		* = included
Element	Description	
Facilitator Reflection*	To be done in journals, emails, interviews, etc.: continually reflect on personal identity and role within the program.	
Potential Topics*	List of items for facilitator to suggest including as collaborative topics of study. Based on knowledge of the school system and potential for marginalization.	
Resources	Provide necessary resources for families. (ex: notebooks, pens, children's books, library cards)	
Connections to Other Programs & Services	Seek & maintain partnerships with outside organizations & local nonprofits to connect families with necessary services. (ex: food, healthcare, legal advice)	

Facilitator Reflection	
Purpose	Understand own identity and how that affects interactions with participants. Reflect upon role within the program: ensure participants have true ownership.
Method	Should involve both individual reflection and reflection shared with other facilitators. Ideas: write in a journal and discuss with a critical friend later; write an email to a critical friend; record self discussing and reflect in conversation with a critical friend. Form varies based on preference.
Sample Questions (adapted from Milner, 2010, p.73-74)	<p>How does my race/SES/language influence my work as a facilitator with my Latino participants?</p> <p>How might participants' race/SES/language influence their work with me? What conflicts might emerge due to differences and disconnects?</p> <p>As a facilitator, what is the effect of race/SES/language on my thinking, beliefs, actions, and decision making?</p> <p>What matters most to participants and to me? How do race/SES/language relate to these important issues?</p> <p>How do I, as a facilitator, situate myself within the participation structure of this program?</p> <p>To what degree are my role as facilitator and my experiences superior to the experiences and expertise of participants? Is there knowledge for me to learn from participants? How does race/SES/language shape these roles?</p> <p>How do I negotiate the power structure in this program to make space for participants to feel a sense of worth and ownership regardless of race/SES/language background?</p> <p>How do I situate and negotiate participants' knowledge, experiences, and expertise with my own? How is this affected by race/SES/language?</p>

Potential Topics	
Purpose	Critically consider the role of race/SES/language in school and society; in what ways might Latino families be disadvantaged? What might they not know that they have a right to know?
Topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Structure of the U.S. school system; district- &amp; school-specific information</li> <li>- Parental rights within the U.S./district/school</li> <li>- Prejudice within the U.S./district/school</li> <li>- Immigration information &amp; laws concerning schools and immigration status</li> <li>- School's idea of parental role construction: possible consequences</li> <li>- Contact information to exercise parental rights (interpreters, administrators...)</li> <li>- Language in the U.S. &amp; Warren: policies/practices, research, possible effects</li> <li>- Relationship between language &amp; literacy: what school says/enacts vs what research says</li> <li>- Cultural biases on standardized assessments</li> </ul>

### **Explanation of the Framework**

**Goals.** In order for this program to be liberating and decolonizing, its focus must by nature be liberation: in such a program, it is not our place as educators to identify areas of improvement for participants and to decide how participants will reach those goals (Freire, 1970/2014, 1974/2013; Ladson-Billings, 2014, 1995; Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Torres & Hurtado-Vivas, 2011; Reyes & Torres, 2007; Caspe, 2003). Research indicates that the current educational system in the U.S. in general, as well as in my state, often takes a deficit approach toward culturally and linguistically diverse students (e.g. standardized assessments), especially in the case of language learning (Tennessee State Government, 1984; Tennessee State Board of Education, 2011; Baquedano-López, 2013; Valencia, 2010; Baker & O’Neil, Jr., 1996; Miller-Jones, 1989). This program itself is not deficit-based, but must encourage awareness of the potentially disenfranchising nature of the system in which students and their families participate (Freire, 1970/2014, 1974/2013; Ladson-Billings, 2014, 1995; Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Reyes & Torres, 2007; Delpit, 1995). For these reasons, the main goal of this program is to strengthen the cultural competence and enhance the critical consciousness of Latino parents at Warren elementary, especially as concerns their children’s education.

However, Torres and Hurtado-Vivas (2011) argued that Latino parents should not be expected to take on the role of the school: even as this program works to enhance parents’ critical consciousness, the structure must not then leave it to parents to help their children develop academic skills aligned with the dominant culture. The literature provides evidence of programs that have successfully worked with both parents and children in a variety of ways, and this seems to be one way of ensuring that children develop the cultural competence necessary for success

while their parents are also learning (Ross, 2015; Madigan Peercy et al., 2013; Anderson et al., 2010; Caspe, 2003). Oral language structures, as well as academic skills such as retelling story structure and school-oriented communication methods, have been identified as one area of cultural mismatch where Latino children may be labeled as deficient (Dudley-Marling & Lucas, 2009; van Kleeck, 2006; Gutstein et al., 1997). For these reasons, the secondary goal of the program is to enrich the oral language of Latino children through both school-based activities and parent practices. In the academic childcare, teachers will work with students to develop their metalinguistic understandings: how to leverage Spanish in learning English, and how to purposefully use the dialogue styles expected in school while also valuing students' own styles (Freeman & Freeman, 2014; Gay, 2002; Gutstein et al., 1997). With parents, students will work more to develop and enhance home literacy practices, as parents come to see their micropractices as valuable for their children's learning and both children and parents become more aware of these activities (Anderson et al., 2010; Lopez et al., 2001).

**Assessment of program effectiveness.** The central goal of this program is to strengthen *parents'* cultural competence and to enhance *parents'* critical consciousness: success will be primarily measured by parent satisfaction. This assessment may take different forms - perhaps an informal conversation, or a paper survey at the end of a session - but what is key for the success of the program is to ensure that parents are having the experience they want to have and are learning information they feel is important (Freire, 1970/2014, 1974/2013; Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Reyes & Torres, 2007). Additionally, success will be measured by evaluating parents' self-efficacy: when parents believe they can help their children in school, they tend to become more actively involved with their children's education in addition to the positive benefits

that come from feeling confident in one's self (Anderson et al., 2010; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Lastly, the program will investigate correlations between participation in the program and student achievement, but will not base judgements of program efficacy on such data: standardized assessments only provide so much information because of the biases inherent in these measures (Valencia, 2010; Baker & O'Neil, Jr., 1996; Miller-Jones, 1989).

**Program features.** In the discussion of each program feature, I include rationale based in the literature to illustrate the connections to my design principles. I also include my reasoning for how each feature aligns with each core value of Latino culture that I previously identified. For simplicity and to aid in the reader's comprehension, I will cite my sources up front for the discussions of cultural value alignment. When I discuss *familismo*, I am citing the following authors: Torres and Hurtado-Vivas (2011), Barker et al. (2010), Caldaza (2010), Ryan et al. (2010), van Kleeck (2006), and Reese (2002). When discussing *educación*, I am citing Torres and Hurtado-Vivas (2011), Ryan et al. (2010), Orozco (2008), van Kleeck (2006), Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005), Gillanders and Jiménez (2004), Reese (2002), Lopez et al. (2001), and Delgado-Gaitan (1992). When I refer to *respeto*, I am citing Caldaza (2010), Barker et al. (2010), Ryan et al. (2010), Parra Cardona et al. (2009), van Kleeck (2006), Reese (2002), and Delgado-Gaitan (1992). When discussing *información*, I am citing Orozco (2008), Reese (2002), and Delgado-Gaitan (1992). The reasoning for alignment is my own, but I have drawn upon these authors in understanding each value and its applications.

**Flexible dates, times, and locations.** My guiding principles of design indicate that organizing sessions around the needs and preferences of participants is paramount (Freire, 1970/2014, 1974/2013; Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Reyes & Torres, 2007). Hoover-

Dempsey et al. (2005) also discussed explicitly the kinds of scheduling and transportation difficulties that can prevent families from participating in school-based activities even when they desire to do so. For this reason, I suggest that the sessions should be scheduled by participants: it may be that they occur monthly, or perhaps biweekly; potentially participants would prefer to meet in the local library's conference room or to take turns hosting at their own homes; perhaps not all participants will attend every session. I suggest that the scheduling particulars are not so important, but rather what is crucial is that families are able to participate and find the experience valuable. This decision aligns with the value of *familismo* because it encourages parents to make decisions that are right for their whole family. It also aligns with the value of *respeto* because rather than dictating a schedule and expecting participants to adhere to that, facilitators are willing to adapt their own schedules to meet the needs of families.

***Family meal to begin sessions.*** In my experience, including meals at family events creates a welcoming, casual atmosphere. The literature suggests that beginning with a meal may be a positive way to begin each session, potentially even acting as an incentive for families to attend the program when they otherwise may not feel able to (Anderson et al., 2010; Lopez et al., 2001). This practice aligns with the value of *familismo* because sharing a meal together invites community and including the entire family in the meal creates time for families to spend together. This also aligns with the value of *respeto* because by creating time for this event, facilitators are communicating their respect for parents' priorities, as well as sharing food as a part of the same community with families.

***Childcare with educational objectives, supervised by teachers.*** One of the main objectives of this program is to influence child educational outcomes through school-based

educational activities and parent practices. While this is an important goal, Torres and Hurtado-Vivas (2011) cautioned educators not to place an undue burden on Latino parents by expecting them to perform the school's job of education through colonizing home literacy and homework practices. Caspe (2003) discussed a program during which the children separated from the parents to participate in literacy activities, illustrating the need for childcare options during parent programs not involving children, which I have also observed in my time at Warren. This seems to be a wonderful opportunity for teachers to spend time working on educational objectives with these children, in a way that allows for integration of home and school literacy practices without requiring parents to take on practices with which they are uncomfortable. This feature aligns with the values of *familismo* and *educación* because it provides accommodations for all family members in a way that will serve to further children's educational achievement. It also aligns with the value of *respeto* through consideration for the family's needs.

***Co-constructed objectives for educational childcare.*** As my guiding principles suggest, participant needs, values, and choice are of the utmost importance (Ladson-Billings, 2014, 1995; Freire, 1970/2014, 1974/2013; Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Milner, 2010; McLaren, 2009; Reyes & Torres, 2007; Delpit, 1995). This is potentially even more important when it comes to children: Latino parents' values of *familismo* and *educación* mean that their choices will consistently align with the best interests of their children, and this framework intends to make space for those choices. This feature also aligns with the value of *respeto*, since by sharing ownership of the curriculum with parents, facilitators communicate respect for participant values. Additionally, since research suggests that Latino parents tend to take less active roles in their children's school experiences since they have less familiarity with the school systems in the

U.S., this opportunity may afford parents the chance to become more actively involved if they would like to do so (Orozco, 2008; Gillanders & Jiménez, 2004; Reese, 2002; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992).

***Bilingual / bicultural facilitators; ideally eventually parent facilitators.*** As I have already suggested, bilingual and bicultural facilitators will play the role of cultural brokers for participants, and parent facilitators will lessen the power dynamics and perceived distance between facilitators and participants (Freire, 1970/2014, 1974/2013; Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Milner, 2010; Martinez-Cosio & Iannacone, 2007; Reyes & Torres, 2007). I have witnessed the value of such staff members at Warren, and will actively recruit their help with the implementation of this program. Additionally, this feature aligns with the value of *familismo* by promoting feelings of solidarity and community. It also aligns with the value of *respeto* by communicating value for participants' language and culture, and aligns with the value of *información* by potentially providing more direct links to pertinent information from a person who has ostensibly faced similar challenges.

***Co-constructed conversation norms; collaborative circle.*** As my design principles indicate, the very foundation of this program is built upon collaboration and co-construction in the truest sense (Ladson-Billings, 2014, 1995; Freire, 1970/2014, 1974/2013; Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Milner, 2010; McLaren, 2009; Reyes & Torres, 2007; Delpit, 1995). This concept can be separated across many of the features I have identified: here, it refers to the mechanisms of sessions. Since conversational norms differ across cultures, participants should be able to work together to construct norms which help every person feel valued and comfortable contributing and listening to other points of view (Gay, 2010; Reyes & Torres, 2007; van Kleeck,

2006; Gay, 2002; Nelson-Barber & Estrin, 1995). In this way, each participant takes ownership in the interactions and is more likely to adhere to the norms selected (Au & Kawakami, 1991).

This feature aligns with the value of *familismo* because it encourages a feeling of community and co-responsibility. It also aligns with the value of *respeto*, because not only is there time spent on setting norms so that everyone feels respected, the facilitators are not the ones in charge of setting those norms.

***Co-constructed session topics and objectives.*** Another feature based on the key principle of collaboration and co-construction is the topics of sessions (Ladson-Billings, 2014, 1995; Freire, 1970/2014, 1974/2013; Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Milner, 2010; McLaren, 2009; Reyes & Torres, 2007; Delpit, 1995). Not only must the program cover information that is relevant and pertinent to the lives of participants, but it must do so in flexible and responsive ways, allowing for change from session to session depending upon the needs of participants while also balancing important considerations of power dynamics and issues of access (Ladson-Billings 2014, 1995; Anderson et al., 2010; Reyes & Torres, 2007; Windschitl, 1999; Delpit, 1995). This feature aligns with the value of *familismo* because it encourages a sense of community and participatory learning, and aligns with the value of *educación* because of the focus on learning about topics relevant to participants' lives. It also aligns with the value of *respeto* because of the explicit value placed on participants' needs and interests. Finally, this feature aligns with the value of *información* because topic choice is an active way that parents can seek information to help their children and families.

***Collaborative inquiry and co-construction of knowledge.*** Building from the idea of deciding topics of study based on participant needs and interests, it is also important that the

study of these topics be done in a collaborative and constructivist way (Ladson-Billings, 2014, 1995; Freire, 1970/2014, 1974/2013; Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Milner, 2010; McLaren, 2009; Reyes & Torres, 2007; Windschitl, 1999; Delpit, 1995). Building knowledge together will involve participants studying and reflecting on their own practices, potentially through homework assignments to be completed with their children at home (Reyes & Torres, 2007). By making participants' knowledge and experiences part of the official knowledge studied in the sessions, parents may come to understand their own daily micropractices as valuable for their children's education in ways that they had not considered before (Anderson et al., 2010; Kincheloe, 2003; Lopez et al., 2001; Apple, 2000). This feature also addresses all four of the identified values: *familismo* because of its collaborative and interdependent nature, *educación* because of its focus on academic study of personal practices, *respeto* because of its emphasis on the value of each participant's knowledge and experiences, and *información* because through this co-construction, parents will gain knowledge and information which they can use to help their children and families.

***Reflective, collaborative, and humble yet well-informed facilitators.*** Facilitators' identities necessarily affect interactions within the program, since power dynamics are inherent in the school and society: facilitators are responsible for understanding and mitigating these power dynamics, which can be achieved through both self-reflection and sharing of equal program control with participants (Freire, 1970/2014, 1974/2013; Nelson & Guerra, 2014; Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Milner, 2010; Reyes & Torres, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2006b; García & Guerra, 2004; Delpit, 1995). Research suggests that Latino parent participants seek this humble attitude on the part of facilitators, and that parents want to be appreciated for their

strengths instead of prescribed culturally inappropriate solutions to problems that may or may not even be problems for their families (Parra Cardona et al., 2009; Williams & Sanchez, 2002; Lopez et al., 2001). A dimension of this interaction that is not often considered is the benefits of this type of interaction for the facilitator: by positioning participant knowledge as equal in importance, facilitators learn knowledge and also acquire the interpersonal skills and community resources that comprise the learning process (Madigan Peercy, Martin-Beltran, & Daniel, 2013; Torres & Hurtado-Vivas, 2011; Gay, 2010; Reyes & Torres, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2006b, 1995; Delpit, 1995). This attitude aligns with the value of *familismo* because it contributes to the building of a true community, and it aligns with the value of *respeto* because of the inherent respect afforded participants in such a setting. This also aligns with the value of *información* because through the community of learners, parents can leverage all participants' (including facilitators') knowledge in order to help their children and families.

**Facilitator reflection guide.** Adapted from Milner (2010), these questions are designed to help facilitators critically think through key issues that may influence the implementation of this program. Drawing on work done for EDUC 3830 (Action Research), I have suggested various methods of conducting this reflection, underscoring the necessity for a balanced perspective offered by both self-reflection and shared reflection with an equity-minded colleague ('critical friend'). This reflection should be ongoing: I suggest that facilitators engage in such reflection after each session at least, to maintain continuous engagement with these important considerations (Reyes & Torres, 2007; Tatum, 2003).

**Potential topic list.** This list of topics is not all-inclusive, but begins to address some of the issues brought up in this paper. The intent of the list is not to dictate the subjects of sessions,

but rather to ensure that the facilitator is aware of such important issues and can capitalize on moments when these issues arise organically from the conversation (Ladson-Billings, 2014, 1995; Freire, 1970/2014, 1974/2013; Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Milner, 2010; Anderson et al., 2010; McLaren, 2009; Reyes & Torres, 2007; Windschitl, 1999; Delpit, 1995). For example, one important issue here is the role of language within the schools and the accompanying consequences for children. Parents should be aware that according to state and strict policy Spanish is not welcomed in their children's schooling; that the assimilationist atmosphere in the United States leads these policies to be interpreted by some schools and teachers to mean that the use of Spanish is actively discouraged and disparaged; that the research on language acquisition shows that people using their first language actively and with purpose to acquire their second language do so more efficiently, and that people who are bilingual have multiple cognitive advantages over people who are monolingual (Tennessee State Government, 1984; Tennessee State Board of Education, 2011; Freeman & Freeman, 2014; de Jong, 2011).

**Resources.** Since many of our participating families are likely to be short on income, it is essential to provide resources necessary for program participation so as not to preclude participation for some families: for example, if parents express an interest in discussing the benefits and drawbacks of bilingual shared book reading, then the program should provide bilingual children's books for families (Ross, 2015; Anderson et al., 2010; Lopez et al., 2001).

**Connections to other programs and services.** Additionally, it will be helpful for the program facilitators to seek and maintain relationships with outside organizations, such as local nonprofits, to connect families with necessary services (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Lopez et al., 2001). I have seen these partnerships successfully in place at Warren in my work with the

Family Involvement Specialist: the school maintains relationships with local organizations that connect families with resources such as food, healthcare, legal advice, and mental health services, among others.

**Session 1: Parental Role Construction**

Here, I offer an example first session to take place at Warren Elementary. My decisions for this session have been based not only on the research that informed this program, but also my knowledge of Warren and experience with parent programs and norms at the school.

Session 1: Parental Role Construction													
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Begin building community.</li> <li>- Begin setting group norms.</li> <li>- Explore how parents view their roles in their child’s education and how this relates to the school’s construction of parent roles.</li> </ul>												
Date / Time / Location	Determine based on typically positive scheduling (6-8 on a Thursday evening in the school library) and revise based on conversations with families.												
Advertising	<p>Word-of-mouth between families: facilitator personally invites parents and encourages them to share the invitation with other families.</p> <p>Also through typical school media: newsletters, Facebook, call-outs, etc.</p> <p>Advertised as the “first” meeting - many more to follow.</p>												
Agenda	<table border="0"> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top;">6:00 - 6:30</td> <td>Family dinner - potluck style. Families and facilitators bring dishes to share; facilitators contribute paper products and drinks. During this time, informal introductions take place and participants casually converse.</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top;">6:30</td> <td>Children go with teachers to childcare in the Gym. Activities include:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- structured play encouraging bilingual conversations</li> <li>- storybook reading in English and in Spanish</li> </ul> </td> </tr> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top;">6:30</td> <td>Adults remain in the Library. (arrange seats in a circle)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- formal introductions (tell your name and something about yourself or your family)</li> </ul>                             Discuss: What should be your role in your child’s education? Facilitators should observe this conversation and leave space for group norms to come about naturally rather than prescribing a structure for the conversation.                         </td> </tr> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top;">7:10</td> <td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- set purpose: why are we here? Why would we continue to come in the future? What types of things would you like to talk about next time? What are you curious about? Construct mission statement from participant contributions.</li> </ul>                             Facilitators contribute as well, but do not shape or overshadow the mission statement: it should reflect participant desires.                         </td> </tr> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top;">7:40</td> <td>Discuss: What about this conversation felt respectful to you? What should we be sure to do so that everyone feels respected in our conversations?</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top;">7:50</td> <td>Determine the date, time, and location for the next meeting. A facilitator might offer to host the next meeting at their house, if comfortable doing so. Encourage families to recommend the group to friends, and remind them that even if they cannot make it to the next meeting, everyone is always welcome.</td> </tr> </table>	6:00 - 6:30	Family dinner - potluck style. Families and facilitators bring dishes to share; facilitators contribute paper products and drinks. During this time, informal introductions take place and participants casually converse.	6:30	Children go with teachers to childcare in the Gym. Activities include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- structured play encouraging bilingual conversations</li> <li>- storybook reading in English and in Spanish</li> </ul>	6:30	Adults remain in the Library. (arrange seats in a circle) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- formal introductions (tell your name and something about yourself or your family)</li> </ul> Discuss: What should be your role in your child’s education? Facilitators should observe this conversation and leave space for group norms to come about naturally rather than prescribing a structure for the conversation.	7:10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- set purpose: why are we here? Why would we continue to come in the future? What types of things would you like to talk about next time? What are you curious about? Construct mission statement from participant contributions.</li> </ul> Facilitators contribute as well, but do not shape or overshadow the mission statement: it should reflect participant desires.	7:40	Discuss: What about this conversation felt respectful to you? What should we be sure to do so that everyone feels respected in our conversations?	7:50	Determine the date, time, and location for the next meeting. A facilitator might offer to host the next meeting at their house, if comfortable doing so. Encourage families to recommend the group to friends, and remind them that even if they cannot make it to the next meeting, everyone is always welcome.
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For the scheduling of the session, I based my decisions on my knowledge of parent preferences for scheduling: I suggested that from 6-8pm on a Thursday in the school library might be a good plan. I chose the library for the location because it is a known location to many parents, and it is a welcoming setting with larger chairs that adults can sit in comfortably. Before determining that to be the final plan, I will need to check with parents at the school to ensure that this would, in fact, be convenient (Freire, 1970/2014, 1974/2013; Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Reyes & Torres, 2007). Since Latino parents use social and family networks to get information, I will personally invite a few families with whom I already have a relationship, ask those families to give feedback about the scheduling of the meeting, and also ask them to bring other families they know (Orozco, 2008; Reese, 2002; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992). Then, I will advertise through typical school media (like flyers and call-outs) to try to reach a broader audience; in my experience, however, it is typically networking that brings families to events, and not advertising.

I included a potluck-style meal to begin the session because in my experience with events at Warren, when families bring something to contribute, the atmosphere is more communal. Since the aim of beginning with a shared meal is to build this sense of family, it seems logical to share in the creation of the meal as well as sharing the meal itself (Anderson et al., 2010; Lopez et al., 2001). I suggest that facilitators also provide paper products and drinks because, in my experience, this is the norm at Warren.

For the children's session, I suggested several general activities to begin with that will further the goals of the program. In keeping with the co-constructed model of the program, I envision that in the next session, after this discussion on role construction has begun, facilitators

will begin drawing parents in to the ongoing discussion about programming for their children (Freire, 1970/2014, 1974/2013; Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Reyes & Torres, 2007).

For the topic of the session, I chose to focus on the issue of role construction, or how parents view their role in their child's education, because of its important implications for how parents approach the school, as well as the results of those interactions (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). As we launch into building our community during the first session, it will be important for us to get to know each other as people and as parents: a discussion on role construction will necessarily lead into a conversation about our values (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). This discussion will, I hope, help us build our community and also identify other topics into which participants would like to inquire more deeply (Ladson-Billings, 2014, 1995; Freire, 1970/2014, 1974/2013; Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Milner, 2010; McLaren, 2009; Reyes & Torres, 2007; Delpit, 1995). In this way, we can construct a mission statement together and a list of topics that will help drive our work, as well as beginning to set group norms for respectful interaction. Additionally, throughout the session I provided suggested time frames, but this should be a natural conversation and not be artificially controlled by the facilitators - including, I think, through scheduling of the time (Freire, 1970/2014, 1974/2013; Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Reyes & Torres, 2007).

At the end of the session, the group will decide together on the scheduling for the next meeting, asking parents to recommend the program to other families if they wish, and to come to later sessions even if they cannot attend the next one (Freire, 1970/2014, 1974/2013; Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Reyes & Torres, 2007). I suggested that a facilitator might offer to host the next meeting in the hopes of enhancing the feeling of

community - but I acknowledge that this may not be comfortable for everyone and may not be appropriate, depending on the situation.

### **Cautions & Limitations**

The most important caution I have to offer regarding this framework is that it is only a framework. The program, even when tailored to a specific context, still must not be much more than a framework, because it must by nature be co-constructed with participants (Freire, 1970/2014, 1974/2013; Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Reyes & Torres, 2007). The details of the program will necessarily change based on participant's needs, which will not be easily predicted or planned for by facilitators. I suggest that the only concrete planning which can be done is the planning for the next session, which must be done collaboratively between participants and facilitators. Because this framework has been designed to be flexible, I believe that it would be possible to take it into a different context - but facilitators in that context would need to make adaptations (similar to my tailoring of the first day) for their context, as well as to be firm in their commitment to adapt to the needs of participants. Further, I reiterate earlier cautions that although this framework has been designed with research-indicated core values of Latino cultures in mind, these values may not apply to all Latino families and should be considered instead as background knowledge with which to begin to understand the needs of these diverse families (Ryan et al., 2010; Orozco, 2008; Weiner, 2006; Reese, 2002).

One important limitation for the potential implementation of this framework is that I, the author and a proposed facilitator, am a middle-class White European American English speaker: my cultural identity does not align with that of my proposed participants. As I indicated earlier, I do not believe that this precludes me from participating, but I (and any other facilitators in my

position) will need to attend to important considerations: I must continue with the process of learning Spanish, constantly reflect upon my identity and the ways in which that affects the program and participants, and recruit bilingual and bicultural facilitators to act as cultural brokers between me, the school, and participants (Freire, 1970/2014, 1974/2013; Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Milner, 2010; Martinez-Cosio & Iannacone, 2007; Reyes & Torres, 2007).

In terms of future research, more work needs to be done to include these types of liberating, decolonizing programs into the discourse of intervention, in order to interrupt the monopolization of interventions on family programs and the accompanying educator and societal mindsets (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Torres & Hurtado-Vivas, 2011; Anderson et al., 2010; Valencia, 2010; Dudley-Marling & Lucas, 2009; Reyes & Torres, 2007; Caspe, 2003).

Additionally, it is necessary to produce more research on the effectiveness of programs aimed at mending the opportunity gap in order to fix the achievement gap: how might a program such as this be measured in its effects on societal inequities, when standardized assessments, the very evidence of those societal inequities, are biased (Valencia, 2010; Milner, 2010; Baker & O'Neil, Jr., 1996; Miller-Jones, 1989)?

It is with these cautions and recommendations that I present this framework for a reimagined early language intervention. *¡Hablemos Juntos!*

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