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The Effect of the Parenting Circles Program on Home Language Retention and Parental Engagement: The Case of a Spanish-Speaking Parent Group in Toronto

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**THE EFFECT OF THE PARENTING CIRCLES PROGRAM ON HOME LANGUAGE
RETENTION AND PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT:
THE CASE OF A SPANISH-SPEAKING PARENT GROUP IN TORONTO**

By Stefany Pinkus, HBA, University of Toronto, 2005

A Major Research Paper
presented to Ryerson University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in the Program of
Immigration and Settlement Studies

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2008

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ABSTRACT

The Spanish-speaking community has recently been getting much attention in Canada due to the prevalent low academic achievement of children of Latin American immigrants. The focus of this study is on empowering Latin American parents to become active participants in their children's education and take control of their children's' educational path. This study documents a Spanish-speaking parent group that combined the "empowerment" approach to family literacy, drawing from elements of the Early Authors Program and the creation of a support network, which was named "Parenting Circles". The study found that the *Parenting Circles Program* is a useful tool in helping Spanish-speaking parents maintain their home language, and in promoting overall engagement in their children's academic development.

Key words:

Parental Engagement, immigrant children and families, Spanish-speaking, home language retention.

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Dedication

To my family

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Chapter 1- Literature Review

Introduction

The Spanish-speaking community has been getting much attention in Canada due to the pervasively low academic achievement of children of Latin American immigrants (Brown, 1994; Drever 1996; Ornstein, 1997; Pacini-Ketchabaw, Bernhard & Freire, 2001). This is of great concern in view that, according to the 2006 Census, the third largest group of recent immigrants to Canada was from Central and South America and the Caribbean (see table 2). Further, the Latin American community in Canada is growing considerably faster than the overall population. Using the mother-tongue descriptor, according to the 2006 Census, there were approximately 108,380 Spanish-speaking people in Toronto, a 30% increase from the 2001 census. Moreover, Spanish is in the top ten languages most often spoken at home in the Greater Toronto Area (See tables 3-5 for 2006 Census statistical tables).

When referring to the Latin American community in Canada it is important to note that it is not a homogenous group (Goldring, 2006). In contrast to the United States where there is over-concentration of specific ethnic groups for example Mexicans in California or Cubans in Florida (Rumbaut, Massey & Bean, 2006), Latin American migration to Canada is very diversified, particularly in the Greater Toronto Area. Yet the Spanish language is the unifying bond. For the purposes of this paper, the terms Latin American, Latino and Spanish-speaking people will be used interchangeably.

Research has demonstrated that parental engagement is a key factor in academic success. Sénéchal (2006), in a review for the National Centre for Family Literacy, confirmed that parental engagement has a positive impact on children's literacy skills. Further, parental engagement has been positively linked to higher grades, greater enrollment in higher level programs and

advanced classes, lower drop-out rates, higher successful completion of classes and greater subsequent enrollment in post-secondary education (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001; Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski & Apostoleris, 1997; Sheldon, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Sandler, Whetsel, Green, Wilkins, et al., 2005). For immigrant children whose home language is not English, parental engagement becomes particularly important, as they need additional support (Dyson, 2001). A significant finding in the literature is that parental engagement has the potential to serve as one means of reducing the achievement gap between diverse student groups, as parental engagement can transcend differences in such indicators as socio-economic status, race, gender and language (Pushor, 2007). Although the Ontario Ministry of Education created the “Parent Engagement Office,” in January 2006, (Ministry of Education, 2007) it is not known to what extent the Latin American community is benefiting, as they are still confronted with systemic barriers. This paper focuses on empowering Spanish-speaking parents to better engage in their children’s education.

Personal Background

Peters, Klein and Shadwick (1998) assert the relevance of providing a sense of one’s perspectives and motives that we bring to research. I am a Spanish-speaking immigrant from Mexico. I came to Canada in the summer of 1999 at the age of 18. I entered High school in the fall at grade 13, and was eager to make friends to reduce the isolation newcomer youth often experience. Naturally, I tended to associate with other Latin American students. I made a particularly good friend in a Chilean girl that was also a recent newcomer. However, one day about two months after we started school she made the announcement that she could no longer be by friend since her parents had instructed her not to associate with other Latin Americans and to immediately stop speaking Spanish because they wanted her to successfully assimilate. I was totally perplexed and could not understand

why her family would want her to do such a thing, since in my household we spoke Spanish at home and were doing okay. This mother would have benefited by a parents group for newcomers such as the Parenting Circles.

Although I faced my own settlement problems, it was relatively easy for me to adapt. Because of my family history, I was familiar with Canadian society, as my family lived in Canada for a few years when I was a child and had attended school during that time. Further, and most importantly I was fluent in English. However, after 8 years of living in Canada, I continue to struggle to understand my identity and place in the world. I have felt the nostalgia of loss of my past self in Mexico and all the cultural richness of that world. However, when I return to Mexico, I feel that I am no longer seen as really Mexican. At the same time I am not seen as fully Canadian.

My educational background has been in International Relations and Ibero-American Studies. I found it important to acquire knowledge about the political, historical and economic forces that have shaped Latin America. However, when I enrolled in Immigration and Settlement Studies, I was drawn to investigate Latin American Settlement patterns and experiences in Canada. Participation in the Parenting Circles program further helped me to understand the struggles Latin American immigrant families face in adapting and settling in their new home and further understand that announcement given to me by my dear friend in the fall of 1999.

Parental Engagement vs. Parental Involvement

Although the present study is guided by the concept of *Parental Engagement*, in the existing literature, *Parental involvement* continues to be the term predominantly used in the field. This is problematic as there does not seem to be a consensus in the definition of the terms and they are often used interchangeably. Nonetheless, there is growing literature that differentiates between the two terms. I will further review each term in turn.

Parental involvement is regularly used to describe the level of interaction between parents

and the school. Calabrese Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis, and George (2004), defined parental involvement as “a dynamic, interactive process in which parents draw on multiple experiences and resources to define their interactions with schools and among school actors” (p.3). Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) further narrowed the definition of parent involvement “as the dedication of resources by the parent to the child within a given domain” (pp.538). Pushor noted that the focus is usually placed, when using the term parental involvement, “on what parents can do to help the school realize its intentioned outcomes for children, not on what the parents’ hopes, dreams or intentions for their children may be” (p.2) Because of this focus, parent involvement programs traditionally “tend to be directed by the school and attempt to involve parents in school activities and/or teach parents specific skills and strategies for teaching and reinforcing school tasks at home” (Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez & Bloom, 1993, p.85).

Since the term *parental involvement* tends to have the connotation of advancing mainly the schools’ agenda, researchers have moved toward the term *parental engagement* as way to discuss the need to equalize power dynamics, incorporate parents’ needs, and draw on parents’ knowledge. Pushor and Ruitenberg (2005) argued that “with parent engagement, possibilities are created for the structure of schooling to be flattened, power and authority to be shared by educators and parents, and the agenda being served to be mutually determined and mutually beneficial” (pp. 12-13). Calabrese-Barton, and her colleagues (2004) used the word *engagement* to expand the understanding of involvement to include parents’ orientations according to their socio-cultural context and how those orientations affect the things they do for their children. Parental engagement can also be seen as an attempt by parents to have an impact on what actually transpires around their children in schools and on the kinds of human, social, and material resources that are valued within schools (Calabrese Barton et al., 2004).

Although it is clear that the terms *parental involvement* and *parental engagement* are

substantially different and our focus is on *parental engagement*, it is nevertheless important to review research studies using the term *involvement* since it helps to further expand the notions of the many ways parents can be engaged in their children's education. For example, parents can be involved in their children's education without being in the schools; they can support their children at home, or community level (De Gaetano, Williams, & Volk, 1998; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). When focusing on the specific types of parental activities, Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski, and Apostoleris (1997) described three types of involvement in children's schooling: behaviour, cognitive-intellectual, and personal. Parent's behaviour refers to participation in activities at school and at home. The cognitive-intellectual dimension of involvement includes exposing the child to intellectually stimulating activities, such as going to the library. The third category, personal involvement, includes being aware of and following what is going on with the child in school.

Barriers to Parental Engagement

Many scholars both in Canada and the United States, have worked to dispel the pervasive misinterpretation by the school that language-minority parents generally have a lack of interest in being involved in their children's education (Bernhard & Freire, 1999; De Gaetano, 2007; Dyson, 2001). In trying to understand why some parents become involved and others do not, it is important to keep in mind that this is not a black and white issue, as there are many potential barriers immigrant language minorities' face that may prevent effective formal parent participation (Bernhard & Freire, 1999; De Gaetano, 2007; Dyson, 2001). The following review of barriers can be summarized in three categories: barriers related to socio-economic status, barriers related to marginalization in the school system, and barriers related to language.

There are many researchers that link Latin Americans' low academic achievement to their generally low socio-economic status (Borjas & Tienda, 1985; Kazemipur & Halli, 1998). Indicators

of low socio-economic status such as below average income, marginal housing and unemployment, are said to reduce family access to resources. Further, Grolnick et al., (1997) suggested that parents' experienced inadequacy of resources will most likely disrupt involvement. However, this is a contentious issue as not everyone agrees with this viewpoint. Shanahan, Mulhern and Rodriguez-Brown (1992) argued, as do other scholars, that despite low economic status, Latino families are very interested in the success of their children, although as immigrants they are often uncertain how to navigate the educational system. This is likely because of little knowledge of the system or differences between what is expected of parents here and in their countries of origin (Valdes, 1996; Theiheimer, 2001; Bernhard, Freire, Pacini-Ketchabaw & Villanueva, 1998; Rueda, Monzo, & Arzubiaga, 2003).

Another barrier parents face is marginalization within the school system (Crozier 2001). Drawing on critical race theory, scholars have noted that schools tend to reinforce the ideals and beliefs of the dominant culture, positioning the cultures of poor, minority, immigrant, and linguistically diverse families as subordinate (Calabrese Barton et al., 2004; Delgado-Gaitan, 1996). Crozier (2001), focused on how poor and minority groups are viewed from a deficit model by school personnel. Aschaffenburg and Maas (1997) defined cultural capital as "proficiency in and familiarity with dominant cultural codes and practices" (p. 573). When the dominant group defines what cultural capital is, cultural differences become "deficits" that must be fixed (Bernhard et al., 1998). All families possess cultural and social capital (Rueda, Monzo & Arzubiaga, 2003); however, it is possible that the current school system unintentionally devalues immigrant children's cultural capital (Bernhard, Freire, Torres, & Nirdosh 1997). This educational concern was noted by Kilbride (2000) who wrote that a student's perception of his or her individual capital and abilities has been highly correlated to academic success. Moreover, following the "cultural deficit" model, the ways in which parents participate may not be considered as an appropriate type of involvement (Bernhard et al.,

1998; De Gaetano, 2007). A study of Latin American families in Canada found that, although parents attached great value to their children's education, their children's teachers showed little responsiveness to their concerns (Bernhard & Freire, 1999).

The third barrier, language, also has a significant impact on parental involvement. Parents' lack of English fluency can lead to feelings of inadequacy and prevent them from actively participating in their children's education. Parents may experience frustration over their limited ability to engage in home teaching activities such as helping their children with their homework, reading to them in English and communicating effectively with teachers (Dyson, 2001; Gougeon, 1993). Salina Sosa (1997), in a literature review of school districts' successful practices to involve Latino parents, referred to a study from Azmitia, Cooper, Garcia, Ittel, Johanson, Lopez. et al. (1994). This study reported that 25% of parents indicated that they could not help directly with their children's homework because of their limited schooling or English. As a response to this barrier, the importance of home language retention as an educational tool will be expounded below.

Home Language Retention

In the United States, bilingualism and bilingual education has been the subject of intense debate. Until the 1950's, most research on bilingualism saw it as negative asset, as something to get rid of through education, mainly through intensive teaching in the majority language and by bringing students quickly into the majority culture. Minimal value was placed minority languages. However, since the 1960's new literature has shown evidence of the significant intellectual and socio-cultural advantages in having a bilingual education (Corson, 1999). Bilingual research shows that becoming bilingual has cognitive advantages (Cummins, 1996). There is growing evidence that bilingual children perform better than monolinguals on divergent thinking tests. Bilinguals also show to have advantage in thinking clearly and in analytical functioning (Corson, 1999). Moreover, with globalization an additional language improves the likelihood of obtaining better employment.

Furthermore, the maintenance of the home language permits effective communication with extended families in transnational contexts (Bernhard, Landolt & Goldring, 2005; Levitt, & Glick-Schiller, 2004; Menjivar, 2003;).

An inevitable consequence for language minority immigrant populations is that first language (L1) skills will be affected. How these are changed is dependent on many variables. Lambert (1972) identified two categories of bilingualism. The first is additive bilingualism, when a second language is acquired with the expectation that the mother tongue will continue to be used widely; the second is subtractive bilingualism, when a new language is learned with the expectation that it will replace the first language. Bernhard, Freire, Torres and Nirdosh (1997), noted that sometimes immigrant children are triply penalized: First, they lose their first language, or at least fail to develop it to a level appropriate to their increasing maturity. Second, they are far behind their peers in English, and finally, they fall behind increasingly in other subjects because they are attempting to learn them in a language in which they converse and comprehend at a much lower level. Home language retention is important because language minority children go to school with many well-developed skills in their first language (L1). According to Cummins' (1981) interdependence theory, one language may serve as a bridge for a new one, building upon existing skills. Children can apply their background knowledge in their L1 to make sense of the unfamiliar in acquiring a second language. Because of this interdependence, research has found that children acquire a second language very quickly in terms of conversational fluency, day-to-day language. However, Cummins (1989) stated that it takes approximately 5 to 7 years to acquire sufficient language for academic learning and solid literacy skills. Studies have also shown that young children lose much of their first language if they do not receive any support or encouragement to develop it at a faster rate than they learn the second language (Anderson, 2004; Lu, 1998).

Immigrant families experience a cultural adaptation transition that involves adjusting to new values and modifying others. This transition may include new perceptions of children and schools

(Theiheimer, 2001). Part of this transition involves becoming a language minority. Latin American parents in Canada are in a language-minority position in relation to the position of Spanish and Canada's two official languages, English and French. Cummins (1997) points out that, in Canada, the debate over bilingualism revolves solely around the two official languages. Their status is entrenched in the country's history, conferring rights and institutional support only for Anglophones and Francophones (Statistics Canada, 2006). Thus there exists a minority-majority where there is a higher status placed on the dominant language. This means that the dominant or majority language is needed to succeed in the educational system and to obtain better employment opportunities (Petrovic, 1997). Thus, there is a tendency to shift to the more highly valued language. First language is then limited to more restricted contexts, primarily those of the home (Petrovic 1997). As such, it is important to consider the assimilative pressures to replace Spanish as a language of the home and its impact on parental involvement (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Bernhard & Freire, 2001).

Language-minority immigrants face great assimilative pressures to incorporate into the host society. Children, in particular, encounter pressures as they enter an English-speaking school system. The pressures to learn the dominant language are three-fold: first, to take full advantage of educational opportunities, second to secure better employment, and third for socialization. However, Wong Fillmore (1991) argue that pressures are not only external, but internal as well. Language-minority children quickly become aware that, in order to participate in society, they have to master English. The consequences of losing a home language are significant, as it affects the social, emotional, cognitive, and educational development of language-minority children, as well as the integrity of their families (Wong Fillmore, 1991). The cognitive advantages of being bilingual have been described above, moreover, it is important to note that the consequences for family and social relations are also far-reaching. Mouw & Xie (1999) argue that, in a transitional sense, bilingualism is important to prevent a language gap from developing between parent and child. Bilingualism allows for effective communication, particularly when parents are not proficient in English. If parents lose

the ability to talk to their children, they also their ability to meaningfully convey to them their values and beliefs; parents lose the means of socializing and influencing their children (Wong Fillmore, 1991).

After reviewing the barriers to parental engagement and particularly exploring the importance of language, we can observe that perceived lack of interest can often be explained by systemic barriers in schools due to race, class, cultural and linguistic differences. Crozier (2001) argued that parental involvement policies fail to recognize the ethnic diversity amongst parents. There is an implicit assumption that all parents are the same. This is problematic, as it conceals the complexity of minority parents' needs and veils constraints they may face for participation in the school, that is at a formal level.

Intervention Strategies for Language-Minority Parents

Many researchers have emphasized the importance of building on culture and language when working with Latino parents (De Gaetano, 2007; Pacini-Ketchabaw, Bernhard & Freire, 2001; Quintero, Huerta, 1990; Shanahan et al, 1995) while also acknowledging the realities of their lives. Only a part of the child is present in the classroom. Children are rooted in their home setting in a culture and context that may be incongruent from the school context and culture (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). Moll and his colleagues (1992) developed the term "funds of knowledge" as a means to connect homes and classrooms. They described "funds of knowledge as those historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well being" (p.133). Taylor, Bernhard, Garg and Cummins (In Press) observed that, while children of minoritized cultural and linguistic backgrounds are often affirmed in their cultural identity, the school and teachers generally ignore their home languages and literacies, as vital "funds of knowledge" that might contribute to academic learning (see also Ada, 1988; Bernhard & Cummins 2006; Dyson, 2001; Moll et al., 1992; Valdez, 1996). This is a critical

observation for a country like Canada where there might be tension between an official Multiculturalism Act and an Official Languages Act. In this context, parental engagement is essential if minority students are to become empowered (Cummins, 1989).

One challenge is to engage parents in both an affirming and empowering way. A main underlying framework for the Parenting Circles Program was the community development and empowerment theories proposed by Freire (1970, 2000). He suggested that educational programs and policies should be from the bottom-up where families and communities themselves envision realistic ways to foster academic achievement. Freire (1970) argued that interactions between teachers and students occur in a social context. He advocated for transformative education in which students were empowered by using cultural references to tap into their strengths. Immigrant families by extension need to be empowered to take advantage of their cultural and social capital and use it to better help their children's academic advancement. Language-minority students will engage academically to the extent that instruction affirms their identities and enables them to invest their identities in learning (Cummins et al., 2005). There are many examples in the literature on parental involvement that describe how Latino, poor and working-class parents can become involved in their children's educations in a variety of ways. The two main approaches are: 1) family literacy projects and 2) the creation of support networks. I will discuss each in turn by introducing a general discussion on the approaches and then follow up with actual interventions relevant to this study.

Family Literacy Programs are based on the notion that the literacy children experience at home and in their communities has a significant impact on later literacy success at school (Cairney, 2002). Most of the literature on engagement of Latino parents hinges on parental interest in literacy development; this can include the parent's interest in learning English (Ada 1988, Auerbach, 1996; Delgado Gaitan & Trueba, 1991; Rodriguez-Brown & Shanahan, 1994). When effectively implemented, literacy programs can tap parents' resources and knowledge. Recent literacy projects have incorporated the home language of the family either by using it exclusively or allowing for code

switching. They have proven to provide meaningful, useful experiences to immigrant parents (Shanahan, Mulhern, & Rodriguez-Brown, 1995; Jimenez, Fillipini, & Gerber, 2006; Quintero & Huerta-Macias, 1990; Young Sook Lim & Kevin Cole, 2002).

Bernhard, Winsler, Bleiker, Ginieniewicz, Madigan (In Press), in reviewing the different types of early literacy interventions in terms of their philosophical approaches and focus, categorize them as roughly falling into two different types: Those that emphasize direct teaching of specific literacy sub-skills, and those that emphasize making changes in the larger socio-cultural context of the family and children's participation in literacy-rich activities. In accordance with their review, interventions that focus on formal reading instruction and skills-based programs have proved to have positive effects in evaluation studies. However, they note that studies have shown that sustained reading growth requires that students find reading enjoyable. To address this, researchers have attempted interventions to increase children's active participation in culturally meaningful and enjoyable literacy activities in a social context. Ideally, the literacy activities should be relevant to the lives of children and their families. They must also validate and respect the learners' identity, language and country of origin (Salinas Sosa, 1997). Jimenez, Filippini and Gerber (2006), developed an intervention in Southern California that focused on *Shared Reading*. Sixteen primarily monolingual Spanish-speaking Latino/a caregivers with children between seven to eight years of age participated. In this study the parents were taught shared reading strategies. The activities were conducted in the primary language spoken at home, mainly Spanish. The intervention was facilitated by graduate and undergraduate bilingual researchers. This intervention took a one- to-one approach, the families were visited individually mostly in their home or in the local library. Families were visited every other week for a total of five 1-hour sessions and phoned alternate weeks. The researchers provided the parents with a total of 12 books, 4 of which were bilingual and consistent across all participants. The results showed increased parent strategy use and overall increased verbal participation.

Further, measures of children's productive language and relative participation increased significantly. Beyond these measurable indicators, Jimenez, Filippini and Gerber (2006) argued that through these dialogues around the books, parents had greater opportunities to share cultural and familial information with their children, by integrating their own knowledge and experiences of the world. Further it increased opportunities for home language use and retention. This study appears to support the effectiveness of implementing a shared reading intervention in a linguistic minority population. While the results of this study were very positive, it was limited to the household; the researchers took a one to one approach, thus it did not address potential family isolation particularly for Spanish monolingual parents and newcomers.

An earlier but ongoing program that is more far reaching in the United States was *Project FLAME* (Family Literacy: Aprendiendo, Mejorando, Educando [Learning, Improving, Educating]). The purpose of the program was to support limited English proficient families with preschoolers and primary grade students by providing information and sharing knowledge about ways to provide a home environment rich in literacy learning opportunities for their children. Rodriguez-Brown, Fen Li and Albom (1999) studied a sample of 60 Spanish-speaking immigrant families who participated in project *FLAME* for 2 school years (1997-1999). The objectives were 1) to increase ability of parents to provide literacy opportunities for their children; 2) to increase parents' ability to act as positive role models; thirdly, 3) to improve the parents' skills to successfully encourage and support their children's literacy learning; and 4) to improve relationships between Latino families and the schools. The project had two components: Parents as Teachers sessions offered every 2 weeks for 30 weeks a year. These sessions focused on teaching parents family literacy strategies to do with their children. The second component was Parents as Learners sessions. These sessions were 2 hours per week during the school year and involved English as a Second Language classes. The classes generally took place in a local school, a park district building or a community agency. This study showed that an intervention of this type can help Latino parents' in all four program objectives. The result was

that families had richer literacy knowledge and skills, used more literacy practices and had a better understanding of their roles in their children's education. Keeping in mind the great reported success of the program it is important to note that because of the length of time the program, parents during this time missed literacy session, primarily to meet family needs. In addition, it is not clear to what extent home language and culture were emphasized. It appears the primary focus is on building English literacy skills and learning literacy sub-skills to teach their children. A final observation is that although most likely parents this program allowed parents to make friends, it did not allow for a space where parents could form a support network independent from the school to discuss their experiences, opinions and aspirations for their children's education.

An important study that emphasized culture and language was *The Cross Cultural Demonstration Project*. De Gaetano (2007), focused on this project in her study on the role of culture in engaging Latino parents. She stated that Latino parents were able to engage in the schooling process meaningfully when their culture and language were focused on in a positive way. This project involved teachers, administrators, and parents in two urban elementary schools. It was a three year project that strived to improve the academic outcomes of English-language learners through using language strategies to enable children to become bilingual and using culture as a mediator of learning. The participants were mainly Latino parents, but included other ethnic groups as well. The project took the format of a 2-hour program for parents per month, that focused discussions and activities based on the parents' backgrounds and experiences. During the first year the programs focused on self and family, during the second year the focus was on the community and the final year the focus moved to the school setting. It is important to note that the second year included several programs on the development on the first and second language in children. As well, there were programs on active learning strategies, such as the importance of storytelling. It is interesting to note that the project took a collaborative approach in which all participants from researchers to teachers to parents had a voice in how the project was to evolve. De Gaetano found in her study based on parent

reports, that in the first year there was greater cultural awareness, in the second year the parents realized the importance of their culture and language in the learning process of their children and in the final year the parents expressed increased participation in their children's learning and gained cultural capital through increased knowledge about the schools.

Again, it is important to consider that this program by being in the school did not allow for a space where parents could form a support network independent from the school to discuss their experiences, opinions and aspirations for their children's education. It was significant that one of the selection criteria for the two school participating schools was that the principals articulated interest in focusing on children's cultures and experiences in the teaching-learning process. Further they were supportive of having outsiders in their schools. Thus, the *Cross Cultural Demonstration Project* can be a good model to work with language minority groups but does not give an alternative support for those immigrant parents that have children in schools that are not as receptive, or a way to empower parents where the school does not take such a collaborative approach and as a result parent-teacher relations are not strong.

A recent step further in literacy intervention emphasizes the holistic processes of engaging young children in authentic literacy activities in appropriate socio-cultural contexts, such as authoring books (Ada, 1988, Ada & Campoy, 2004). This approach can be termed a "transformational" or "empowerment" approach (Bernhard, et al., In Press). This perspective draws on family experience and knowledge, and provides opportunities to draw on unique cultural and familial "funds of knowledge" (Moll et al., 1992). Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzalez (1992) argued that "funds of knowledge" represent a positive view of households as containing cultural and cognitive resources.

Ada (1988) implemented transformative literacy projects in the Pajaro Valley School District in California. The project involved monthly meetings with a group of 60-100 parents that for the most part had very little schooling and many had never read a book before. The group met outside

the school at a local library to discuss in their home language children's literature, and to read stories written by their children. This eventually led to the parents creating their own books. The parents were also given a list of questions to take home and use with their children. Small discussion groups were facilitated initially by bilingual teachers and eventually parents took over. This intervention reported positive results:

'parents began to read aloud to their children, the children have begun to bring home books from the school library, and parents and children have gone to the public library in search of books...At the first meeting we had a show of hands to find out how many parents had public library cards. None did (Ada, p.223).

Further, the project helped parents increase self-confidence and self-expression. Parent's self-reports point to the great success of the project and demonstrated how the use of the home language can empower families and children. However, no formal evaluation was conducted.

Following the "transformative" approach, Bernhard, Winsler, Bleiker, Ginieniewicz, and Madigan (In Press) conducted a rigorous evaluation of the efficacy of the Early Authors Program (EAP). This program brought the "transformative" approach to the classroom setting. The EAP was a 12-month grand scale intervention implemented in Miami-Dade County, Florida, involving 57 teachers, 32 childcare centers, 13 literacy specialists, 1,179 children and 800 families. It emphasized authentic, culturally sensitive, holistic interactions (writing, book making and storytelling) to promote literacy. The intervention involved a) literacy specialists working with pre-school teachers to improve literacy based activities and incorporate home-language in the classroom, b) bringing book-making equipment and supplies into the classroom, c) children self-authoring books with the help of literacy specialists, teachers and parents, d) parents coming in for on-site group parent/family meetings in which parents and families shared family stories and made books together based on the stories, and e) frequent reading, sharing, display and dissemination of the children's self-authored books both in the classroom and in the community. The study did not focus on teaching specific

literacy skills, but rather focus on children's and families' experiences and knowledge. Their study confirmed that the EAP's transformative approach helped improve the early literacy skills of language and ethnic minority children living in high poverty areas, as an alternative to more arduous parent literacy skills training programs. However, it remained to be seen to what extent this program could be successfully replicated in other locations and other populations.

Now we turn to the parent support network approach. There is not much literature in the field that recognizes the value of informal parent support networks as a means to engage parents. However, there is growing appreciation of its usefulness. First we shall do a brief overview of proponents for promoting parent networks as a means to engage parents and then we will review a relevant example of this approach. Wasserman and Faust (1994) defined social networks as the set of social relationships and linkages one person has with other individuals. Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez (1992) asserted that social networks facilitate the development and exchange of resources, including knowledge, skills, and labor, that enhance the household's ability to thrive. Sheldon (2002) examined social networks and beliefs as predictors of parental involvement. His study recognized that parents are social actors and maintain social networks that may affect the role they play in their children's education. Sheldon (2002) undertook an analysis of 195 survey responses sent to parents with children in grades 1-5 in 2 elementary schools in the United States. He found that parents' social networks were associated with parent involvement at home and school. Further, his study suggests that it may not take a large or extensive network to encourage parent involvement. The average parent network involved approximately two parents.

Parent support groups can have a significant impact on parental orientation, as a Latin American parent support group in Toronto demonstrated. Bernhard, Freire, Pacini-Ketchabaw & Villanueva (1998) documented this group of 8-12 parents. The group met monthly for an eight-month period to discuss issues regarding their children's primary schooling. The research team was Spanish-speakers and had lived in Latin American. The two-hour sessions were conducted in

Spanish, and refreshment and child care was provided. The role of the facilitator was to introduce each session and initiate discussion by asking a neutral, open-ended question. Bernhard, et al. (1998) described in their study how the parents' group helped its members understand their role in supporting their children's educational practices without devaluing their own cultural capital. Bernhard and her colleagues (1998) suggested as did Sheldon (2002) that parents' social networks can function as a resource for schools and teachers. Traditional models of parent participation need to be revisited. Parent support networks can function as an alternative form of sustaining and encouraging parental engagement.

Research Questions

The focus of this study is on empowering Latin American parents in their socio-cultural context, to become active participants in their children's education and take control of their children's educational paths. This study documents a Spanish-speaking parent group that combined the "empowerment" approach to family literacy, drawing from elements of the Early Authors Program and the creation of a support network, which was named "Parenting Circles." The research questions are:

1. To what extent is the Parenting Circles Program a useful tool in helping language-minority parents maintain home language and/or stopping language erosion?
2. To what extent does the Parenting Circles Program promote overall parent engagement in their children's academic development?

Chapter Two: Methodology

The *Parenting Circles Project* was proposed as a means to provide parents with strategies to support their children's school success at the elementary school level and to connect these adults so that they could build strong support networks. As part of the project parents also took part in creative writing exercises and produced books to give to their children. The Ministry of Education generously awarded the research group with a *Parents Reaching Out* grant in order to carry out the following activities, which will be expanded on below: Recruitment, Location, Facilitator Training, Facilitation of Parent Groups, Final Event, Final Interview, Data Analysis. The two groups included in this framework were Black and Spanish-speaking parents, as evidence has shown that children of these communities have lower academic achievement and higher-dropout rates. The Spanish-speaking parent group was called *Padres en Acción/Parents in Action* and the second group was called the *Organization of Parents of Black Children*. However, this major research paper focuses exclusively on the experience of the former group. Towards the end of the project *Parenting Circles* collaborated with Dr. Jim Cummins from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto, for the production of a video based on the exchanges between the Spanish-speaking parent group. It is worth noting that this paper is part of a larger study in relation to the Spanish-speaking group. The present methodology was developed in collaboration with graduate student Catalina Garcia. While my focus is on home language retention and parental engagement, Garcia's focus is on key elements for the meaningful engagement of parents.

I. Participants

a) Recruitment Process

The recruitment criteria for the Spanish-speaking parent group was that they speak Spanish, have been living in Canada for at least one year and are the primary caregiver of a child younger than

thirteen years of age who is currently enrolled in a licensed setting or school. Flyers in Spanish were created for outreach and were displayed at the Centre for Spanish Speaking People (CSSP), St. Thomas Aquinas Church, Black Creek Community Centre, and Toronto Latino (retail store). All sites are within the catchment area of the Centre where the *Parenting Circles* took place. The flyers stated that participants would be given TTC tokens, reimbursed for childcare and, if they attended five out of the six sessions, they would receive a \$200 honorarium (*see Appendices A and B for flyer samples*). Some of the recruitment was done through snowballing effect as some parents in the group were referred through word-of-mouth by other group members. In total fifteen people applied, however, four people were turned down due to the distance of their area of residence and reasonable commuting time to get to the *Parenting Circles*, as well as the appropriate age of children. Each participant was provided with a detailed description of the project in Spanish and given the choice to either sign the consent form or decline to take part in the group. All sessions and forms were also in Spanish. In order to participate, the parents had to agree to be both audio and videotaped throughout the program. There was the concern that there was the possibility of a sample bias, as it is was likely that only those parents already oriented towards engagement would apply, however it was felt that the incentive of an honorarium and selection process helped to reduce this quandary (Babbie & Benaquisto, 2002, p. 168).

b) Participant Information

Eleven parents participated in at least five of the six sessions as required by our recruitment process. There was an additional parent that attended only the first session and did not qualify for the honorarium. There were a total of ten female and one male participants in the parent group, including one grandmother. It should be noted that while there was one grandmother participant for brevity sake this paper will refer to all members as “parents”. Their ages ranged from 29 - 55 and all had lived in Canada anywhere from one to nine years. Their countries of origin were six from Mexico,

two from Colombia, and one each from Guatemala, Ecuador and Cuba.

*Table 1. Participant Information **

** Parent Name	Area of Residence	Country of Origin	Length of time in Canada	Education	Children's Year of Birth	Marital Status and Income level
Beatriz (Mother)	Toronto	Colombia	1 year and 6 months	Post-secondary	1999	Married or living with a common law spouse. Income level (Below \$15K)
Berenice (Mother)	Toronto	Mexico	6 years and 10 months	High school	1989 1996 2004	Married or living with a common law spouse. Income level (Below \$15K)
Carolina (Mother)	Miss***	Mexico	3 years and 7 months	Some Post-secondary	2000 2005 2006	Married or living with a common law spouse. Income level (34K – 38K)
Cintia (Mother)	Miss***	Mexico	7 years	Some Post-secondary	1998 2000 2005	Married or living with a common law spouse. Income level (38K – 42K)
Jimena (Mother)	Miss***	Cuba	1 year	High school	1997 2001	Married or living with a common law spouse. Income level (15K – 22K)
Josefina (Mother)	Toronto	Mexico	9 years	High school	1992 1994	Separated. Income level (Below \$15K)
Juan (Father)	Toronto	Guatemala	1 year	Post-secondary	1998	Married or living with a common law spouse. Income level (\$23K-\$28K)
Maria (Mother)	Toronto	Mexico	2 years	High school	1996 1999	Separated. Income level (Below \$15K)
Marta (Mother)	Toronto	Ecuador	1 year	Post-secondary	1997	Single. Income level (Below \$15K)
Monica (Mother)	Toronto	Mexico	2 years	High school	1990 1994	Separated. Income level undisclosed.
Natalia (Grand-mother)	Toronto	Colombia	2 years and 6 months	Elementary	1989 1995	Marital status undisclosed. Income level (Below \$15K)

* These data are from information collected from parents in the intake form May 2007

** All participants' names have been changed to protect their identity

*** This is an abbreviation for Mississauga

It is worth noting that more than half of the participants were recent newcomers with low income levels. Further, more than half of the participants completed high school or less, however, this paper does not analyze these indicators. In terms of length of time in Canada, this paper will not

compare newcomers to those in the sample that have been in the country longer without knowing their level of integration and settlement history. Nor will it analyze income differences as there is no way to verify individual household resources (other sources of income or familial support, transnational links, remittances). Finally, there will not be a discussion of differences in participants educational levels as all parents have ‘funds of knowledge’ to offer their children regardless of academic achievement.

II. Procedure

a) Location

The Spanish *Parenting Circles* took place at the CSSP at 2141 Jane Street in North York, Ontario. This site was selected for three specific reasons: First, this project is community based research and it was vital to engage the CSSP as a partner. They were responsible for the recruitment process by outreaching to their clientele. Secondly, it is a recognized service provider in the community and provides a neutral and welcoming space. Finally, the centre is located in an area of high concentration of Spanish-speaking people (*see Figure 1*).

b) Facilitator Training

The effective training of the facilitators was crucial to the project in order to ensure the least amount of intrusion and greatest amount of meaningful participation by the parents. The bilingual facilitators for the Spanish-speaking parent group were one of the principal investigator’s of the project and three graduate students from Ryerson University. The graduate students working on the project were required to read the *Canadian Parenting Programs* (2004) as a guideline for the Parenting Circles, which was written and designed by Dr. Judith Bernhard, Dr. Marlinda Freire, and Vicki Mulligan. In the *Canadian Parenting Programs* there are ten modules that are fully scripted to guide facilitators as well as learning activities for the parents. While these modules were helpful in

the training of the facilitators in areas such as school curriculum, special needs, child protection and the application of parenting strategies that support school readiness, once the groups began the parents determined what topics were of interest to them and each session catered to those choices.

c) Facilitation of Parent Groups

As a result of time constraints for the completion of the project, it was decided to hold weekly sessions instead of the originally intended bi-weekly sessions. Parents met in order to share their experiences, learn from the facilitators about the Ontario school system, and develop strategies to enhance their children's overall success. The first meeting was held on Thursday, 10 May 2007, at seven o'clock in the evening the Spanish parent group met with four parents in attendance at this initial information and recruitment meeting in the CSSP. At the end of this session the parents were asked about the convenience of the day and time and, if not, were invited to propose alternatives. This was a strategy to encourage the parents to take ownership of the group. Subsequent meetings were held as per group vote on Wednesdays at five o'clock in the evening for a total of six two-hour sessions. Parents who attended the sessions were provided with adult bus tokens, child bus tickets, child care reimbursement if applicable, and light refreshments.

While the *Canadian Parenting Programs* book served as a foundation, the process was participatory in that the topics developed out of the interests of the parents. Program discussion topics addressed were: Child discipline, bullying, guide to the school system, guide to parent teacher interviews, settlement and adaptation issues, home language retention and literacy development. In the third session parents were motivated to practice early literacy development through a creative book project introduced to them by guest speakers Dr. Alma Flor Ada and Dr. Isabel Campoy. Both are world renowned professors and authors of bilingual children's books including the book *Authors in the Classroom* (2004). Originally developed in California, the program was also implemented in thirty-two child care centre's in Miami-Dade County, Florida. Ada and Campoy conducted the

session with the Spanish-speaking parents and helped them create their own books as a strategy to encourage literacy development for their children. The focus of the texts was on affirming the linguistic and cultural identity of their offspring and covered such themes as, *My Name, This is who I am, Story of My Name, A Special Person in My Life, Hopes and Dreams for my Child*. As a result of the great success and interest in authoring the books, the group worked on them for a total of three sessions and created thirty-three texts. In addition, at the end of each session parents were tasked with homework assignments which were to be completed by the next meeting. These covered activities related to topics discussed throughout the sessions and dealt with strategies to promote their children's academic and social success.

d) Final Event

A final event was held on 20 June 2007 to celebrate the completion of the project which brought together both *Parenting Circles*: the Black and the Spanish-speaking parent groups. A total of forty-two individuals attended the final celebration, which took place at the CSSP from six until nine that evening. Attendees at the final event included the parent participants, representatives from the Ministry of Education Office of Parent Engagement, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Faculty from Ryerson University, and staff from Radio Voces Latinas. The selection of the location for the final event was consulted with both parent groups and the decision was determined based on availability of space, parent's willingness to travel and their availability. Artistic performances from the Caribbean and Latin American communities were a meaningful way to celebrate the heritage of both groups. Refreshments were also provided representing both cultural cuisines. During the final event each parent received a framed certificate of completion and several parents shared their experiences about their participation in the project as well as detailing what they had learned. In addition, samples of books created by both parent groups were presented on an overhead projector, and there was also a power point slide show playing in the background to showcase photographs of

the sessions and examples of several texts.

III. Measures

The data were collected through the intake form (*see Appendix C and D*), registration form (*see Appendix E and F*), initial participant survey (*see Appendix G*), as well as the transcription of videos of the sessions and final interviews (*see Appendix H, I and J*). The intake form was used as an expression of interest to participant in the study, and included basic demographic information: Name, area of residence, ages of their children and marital status. The registration form was used to formally enroll the parents in the program. It was expansion of the intake form which included information such as income and education levels. The initial participant survey asked parents to self-assess in various parenting strategies (opinions with regards to child development, aspirations for their children, discipline styles, parent-child shared activities), and knowledge of social and school resources. As some activities were done on loose paper by participants, and flip charts were used by facilitators in some group activities, all paper-based materials were collected for analysis by the researchers. Colour copies were made of book samples that were produced in the group (*see Appendix J*). All of the weekly meetings and interview sessions were both video and audio-taped. Most of these tapes were transcribed, sealed and placed in a secure locked location.

Initially a paper evaluation survey was created to be completed at the end the *Parenting Circles*. It was to assess parents in contrast to the initial survey responses as an evaluation tool. However, the parents determined the topics for discussion and the final questionnaire was changed as the original one was no longer relevant. Furthermore, the research team eventually determined to conduct the survey as a one-on-one interview to allow the parents to expand on their answers thereby obtaining more thorough information. As the initial survey and exit interviews were no longer corresponding, I used session one and two, where parents discussed initial points of view and practices, as the reference to measure final outcomes. Two sets of interviews were conducted; the

first consisted of a questionnaire directly related to the *Parenting Circles*, to evaluate the program and asked parents to discuss what they had learned. All eleven participants were interviewed, eight of which were conducted at the participant's homes and the remaining three were completed at the CSSP, which was ultimately dependent on the parent's choice and on interviewer availability. The interviews were conducted by two of the Ryerson graduate students who also facilitated the meetings. On 20 June 2007 at the CSSP before the start of the final event, the second set of interviews were conducted relating to questions around 'Home language maintenance' as it was an issue of particular interest to the Spanish-speaking parent group. The researchers considered it worth investigating further and these interviews were conducted by a doctoral student working with Jim Cummins of OISE, University of Toronto. Two facilitators were present at each interview and an additional consent form was signed by each of the parents.

The arduous task of video production, archiving and editing began on 5 June 2007. They created a slideshow presentation for Judith Bernhard that was presented on 14 June 2007 at a conference in Halifax, Nova Scotia. These slides were also used at the final event of the *Parenting Circles* which allowed the families to witness some of the inspiring work created throughout the weeks.

Chapter 3 – Findings

In this section I will summarize my findings on what parents gained from the intervention. I will discuss to what extent the *Parenting Circles Program* helped in the maintenance of home language, and describe the impact that the Program had on the parent participants in relation to parental engagement, at three levels: home, school, and community. I have organized the findings under the following three subheadings: 1) Cultural identity and Language; 2) Parents as Teachers; and 3) Parents as Leaders.

Finding 1) Cultural Identity and Language

The most powerful impact of the *Parenting Circles* was at the personal level. After participating in the program, parents were motivated and empowered. They had acquired a sense of the importance of maintaining their home language and cultural values, both of which are an important part of their identity. Many positive attitudinal changes could be observed in both self and community perception.

Like other language minority communities of immigrants, the parents involved in this study valued their home language. However, when they came to Canada they felt that fluency in English was essential to their children's adaptation process and deemed it as vital to their success. In our first session, parents discussed English language acquisition. The parents were asked to rate their goals and desires for their children for the next five years. Fluency in English, adaptation to the new environment and academic success were the top three goals identified among the group, with adaptation and academic success seen as dependent on English fluency. However, in the second session, the parents discussed home language retention and its interrelation to cultural identity as an important value. Most parents expressed concerns about what educators call subtractive language acquisition (Corson, 1999). In other words, they were worried that in the process of acquiring a second language, their children would lose their first language. However, they were very adamant

that they wanted their children to be bilingual. Carolina, a Mexican mother of three children ages seven, two and one went further in the discussion and challenged the other parents about the need to not only speak or understand Spanish, but to be proficient in it:

Yo quiero decir algo – para mi es muy importante que mis hijos hablen español. Yo tengo una regla en casa se hable español, solo español... Entonces ellos que hablen español en la casa para que hablen una español claro y perfecto... no nada mas es hablar un español al que me doy a entender y puedo pedir lo que yo necesito, si no saben hablar un buen español.

I want to say something-for mi it is very important that my children speak Spanish. I have a rule at home: only speak Spanish at home, only Spanish... Then, they should speak Spanish at home so they will speak a perfect and clear Spanish...it is not about only being able to make myself understood and being able to ask for something I need, they need to be able to speak [fluent] Spanish.

By the end of the project there was a heightened assertion and appreciation of the group's cultural heritage and recognition of the value of transmitting that heritage to their children. Maria, a Mexican newcomer to Canada and a single mother of two children, ages eight and eleven, serves as an example. Maria had been trying to assimilate by adapting to a Canadian lifestyle and focusing on learning English. Maria stated that as a result of participating in the parent circle she had had a change in attitude toward using her cultural identity as a central part of her children's development:

Me gusto mucho el taller, fue una experiencia muy bonita, estoy agradecida de haber ido porque ahora comprendo un poquito mas de la importancia de nuestras raíces, somos de donde somos pero también todos somos hispanos verdad ?, y yo creo que es una base muy favorable para el desarrollo de mis niños y también mía.

I really liked the program. It was a beautiful experience. I am thankful for having attended because I now understand a little better the importance of our roots. We are from where we are, but we are also all Hispanics right? And I believe that it is a very favorable base for the development of my children and myself.

The parent group discussed the relationship between language and identity and, with the exception of one parent believed that the two are intrinsically interconnected. This belief is captured quite strongly by Berenice, a Mexican mother of three:

Si el niño pierde el español y deja de hablar español, pierde su identidad. Porque por ejemplo yo para comunicarme con mis hijas yo no les puedo decir igual "Te quiero" en español, que en ingles "I love you". No lo siento igual. Cuando por ejemplo, la identidad la pierden, ellos se empiezan a avergonzar de su español, se van a avergonzar de su origen y al avergonzarse de su origen que pena porque nuestra

cultura es muy rica. Entonces ellos ahí se empiezan a sentir menos. Entran a high school y se sienten... Ya no quieren entrar a la universidad, se sienten menos que los demás y yo pienso que por eso es importante mantener el español.

I think that if a child loses his ability to speak the language he loses his identity. For example, to communicate with my daughters, I can not say “Te quiero” in Spanish, and “I love you” in English. It doesn’t feel the same. When they lose their identity, they start to be embarrassed about their Spanish, and then they are going to be embarrassed about their origin. If they are embarrassed about their origin, what a shame because our culture is very rich. Then they start to feel inferior. They go into high school and they feel...they don’t want to go to university, they feel inferior to others and I think that is why it is important to retain Spanish.

For Berenice, as well as most of the parents, speaking Spanish was a very emotional issue. It was about the connection with her children. She needed to know that her children were able to understand her feelings and goals for them. Berenice’s comment is also very important because it demonstrates the connection that was often made by the parents between cultural identity, home language, and academic success. Parents realized the importance of emotional stability in their children’s development as part of the adaptation process. Research shows that minority language children who are comfortable in their emotional adjustment to both the majority culture and the culture of the home perform better academically than those who are ambivalent about either home or majority cultures or both (Cummins, 1981). Thus, language maintenance is very important to cultural identity.

However, although the parents wanted their children to be bilingual, there was also a feeling of tension around making sure they were fluent in English. The *Parenting Circles* helped the parents to overcome their doubts or feelings of insecurity about maintaining the home language. After participating in the program, the parents felt validated in wanting their children to be bilingual. Jimena, a Cuban mother of two children ages six and ten, was a very recent newcomer to Canada. She was still trying to adapt to her new life. Jimena talked about feeling socially isolated and did not think that the Latin American community was very united. Further, she mentioned how the children of friends she knew had lost their Spanish, and that her own children were starting to lean towards English and adapting quickly to a “Canadian way of life” It was very comforting for her to know that her language and her roots were valued.

Bueno lo que mas me impacto fue, que ahí aprendí que es verdad que el idioma materno en el caso de nosotros el español, los niños no lo deben perder en la casa. Mantener hablando en la casa el idioma de nosotros español, la lengua materna, mantenerla y seguir con las raíces de nosotros.

Well, what impacted me the most was that I learned there [in the Parenting Circles] that it is true that our mother tongue, in our case Spanish, should not be lost at home. We should continue to speak our language, Spanish, at home, continue our mother tongue, maintain it and continue with our roots.

Nonetheless, not all the parents agreed with the interrelation between home language and identity. Juan, a Guatemalan father of a nine-year old girl, asked for clarification during a group discussion in which participants were talking about the value of maintaining Spanish. He wanted to know if the group was referring to Spanish in particular or to any language in general. He stated that, personally, he was in a particular situation of multiple nationalities and languages at home. He spoke Spanish, his wife spoke Portuguese and his daughter was now learning English. They had lived in different countries as well. Further, he questioned home language as an essential aspect of his daughter's identity:

Yo creo que [los libros que hicimos son] importantes en la medida que les puede ayudar a manejar mejor un idioma que es importante, que tiene que ver con quizás mas que con su propia historia con la historia de sus padres. Entrando en el tema de 'su identidad' para mí es un asunto mucho más denso y complejo. No tengo muy claro que quieren decir con esto. Yo creo que la identidad de un individuo se da por lo que el puede percibir en su entorno, no? Y el entorno de nuestros niños definitivamente ya no es de un país hispanoamericano, no lo es. Podría ser un componente, pero yo no, no...bueno hablándote crudamente no reconozco identidades, fronteras, no...

I think that [the books we made] are important in the measure that they can help to learn a language better, that is important. Although it may have more to do with the history of the parent than their own. The topic of identity for me is very complex and profound. I am not really clear what is meant by it. I think that the identity of an individual is shaped by the environment they live in, right? And the environment that our children live in is definitely not a Hispanic country, it is not. It could be an element of their identity, but I don't...speaking crudely I do not recognize identities or borders...

His position was that maintaining home language was much more an extension of the parent's identity upon the child than the child's own identity. Juan spoke from his experience as an

immigrant in different countries and as someone living with different languages at home. Jokingly, he mentioned that if he took language as a carrier for identity then what would his daughter's identity be? Would she be Peruvian, Guatemalan, Brazilian, or Canadian? What about language? Would she be a Spanish-speaker, Portuguese-speaker, or English-speaker? We did not delve deeper into the complexities of multiple identities as it is beyond the scope of this paper. However, Juan did see home language as a transmitter of cultural values and as an asset for future employment opportunities.

It must be recognized that when you are in a language minority position, it is not an easy task to maintain your home language and culture. Many studies have commented on the various barriers to home language retention. Most of these studies have been done in the United States, but they can apply to Canada. They are especially relevant to the Latin American community where the concentration and levels of immigration are not as high as in the United States and where there are fewer opportunities to speak the language extensively. All the parents regarded loss of Spanish as something undesirable. However, the parents observed that their children were losing their Spanish in differing degrees. An interesting observation from our field notes was when the interviewers visited Berenice's home. Berenice was playing regional Mexican music that could be heard throughout the whole house. She mentioned how she likes to listen to it all the time and that her children like it as well. This is a clear language retention strategy. However, while the interviewers were introduced to the children in Spanish by Berenice, they talked to the interviewers in English. Thus, although they understood Spanish and retained certain cultural affinities, they preferred to speak English even with Spanish-speaking people. Language shift is a common intergenerational dynamic that tends to become stronger with every subsequent generation. Further, this was viewed by the parents as a normal and inevitable process. Carolina, a Mexican mother of three children, stated as a matter of fact that:

Hay algo muy importante que es que tu hijo es el más chico y sus dos hermanas

hablan ingles. A tu hijo le hablan ingles. Cada niño mas chico va aprendiendo menos español. Y eso lo veo en casa con mi sobrino, es así con mis hijos. Mientras mas pequeño es el niño menos español oye.

There is something very important and that is that your son is the youngest and his two sisters speak English. They speak English to him. Every younger child learns less Spanish. I see that at home with my nephew. I see that with my children. The younger the child the less Spanish he hears.

This comment was in response to Berenice, who shared with the group that she was concerned about her 3 year old son that was in a childcare centre. At home they spoke Spanish, but in the childcare centre they spoke English. However, Berenice found that her son was not speaking well either English or Spanish. The attitude that could be deduced from the parents in the initial sessions was that although most continued to speak Spanish at home, they had given in or accepted that the eventual outcome was that as their children learned English, their Spanish would be eroded. However, after having the opportunity to talk about it with other parents in the group they realized that they could play a central role in the outcome and help their children to become and remain bilingual. Regardless of the challenges to the maintenance of home language the parents felt encouraged to continue promoting language retention in the home. Most parents in the group reported in the exit interviews to have acquired a sense of commitment to home-language maintenance and to stopping language loss.

The discussion of language retention had a particularly strong effect on newcomer parents who had previously believed that their children would not easily lose their Spanish because they came to Canada with it. Monica shared this opinion before coming to the program. In the Parenting Circles Monica related how hard it was for her as a single mother to bring up her two children alone. She had no support and she often struggled. Moreover, she mentioned that her children's education had been her main reason for migrating to Canada. This motive was echoed by all the parents in the group. The best guarantee for her children's academic success, Monica believed was for them to learn English. Thus, she was not concerned with home language maintenance. However, after hearing the experiences of other parents in the program, she stated:

Este taller...es un apoyo muy importante para nosotros los padres que estamos recién llegados aquí. Muchos padres cometen el error de no enseñarles a sus hijos el español, eso también es muy importante para nuestros hijos.

This program...is an important support for us parents who have recently arrived here. Many parents make the mistake of not teaching their children Spanish and that is also very important for our children.

When the Early Authors Program was introduced to the parents, it proved to be a particularly effective tool to help them in the task of maintaining home language. When asked what the most important thing that impacted her after participating in the program was, Monica (the mother who had been focusing her efforts on her children learning English) mentioned how helpful writing the books was:

Bueno, primero que nada les gustaron los libros que yo hice como que bastantes tipos como enseñarles a que no deben olvidar el español y aprender el inglés.

Well, first of all they liked the books that I made. There are many types to show them [her children] that they should not forget their Spanish and learn English.

It was significant that the books were in Spanish. In the initial survey, Monica rated herself on a scale of 1 to 7 on English proficiency as being at number 1, i.e., the lowest rank. However, she found that by using her home language in the books she made she was able to pass along to her children important messages and knowledge. The parents were empowered through the books, as they became author-experts through their home language. Further, Maria, a Mexican single mother of two boys expressed how she found the use of her own life stories and experiences very motivating as her family became the main characters and her aspirations for her children became the main themes. A book that particularly inspired her was about her son. It is a story about his birth and the difficult first months of his life. It is a story of how he is loved:

A mi me gusto una cosa mucho, cuando comenzamos a escribir los libros. Lo que es una experiencia nueva porque nunca he escrito en calidad de “yo” para todas mis vivencias, entonces eso para mí, como experiencia es algo que me gusto mucho, para compartir con mis hijos.

I really liked when we started to write the books. It was a new experience for me because I have never written as “myself” for all my experiences. That was something I really enjoyed, to share with my children.

These examples illustrate how the program was successful in helping parents re-evaluate the

value of their home language and cultural backgrounds in a positive way. It was interesting to find, contrary to what is usually expected by researchers, that the parents received messages of reinforcement from the school and other sources where they got information. For example, community centres, religious institutions and family and friends were almost always positive about the maintenance of the first language at home. In the second session, when we were discussing home language retention, the facilitators asked the parents if anybody had advised or encouraged them to lose their Spanish or to speak English at home to learn the language faster. All parents answered no, to the surprise of the researchers. According to the literature in the field, this response does not seem to be the usual response language minorities receive, particularly when their children are attending school. This result in our study gives us an indication of how strong the assimilative pressure in society is, even if not overt. Regardless of the explicit positive messaging that the parents reported on receiving, there were implicit assimilative pressures that the parents also received that contributed to them placing their home language as second to English. Nonetheless, although as immigrants the parents who participated in the study faced assimilative pressures, they reconsidered their language and cultural diversity as beneficial for the integral development of their children, thus, reversing ‘subtractive’ language acquisition and causing them to make efforts to ensure an ‘additive’ process.

Finding 2) Parents as Teachers

A second important finding was that contrary to some thinking that minority parents are ‘hard to reach’ (Feiler et al, 2006), the enthusiastic participation of the parents in this program showed that they care greatly about their children’s education and want to be involved. As tends to be the case with most immigrants with children, participants in the study revealed that their children’s education was their main reason for migrating. They indicated that they would do anything necessary to make sure their children succeeded. Their involvement was not limited to their decision to move to Canada. It was also important to the parents to support their children’s academic development, and to let their

children know that they are supported. A particular parent, Marta an Ecuadorian single mother of an eleven year old son stated:

Lo mas importante para mi hijo fue que el haya visto que los padres de familia asisten a reuniones sobre temas educativos que les va a afectar en el futuro mas tarde a ellos.

The most important thing for my son was that he saw that parents attended meetings about educational topics that will affect them in the future.

It was important for Marta that her son knew that she cared and wanted to be informed about his future academic choices. This way she would be in a better position to guide and support him. Maria further added that regardless of time constraints and daily obligations, she was willing to make an extra effort to attend an event regarding her child's education.

...Yo salgo de las 4pm de las clases de ingles, de las clases tengo que pasar a recoger a mis hijos a la guardería, de la guardería directamente me voy así al taller. Es un poquito complicado y el autobús van comiendo los chicos... para mi es un poquito complicado pero es interesante y me gusto mucho.

I leave my English classes at 4pm. From class, I have to go pick up my kids at the childcare centre. From the childcare centre I go directly to the program. It is a little complicated, my kids eat on the bus...For me it is a little complicated, but it is interesting and I like it a lot.

The above quotes illustrate how much parents are committed to their children's education, and will take advantage of any opportunity that they consider useful in helping their children succeed in school. However, notwithstanding the parent's interest in the academic success of their children, at a more formal level, most parents related that there were barriers when it came to interacting with their children's teacher and by extension, with the school as a whole. The two major issues they cited were language and lack of tolerance toward language minorities. Some parents said that they were fortunate that their children had a teacher that spoke Spanish. However, such language compatibility is usually not the case. In the self-rating exercise on English proficiency, over 60% of the parents rated themselves at four and lower on a scale of 1-7. Jimena talked about this difficulty and how it impacted her efforts to attend parent-teacher interviews:

...Yo misma con el ingles mío me es un poco difícil a veces llegar a la maestra. Ella a veces me explica pero yo digo no entendí bien, pero bueno yo espero que con el

tiempo mi ingles mejore.

With my English it is a little difficult to get to the teacher. She sometimes tries to explain, but I say that I didn't understand well. But I hope that with time my English will improve.

This language barrier by extension also applies to the school. Beatriz, a Colombian Early Childhood Educator and mother of an eight year old child mentioned that she would like to participate more in her child's school but that she had difficulties with speaking English.

Me gustaría mucho participar en la escuela de mi niño pero no me va bien con el ingles.

I would like to participate in my children's school, but English does not go well with me.

All parents were made aware that interpreters could be made available at their request for parent-teacher interviews, at their local school. Most parents seemed to know if there was a Spanish-speaking staff member at their children's school. They were encouraged to make full use of these existing resources to better engage with the school. Cintia, a Mexican mother of three children, ages nine, seven, and two, stated that she now realized the importance of home-school contact and was prepared to take action:

Después de haber participado en el taller me he dado cuenta que es importante tratar de ir mas seguido a la escuela y preguntar como van los niños...En la escuela de mis hijos hay una persona que habla español, la trabajadora social, entonces voy a dirigirme con ella para preguntar sobre mis niños.

After participating in the program, I have realized the importance of trying to go more regularly to the school and ask how my children are doing...In my children's school there is a person who speaks Spanish, the social worker. I am going to ask about my children through her.

Thus this finding showed that as much as it was important for the parents to gain access to information it was also important for them to know how to use existing resources effectively.

Beatriz was also motivated to overcome her language barrier, but she also wanted to become more involved in her child's school, by taking what she learned at the program to the school to help other Spanish speaking parents:

...Yo estuve hablando con la trabajadora social, ella habla español y hemos tenido dos citas con ella, le comente que yo quería ayudar, compartir con los padres hispanos, y podíamos hacer unos talleres con mi esposo, haber como le podíamos

ayudar a estos padres ya sea en el salón, en el aula, especialmente para los padres.
I talked to the social worker [at her child's school]. She speaks Spanish, and we have had two appointments with her. I commented that I wanted to help, to share with Hispanic parents. I could run some programs with my husband, to help those parents, maybe in a classroom, especially for the parents.

This type of initiative shows how the parents valued the information and strategies they obtained at the Parenting Circles. It was inspiring to see how Beatriz and other parents wanted to help fellow parents.

Understandably, the language barrier was the major obstacle for most of the parents, and it is one that would probably hold true with immigrants of any language minority. However, the second reported barrier was more worrisome. Some parents reported having negative experiences with school engagement in the past, and expressed it as lack of tolerance to language minorities. These negative experiences served to discourage parents from interacting with their children's teacher.

Marta recounted her experience with her son's teacher:

En primer lugar, lo que tienen que tener es más tolerancia hacia otras culturas. Yo no creo que sean tolerantes. Entonces eso reciben los niños, ese choque que no son tolerantes. Entonces les hacen sentir mal y yo no estoy de acuerdo con eso....Entonces yo le estoy explicando (a la maestra) que recién está ajustándose a la nueva cultura, que por favor tenga un poco de paciencia porque lo va a lograr...Aquí se hace así las cosas y tienen poco tiempo para aprender... Esas cosas a mí me duelen, pero eso es todo el tiempo. Les tratan muy mal a los niños hispanos o yo no sé si tal vez de otras culturas igual.

In the first place, they have to have more tolerance towards other cultures. I do not believe that they are tolerant. That is what the children receive, that shock that they are not tolerant. They make them feel bad, and I do not agree with that...I explained (to the teacher) that he is just adapting to this new culture, that she please have patience because he is going to make it...That is how they do things here, and they have little time to learn. These things hurt me, but it's like that all the time. They treat Hispanic kids badly or I don't know if other cultures as well.

Marta referred to a conversation she had with the teacher after giving her son a bad grade because he persisted in writing the number seven in the style that he was taught in his country of origin. She noted that this was not a one time event. She stated how she has been faced with this situation many times in different schools. This barrier definitely has implications in building home-school relationships. After facing such negative experiences in engaging with the school, parents feel

disempowered and prefer to stay away. This same mother shared that her solution was to advise her son to not depend on the teacher and be more independent, to go to the library, research, and study on his own.

There were other parents who seemed not to have encountered the above barriers so much. However, they did not consider home-school contact necessary, if they thought their children were doing well at school. An interesting example of this was Juan, a highly educated professional, who had worked as a professor for many years in his home country. During the course of the program he remained very critical and always questioned statements that were made, a dynamic which provided for lively parent discussions. Juan expressed the view that he saw the function of the school system as a site for socialization and as such parent-teacher interaction was not that crucial.

Yo digamos, le veo un papel a la escuela hum, alternativo, he, creo que si la persona, si el padre siente que necesita informarse mucho, acompañar de cerca lo que su hijo hace o deja de hacer, el debe ir a conversar con sus maestros y todo. Yo en mi caso particular prefiero conversar más con mi hija, observarla más, escucharla más. Y claro que si ella lo necesita yo iré a conversar con su maestra.
I see an alternative function to the school. I think that if the parent feels that he needs to inform himself a lot and follow closely what his child does or does not do, he should go to speak with the teachers. In my particular case, I prefer to speak more with my daughter, observe her more, and listen to her more. And of course, if she needs me to go talk to her teacher I will.

This did not mean that he was not concerned or involved in his daughter education. In fact Juan shared with the group his strategies in helping his daughter succeed academically by enrolling her in extra curricular tutorial classes.

From my study it emerged that parents are very interested in helping their children succeed academically. However, for the most part they were very limited in their approach, which consisted mostly in promoting the student's responsibility for learning, that is, on making sure they completed their homework. Most parents tried to help their children with their homework, however, like Carolina did not feel very efficient as many parents had limited proficiency in English.

¿Pero como nos vamos a ponernos a enseñarles ingles cuando nuestra pronunciación no es perfecta?

But how are we supposed to teach our children in English if our pronunciation is not perfect?

However, after participating in the program, parents were empowered to become more involved in their children's education, a role that had been diluted by the immigration experience. Parents felt more effective as they learned strategies for enhancing communication with their children's teachers and for supporting their children's literacy development.

There was an increased awareness of the importance of parent-teacher interaction, and they learnt strategies they could use to reach out to the school. The most notable shift in perspective came from Juan, who in his exit interview said:

...Paso a ver con un poquito más de interés el tema de los profesores, la relación de los profesores con los padres, porque como te dije al inicio de esta plática, yo mucho no me interesaba.

I have come to see with more interest the topic of the teachers, the relation between teachers and parents. Because like I said in the beginning of this conversation, I was not really interested before.

It was considered a success by the researchers that Juan expressed this shift in perspective. Although he did not say he would significantly increase parent-teacher interaction, he did begin to re-think his position on this issue. Other parents in the group stated that they now realized that they should reach out to their child's teacher even though their children said that they were doing okay at school. This notion was something that affected newcomer parents. However, it also had an effect on parents that had been in Canada longer Josefina, for example, a Mexican mother of two daughters, expressed how her perception of parent-teacher communication changed:

A pesar de que tengo mis añitos en Canadá no me había dado cuenta de la importancia que tenemos los padres en conjunción con los maestros como parte importante de la educación de la escuela para los hijos no solamente en la casa o sea uno tiene que platicar con los maestros.

Regardless that I have my years in Canada, I had not realized the importance that we as parents have in conjunction with the teachers as an important part of the education of our children, not only at home. I mean we have to speak with the teachers.

An important development that occurred as the parents became aware of their pivotal role in their children's education was that not only did they realize the importance of interacting with the teacher, but they also understood their own role as home-educators. They began to see that they had knowledge to offer their children. Carolina, a Mexican mother of three, ages seven, two and one, stated how the Parenting Circles made her realize that she had to be actively involved in her children's education:

Me impacto...los errores que he tenido con mis hijos porque yo no lo sabia, por ejemplo leerle al niño un cuento, lo que tu quieras, a veces por cansancio, porque uno llega tarde y ya « vete a dormir » y ya no queremos saber nada...pero cuando ya sabes que tan bueno o que tan malo es hacerlo, como que tomas conciencia y tratas de hacerlo mas seguido.

I was impacted by the mistakes I have made with my children, because I did not know. For example, to read a story to my child, sometimes because of exhaustion, because one arrives late and you say "Go to sleep" and we don't want to know more...But when you know, it is like you gain conscience and try to do it more regularly.

There was greater awareness that there are practical day to day things -for example, reading a book together- that the parents could do with their children. They saw that they were actually contributing to their academic success in the process. Parents felt empowered by observing how they could transmit knowledge to their children. The book-authoring project was particularly effective in affirming the parents' sense of efficacy in their role as educators. Marta was very touched by the experience of authoring books, and talked about how it had a definite impact on her son:

Lo que mas me ha gustado es la enseñanza que nos dieron de elaborara los libros como medio de comunicación dentro de la familia. Eso estuvo precioso y nunca se me va a olvidar. Mi hijo vio los libros y estaba estimulado, motivado y contento de las cosas que yo le comunique.

What I liked the most was learning to make the books as a medium for family communication. It was a wonderful experience, and I will never forget it. My son saw the books and was stimulated, motivated and happy about the things that I communicated to him.

Carolina identified the specific benefits she was giving her children through the books she had made:

Con los libros que hicimos...les estas transmitiendo a tus niños conocimiento, les estas transmitiendo amor y les estas enseñando mas vocabulario.

With the books we made...you are transmitting knowledge to your children, you are

transmitting love and you are teaching them more vocabulary.

The book-authoring project was also very valuable to the parents in supporting family literacy development in the home language. Four factors converged to make this a favourable practice to the parents. First, the group observed that their children picked up English in a very short period of time. They were in school with an English language curriculum. The children at school with whom they socialized spoke English and every time they stepped out of their front door they encountered English, so much so, that some parents relied on their children as translators. Secondly, many parents recognized that they had difficulties with speaking English and as such were limited in their capacity to help with their children's English language curriculum at school. Thirdly, the parents were concerned because regardless of their efforts they had observed language loss of the home language in their children. Finally, through the *Parenting Circles* they realized that they indeed had 'funds of knowledge' (Moll et al, 1992) to offer their children as they became the experts by authoring their own books or by guiding them in reading other Spanish language books.

Reading was an important strategy incorporated by the parents to encourage home language maintenance. Berenice related the turnabout in her perspective of reading in her home language:

Yo hace tiempo ya no le tomaba mucha importancia a que leyeran en español, pero cuando llegue a este programa me di cuenta de la importancia de mantenerlos...o sea que no pierdan su idioma. Es cuando me preocupe más porque lean en español y no solo ingles.

For a long time now I had not given importance to reading in Spanish. But after attending this program, I realized of the importance of maintaining it...I mean that they do not lose their language. It's when I worried more about them reading Spanish and not only English.

Berenice further went on to say how the program had an impact on her own literacy habits. She found that not only was she promoting reading to her children but was also picking up her own reading which she found enjoyable but had neglected in her efforts to learn English. This experience was echoed by many of the other parents.

When talking about what impact the program had on her family, Maria shared the great

improvement that encouraging reading has had on her children in such a short period of time:

Mi hijo Pablo ha tomado la lectura de español eso es importante. Jorge y Daniel han tenido una lectura con mas entonación, con más puntuación que también me parece muy importante que ellos sepan expresar el idioma y lo sepan leer correctamente. Eso es que ha asistido mucho, muy favorable para los tres pelados.

My son Pablo has taken up reading in Spanish, which is important. Jorge and Daniel are reading with more intonation, with more punctuation. I also believe that is important, that they know how to express the language and that they read it correctly. That is what has helped us a lot. It has been very favourable for the three rascals.

Another great benefit that the parents mentioned was that family reading also helped to improve parent-child communication and, additionally, improved the children's listening skills. Cintia spoke about her experience with her three children:

... Lo que me resulto útil para manejar a los niños en casa es leer con ellos, de tener un tiempo para ellos para leer en la noche y eso a ellos les encanta, les gusta mucho...pues fíjate que me llamo mucho la atención cuando dijeron que teníamos que leer a los niños, escucharlos y que ellos escucharan el ingles, eso me sirve mucho con el niño grande porque casi no se enfoca en las cosas y cuando le leo se esta tranquilo escuchando.

...What resulted useful to me at home in guiding my children was to read with them, to make a time to read with them at night. And they loved it. They liked it a lot...It really captured my attention when they said [the guest speakers] that we had to read to our kids, listen to them and that they listen to English, that has helped me a lot with my older boy because he hardly concentrates on things and when I read he stays still listening.

Some parents even said that by taking up family reading they had gained more patience toward helping their children read, and this too promoted parent-child communication. As Maria recounts this positive effect when talking about what benefits she gained from the program:

Okay, la cosa mas importante que yo considero ha sido la tolerancia. La tolerancia a tomar a los hijos y a empezar a relatarles a leerles un libro y eso ha sido muy importante porque yo he tenido confianza con ellos y ellos han puesto más atención a lo que yo les he platicado.

Okay, the most important thing that I consider I gained is tolerance, tolerance to take your kids and start to read a book to them. That has been very important, because I have had confidence with them and they have paid more attention to what I have told them.

A further literacy practice that the parents incorporated was to make use of their community's library resources. A particular homework activity for the parents during the program was to get a library card if they did not have one, and further, to select a book that they felt appropriate to read to their children and share with the group why they picked it. In this way they got to know the services available in their local libraries and were informed how to order books printed in their home

language. Carolina proudly shared at the end of the program that she was now taking out books from the library on a regular basis; whereas before the Parenting Circles she did not go to the library:

Si ya lo empezamos a hacer, cada segundo lunes. OK, el mes tiene cuatro lunes, dos lunes al mes vamos a sacar libros, al siguiente lunes, bueno durante la semana los leemos y durante la otra semana vamos y los regresamos y sacamos otros.

Yes, we have now started to do it every second Monday. Okay, the month has four Mondays, two Mondays a month we go take out books, the next Monday, well, during the week we read them and during the next we go and return them and take out others.

Parents learned how to better engage in their children's education by reaching out to the school setting and becoming a more efficient advocates for their children and by promoting family literacy practices. Parents felt more fulfilled in their role as educators by making use of their home language.

Finding 3) Parents as Community leaders

Parents taking part in the *Parenting Circles Program* found it extremely valuable to meet informally with other parents to share knowledge and experiences. Because of language barriers and/or cultural identification parents appreciated being able to discuss -- in their own language-- topics that were important to them. In the exit interviews parents were asked what three factors out of eleven they liked most about the Parenting Circles (See appendix I, question 4 for the full list of eleven factors). The factor that most parents chose as number one was the topics discussed, and in particular issues around language retention. What I want to highlight here is the second and third factors. Chosen as the number two factor was how the group was facilitated. It is important to remember that the groups were parent-led. It was the parents themselves who generated most of the discussion, and the topics discussed emerged from parent interests. The process was a participatory one, where all parents shared their opinions, experiences, and concerns. It was important that the discussions focused around the lived experiences and day to day lives of the participants. A sense of community developed as the parents shared common interests and concerns. Cintia highlighted this

point when asked what she liked most about the program:

Pues la convivencia, que uno puede hablar de los mismos temas que nos interesa a todos los papas que fuimos.

Well the sharing with other parents, that one can talk about the same topics that are of interest to all the parents that attended.

At the outset of the program there was a suggested agenda developed by the facilitators to help initiate discussion. This agenda was presented to the parents; however, they were given full liberty to discuss issues that were important and relevant to them. In the first session the parents identified certain topics from the agenda and added more of their own. The parents were also consulted in regards to the appropriate time of the sessions. In these ways, the parents were encouraged to take ownership of the Parenting Circles.

The third factor that was identified as most important in the parent evaluation was the chance to communicate informally with other parents. Maria mentioned how she already knew about parent information sessions at the school. However, they were in English and she did not feel comfortable attending. The participants felt comfortable interacting with other Spanish-speaking parents and through accessing this parent group they gained access to valuable information, and to a support network. In the second session, the facilitators talked about and distributed information about settlement services in Toronto, and a booklet in Spanish that gave an overview of the Ontario School system. A discussion emerged in the group about the different settlement services that they had already accessed, and their experiences with these services. In the next session the parents were asked to bring contact information for one settlement service agency to share with the rest of the parents. A few of the participating parents commuted from Mississauga, so this informal sharing of information was very valuable, as the facilitators had only given information on Toronto services.

Cintia said that she found the Parenting Circles very valuable because she felt it was important to interact with other parents:

Bueno que te das cuenta de muchas cosas que uno puede hacer para ayudar a los niños o para ayudar a mas padres hispanos que no sabemos que hacer en determinadas ocasiones no? o problemas que pasan con los niños en la escuela y aprender de los demás papas experiencias que les hayan pasado yo creo que es lo mas importante.

You learn many things that you can do to help the children or to help other Hispanic parents that don't know what to do on certain occasions, or problems that our children go through in school. You learn from the lived experiences of the other parents, I think that is important.

The parents that participated in this study care about their children's academic success.

However, because of language barriers, time, transportation or other factors, language minority parents use informal ways of parental engagement. Many of the information that parents receive around their children's education is from informal sources. Thus, the parents valued interacting with other parents because they considered each other as a source of knowledge and support. They were expanding their social and cultural capital.

Some parents like Juan, highlighted how the Parent Circle type of setting was very beneficial to newcomers to Canada:

Lo recomendaría (el taller) porque creo que es importante, sobre todo para aquellos que... bueno estoy teniendo en cuenta el publico objetivo que tiene que es, bueno gente inmigrante, todo eso, mucho de ellos llegan acá con una necesidad muy grande de trabajar esta es su prioridad y esto es importante por supuesto es vital para la subsistencia de la familia y no tendrían mucho tiempo de por si mismos estar buscando informaciones. Un taller de estos me parece que ayuda mucho.

I would recommend the program because I believe it is important, above all for those...well, I am keeping in mind the target group that is the immigrants. Many of them arrive here with the great need to work. That is their priority, and it is of course vital to the subsistence of the family, and they would not have time to find out information by themselves. Programs like this I think helps a lot.

The tribulations of being an immigrant were a theme that underlay our sessions. Not only do they have to adapt to a new 'culture', but they have lost their social networks. Many are socially isolated, some may have a language barrier, and enveloping all this is the need to find proper and sustainable employment. The parents found that the structure of the *Parenting Circles Program* was appropriate to the needs and issues of immigrants as it addressed all the issues described above with the exception of employment. This sentiment is captured by Beatriz:

Me alegra y las felicito a todo el grupo por haberse preocupado por los inmigrantes, que realmente pues uno llega aquí sin mucho saber, como a penas empiezan a nacer, entonces que ahorita apenas uno esta abriendo los ojitos, le empiezan a uno a enseñar a vivir en este país.

I appreciate and congratulate the entire group for having been concerned about newcomers. Really one arrives here knowing very little, like you were just born. Now, we are just starting to open our eyes, as they teach us to live in this country.

Some parents mentioned during the sessions and in the interviews that they were grateful

that somebody cared about Latin American immigrants. This gives an indication that regardless of the settlement and school-based services that were available to them, there was still a sense of marginalization. The structure of the Parenting Circle Program helped to empower the parents by focusing on their culture, knowledge and experiences.

The Parenting Circles, according to the parents' reports, had a great impact on them. In the final session an event was organized to celebrate the completion of the Parenting Circles. Staff from a local community radio station –Radio Voces Latinas- attended this event, and showed great interest in this community initiative. The parents were invited to an interview at the radio station to share their experiences in the Parenting Circles. A group of the parents attended the interview and were very enthusiastic with sharing this with the community. The parents went to this interview of their own initiative regardless that the Parenting Circles had ended. The parents took on their role as leaders in the community.

Moreover, 11 out of 11 parents said in the evaluation that they would recommend the program to other parents. Further, they indicated that it is a model that they can take out into the community. Nine out of eleven parents stated that they were interested in starting their own parent support network. Four would like to start right away, and had already identified as potential locations a local church, community centres, elementary schools and a LINC centre (Language Instruction to Newcomers to Canada). Cintia attends a LINC Centre and talked about the idea of helping newcomer parents in her school:

Si, si me gustaría comenzar un grupo. Ya había platicado con mi prima si había la posibilidad de que aquí en la escuela [LINC] nos ayudaran. Porque hay muchas personas que se interesan, aquí hay muchas personas, muchas mamas latinas y este, de ayuda sería pues para los materiales o para que alguien viniera a apoyarnos.
Yes, yes I would like to start a group. I had already spoken with my cousin about the possibility of getting help here in the school [LINC site], because there are many people that are interested. There are many people here, many Latin-American mothers. It would help to get support for the materials or for somebody to come and support us.

Other parents were interested in taking similar initiatives but under certain conditions, for example,

time and work permitting. Thus, parents felt stimulated and capable of facilitating their own groups. However, they recognized that to make such a group successful they would need assistance, particularly financial assistance to sustain the groups and pay for meeting space. Initial help in facilitation or getting guest speakers was also suggested to start up the groups.

Summary of Findings

Findings in this study suggest that the intervention helped immigrant parents in several important ways. First, they acquired a sense of the value of their home language and of their cultural roots. They reaffirmed their commitment to their children's bilingualism, recognizing that while the children learned English in school and in the wider society, it was also possible for them to stay in touch with Spanish in the home environment. Secondly, the parents who participated felt empowered through language in reaffirming their identity and in cementing their role as the first educators for their children. With this achievement, they felt confident that they could interact effectively with their children's teachers, and with other professionals and workers in institutions related to their children's education. Finally, as a result of their experience in the *Parenting Circles*, many of them looked forward to building on what they had learned and becoming leaders of similar project in their communities in the future.

Chapter 4 - Discussion

This study lends support to the use of the Parenting Circles Program as a tool in helping parents maintain their home language and gain confidence to participate actively in their children's education. Participants reported many positive benefits including; 1) a heightened sense of the value of their culture and language as a source for helping their children develop literacy skills, 2) increased confidence in their role as first teachers for their children, and 3) a sense of preparedness to be a leader in supporting other immigrant parents. This is significant at a time when school boards and ministries of education are turning to parents for support in raising the academic achievement of immigrant students.

The reader is reminded that Grolnick and colleagues (1997) outlined three categories of parental involvement: behaviour, cognitive-intellectual and personal. Behaviour refers to participation in activities at school and at home. The cognitive-intellectual dimension of involvement includes, exposing the child to intellectually stimulating activities, such as going to the library. The third category, personal involvement, includes being aware of and following what is going on with the child in school. The participants in the Parenting Circles Program demonstrated outcomes on all 3 of Grolnick's areas. In relation to his first category of behaviour, many of the parents in our study began to take up reading with their children at home and to teach them literacy skills in their home language. For example, Maria, one of the parents said that her sons had taken up reading in Spanish and that she had begun to help them with intonation and punctuation. The second category of cognitive-intellectual involvement was also seen in our study as parents introduced stimulating practices like visiting and making use of the local library. For example Cintia, another participant, proudly said that she was now taking out library books on a regular basis, whereas before her participation in the program she did not go to the library. Finally, there was also an effect on the personal involvement category. Parents were motivated to more effectively approach their children's

teacher. For example Josefina said: “Regardless that I have my years in Canada, I had not realized the importance that we as parents have in conjunction with the teachers as an important part of the education of our children, not only at home. I mean we have to speak with the teachers”.

The program described in this paper connected potentially isolated families, offered a space to talk freely about educational issues and provided an alternative for parents that have children in schools that may not be as responsive to linguistic and cultural empowerment of families. The *Parenting Circles* drew on successful elements of previous interventions, by combining the Freirian method of parent groups with a transformative literacy intervention inspired by the Early Authors Program.

This study further reaffirms the importance of building on the parent’s home language as an empowering process. Recruitment flyers for this parent group called for parents interested in discussing issues in regards to the educational system. Researchers and parents in the initial session expected to be mostly interested on how to navigate the school system, however, the findings in this study showed that the parents found the greatest reward in feeling validated in the value of their home culture and language, and how they can activate these resources to engage in their children’s education.

Calabrese Barton and colleagues (2004) posited that important factors of parental engagement are authoring and positioning. The Parenting Circles Program supported the parents to engage in actions that made use of the resources available to them in order to author a place of their own and re-position themselves as experts with significant ‘funds of knowledge’ (Bernhard et al., In Press) noted in their review of early literacy interventions that under the “Empowerment” family literacy approach, authoring books is a very effective tool as they shift the balance of authority and expertise among teachers, students and family. Further they noted that authoring allows family and other out-of school literacies as valid pedagogical practices, thus their expertise becomes a form of academic capital. In this way parents can re-position themselves as educators rather than just

observers of their children's education. All the participating parents stated that they enjoyed the authoring of the books. For instance, Maria said that she enjoyed being able to write as "herself" and being able to share her experiences with her family. Other parents noted how their children were motivated by the books they had made for them. Further, the parents recognized that they were actually transmitting valuable knowledge to their children. The parents took on the role of experts and meaning makers for their lives and their family.

In addition to helping parents engage in literacy and other educational practices as well as encouraging home-school communication, it was important for parents not to feel isolated. Support networks are an important resource for parents. In an exploratory study, Bernhard, Freire, Pacini-Kethchabaw & Villanueva (1998) reported how a group of Latin-American parents were able to understand their role in supporting their children's education while valuing their own cultural capital. Expanding a parent's network is beneficial for parents to better position themselves in guiding and directing their children's educational path. Bernhard, Freire and Pacini (1998) further suggested that the school system can be influenced by parents meeting and supporting each other outside the school. It is unclear to what extent programs like *The Cross Cultural Demonstration Program* or Project *FLAME* created this networking, however, future projects would do well to pay attention to this important element.

It is also important to comment on the program duration. Project FLAME spanned a long time period (2 school years) and as a result experienced parent absenteeism at certain times due to family obligations. More significantly, *The Cross Cultural Demonstration Project* that e Gaetano (2007) evaluated had comparable outcomes to the *Parenting Circles Program*; however, it was a three year project that advanced objectives in stages. Yet given the demanding work schedules of most parents, few parents who are not dedicated activists would have time to participate in such a group. Thus, the *Parenting Circles Program* offers an alternative model to impact language minority families in a shorter and possibly more realistic time frame.

There have been numerous studies on family literacy and to a lesser degree on parent support networks in the United States. However, in Canada studies on “Transformational Pedagogy” and support networks are relatively few. This experimental project can help us move forward by first, setting it in a Canadian context and secondly, by experimenting with the efficacy of combining both family literacy and support networks in a relatively short time span. This can serve as a model for working with the increasing group of newcomer families.

As all studies, this study has a number of limitations. As this study only focused on Spanish-Speaking parents, it is not possible to make any generalizations for other language minority groups as they may face other particular issues.

Another shortcoming of my study was that we did not have a random sample but rather a sample of convenience. Although an effort was made to outreach to as wide an audience as possible, the parent sample may not be fully representative of the Latin American community. There was the concern that there was the possibility of a sample bias, as it is likely that only those parents already oriented towards engagement would apply, however it was felt that the incentive of an honorarium and selection process helped to reduce this quandary. Furthermore, the parent evaluations should be interpreted with caution as there could be an undisclosed bias from the participants during the interview process, as they were completed by the group facilitators. This bias was reduced in the second interview set as an external researcher was the principal interviewer for this round of interviews. In the initial sessions the facilitators made it clear that the purpose of the program was to learn about their experiences and at the end to get their views on how to improve the Parenting Circles for other parents. Nonetheless, the parents’ evaluation of the program could have been influenced to a certain degree by the presence of the facilitators as interviewers.

The study was further limited by not having a control or comparison group. Additionally, there were no objective measures to rate the transfer of the benefits of the program to the children

such as children's grades, or teacher observations. In regards to the positive benefits reported by the parents it is important to note that the initial survey and exit interview did not correspond. The exit survey questions were changed and turned into an interview, as the parents came up with new topics of discussion from the original agenda the initial survey was not longer entirely relevant. The new measure to reference outcomes was the two first sessions where parents discussed their initial points of view and practices. However, a limitation to this is that there were no standard questions to compare pre-and post intervention results.

Many positive family literacy strategies were introduced and taken up by the parents. The extent of the impact of the Parent Circle is even more impressive due to the short period of time in which it was delivered. It is interesting to note that researchers for the Spanish-speaking group are planning to follow-up with parents to further evaluate the effectiveness of the *Parenting Circles Program*, in order to monitor if the literacy practices were maintained. A related research would be to analyze the results of a follow-up in relation to the socio-economic status of the parents, and the time/resources available that are committed to literacy in the first language. Additionally, it would be interesting to analyze differences in parents concerns according to the length of time in Canada.

There are additional areas that need to be further explored as a result of this study. Findings lent support to the *Parenting Circles Program* as a useful tool in helping parents maintain or stop home language erosion. However, there is still not much literature in this area beyond demonstrating the advantages of bilingualism and bilingual education and the consequences of language loss. There needs to be further investigation in the most effective strategies on preventing or stopping language loss.

A further area of research would be in experimenting with adding specific literacy skills to the program. Although the *Parenting Circles Program* has suggested positive benefits to family literacy without specific parent skills training, it would be interesting to provide parents with specific literacy sub-skills training as in the *Shared Reading* study by Jimenez, Filippini, and Gerber (2006),

with the production of EAP books to observe if there would be further significant benefits or if authoring books is sufficient.

Finally, this study lends support for the *Parenting Circles Program* as an effective tool to engaging parents and helping in the retention of home language. The results in this study showed positive benefits for the families and the community. It would be interesting to test and evaluate this new model in the school setting. In this case study the responsibility of parental engagement was placed solely on the parents. It is necessary to incorporate teachers and by extension the school system as they are important stakeholders in our children's education. As in *Project FLAME*, the *Parenting Circles program* could be introduced in the schools with the English as a Second Language classes (ESL). Additionally, this model could also be attached to LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada) classes, as many recent newcomers attend these particular classes.

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Table 2. Immigrant Population by place of birth.

Immigrant population by place of birth (2006 Census)	
Canada	6,186,950
United States	250,535
Central and South America	380,165
Caribbean and Bermuda	317,765
Europe	2,278,345
Africa	374,565
Asia and Middle East	2,525,160
Oceania and other countries	59,410

Source: [Statistics Canada](#) 2006 Census

*Latin American countries are located in North America (Mexico), Central and South America and the Caribbean.

Table 3. Languages spoken most often at home for total population and age groups for Toronto

Languages spoken most often at home for total population and age groups, 2006 counts for Toronto-20% sample data.	
Single Responses*	
Official Languages	
English	3,494,705
French	25,325
Top Ten Non-official Languages	
Chinese	1,363,690
Punjabi	103,555
Tamil	75,625
Italian	74,690
Urdu	70,780
Spanish	67,390
Portuguese	56,060
Tagalog	53,870
Russian	50,710
Persian (Farsi)	47,395

Source: [Statistics Canada](#) 2006 Census

*Single responses only, it does not include multiple responses that can combine official and non-official languages.

**Does not reflect mother tongue responses, as data was not available at the time of this publication. Mother tongue refers to the first language learned at home in childhood and still understood by the individual at the time of the census. Thus, not all Latin American community reflected in this table.

Table 4. Comparison of Mother Tongue descriptor 2001 and 2006 Census

Mother Tongue* for total population and age groups, 2001 census for Toronto- 20% sample data	
Single Responses**	
Official Languages	
English	2,684,195
French	57,485
Top Ten Non-official Languages	
Italian	195,960
Chinese, n.o.s.	165,120
Cantonese	145,490
Portuguese	108,935
Punjabi	95,950
Spanish	83,245
Polish	79,875
Tagalog	77,220
Tamil	72,715
Urdu	53,890

Mother Tongue* for total population and age groups, 2006 census for Toronto- 20% sample data	
Single Responses**	
Official Languages	
English	2,684,195
French	57,485
Top Ten Non-official Languages	
Italian	185,760
Chinese, n.o.s.	172,045
Cantonese	166,655
Punjabi	132,745
Spanish	108,380
Portuguese	108,180
Tagalog	100,420
Urdu	98,575
Tamil	93,590
Polish	80,095

Source: [Statistics Canada](http://www150.statcan.gc.ca) 2001 and 2006 Census

*Mother tongue refers to the first language learned at home in childhood and still understood by the individual at the time of the census.

**Single responses only, it does not include multiple responses that can combine official and non-official languages

Table 5. Population by Mother Tongue* for Toronto- Ontario-Canada

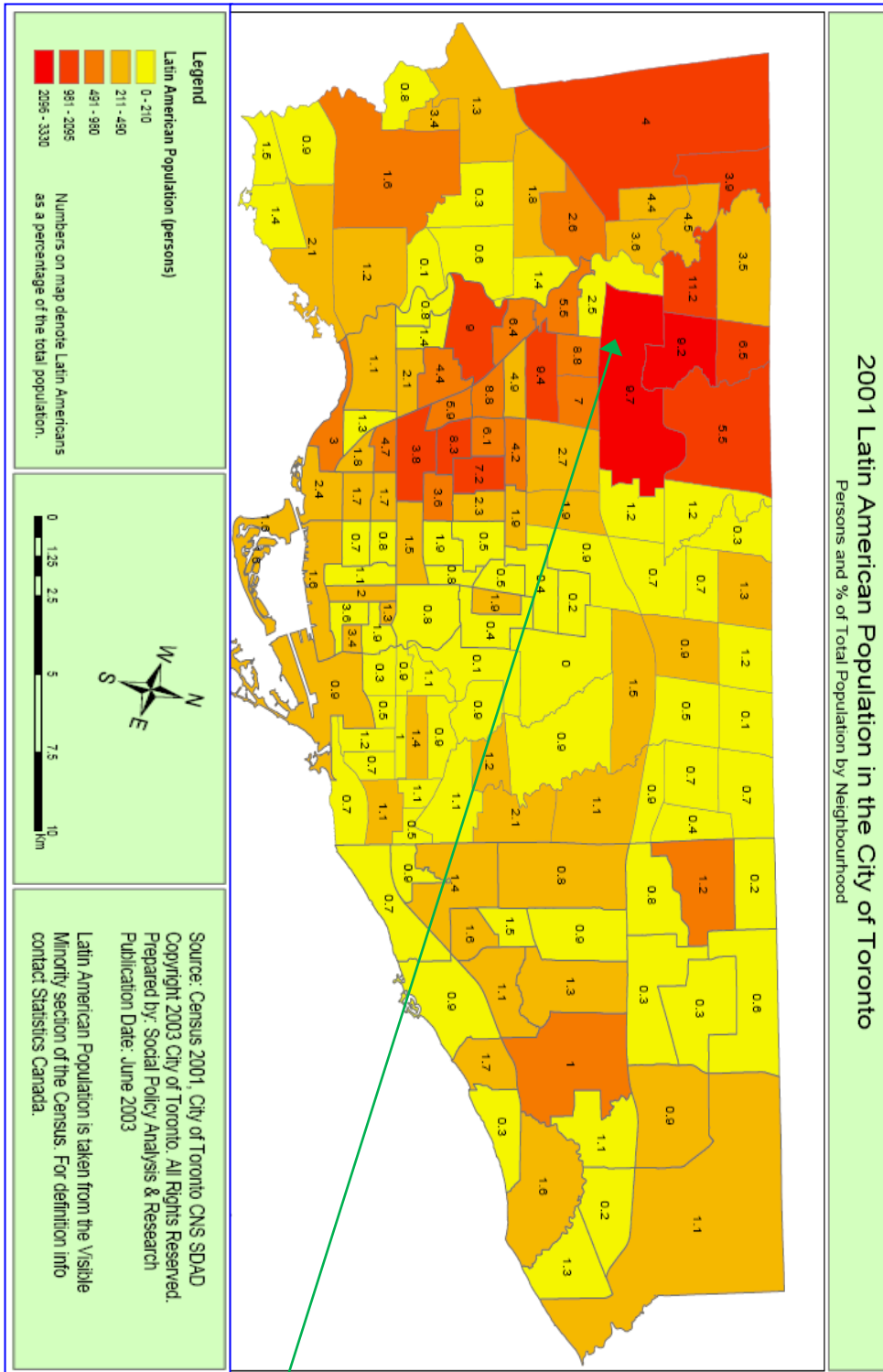
Population by Mother Tongue* for Toronto- Ontario- Canada		
	Single Responses	Multiple Responses**
Toronto	108,380	112875
Ontario	160275	167135
Canada	345345	362120

Source: [Statistics Canada](#) 2006 Census

*Mother tongue refers to the first language learned at home in childhood and still understood by the individual at the time of the census.

** Multiple responses can combine official and non-official languages.

Figure 1: 2001 Latin American Populations in Toronto



Location of Centre for Spanish Speaking People: 2141 Jane Street, North York, Ontario.

Appendices

Appendix A. Recruitment Flyer (Spanish Version)

Familias Latinoamericanas en Toronto

¿Su familia habla español en casa?

¿Actualmente, tiene bajo su cuidado hijos o nietos menores de 13 años de edad?

¿Los niños están en una escuela pública o Católica?

Si ha contestado sí a estas tres preguntas, quizás califica para participar en un grupo de estudio para padres de familia.

Para este estudio nos interesa saber cómo son las experiencias de las familias inmigrantes con la escuela pública. Queremos incluir al principal responsable del cuidado de los niños.

- Comparta las estrategias que utiliza para apoyar los estudios de sus niños
- Aprenda nuevas estrategias para facilitar el desarrollo educativo
- Conectase con otros padres para crear una red de apoyo
- Participe en un proyecto para escribir un libro
- Discuta problemas que afectan a sus niños dentro del sistema educativo

Participantes recibirán boletos para el TTC, reembolso de gastos para el cuidado de sus niños, refrigerios y un pago de \$200 al finalizar 5 de 6 sesiones.

Comenzaremos el día Jueves 17 de Mayo de 5:30 a 7:30 en el Centro para Gentes de Habla Hispana (esquina sureste de Jane y Wilson)

Si tiene preguntas o está interesado en participar en este estudio por favor llame a _____ al xxx-xxx-xxxx y deje un mensaje. Le devolveremos su llamada a la brevedad posible.

Parents Wanted!

Are you the parent of a child 13 or younger?

Are you a member of:

The Spanish-Speaking Community?

Parenting Circles is a new Ryerson University project funded by the Ministry of Ontario's Parent Engagement Office. In 6 bi-weekly sessions, you will have the opportunity to:

- Share the strategies you use to support your children's success in school
- Learn new strategies to support your children's success in school
- Connect with other parents to develop parent support networks
- Participate in a creative book-writing project
- Discuss issues that affect your child's accommodation in the school system

Participants will be provided with TTC tokens, reimbursement for child care, refreshments, and a \$200 honorarium upon completion of 5 of 6 sessions.

Contact Project Co-ordinator: Alana Butler at abutler@ryerson.ca or 416-979-5000 x 7676

Appendix C. Intake Form: Spanish Version

La persona que le sugirió participar: _____ **Fecha:** _____

Muchas gracias por su interés en participar en nuestro proyecto. Las familias seleccionadas recibirán \$200 por su participación en el programa que durara dos horas por semana por 5 semanas. Le aseguramos que toda la información que usted nos brinde será manejada de forma confidencial y su nombre jamás será usado en ningún reporte. Para saber si su familia puede formar parte del proyecto, le pedimos que por favor responda a las siguientes preguntas. Nosotras nos comunicaremos con usted en los próximos días.

1. Nombre _____ Apellido _____

2. Su país de origen: _____

El país de origen de su pareja: _____

3. ¿Cuántos niños están a su cuidado? _____

¿Qué edades tienen los niños? _____

4. ¿Adónde están esos niños? Canadá ____ País de origen ____

5. ¿Cuál es su parentesco con los niños?

____ Uno de los padres

____ Tío/a

____ Abuelo/a

____ Otro (detalle)

6. Si los niños no están con usted, ¿por cuánto tiempo han estado lejos?

_____ (detalle)

7. Si han estado separados, ¿cómo se dio esa situación?

____ Usted vino primero a Canadá

____ Mandó a sus hijos primero

____ Dejó a sus hijos en Canadá y volvió a su país

____ Otra situación (por favor descríbala) _____

8. ¿Hace cuánto tiempo vive usted en Canadá? _____

9. Es usted: Soltera(o) ____ Casada(o) o Unión libre ____ Viuda(o) ____ Separada(o) ____

10. Intersección o esquina de las calles principales cerca de donde usted vive:

11. Teléfonos donde podemos encontrarle: 1 _____ 2 _____

12. ¿Cuál es la hora más conveniente para llamarla(o)?

En la mañana ____ tarde ____ noche ____ fin de semana ____ no importa ____

Appendix D. Intake Form: English version

The person who suggested you participate: _____ **Date:** _____

Thank you for your interest in participating in our project. The selected families will receive \$200 for participating in the program, that will consist of a 2 hour session every week for 5 weeks. We guarantee that all of the information provided will be kept strictly confidential and your name will never appear in any report. To determine if your family can participate in this program we ask that you answer the following questions. We will be in touch with you in the next few days.

1. Name: _____ Surname: _____

2. Your country of birth: _____

Your partner's country of birth: _____

3. How many children are under your care? _____

What are their ages? _____

4. Where are your children? Canada ____ Country of birth: ____

5. What is your relationship with the children?

____ One of the parents

____ Aunt/Uncle

____ Grandmother/Grandfather

____ Other (please specify)

6. If the children are not with you, how long have they been away/separated?

_____ (Please explain/clarify)

7. If you have been separated, how did this come about?

____ You came to Canada first

____ You sent your children first

____ You left your children in Canada and returned to your country

____ Other – please clarify/describe _____

8. How long have you lived in Canada? _____

9. Are you: Single ____ Married ____ Common-Law ____ Widow(er) ____ Separated ____

10. Nearest main intersection or corner to where you live

11. Phone numbers where we can contact you: 1. _____ 2. _____

12. What hour of the day is better for us to call you?

Morning ____ Afternoon ____ Night ____ Weekend ____ Any time ____

Appendix E. Registration Form: Spanish version.



Inscripción

Ciudad: Toronto

Fecha de inscripción: _____

Fecha de inicio del programa: _____

Nombre de la madre _____

Apellido _____ Nombre _____ Iniciales _____
 Ultimo nivel de estudio alcanzado _____ Fecha de nacimiento de la Madre _____

País de origen _____ Tiempo que ha vivido en Canadá _____ (años)

Nombre del padre _____
 Apellido _____ Nombre _____ Iniciales _____

Ultimo nivel de estudio alcanzado _____ Fecha de nacimiento del Padre _____

País de origen _____ Tiempo que ha vivido en Canadá _____ (Años)

Nombre/s de su/s niño/s	Hombre e Mujer	Fecha Nacimiento Día-Mes-Año	Su niño/a tiene alguna necesidad en especial? Haga un circulo en sí o no. Cuáles son esas necesidades?
			Sí/ No
			Sí/ No
			Sí/ No
			Sí/ No

¿Qué Consejo Escolar administra la escuela donde asiste su hijo/a ? (Por ejemplo Consejo Escolar de Vancouver, Escuelas Católicas Independientes de Vancouver Escuela Católica de Toronto, Consejo Escolar del Distrito de Toronto, Consejo Inglés de Montreal, Comisión Escolar Marguerite Bourgeoys)

Dirección- Calle y Número: _____ Número de Departamento: _____

Ciudad: _____

Provincia : _____ Código Postal: _____ Número de Teléfono _____

Adultos que viven con los niños: Madre: Padre: Abuelo/a: Otros: _____
 (especifique) _____

Número de adultos en la casa: _____ Número de niños en la casa: _____
 Sobre 18 años _____ Bajo 18 años _____

Es usted: Casada o convive con alguien Separada Divorciada Viuda Soltera

¿Le ayuda alguien con sus niños? Sí No Si es Sí ¿Quién?

(ejemplos: esposo, su madre, hermana, abuelos, etc) _____

¿Alguien le da consejos sobre sus hijos? Sí No Si es Si, ¿Quién?

(ejemplos: esposo su madre, hemana, abuelos, etc) _____

¿Cuán fácil es para Ud. hablar inglés 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Muy difícil Muy fácil

Ingreso anual de la familia, sin descuentos

Bajo \$15,000 \$15,000-\$22,999 \$23,000-\$28,599 \$28,600-\$34,599

\$34,600-\$38,599 \$38,600-\$42,699 \$42,700-\$46,799 \$46,800-\$60,000 Over

\$60,000

Gracias.

Does anyone else give you advice about your children? Yes No If yes, who?

(examples: husband, your mother, your sister, your grandparent, etc.)

How easy is it for you to speak English? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Very hard easy Very

Annual family income before taxes:

Below \$15,000 \$15,000-\$22,999 \$23,000-\$28,599 \$28,600-\$34,599
\$34,600-\$38,599 \$38,600-\$42,699 \$42,700-\$46,799 \$46,800-\$60,000 Over

\$60,000

Thank you !!

Appendix G. Initial Survey: Spanish version.



ENCUESTA PARA LOS PADRES

Nombre: _____ **Fecha:** _____

Necesitamos saber si este programa es de utilidad, por lo cual le agradeceremos responda a las siguientes preguntas antes de comenzar el programa. La información es para investigación educacional y es absolutamente confidencial y anónima. Esto significa que nadie más que los investigadores y facilitadores del grupo tendrá acceso a la información, y que los nombres de los participantes jamás serán revelados. Las encuestas una vez hayan sido completadas, serán guardadas bajo llave y después de cinco años la información será destruída/borrada. Antes de cualquier publicación Ud. podrá revisar cualquier información que Ud. haya entregado en la encuesta, si Ud. así lo deseara.

La participación en este estudio y el completar la encuesta es voluntaria. Su decisión de participar o no participar, no influirá en las relaciones que usted pueda tener en el futuro con la Universidad Ryerson. Si Ud. decide completar la encuesta, Ud. no tiene la obligación de contestar todas las preguntas, y Ud. puede dejar de responder sin que exista penalidad o pérdida de beneficios que le hayan sido acreditados.

Es conveniente recordarle que en varias de las preguntas se le pide que elija un número entre el uno (1) y el siete (7). Por ejemplo:

EJEMPLO:

Creo que los niños son nuestro futuro.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Totalmente de acuerdo No estoy seguro Totalmente en desacuerdo

Si Ud. está totalmente en acuerdo, haga un círculo en el # 1. Si Ud. está en general de acuerdo haga un círculo en el # 2 o 3. Si Ud. no está seguro, haga un círculo en el # 4 y así sucesivamente.

Gracias por ayudarnos a evaluar el Programa para Familias Recién Llegadas.

Apoyo Social

1. Busco apoyo de otras personas para saber como criar a mis hijos.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Totalmente de acuerdo

No estoy seguro

Totalmente en desacuerdo

2. Converso con otras personas para saber como criar a mis hijos.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
nunca	casi	una vez	1-2 veces	varias veces	una vez	muchas veces
nunca	al mes	a la semana	a la semana	al día	al día	

3. ¿De quién recibe apoyo para criar a sus hijos? (Marque todos los posibles)

Mi esposo _____
Mi/s padre(s) _____ Mi/s tía(s) o tío(s) _____
Mi/s abuelo(s) _____ Otros miembros del grupo de Familias Recién Llegadas
Mi/s hermano(s) o hermana(s) _____ Mi/s amigo(s) _____
Otros —¿Quién? _____

Desarrollo de los niños

Marque si está de acuerdo con cada frase haciendo un círculo en el número que corresponda del uno (1) al siete (7)

4. Los niños aprenden a través del juego

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Totalmente de acuerdo			No estoy seguro			Totalmente en desacuerdo

5. Hablarle a los niños sobre lo que están jugando les ayuda a aprender.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Totalmente de acuerdo			No estoy seguro			Totalmente en desacuerdo

6. Los niños aprenden jugando con adultos

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Totalmente de acuerdo			No estoy seguro			Totalmente en desacuerdo

7. Los padres juegan un rol importante en ayudar a sus hijos a aprender.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Totalmente de acuerdo			No estoy seguro			Totalmente en desacuerdo

8. Es importante pasarlo bien con los niños de uno.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Totalmente de acuerdo			No estoy seguro			Totalmente en desacuerdo

9. Los niños aprenden de las historias que le cuentan sus padres sobre sus experiencias.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Totalmente de acuerdo			No estoy seguro			Totalmente en desacuerdo

10. Yo se como ayudar a mi hijo/a para que esté preparado para empezar la escuela (apresto escolar).

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Totalmente de acuerdo			No estoy seguro			Totalmente en desacuerdo

11. Yo creo que hablar con mis niños en mi idioma, es una buena preparación para ellos para aprender el idioma que se habla en la escuela.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Totalmente de acuerdo			No estoy seguro			Totalmente en desacuerdo

12. Con relación a su hijo/a mayor dentro del grupo que va de los 2 a los 4 años de edad, encierre en un círculo el número que muestre donde Ud. ve a su hijo/a en las siguientes áreas:

Nombre de mi hijo/a: _____, edad _____		Tiene dificultades			Más o menos		Lo hace bien	
a.	Se lleva bien con otros niños	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b.	Tiene un language apropiado para su edad	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
c.	Sus destrezas motoras son apropiadas	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
d.	Lidia bien con problemas o conflictos	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
e.	Lidia bien con los cambios	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
f.	Se lleva bien conmigo	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
g.	Se siente bien con él/ella mismo/a	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
h.	El/ella me habla acerca de sus sentimientos	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

13. ¿Si Ud. tiene una hija/s, cuales son sus sueños y esperanzas con relación a ella/s?

14. ¿ Si Ud. tiene un hijo/s, cuales son sus sueños y esperanzas con relación a él / ellos?

15. ¿ Los padres deberían tratar a sus hijas e hijos de la misma manera o en forma diferente?

___ igual ___ un poquito diferente ___ muy diferente

Por favor explique

16. ¿Cuán a menudo Ud. usa los siguientes métodos para ayudar a que su hijo/a tenga un comportamiento aceptable?

Por favor encierre en un círculo el número del # 1 al 7 para mostrar cuan a menudo Ud. usa cada método

	1 nunca	2 casi nunca	3 una vez al mes	4 1-2 veces a la semana	5 varias veces a la semana	6 una vez al día	7 muchas veces al día
a Premiar	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

b. Distracer o redirigir	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
C. Avisar con antelación (Ej. : es casi la hora de acostarse, entonces vamos a empezar a guardar los juguetes pronto)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
d. Mandarlo a su pieza	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
e. Ofrecer opciones limitadas	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
f. Resolver problemas	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
g. Ignorar	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
h. Explicar lo que se debe hacer	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
i. Crear reglamentos justos y no complicados	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Que hacen los padres y los niños juntos

Haga un círculo en el número que muestre cuan a menudo Ud. hace lo siguiente:

17. Yo hablo con mi hijo/a sobre lo que estamos haciendo mientras jugamos.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
nunca 1-2 veces a la semana muchas veces al día

18. Le cuento historias a mi hijo/a en español, francés o inglés.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
nunca 1-2 veces a la semana muchas veces al día

19. Miramos o leemos libros o revistas juntos en español, francés o inglés.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
nunca 1-2 veces a la semana muchas veces al día

20. Cuando vemos televisión juntos, hablamos sobre lo que estamos viendo.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
nunca 1-2 veces a la semana muchas veces al día

21. Pedimos prestado libros y grabaciones para niños de la biblioteca en español, francés o inglés.

Marque una de las siguientes:

nunca _____ más de una vez al mes _____
unas pocas veces al año _____ todas las semanas _____
todos los meses _____

22. Por sobretodo, mi hijo/a y yo nos llevamos bien

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
totalmente de acuerdo No estoy seguro Totalmente en desacuerdo

23. Cuando mi hijo/a hace muchas preguntas, me frustro.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 Totalmente de acuerdo No estoy seguro Totalmente en desacuerdo

Por favor explique.

Los jardines infantiles, la escuela y los servicios sociales canadienses

24. Comprendo bien:

a. Que es lo que quieren los maestros de mis niños cuando comienzan la escuela.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 9
 no del todo de alguna manera mucho bastante

b. Que es lo que los maestros esperan de los padres.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 9
 no del todo de alguna manera mucho bastante

c. Como ayudar a mi hijo/a a hacer lo que se espera de él / ella en la escuela.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 9
 no del todo de alguna manera mucho bastante

d. Acerca de la ayuda especial que mi hijo/a puede recibir en la escuela si él / ella lo necesita.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 9
 no del todo de alguna manera mucho bastante

e. Como obtener ayuda para mi hijo/a si tiene un problema en la escuela.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 9
 no del todo de alguna manera mucho bastante

f. Que el jardín infantil y la escuela son cosas separadas, entonces necesito conversar con ambas.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 9
 no del todo de alguna manera mucho bastante

g. Donde encontrar recursos o programas para mi hijo/a.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 9
 no del todo de alguna manera mucho bastante

h. Donde encontrar recursos o programas para mí.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 9
 no del todo de alguna manera mucho bastante

i. Acerca del rol de las sociedades de protección de los niños

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 9
 no del todo de alguna manera mucho bastante

j. Acerca de las leyes de protección del niño de donde yo vivo en Canadá

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 9
 no del todo de alguna manera mucho bastante

Conversando con el personal de la escuela y del jardín infantil

25. Sé muy bien sobre:

a. mi derecho a hablar con los profesores de mi hijo/a.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 9
no del todo de alguna manera mucho bastante

b. como hablar con los profesores de mi hijo/a

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 9
no del todo de alguna manera mucho bastante

c. que es bueno que los profesores de mi hijo/a sepan que nuestra cultura es diferente.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 9
no del todo de alguna manera mucho bastante

d. cuando debo usar un intérprete profesional en lugar de amigos o mi hijo/a.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 9
no del todo de alguna manera mucho bastante

e. como obtener un intérprete profesional si lo necesitara para conversar con el profesor de mi hijo/a/.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 9
no del todo de alguna manera mucho bastante

26. Me gusta compartir información sobre mi cultura con gente de otras culturas.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
no del todo de alguna manera mucho

27. Comentarios adicionales.

Muchas Gracias por completar esta encuesta.

Cuestionario de “Los Talleres Para Padres Hispanos”

Nombre: _____ Fecha: _____

Gracias por completar este cuestionario. Esta información nos va ayudar a mejorar los talleres para otros padres.

Sobre los Talleres para Padres Hispanos

1. ¿Cuales son las cosas mas importantes que le sucedieron a usted al venir a los talleres?

.... ¿y a sus hijos?

2. ¿De donde obtiene información para tomar decisiones sobre la educación y desarrollo de sus hijos?

3. ¿Cuanto le gusto atender el grupo?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
No me gusto Me gusto algo Me gusto mucho

4. ¿Que fue lo que mas le gusto sobre los Talleres para Padres Hispanos? Señale *sus tres primeras opciones*.

_____ 1. Lugar

_____ 2. Hora del día

_____ 3. Numero de Talleres

_____ 4. Numero de veces por semana

_____ 5. Como fue manejado los talleres

_____ 6. Tiempo para discutir

_____ 7. Comunicarse con otros padres informalmente

_____ 8. Tareas para hacer en casa

_____ 9. Los temas que se hablaron

_____ 10. Un tema en particular o temas- ¿cual tema o temas? _____

_____ 11. ¿Algo más? – por favor explique _____

5. ¿Que fue lo que le hizo continuar participando en los talleres?
6. ¿Si es que fue difícil venir a los talleres por cualquier razón, que podría hacerlo mas fácil?
7. ¿Que información, si la hubo fue nueva para usted?
8. ¿Que le gustaría cambiar del taller?
9. ¿Recomendaría usted los Talleres para Padres Hispanos a otros padres?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Definitivamente No Tal vez Definitivamente Si

10. ¿Por que recomendaría o no, el taller a otros padres?
11. ¿Consideraría usted comenzar su propio grupo? ¿Si es así donde? (El nombre del lugar, nombre de la escuela /colegio) ¿Que tipo de apoyo necesitaría usted?
12. Después de haber participado en el grupo, ¿que acción especifica tomaría para aumentar su participación en la escuela/ colegio de sus hijos?
13. ¿Cree usted que los libros le pueden ayudar a sus hijos a mantener su identidad hispana?
14. Nos gustaría mantenernos en contacto con ustedes a través de los años. ¿Tiene algún número de teléfono suyo o de un familiar que generalmente no se cambia de casa?
15. ¿Se va a mantenerse en contacto con los miembros del taller?
16. Por favor añada cualquier otro comentario que usted quiera decirnos.

Appendix I. Exit interview questionnaire: English version

**Questionnaire for The Canadian Parenting Project
Ryerson University and Ministry of Education Parental Engagement Office**

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Thank you for completing this survey. This information will help us improve the programs for other parents.

About the Canadian Parenting Circles

1. What were the most important things that happened for you because of coming to the programs?
....for your child?

2. Who do you talk to when you need to make decisions about your children?

3. How much did you like attending the group?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not at all somewhat very much

4. What did you like most about the Canadian Parenting Circles? Check your top 3 choices.

_____ 1. location

_____ 2. time of day

_____ 3. number of programs

_____ 4. number of times per week

_____ 5. how the programs were run

_____ 6. discussion time

_____ 7. talking informally with other parents

_____ 8. the homework assignments

_____ 9. the topics we covered

_____ 10. a particular topic or topics- which topic or topics? _____

_____ 11. something else- please explain

5. What made you want to keep coming to the programs?

6. If it was hard to come to the programs for any reason, what would have made it easier?

7. What information, if any, was new to you?

8. What would you like to see changed about the programs?

9. Would you recommend the Canadian Parenting Circles to other parents?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Definitely Not Perhaps Definitely yes

10. Why would you recommend it or not recommend it to other parents?

11. After participating in the group, what specific actions will you take to increase your involvement in the school?

12. Have you considered starting your own group? If so where and so, please write the name and locations of the new group.

13. Do you think that the books can help your children maintain their Latin American identity?

14. We would like to keep in touch with you over the years. Please give us a phone number of a relative who is not likely to move (here and in another country)

Name _____ Phone # _____ Relation to you _____

15. Are you planning to keep in touch with group members? Who?

16. Please add anything else you would like to tell us.

Appendix J. Exit interview questionnaire 2nd set: Spanish version

Questions for Interviews with Spanish-speaking Parents

(Note: These are “lead-in” questions that can be explored in more depth depending on how much individual parents want to say about the issues; the formulation and relevance of the questions will also vary according to the age of the children involved; the questions are essentially guidelines for opening up conversation about these issues)

1. ¿Qué idioma utiliza en casa son su(s) niño(s)?
¿Ha notado algún cambio en el uso de lenguaje de su(s) niño(s) conforma va(n) creciendo?
¿Qué actitud toma(n) su(s) niño(s) hacia el español y el inglés?

2. ¿Qué tan bien habla su(s) niño(s) español e inglés?
¿Cree que su(s) niño(s) podrá(n) mantener su español (hablarlo y entenderlo) mientras vaya(n) creciendo y avanzando en la escuela?
¿Cree que su(s) niño(s) podrá(n) leer y escribir en español mientras vaya(n) creciendo y avanzando en la escuela?
¿Qué cree que usted puede hacer para ayudar a su(s) niño(s) a seguir desarrollando sus habilidades en español?
¿Qué cree que los maestros en las escuelas podrían hacer para ayudar a que su(s) niño(s) se sientan bien de hablar español y animarlos a que lo usen?
¿Tiene usted algún ejemplo (de su propia experiencia o de sus amigos) sobre la actitud que toman los niños hacia sus dos idiomas mientras van creciendo?

3. ¿Qué tipos de mensajes reciben su(s) niño(s) dentro y fuera de la escuela a cerca de su idioma? ¿Se sienten orgullosos de hablar español o lo ven con algo negativo?

4. ¿Cree que el poder hablar español ayude a su(s) niño(s) a mantener lazos familiares y culturales?

5. ¿Tiene(n) su(s) niño(s) acceso a medios de comunicación en español?

6. ¿Ha alguna vez escuchado a su(s) niño(s) hablar español/inglés con sus amigos o hermano(s)? ¿Cómo respondió o cómo se sintió usted?

Appendix K. Completion Certificate



School of Early Childhood Education, Ryerson University, 350 Victoria Street, Toronto, ON M5B 2K3

Certificate of Participation

First Name Last Name

has completed the program

Parenting Circles: Preparing Minority Parents to Support School Success

Toronto, Ontario • June, 2007

Dr. Gloria Roberts-Fiati
Professor, Ryerson University

Dr Judith K. Bernhard
Professor, Ryerson University

RYERSON UNIVERSITY

Funded by
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Office of Parent Engagement



Appendix L. Book Samples