Partnerships Through Adult Education: Re-conceptualizing Family Literacy in the New Latino Diaspora

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PARTNERSHIPS THROUGH ADULT EDUCATION: RE-CONCEPTUALIZING FAMILY LITERACY IN THE NEW LATINO DIASPORA

by

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Schools are complex social institutions that mediate the experiences of newcomer families in the US. In recent years, a body of scholarship known as New Latino Diaspora has followed the migration of Latino families as they have moved away from traditional gateway communities and settled into territories that have previously been home to few, if any, Latino families. As a result, both institutionalized and grassroots educational initiatives have emerged as vehicles to support newcomer families as they learn English and adapt to living in a new community. This dissertation looks at the cultural space of a family literacy program that was hosted by a large urban school district in Chesterfield, Nebraska, a city whose Latino population had nearly doubled between the years 2000 and 2010. Specifically, this ethnographic study depicts how the cultural space of ELL family literacy was constructed at three elementary schools and how Latina mothers interacted within this space.

Findings show that when the program was appropriated into practice, the enacted family literacy experience diverged from the original model and embodied varying perceptions about what constituted the program. Ironically, the notion of “family” was largely absent from the program: families were separated upon entering the program and interacted with each other under strict regulations. The program personnel held varying perceptions about the participating parents; in turn, the Latina mothers responded to these perceptions with silence, compliance, and subversion. English language learning was viewed mostly from a traditional perspective and incorporated elementary school concepts. Sociocultural literacies emerged, but often went unnoticed. Re-conceptualizing the family literacy program as a partnership through adult education would be more reflective of its enacted reality and it would counter placing elementary attributes onto parents. Furthermore, moments when sociocultural literacies emerged in the family literacy classroom offer a starting point from which to develop culturally relevant pedagogies that are reflective of and
responsive to parents’ realities. Finally, this family literacy program provides one model for the professionalization of the field of family literacy and is fertile ground on which to develop and implement culturally responsive pedagogies that integrate sociocultural literacy learning.
This dissertation is dedicated to:

Mom and Dad, for your love and support no matter the offbeat, winding paths I have followed.

Drew, for your love, encouragement, and unyielding belief in me.

The students of all ages, inside and outside of classrooms, across the nation and around the world, who have become my teachers and have shared their lives and intellect with me.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

(Field Notes, Aster Elementary, February 12, 2013): The Parent Time class was about to begin. I sat at a desk in the front of the room and observed quietly. Megan, the math coach, stood with Anne, the program coordinator, at the front of the room, as about twenty parents chatted in several languages behind me. Anne announced that they were waiting for the Spanish translator and then they would begin. (The translator was a bilingual liaison employed by the school district who interpreted during the parent time class. The terms translator and bilingual liaison were used interchangeably in this setting.) Although it was my first day in the class, I raised my hand to get Anne’s attention. “I can translate while you wait if you want.” Anne’s eyes brightened and she exclaimed, “Oh that’s right! That will be great!” She turned to the Spanish-speaking parents. “Jen is going to translate to start us off.” Anne, who the parents and the rest of the school referred to as Miss Anne, introduced Megan as the school’s math coach and said that she was going to talk with them about math for students in 4th and 5th grades. Anne walked to the back of the room and sat down.

I moved from the desk at the front of the room to the table by the windows where the three Spanish-speaking women were sitting. “¿Hola, cómo están? [Hello, how are you?]” I asked. Then I told them that I hoped they would understand my Spanish because I am not very good with math vocabulary in Spanish. They responded with laughter and polite comments about how well I was speaking Spanish.

Megan began by telling parents that they would talk about division and fractions today. She began by putting division problems on the board and asking parents how they would solve them. The first couple of problems were simple. “If there are 25 slices of pizza and 5 can go on one pan, how many pans will they need?” The parents answered 5. “If there are 48 students and 8 can each go on a bus, how many buses do they need?” The parents said 6. Parents watched as Megan drew the solutions on the board and nodded along.

The next problem was a 4-digit number divided by a 1-digit number. Parents turned to work on it on their own. In my group, all of the women wrote the problem down. Two of the women stopped writing after they had the problem down. They looked at Verónica as she continued to work through the problem and eventually solved it. They looked at her paper intently and murmured in agreement as she worked through the problem. Then, Yolanda turned to her own paper and wrote down the steps of the problem. The other two women watched her solve the problem and nodded in agreement.

Megan called for all of the parents’ attention. She then worked out the problem on the board using long division. She wrote each step of the long division, including subtracting out the multiplication products from the dividend.

I checked in with the women: “¿Entienden? [Do you understand?]” I asked. “Sí pero no. [Yes, but no]” one woman responded. I took a closer look at their papers. I told them that they were doing the same steps as the teacher, except that they were not writing out each time they subtracted a number. Verónica said, “Ah, sí. Es verdad. [Yes, it’s true.]” The others looked confused and no one wrote anything down. I explained again, and pointed out that they are subtracting the numbers mentally but that the teacher is writing them down on the paper. “Es diferente de lo que hacemos nosotros [It’s different than how we do it]” said one of the women.
Megan asked if the parents wanted to see another example of long division. I asked the women if they wanted another example like this. They did not say anything at first, and I asked again. One woman slowly nodded her head. I turned to Megan and asked, “Can we see another example?”

This time she wrote a problem that was three digits divided by one digit number. Megan said, “This should be easier.” “Sí [Yes]” said both Verónica and Yolanda. Verónica took the lead and wrote and solved the problem again. The others again nodded in agreement.

Megan worked the problem out on the board again, and the women again followed along without my interpreting every utterance. As Megan wrote the numbers that she was subtracting out, I told the women “Vean: esta es la parte diferente. [Look, this is the part that is different.]” They looked at it intently and nodded. One told me again that this was different from “como lo hacemos nosotros [how we do it].”

Not fully acknowledging that she had already introduced a partially unfamiliar way, Megan now told them that she was going to show them a new way to do the problem, adding that it was the way that some of the elementary students learn in 4th grade. There was a t-chart on the board that said “Traditional” on one side and “New” on the other side. She put another 4-digit number on the board. She said that any student could do this if they know how to subtract and know their multiplication facts.

Megan said that the first step is to take out the number that is closest to the number being divided. She demonstrated how you first find the multiplication fact “closest to” the number in the first place value spot. For the problem 344 divided by 5, you first want to get the closest to 300. Megan listed the 5 facts down the right side of the board: 5 x 1 = 5; 5 x 2=10; 5 x 3=15 etc. She pointed out that 5 x 6 is 30 and asked, “What is 5 x 60?”

Parents were quiet until one said 300. “Good!” she said and wrote 60 on top of the problem and 300 below it and subtracted.

Next she demonstrated what was closest to the number 44. She said that 5 times 8 was 40, so she wrote 8 on top and subtracted 40 below. She added the 60 and 8 together and wrote the answer as 68 and circled it. Then she asked parents, “What is this 4 below?” One parent said “Remainder.” Megan wrote 68 R4 for the answer.

I turned to the group of Spanish-speaking women. “¿Cómo se sienten? ¿Entienden? [How do you feel? Do you understand?]” Verónica told me, “Más o menos. [More or less.]” She then explained that her fourth grade son does division by using long division. She said that when she helps him with his homework, he does division with the subtraction and she doesn’t know how to help him because it is different. I pointed to her paper, which had notes from the traditional and new strategies, and asked, “Which way?” She pointed to the traditional long division problem.

I told her that this is the same way that she does it, but he is writing out the subtraction problem and she is not. She said that she tells her son, “es más facil así [it’s easier this way],” but added that he does it the traditional American way (showing the subtraction). I asked if he uses the new way to do division. She said no. “Esto es muy dificil.[This is very difficult].”

I then asked the other two women if they understood the new method. They said that it was difficult. I explained that they are first looking for what multiplication fact is closest to the answer and then subtracting it. And that they could start with any number and keep subtracting.
Megan told the parents that their children could choose which method they want to use, whichever is easier for them. I told this to the parents and they nodded. Yolanda said, “Esto es muy difícil. Y es muy diferente que lo de nosotros [This is very difficult. And it is very different than our way].” I thought that she was referring to ‘new’ way, but just as easily she could have been referencing the idea that schools were teaching more than one way to do division.

Megan asked the parents where they wanted to go next. She said that she still had 10 minutes before she had to teach (which suggested she saw the time with parents through a lens that did not quite make her ‘the teacher’). She asked if they wanted to see more division or if they wanted to do fractions. I asked the women I was working with. They said that it would be good to see something new—their kids would do new things in school and they wanted to know what they were. I then told this to Megan in translation.

She drew a rectangle on the board and the words ‘whole’ and ‘part’. She divided the rectangle in half and said that these are two parts of a whole. A couple of parents said, “One half,” and Megan wrote 1/2 inside each of the parts of the rectangle. She did the same for 1/4. She said, “These are parts of a whole.” She showed how the parts are equal parts and then drew an example where the parts were not equal. She said that sometimes children draw unequal parts inside of the shape and then they get confused when they do the math.

I asked the parents if they understood and they said yes. Verónica said, “¡Esta es la parte fácil! [This is the easy part]!”

Anne stood up and moved to the front of the room. She asked Megan if she could write some problems on the board for homework. She suggested writing story problems about things around the house.

Megan wrote three different problems: one for grades K-1, 2-3 and 4-5. The K-1 problem asked them to put 12 toys away in four boxes. Anne told parents that they could do this with their children by putting out 12 toys and asking them to put them in groups. One parent asked if she could use “yellow bags” instead of boxes. Anne asked her to repeat her question two more times before answering with, “Yes you can use bags too.” The yellow bags that the woman were referencing were likely from Super Saver, a supermarket that was near the school and frequented by the participating families.

The question characterized as for second and third graders asked to separate forks, spoons, knives and other utensils into different groups, and the final homework question was a set of long division problems like those practiced in class. The bilingual liaisons and I interpreted the problems in the parents’ home languages. Parents quietly began to copy down the problems. My group of parents began writing down all three sets of problems. It was not clear if these women knew that they only needed to complete all three of the problems or only those that correlated with their child’s grade level.

At last the actual Spanish-speaking bilingual liaison entered the classroom and sat with my group. The Spanish-speaking women asked questions about the homework and the translator answered them. She took over translating and clarifying questions from the parents to Megan and Anne. I remained at the table quietly, unsure about how I was supposed to act in the presence of the translator.
Anne told parents that they only needed to do one of the problems for homework, depending on the grade of their child. The translator told the Spanish-speaking women this, but the women continued writing all of the problems down.

Anne told them that once they had their homework written, they could take a 5-minute break. Megan thanked them for having her in their class, dismissed herself, and left.

The preceding vignette previews the cultural complexity of the elementary school-based family literacy program that was sponsored by the Chesterfield Public School District in Nebraska. The program served some of Chesterfield’s newcomer and refugee families by inviting parents to participate in daily classes that integrated learning English as an additional language with learning about elementary school practices, community resources, and parenting skills. As a result, the program was a meeting ground for myriad perspectives and goals of many people and institutions that became enacted through literacy learning in English. The program and its tangible representation (i.e., class sessions) also encompassed the demographic changes that Nebraska and the city of Chesterfield have experienced throughout the past twenty years and the unique social and linguistic complexity of the more recent settlements of Latino families in this area, part of what some call the New Latino Diaspora (Hamann, Wortham, & Murillo, 2015; Wortham, Murillo, & Hamann, 2002). This dissertation utilizes ethnographic research methods to illuminate how this cultural complexity was constructed at three of the eight family literacy sites in Chesterfield Public Schools, looking particularly at how it was experienced by the participating Latina, Spanish-speaking mothers at these sites.

The culture of the family literacy classroom within a public elementary school is complex. The school itself is located within a specific geographic-demographic setting, is charged with transmitting some of cultural material of the society, and is what Frederick Erickson calls a “network of communication, rights and obligations to larger social units” (Erickson, 1984, p. 7). A school is constantly and actively ‘doing culture’; it is full of individuals constructing the structures of signification that carry meaning about how people in the space are making sense of it and how these understandings are conjoined with and enacted in patterned conduct in a given space and time (Geertz, 1973). Languages are the facilitators of this process, transmitting the norms, expectations and nuanced ideologies of the people involved. The family literacy
classroom, then, can be viewed as one social unit of this larger social institution (Erickson, 1984). It is expected that the classroom reflects some of the culture of the larger school, but because it exists due to the amalgamation of specific individuals, it is also unique. Furthermore, in this particular family literacy classroom, the individuals are all adults who have had lifetimes of semiotic experiences that have spanned multiple social settings throughout the world. So, while the school is situated in a particular geographic setting, the cultures within it emerge from the heteroglossic contact of the individuals within the schools’ and community’s smaller social units.

This particular family literacy classroom in Chesterfield Public Schools provided a space for parents of multiple backgrounds to come together with teachers employed by the school or local community college, volunteers, and community leaders while their children were learning in elementary and preschool classrooms nearby. The school’s central aim for the parents and children in program was English language learning: while adults participated in Adult Basic Education (ABE) English Language Learning (ELL) classes, the children were attending general education classes in English. Many of the young students also received elementary ELL services. However, the program also included a parent time class (also referred to as parenting class or family class) once a week and a component called Parent and Child Together time (PACT time) during which the parent learned alongside his/her child in the child’s elementary classroom. All aspects of the program were conducted in English; however, the parent time class was the only class that utilized the district’s bilingual liaisons as interpreters. The vignette presented above captures my first experience as a researcher in this space, depicting the general setting and unearthing some ideas that are worth exploring through a more in depth dissertation research project.

Clear from the moment one walked into the family literacy classroom were the role expectations for each person present. The coordinator/teacher stood in the front of the room with Megan, the presenter for the day, while the parents assumed the role of students sitting at the tables. The parents had notebooks and pencils, sat quietly as the class unfolded, took notes and answered questions. The bilingual liaisons/interpreters were such important intermediaries that the class was put on pause while waiting for one to arrive. Ironically, given the program title, what was notably absent from this scenario is the concept of
family. No children were present while the parents learn long division: they were only alluded to. Spouses, older siblings and extended family members were even more invisible. The vast majority of parent participants in all of the sites were women: only three men were observed in the classes during the nine months of data collection.

The abundance of women attending this program was in line with Velázquez’s (2014) most recent findings that Spanish-speaking mothers in Nebraska perceived agency for their children’s English and academic development to be placed in the school, while the mothers were vested by the school and community the task of supporting and facilitating acquisition of literacy in the majority language, English. (Comparatively, the family and the home were identified as key to teaching and maintaining Spanish language skills.) Thus, it was not surprising to find that mothers comprised the majority of a class that integrated English learning with learning about the expectations and practices of elementary school. Velázquez (2014) also found that Spanish-speaking mothers in Nebraska indicated that free, community-based learning sites, including CPS’s family literacy program, helped them to acquire the skills needed to fulfill this task.

While the presence of family was an illusion within the program, the presence of the school during family literacy was never doubted. Not only did the class take place within the space of an elementary school, most of the activities mimicked the norms of the school. In the opening vignette, Anne and Megan stated that their purpose of this lesson was to help parents understand what some of their children were learning in math by learning a different strategy for division themselves. The district had recently adopted a new math program and efforts had been made across CPS to help parents learn about the different methods they were teaching in mathematics. The focus of nearly the entire class was on learning elementary division methods, though later the parents received a homework assignment to do some hands-on math assignments at home with their children. Still, these homework activities were school-like and focused on applying the concepts taught in class with their children in a different setting and in a slightly different manner. It could be assumed in this event that Anne, or someone else at the school, had determined this topic for the class, as opposed to the parents. Anne introduced the topic and directed
Megan as to what to do with the parents. Given the parents’ general unfamiliarity with the topic and their passive participation, it did not seem like the day’s class was initiated by the parents.

Of particular interest in this vignette, however, are the differences that are noted between the participants as the events unfolded. Megan began by reviewing “the traditional method” for doing long division, but she did not seem to notice that her concept of the traditional method differed from the Spanish-speaking women’s. While the interpreter (me) pointed out what she saw as differences between the methods, the parents noted that these problems varied by degrees of difficulty, as well as by other differences. Megan’s traditional method was more difficult than theirs. The new strategy that Megan presented to the parents was not necessarily conceived by the parents as a new strategy, but as a more difficult skill. Although Megan took time to review her traditional method before moving on to the new strategy, the parents remained focused on the difficulty of the two new ways (not just one) of doing division that were presented.

The notion of what counted as “traditional” in this setting was clear. The first method that Megan reviewed was upheld as the traditional method despite the fact that the Spanish-speaking women perceived this method as a new way of doing long division. Megan’s adherence to a certain method being conceived as traditional blinded her to the prospect that it was a method with which the mothers were not familiar. According to Verónica, her struggle to help her son with math homework was between her traditional method and the school’s traditional method, not the “new” strategy that Megan was presenting. To develop an understanding of what the school was doing with her children in math class, Verónica needed to learn (at least) two new math strategies, not just one. Verónica foreshadowed with her statement, “Esta es la parte fácil. [This is the easy part.]”, that she anticipated more degrees of difficulty as she learned the school’s methods for fractions.

The disparities presented in this vignette illuminate how different participants perceived, constructed, and experienced the same cultural space. The parents, math coach, and interpreter all used different words (traditional method, different, and difficult) to describe what was happening and these different words were not sufficiently examined by any of the participants to see how/why they were
sometimes talking past each other. (In retrospect, I realize that I missed an opportunity as acting translator to communicate these differences to Megan, further illustrating the invaluable role of interpreters in this space.) To more completely capture the cultural space of this family literacy program, it is necessary to learn about the myriad experiences of the different participants and the conditions under which they played out. These experiences illuminate the social practices that facilitated or impeded the extent to which each participant met his/her (language, literacy, social) goals, as well how this particular family literacy setting contributed to advancing the general wellbeing of diverse populations within society.

The following ethnography sets out to learn about the cultural space of the family literacy program. This dissertation presents the research that I conducted in Chesterfield Public Schools’ family literacy program over the course of nine months that spanned across two complete semesters. I studied three of the eight participating sites within the program to learn about the cultural space of the program and how the participating Latina mothers experienced this space. The following chapters include a review of relevant research, the methodology and data collection techniques used throughout the study, key findings, and preliminary conclusions and directions for research.

Chapter Two: Overview of the Literature

Chapter two presents an overview of scholarly literature that orients this research study within the broader fields across which it spans. As such, chapter two is divided into three sections: the New Latino Diaspora, Adult ELL literacy programs, and family literacy. The first section describes the New Latino Diaspora as a pattern of migration of both newcomer and US-born Latinos settling in geographical locations within the United States that have previously been home to few, if any, Latino families (Wortham, Murillo, & Hamann, 2002). This section overviews how recent economic changes, like the relocation of meatpacking industries to small towns in the Midwest, have influenced the migration patterns of Latino populations differently than other historical factors, such as the construction of the railroads or the Bracero program, have (Broadway, 1994; Chavez, 1998; Davis, 2001; Gouveia et al., 2005). I focus on the demographic changes that have occurred within the state of Nebraska and specifically within the city of Chesterfield,
Nebraska since the 1980s mostly due to the economic influences of meatpacking industries and service jobs (e.g. restaurant work, construction, landscaping, etc.). I follow the work of notable scholars who have established a body of literature about the educational experiences of Latino populations settling in communities that previously served few, if any, Latino families, accounting for the transnational characteristics of these communities, their changing language and cultural practices, and the responses of the receiving community inside and outside of social institutions (Broadway, 1994; Grady, 2002; Grey, 1991; 1992; Hamann, 2003; Hamann & Reeves, 2012; Hamann, Wortham, & Murillo, 2015; Reeves & Hamann, 2008; Villenas, 2000; Zuñiga & Hernández, 2005). Schools are established in this larger body of research as the principle social institutions that serve as mediators that channel larger political and economic forces into settings that have impact on the lives of individuals and that mediate the interaction between newcomers and established residents (Lamphere, 1992). Therefore, this section also looks at the role of larger ideologies surrounding Latinos in the United States and the languages that they speak (Chavez, 1998; Chavez, 2013; Santa Ana, 2002).

The second section of this chapter reviews the literature on adult English language learning (ELL) literacy programs. It situates adult ELL classes within the larger realm of Adult Basic Education (ABE) and looks closely at its peripheral position in educational policy, in institutions of education, and in educational research (Crandall, 1993; Cuban, 2009; Rose, 1991). Given the limited research on ELL programs within ABE, this section also draws on the research about successful practices in elementary and secondary English language learning. By drawing on a breadth of research, I posit that a successful ABE-ELL class integrates an interactive learning model with adults’ interests and motivating factors for learning the language (Ewert, 2014; Genesee & Riches, 2006; Giouroukakis & Honigsfeld, 2010; Norton & Toohey, 2001; Park, 2011). However, such a model must also account for adults’ past educational experiences and expectations for language learning and make clear the rationale and purposes of pedagogical practices (Ananyeva, 2014; Auerbach, 1983; Jimenez & Teague, 2007).

The third section of this chapter reviews the literature on the field of family literacy: it follows the field from its organic origins of family literacy learning of home and community into institutionalized settings.
This section highlights the theoretical underpinnings of family literacy and foundational studies within the field (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Heath, 1983; Moll et al., 1992; Purcell-Gates, 1995; Street, 1995; Taylor, 1983). It also looks at national responses via philanthropy (e.g., The Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy and The National Center for Families Learning) and policy (e.g., Even Start and the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act of 1998) and the rise of family literacy programs as a result. Finally, it offers an overview of empirical studies in family literacy and illuminates the pervasive divide that exists in the field between sociocultural (community and home-based) family literacies and family literacy programs (Edwards, 2003; Gadsden, 1994; 2004). I argue that utilizing ethnographic methods to study programmatic family literacy and to illuminate opportunities for outside-school literacies to enter into the program is a step toward bridging this divide.

This study about a family literacy program, then, contributes to the research in all three of these fields. It adds the experiences of a school-sponsored family literacy program to the growing body of literature of the educational experiences in the New Latino Diaspora. The focal program adds a unique educational scene to this body of literature: the program is housed in traditional educational institutions (i.e. elementary schools), yet also resembles a mixture of an ELL-ABE class and a parent-school partnership initiative. Within this setting, I look at the learning experiences of adult ELL students, thus contributing to the limited literature on ELL teaching and learning practices within ABE. Finally, by using ethnographic methods, this study sheds light on opportunities for family literacy programs to utilize culturally responsive teaching in order be more responsive to families’ funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) and sociocultural literacy practices (Gee, 2012; Street, 1995).

Chapter Three: Methodology

Chapter three describes the research methodology I used to study the elementary school-based family literacy program in Chesterfield Public Schools. Drawing on the work of Frederick Erickson (1984), I first explain why ethnography is a research methodology that is well suited for educational research and why it is particularly useful for studying programmatic family literacy. Essentially, ethnography permits the
collection of multiple perspectives from multiple actors over time, allowing the researcher to learn about patterns of behaviors and interaction of all program participants as they unfold naturally. This methodology not only unveils the perceptions of the participants, but also how these perceptions become enacted in a social setting. I situate the interaction of participants within a theoretical framework that integrates the work of social theorists who describe how the social structure is created through semiotic interactions, how these interactions construct and usually perpetuate power structures, and how individuals navigate and influence these structures (Bourdieu, 1991; de Certeau, 1984; Foucault, 1972; Freire, 1968; Gee, 2012; Goffman, 1959; The New London Group, 1996).

The rest of the chapter outlines the specific methods that I utilized to learn about the three focal sites of the family literacy program. I conducted observations of all program components at each site and took field notes. Field notes were transcribed and coded using MaxQDA 11 Plus (Verbi Software, 2014); in-process and analytical memos were written throughout the process as a way to note and construct significant findings as they emerged (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). I conducted both formal and informal semi-structured interviews with parents, teachers, coordinators, and administrators and coded the interviews following Spradley’s (1979) method of conducting ethnographic interviews and analyzed the interview data through domain analysis. I also collected artifacts from each research site as was relevant. Findings emerged from triangulation of the data collected.

Chapter Four: Ethnographic Findings

Ethnographic data are presented in chapter four in four different sections. Section 1 offers a detailed overview of each of the research sites. Section 2 describes the actual lived experience of the family literacy program. While these findings describe the four-component, comprehensive model around which the program is organized, the data are presented according to the accounts of the participants and the social interactions within the program space. Thus, Section 2 is sub-divided in the following categories:

- What is Family Literacy?
- English Class
• PACT Time: Where the Rubber Meets the Road
• Parent Time
• Separation of Families
• Professional Development

Section 3 considers the various stakeholders’ perceptions about the parents who participated in the program and how these perceptions were enacted through English classes and parent time classes. The perceptions held by the teachers, coordinators, and administrators about the parents fell into five different categories: 1) parents as learners and decision makers; 2) parents as culturally distinct; 3) parents as a good match; 4) parents as children; and, 5) parents in need of help. Section 3 then describes the parents’ responses to these perceptions with a focus on the responses of Latina mothers. Their responses fell into three different categories: 1) silence; 2) subversion; and, 3) cooperation.

Section 4 describes the English learning experience with each teacher at each of the three focal sites. Each explanation includes a description of common whole group and small group methods and activities used to teach the English language as well as the literacies that were present in the class (with or without the teacher’s knowledge).

Chapter Five: Conclusions

The fifth chapter of this dissertation is the conclusion. It describes the theoretical and analytical interplay between the empirical findings, theoretical framework, and literature review. As such, conclusions are drawn in three categories that contribute to advancing the knowledge about programmatic family literacy and about intergenerational educational experiences within the New Latino Diaspora.

First, I analyze how the appropriation of the family literacy program from its original comprehensive, four-component model into action illustrates the changing nature of the concept of family literacy once it is attached to a school district and housed within an elementary school. I propose that family literacy in this case became a hybrid of adult basic education and parent-school partnerships, with intergenerational literacy learning in the background. I posit that re-conceptualizing the family literacy
program as a partnership through adult education would be more reflective of its enacted reality and it would counter the program’s tendency to place elementary attributes onto parents.

Second, I review the literacies that were present within the program and highlight how certain literacies, that often went unnoticed by the teachers, indicated when and how parents brought in their backgrounds and societal realities. I propose that these moments offer a starting point from which to develop culturally relevant pedagogies that are reflective of and responsive to parents’ realities. Furthermore, I suggest that some of the nuanced perspectives that the teachers, coordinators and administrators hold about the parents, as well as some of the adamant adherence to the comprehensive family literacy model, could impede progress to accomplishing this.

Finally, I conclude that Chesterfield Public School’s family literacy program exemplifies one way of professionalizing the field of Adult Basic Education. The structure of the program lends to some financial security, status in both the community and in educational institutions, and professional development opportunities. Chesterfield’s family literacy situation actually provides a fertile ground on which to develop and implement culturally responsive pedagogies for ABE that integrate sociocultural literacy learning. This is due to, in part, the professional structure of the program that provides resources (financial, human, and intellectual) to do these things, but is also in part due to the program’s peripheral status within the district and within the community. Besides its required testing and reporting commitments at the national and state levels, and to funders, the curricular decision-making process in the program was quite flexible and already attempted to integrate, to some degree, the realities of its adult students.
CHAPTER 2: OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The literacies and language practices of Latino families living in the United States have actively been a focus of research for years. To inform research concerning Latino families participating in a family literacy program in the context of the New Latino Diaspora, it is necessary to review several areas of research in conjunction with each other.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section describes the New Latino Diaspora and focuses on the influence this migration pattern has had on transnational families living in new geographical locations in the United States. The second section of this chapter reviews the literature on adult ELL literacy programs and pays particular attention to studies that have focused on the Spanish-speaking adult ELL student. The third section of this chapter reviews the literature on the field of family literacy; it follows the field from its organic origins of family literacy learning of home and community into institutionalized settings. This section highlights: 1) theoretical underpinnings of family literacy; 2) foundational studies of family literacy; 3) national responses via philanthropy and policy; and 4) an overview of empirical studies in family literacy. As a label, family literacy has come to encompass a wide range of programs that are very different in terms of their orientation. This review helps locate the particular family literacy program that I studied in relation to both similar and very different programs that also bear the label ‘family literacy’ and that also enroll Spanish-speaking adults who are studying English.

The New Latino Diaspora

As the Latino population in the United States continues to grow, the characteristics of Latino immigrant cohorts continue to change. Currently more than 54 million people of Hispanic origin reside in the US, accounting for 16.9% of the general population (Pew Research, 2012). This demography reflects a general trend of a growing Latino population that is US-born: 64.5% of the Hispanic population in the country was native-born in 2012 (Pew Research, 2012). The vast majority of this population (64.6%), both US-born and foreign-born, traces their family origins to Mexico (Pew Hispanic, 2013).
Latino settlement within the current geographical borders United States has a longstanding history that has not always been one of immigration. The notion of Latino immigration into the United States, historically speaking, is a relatively new concept introduced and constructed through political, social, and legal discourse throughout the twentieth and twenty-first century. Many people of Mexican descent living in the U.S. Southwest can trace their roots to settlement as early as 1595 (Chavez, 1998). After the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed in 1848, signifying the end of the Mexican-American War and the United State’s annexation of a large portion of Mexican land, Mexicans that were living in what is now U.S. territory were granted citizenship (Chavez, 2013). Porfirio Diaz’s regime as president of Mexico from 1876-1911 brought foreign investment to Mexico’s economy that resulted in the privatization of communal lands (amongst other changes) and enduring relations with the U.S. companies and employers who invested in building parts of Mexico’s infrastructure, like railroads. Consequently, Mexican campesinos (peasants or farmers) no longer had land to farm and became a strong, mobile labor force (Chavez, 2013). With of the onset of the Mexican Revolution in the background at the turn of the 20th century, these workers looked north for work, mostly in cities throughout the U.S. Southwest in railroads, mining, and agriculture (Chavez, 1998).

With a brief break during the Great Depression (when hundreds of thousands of Mexican workers were actually deported from the United States), Latinos would continue to migrate to the United States for work and settle throughout the Southwest and other established Latino metropolises, or gateway communities. The category of established Latino metropolis “contains all the major contemporary immigrant gate-ways such as New York, Los Angeles, Miami, and Chicago as well as a variety of western, southwestern and border metros with large, long-standing Latino communities” (Suro & Singer, 2002, p.3). Particularly, the bracero program that was established in 1942 was a series of laws established to permit contracting temporary workers from Mexico to come to the U.S. to work. These laws and diplomatic agreements permitted mostly Mexican men to work first in expanding the nation’s railroad system and then in agriculture (Chavez, 1998). By the time the bracero program ended in 1964, a macro and micro pattern of migration from Mexico and to the United States for work was well established. Furthermore, Mexican
families who had participated in the program had created connections and networks within the United States in addition to becoming familiar with American* customs and social life. (*The term American is used here and throughout to denote “of the United States”, despite the fact that the word also connotes being from North, Central and/or South America. The term in Spanish, estadounidense, is much more appropriate but does not have a direct English translation.)

While the current Latino population has remained high in traditional gateway areas of the United States, such as California, New York and Texas, a geographical shift in the settlement of Latinos to other areas of the United States has been one focus of researchers over the past twenty years. The shift of settlement of Latinos within the nine states of the traditional diaspora (Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, and Texas) to any one of the remaining forty-one states has been defined as the New Latino Diaspora (Hamann and Harklau, 2010). This body of work has depicted the substantial demographic and cultural changes in communities that previously included few, if any, Latino members (Wortham et al., 2002). Research has followed Latinos, both native-born and newcomers, as they have dispersed to the New South (Hamann, 2003) and into the Midwest (Broadway, 1994; Grady, 2002; Hamann & Reeves, 2011; Reeves & Hamann, 2008; Zuñiga & Hernández, 2005), accounting for the transnational characteristics of these communities, their changing language and cultural practices, and the responses of the receiving community inside and outside of social institutions. A number of institutional settings—workplaces, houses of worship, the criminal justice system, community organizations—are important for how this migration is mediated (in terms of host/newcomer relations, but also in terms of intra-familial change) with schools a centrally important one.

Public schools in particular serve as a nexus of the characteristics, practices and attitudes of each community in established gateway communities and new settlements. Louis Lamphere (1992) states that schools serve as mediating institutions, or, “structures that are hierarchically organized…and have a structure that continues on beyond the lives of the individuals who are involved with them at any particular time” (p. 4). Schools are mediators in the sense that 1) they serve to channel larger political and economic forces into settings that have impact on the lives of individuals and 2) they mediate the interaction between
newcomers and established residents (Lamphere, 1992). Goode et al. (in Lamphere, 1992) demonstrated that schools that are experiencing the same demographic changes at the community level foster distinct interrelations between newcomers and established residents at the micro-level, within each individual school. Interrelations are mediated through a complex interplay of school structures, public and private governing structures (including religion), community characteristics and economics (Lamphere, 1992). Notably, in all of the communities studied, school personnel did not feel comfortable reaching out to or interacting with parents of newcomer students (Lamphere, 1992). Grey (1991; 1992) found that English as a Second Language programs, in which Latino students are often enrolled, are marginalized within the school structure and as a result, perpetuate mainstream, hegemonic ideologies concerning students who are learning English: newcomer students interact with the mainstream structure of school on the peripheral, replicating society’s greater expectations for them.

As the geographical context of the New Latino Diaspora continues to expand into new areas, it is necessary to study the mediating institutions that serve these families in order to bring attention to how macro and micro ideologies are playing out in these residents’ educational experiences (Lamphere, 1992). Studying programs that are marginalized within the school and that often also promulgate marginalization, such as English learning programs, can shed light on the structural inequalities that are in play at the micro-level that will likely lend to recreating macro-level inequalities and can highlight opportunities for more equitable practices (Grey, 1992). Specifically looking at a marginalized, school-based program for English learning families (ie. the family literacy program) within the context of the New Latino Diaspora will illuminate the process of institutionalized mediation for these families.

Nebraska

Nebraska has been home to an established Latino population since the early twentieth century (Gouveia et al., 2005; Hamann & Harklau, 2010). At that time, basic economic elements that would pull immigration into Nebraska were in place: the railroads, cattle production and meatpacking, general agriculture, and, specifically, sugar beet production and processing (Davis, 2001). Mirroring national trends,
Nebraska’s growing economy would first attract people from Mexico during the Mexican Revolution of 1910 and later through the Mexican Farm Labor Supply Program (MFLSP), or Bracero program, that allowed employers in the United States to contract for seasonal labor (Davis, 2001). However, settlements of Latinos during the majority of the 20th century remained small and concentrated in the Western portion of the state, along railroad routes, and in Omaha. The 1980 U.S. Census counted less than 30,000 Hispanics in Nebraska (Hamann & Harklau, 2010), whereas the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey estimated that almost 185,000 Hispanics lived in Nebraska in 2013. (US Census, 2014).

The economic landscape during last quarter of the twentieth century set the stage for an immense increase in the Latino population throughout the state of Nebraska. The revolution of the meatpacking industries in the 1970s brought Latinos to relocate to the countryside and to rural towns in order to escape the big cities’ demands for unionization and higher wages and the complaints of the smells and noises of meatpacking plants (Davis, 2001). Furthermore, the Mexican economic crisis of the 1980s pushed many people to look for work northward, prompting the United States to respond with the 1986 Immigration Control and Reform Act (IRCA), which granted amnesty to Latino workers who were previously working without documents (Davis, 2001). An estimated 2.3 million Mexicans received documents through IRCA; as a result, newly documented workers arrived to established gateway labor markets, such as Texas and California, but were not limited to remaining there (Durand et al., 1998). One explanation for the new geography of Latinos in the U.S. that immigrants who had previously been working illegally in the United States no longer needed to fear moving from place to place to avoid detection and could begin to look outside of gateway communities for work (Durand et al., 1998).

Latino immigrants had other reasons to move away from the gateway states during the late 1980s and early 1990s as well. Partly due to the IRCA, economic conditions were deteriorating in California and hostility towards Latinos was increasing, as evidenced in the discourse revolving around the following ballot initiatives in California at the time: Proposition 63 (to establish English as Official Language); Proposition 187 (a state-run citizenship screening system that would deny health care, education and other services to non-citizens), Proposition 209 (to end affirmative action), and Proposition 227 (to end bilingual education
and promote English-only instruction in schools) (Chavez, 2013; Durand et al., 1998; Santa Ana, 2002). The discourse regarding documented and undocumented Latino families (men, women and children) at the time would extend beyond the propositions in California and produce the myth that Chavez (2013) deems “the Latino threat”: or, the idea that Latinos are invading the United States in order to establish a Quebec-model of a linguistic and cultural stronghold within the United States. In his book Brown Tide Rising: Metaphors of Latinos in Contemporary American Public Discourse, Santa Ana (2002) dissects the metaphors in public discourse, particularly newspapers and magazines, that associated Latinos (including newcomers and established citizens, both with and without documents) with out of control natural disasters, such as floods and tidal waves, amongst other derogatory and pejorative terminology.

There were several other sociopolitical dynamics that contributed to Latinos deciding not to settle in traditional gateway communities and to move to states like Nebraska. On a larger scale, California was experiencing a severe economic recession due to the aftermath of the Cold War, during which the state relied heavily on the defense industry to sustain economic growth (Santa Ana, 2002). The economic downturn resulted in high unemployment rates and a growing hostility toward immigrant workers. Following the 1986 IRCA, employers turned to subcontractors to bring in undocumented workers to avoid prosecution, which meant that they did not readily turn to the local Latino workforce (Durand et al., 1998). Furthermore, in efforts to enforce stricter immigration laws, the US government was also investing more money in border security and administering crackdowns in busy gateway cities such as San Diego and El Paso, forcing undocumented workers to move elsewhere (Durand et al., 1998). While all U.S.-born Latinos and many immigrants had permission to live and work in the United States, many more continued to migrate throughout the nation as economic, political, and legal conditions made traditional gateway communities less ideal places for them to settle.

While legislation, politics and the economy were working together in the Southwest to construct a generally unwelcoming atmosphere for Latino workers in the late 1980s and early 1990s, sociopolitical and economic conditions were developing throughout the Midwest and the New South that would draw Latinos, both with and without documents granted through IRCA, to settle in new places. Central to this movement of
people to the state of Nebraska and to other Midwestern states like Kansas and Iowa was the restructuring of the meatpacking industry (Broadway, 1994; Gouveia et al., 2005). In efforts to move away from the high costs and union pressures of big cities, major meatpacking industries moved to the Midwest. New technology contributed to the mechanization of many of the processes involved in meatpacking: few previous skills, not even a command of English, were required for the jobs at the plants (Broadway, 1994). Hence, while Latinos were seeking work outside traditional gateway communities, the meatpacking industries in the Midwest were actively recruiting low-skilled workers who would work for low wages.

Meatpacking work was and continues to be grueling. To keep up with the thousands of heads of cattle, pig, or other animals slaughtered and packaged per day at the plants, workers withstand long hours of standing without many breaks and are expected to use dangerous equipment proficiently (Broadway, 1994; Erickson, 1994; Stull, 1994). The physical labor required to prepare and cut carcasses precisely and quickly is demanding and exhausting: workers frequently experience physical ailments such as Carpal Tunnel Syndrome and back pain with little access to comprehensive health care that extends beyond the minimal healthcare providers that are contracted by the meatpacking company (Erickson, 1994; Stull, 1994). Conditions are dangerous: the “kill floor” (Stull, 1994) is cold, often slippery, and ready with opportunities to puncture or cut oneself while working. Worker turnover is high in this business and industries continuously hire and train new workers. While there is a general sense of respect for the hard work that goes into working in meatpacking and other low-paying, high demanding jobs, these jobs are also typically stigmatized. Companies often have difficulties hiring established, working class Anglo folks to fill these jobs and they consistently turn to newcomer populations for labor (Lamphere et al., 1994).

Similar to trends in other Midwest states with meatpacking and other agricultural businesses, the number of Latinos living in Nebraska between 1970 and 1996, grew nearly 700% - from 7,177 people to 63,294 people (McHugh, 1989 in Davis, 2001, p. 43). (Prior to 1980, this population was categorized and calculated under the label “Mexican”; after 1980, the term Hispanic has been used.) Between the years 1990 and 2000, the Latino population in Nebraska more than doubled (Gouveia, et al., 2005). This demographic shift was felt statewide, particularly in rural communities: in the year 2000, nearly half of the
Latino population in Nebraska lived in cities of less than twenty-five thousand people, reversing the population decline of these towns (Gouveia, et al., 2005). The population and economic growth contributed to the urbanization of Nebraska, reclassifying the state as not rural due to the influx of industries and, subsequently, the growing Latino population. The 10 most industrialized counties of central Nebraska accounted for 86% of the Hispanic population of the region (Nebraska Statistical Handbook, 1997 in Davis, 2001). While the change has been notable in the rural areas of the state, the urban hubs of the eastern part of the state including Chesterfield (the pseudonym for the city in this study), have also seen substantial change in their Latino population during the end of the 20th century.

Receiving communities throughout Nebraska have had varied responses to the new Latino families moving in. Communities generally appreciate the new workforce and recognize the economic value that the factories and workers bring to their towns (Gouveia et al., 2005; Grey & Woodrick, 2005). Latinos and other newcomers contribute to and stimulate local economies in ways beyond laboring in factories and agriculture: they rent and buy houses, invest in new businesses, shop in local stores, eat in restaurants, and purchase services (Gouveia et al., 2005). Nevertheless, Latino populations are not immune to the effects of the Latino Threat discourse that continues to permeate the country (Chavez, 2013; Santa Ana, 2002) and the degree to which these myths are perpetuated or negated varies between and within communities. Gouveia et al. (2005) found three specific barriers to the integration of newcomers into communities in Nebraska: language, working conditions and quality of jobs, and legal status. These topics are typical scapegoats of the Latino threat discourse (Chavez, 2013; Santa Ana, 2002) and the manner in which communities respond to them can shape the experience of integration for Latino communities. For example, Fremont, Nebraska, a town north of Chesterfield, made national news in its decision to first pass the 2010 city ordinance (Ordinance 5165) that bans immigrants without documents from renting houses and then voted to uphold it in 2014 (Bergin, 2014; Davey, 2010; Hennessy-Fiske; 2014; Hinojosa, 2014). The aftermath of this decision and the divided opinions within the community created a hostile environment for Latinos, both those with and without documents. Other cities, such as Crete, have been noted for their
welcoming attitude toward Latino newcomers, fore fronting the economic development that the new workforce has brought to the town. The local school partners with the meatpacking industry to reach out to parents and provide adult education programs. Here, Latinos were characterized as being similar to previous European immigrant groups who have settled in the town and the diversity they bring to the town is viewed as an opportunity (Meier & Reinkordt, 2010; Kindschuh, 2006).

As in other places, the sociopolitical contexts surrounding Latinos in Nebraska have filtered into social institutions (e.g. schools) and have mediated their experiences of negotiating a new community (Lamphere, 1992). It is well documented in educational research that macro and micro social tensions, particularly regarding race, ethnicity and language, often contribute to inequitable learning experiences for minoritized students (Labaree, 2010; Nieto & Bode, 2012; Oakes, 2005; Spring, 2012). This is confirmed in Nebraska by a consistent gap in achievement between Hispanic and white students that has been well documented by state standardized test scores and graduation rates since the turn of the twenty-first century (England et al., 2014). Grassroots initiatives to ensure a successful educational experience for Latino students, such as the Latino Center of the Midlands (formerly known as the Chicano Awareness Center) were formed as early as 1971. The Center’s mission is: “to promote the self-sufficiency and self-determination of Heartland Latino families and community by providing bilingual, high quality social, educational, economic, and advocacy services” (Latino Center of the Midlands, 2015). The Center now provides myriad social services to the Latino community in the major city of Omaha and the surrounding areas.

Government initiatives to serve Latino interests were also founded around the same time. In 1972, the Nebraska Latino American Commission (formerly the Mexican American Commission) was established to “serve as a link between the Nebraska state government and the Hispanic/Latino community” and to “empower the Hispanic/Latino Community through a pro-active approach to issues that affect their access to education, social, political, and economic opportunities in Nebraska” (Nebraska Latino American Commission, 2011). Most recently in 2013, the Latino American Commission approached the Nebraska
Department of Education with concerns about the persistent achievement gap that appears throughout the state between Hispanic and white students. A team of researchers from the University of Nebraska (of which I was a part) was contracted to conduct a mixed-methods study about Latino achievement and promising practices in ten schools throughout the state with the largest proportional Hispanic population. Findings of this study point to a few educational practices targeted specifically at promoting equitable educational opportunities for Latino students, such as Spanish as a Heritage Language classes and dual language programs, heritage and culture clubs, and social services offered in Spanish (England et al., 2014). Other supports, like testing preparation, college readiness, and alternative education options are offered to all students and, per the administrative perspectives, are considered to benefit the achievement of Latinos de facto (England et al., 2014). Like Grey’s (1991; 1993) findings, programs that address and support characteristics that distinguish Latino students from their Anglo peers remain on the periphery in schools in Nebraska.

**Current Latino demographics in Nebraska.** Nebraska’s current Hispanic population consists of more than 178,000 people, or 9% of the general population (Pew Research, 2012). This is a 92% increase from the year 2000, (Pew Research, 2012). Mirroring national statistics, 61% of Nebraska’s Hispanic population is native-born and 39% is foreign born (Pew Research, 2011). The density of the Hispanic population varies throughout the state, with Dawson County almost a third Latino (32.9%) in 2013 and others, like Keya Paha where perhaps just a single Latino family resides (0.5% of a total population of 790). Douglas County, Lancaster County, Sarpy County, and Hall County, the state’s four most populous counties were home to 62,859, 19,010, 13,716, and 15,423 Hispanics respectively (US Census Bureau, 2013). However, the average age for Nebraska’s native-born Hispanic population is 13 while that of the foreign-born population is 35. This indicates a couple of things. First, it suggests that the native-born, mainly second generation, Latino population is present in Nebraska’s public schools. Given that 14% of Nebraska’s K-12 students are of Hispanic origin and that the average age of a native-born Latino person in Nebraska is 13, it is likely that many of these Hispanic students are native-born (Pew Research, 2011). Second, these
numbers suggest that the majority of newcomers, or the foreign-born Hispanic population, are beyond school age and are not guaranteed to be enrolled in any institution of education. The characteristics of adult learners who are enrolled in educational programs in the New Latino Diaspora will be discussed in a later section.

Language and Culture in the New Latino Diaspora

“Language is the principle means by which we conduct our social lives” (Kramsch, 2008, p. 3). The semiotic system of language that constructs, expresses, and embodies cultural reality is inherent to society and to the communities that make up society (Kramsch, 1998). Cultural and language practices are manifested and enacted in communities throughout the New Latino Diaspora on a daily basis and embody the realities of these communities in a way that is reflective of macro and micro level discourses and ideologies (Hornberger & Wang, 2008; Zentella, 2002). While Spanish and English are the languages most commonly associated with Latino communities, Latinos may speak and/or have contact with various other languages as well, such as indigenous languages from Latin America. Although Spanish is currently considered a minoritized language in the United States, its roots grow deep in American soil. Santa Ana (2002) reiterates that with the United State’s annexation of the former Mexican lands came language, property and citizenship rights to the Spanish-speaking residents of the territory. The Spanish language can also be traced back to the sixteenth century in early colonies that were settled in the state of Florida (Lipski, 2008). Thus, while the Spanish language is often (but not always) a characteristic of Latino communities throughout the U.S., including the New Latino Diaspora, it is important to recognize that it has been a part of the country’s linguistic-geographical complexion since the earliest days of colonization.

Language Ideologies and attitudes in the New Latino Diaspora. The contingency between language and culture must not be separated when describing the language practices within the New Latino Diaspora. Spanish is considered a minoritized language in the United States, spoken by about 13% of the
population, while English is the dominant language, spoken by 79% of the population (American Community Survey, 2012). Languages also embody and transmit the norms, expectations and nuanced ideologies of a particular society through formal and informal educational processes (Scollon, Wong Scollon & Jones, 2012). Thus, it is expected that the ideologies about other languages that are imbedded within a society dominated by English be disseminated throughout society through the dominant language. In her study of Latina mothers, Velázquez (2014) distinguishes between language ideologies and attitudes. Citing Spolsky (in McGroarty, 2008, p. 98) and Allport (in Garrett, 2010, p. 19), Velázquez explains that ideologies are “belief systems that determine language attitudes, judgments, and ultimately, behavior” while language attitudes are “learned disposition[s] to think, feel and behave toward a person (or object) in a particular way” (p. 136 - 137).

While the purpose of this literature review is not to identify the ideologies and attitudes imbedded in English throughout the country, it is important to point out that the ideologies and attitudes expressed in English concerning Spanish and those who speak are framed within a majority-minority context and are expressed through behaviors. Invoking a critical approach to studying bilingualism amongst Mexican-Americans, Martinez (2006) states that, “the nature of social interactions [are] engendered by a bilingual reality and [the critical approach to studying bilingualism] attempts to configure these interactions within the larger ideological constructs that sustain privilege and power in the prevailing social order” (p. 17). For example, Santa Ana (2002) explains that the language of Latinos is viewed through the metaphor of barrier. This indicates that in the United States, the English language has been naturalized as a unique form of communication that is qualitatively different from other languages: “Anything that strikes the monolingual English speaker as foreign is a ‘language’” (Santa Ana, 2002, p. 216). Thus, the popular description of Latinos in the United States as needing to overcome a language barrier implies that their language, presumably Spanish, is a hindrance to reaching the ideal, neutral status of a monolingual English speaker.

Over the past twenty years, an English-only ideology has pervaded the majority discourse about language learning and language use, despite the Lau vs. Nichols 1974 decision that stated that linguistically
diverse students are protected under the 14th Amendment to have equal access to education and that instruction in a language they do not understand (English) violates this right. According to this Supreme Court decision, these students are deserving of special instruction that permits them to learn the academic content as well as the English language. In 1998, California's Proposition 227 ended bilingual education for Spanish speakers in the state and replaced it with English-only instruction. This decision was felt nationwide (Santa Ana, 2002) and the massive coverage of the decision sparked a rhetoric that followed Latinos as they settled into new areas. More than twenty-five years after Lau, the passage of the 2002 No Child Left Behind and its focus on English instruction and English acquisition played a central role in shaping the language learning experience of diverse language learners both young and old (US Department of Education, 2015). This will be discussed more in depth in relation to adult English language learners in the next section. Language policy in the U.S. has reflected the myth that languages other than English are barriers for which minoritized peoples must overcome. As languages actively construct and promulgate culture, daily cultural acts within the New Latino Diaspora are reflective of this larger ideological context.

**Language use in the New Latino Diaspora.** The Spanish spoken in the United States is in constant contact with English, the dominant language, and given its role as a minoritized language, it is often subjected to language loss within Latino communities (Bills, 2005). Latinos living in communities in the United States live in contexts that Pratt (1991 in Garcia, 1998) labels as “contact zones”. Garcia (1998) uses Pratt's (1991) terminology of home fronts and contact zones to explain the cultural and linguistic tension that Latinos in the U.S. navigate on a daily basis. Similarly, Agar (1994) refers to this phenomenon as a “rich point”. The communities from which different social, cultural, political, economic and linguistic groups originate are referred to as “home fronts” and the arenas where their differences clash, blend or intermingle are called “contact zones” (Garcia, 1998). These tensions occur in marginalized communities and within contexts of asymmetrical relations of power; navigating these tensions require much more than knowledge of one language or the other (Garcia, 1998).

In his study of Mexican American oral, reading and writing practices in a transnational community
in Chicago, Garcia found that adults’ practices constantly intertwined with their Mexican home front (Rancho Verde, their home community in Mexico) and their reality in the United States. For example, in evening *pláticas*, the adults from several families would gather and used multiple forms of oral storytelling using emotional language to make sense of the tensions or rich points that they experienced in their daily lives (Garcia, 1998). Writing, sending, and receiving letters to and from Mexico was an important practice to not only remain in touch with relatives, but to maintain contact with certain cultural pillars that represented their home front community, like religion and agriculture (Garcia, 1998). It is critical to note that the adult women were charged with writing the vast majority of letters and if the letter was dictated to a child to write, it was nearly always a female child who wrote it (Garcia, 1998). In transnational communities, women continue to play the most integral role in Spanish language maintenance as they make critical decisions about language use in the home and negotiate many of the social tensions associated with language in the community and with their own children (Velázquez, 2008; 2014).

New technologies permit families to have consistent contact with the home front or country of origin: families can access news sources and media through the internet and can communicate frequently with relatives and friends through social media sites and internet calling. These venues also capture the contact zones in which Latinos in the U.S. live and offer a space to express these experiences. The established Latino community in the United States also ensures a steady stream of media programs targeted at Hispanic populations and broadcasted in Spanish, and also provides a space for growing Hispanic businesses, restaurants, and community organizations. Nevertheless, these practices take place in a context of constant contact with the majority culture and language of the United States, making them inherently intercultural. With regard to the new destinations of Latinos, this context can vary greatly depending on whether the settlement is located in a rural, urban or suburban community, or, anywhere in between as well as the sociocultural and political climate of the receiving community.

**Current language demographics.** In the 2012 American Community Survey, 13% of the general population reported speaking Spanish; in the same year, Pew Hispanic (2012) found that 36% of the
Hispanic population spoke only English at home, signifying that the majority (64%) of the Hispanic population also speaks a language other than English. In Nebraska this number is slightly higher: over 70% of the Hispanic population speaks a language other than English, presumably Spanish and/or other indigenous languages stemming from Latin America (American Community Survey, 2012). The predominance of Spanish and indigenous languages stemming from Latin America in Latino communities in the US has long been established; however, like all living languages, these language practices continuously and organically develop and change over time. Varying degrees of multilingualism are a common characteristic of Latinos in the United States and as a result, are a trait of communities in the New Latino Diaspora.

Of the reported 38 million Spanish-speakers in the country, more than half reported also speaking English “very well” (American Community Survey, 2012). In Nebraska, however, only 35% reported speaking English “very well”, indicating that the majority of the Hispanic population is speaking a language other than English, presumably Spanish, with more fluency and ease (American Community Survey, 2012). This is not uncommon: many Spanish speakers in the United States live in communities with predominant Latino populations that are uniquely characterized not only by the fact that Spanish and English are spoken and in constant contact with each other (and often with other languages), but also by factors such as the varying dialects of Spanish, including several varieties of U.S. Spanish, and different degrees of generation of linguistic contact that greatly influence communication practices within these communities (Bills, 2005; Lipski, 2008; Otheguy, 2008; Zentella, 2002). Such a dynamic linguistic context provides grounds for infinite possibilities of different cultural negotiation and recognition phenomena that are influenced by the unique social-geographic space of a community.

The notion of language practices, though, becomes more interesting when broken down by age. Throughout the country, 79% of young Spanish speakers, ages 5-17, reported speaking English “very well” while only 53% of those ages 18-64 claimed the same proficiency (American Community Survey, 2012). Nebraska’s statistics are similar: 76% of young Spanish speakers reported speaking English “very well” while only 43.5% of adult speakers did (American Community Survey, 2012). These numbers indicate many
realities and issues in the field of language education. On one hand, they exemplify the phenomenon of potential language loss in Spanish-speaking communities: research has found that young Spanish speakers are not developing their Spanish language skills as in depth as their English skills (MacGregor-Mendoza, 2005), partially due to the lack of formal schooling that is available to these youngsters in their heritage language or the opportunities to view Spanish use as cultural capital in the community (Velázquez, 2012). These numbers also suggest a generational divide amongst speakers. Given that the younger generation is able to develop their English skills to a greater degree, they are poised to develop language-brokering skills to become interpreters for the older generations; however, if their Spanish language skills are not maintained or developed, children may have difficulties communicating with older generations at all (MacGregor-Mendoza, 2005).

Perhaps the most obvious and glaring conclusion to be drawn by these numbers, however, is the portion of adult Spanish-speakers in the United States and in Nebraska who are actively contributing to the economic and social life of the country and state, but who are not guaranteed any kind of support to help them adjust culturally and linguistically to their new environments. Young Spanish speakers legally have access to English instruction in schools through the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (US Department of Education, 2004) that, despite issues that it generates such as language loss, will facilitate participation in society. Older Spanish speakers are more likely to be newcomers and less likely to speak English very well, yet they are also heads of households who are making imperative social, cultural, and language decisions for their families (King et al., 2008; Velázquez, 2012). Bourdieu (1991) writes that access to the dominant language permits access to the dominant culture, a culture that is fraught with an ingrained hegemony; therefore, successfully navigating the landscape of the dominant society requires one to not only know the language, but also to use the language in such a way that meets her needs and helps her overcome, or at the very least navigate, oppressive forces. Unlike children, adults do not have immediate and guaranteed access to a formal, public site of education to learn these imperative linguistic and cultural skills. Informal sites of learning that are available to adults, again, are characterized by the socio-geographical spaces of the communities in which they are founded and the prevalent ideologies of the local adult education leaders.
Latinos in Chesterfield, Nebraska

This study will look at the learning experiences of Spanish-speaking adult newcomers participating in a family literacy program in Chesterfield, Nebraska. (Chesterfield is a pseudonym for the city in this study.) Chesterfield is currently home to more than 16,000 Latinos who make up 6.3% of the city's population (US Census, 2010). Like many sites in the New Latino Diaspora, Chesterfield has also experienced an increase of the Hispanic population in a relatively short amount of time: this population nearly doubled in the span of ten years (US Census, 2000; 2010). The majority of Chesterfield’s current Hispanic community is of Mexican descent (4.7%), followed by Guatemalan (0.3%) and Puerto Rican (0.2%); the population also includes lineage from countries throughout Central and South America (US Census, 2010). 4.3% of Chesterfield’s population speaks Spanish and more than three-fourths of these speakers are between the ages of 18 and 64 (US Census, 2010). Approximately 28% of the Latino population is foreign-born (American Community Survey, 2012).

The demographic landscape of Chesterfield is distinctive within the geographical context of the New Latino Diaspora. Following the Refugee Act of 1980, Chesterfield’s refugee population began to increase (Mitrofanova, 2004; Pipher, 2002). Now formally designated as a refugee relocation site, the city is comprised of people seeking asylum from countries all over the world. In the year 2012, the state received refugees from Bhutan, Burma/Myanmar, Cuba (who also fall into the broader category of Latino), Ethiopia, Iran, Iraq, Malaysia, Somalia, Sudan and Thailand: Chesterfield was designated to receive about a third of this population (US Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2012). In many cases, the Latino population lies within close quarters with these folks, sharing neighborhoods, businesses, public spaces, social services and schools. Thus, Latinos in Chesterfield come into contact with people of multiple cultural backgrounds who have migrated to the United States for a plethora of reasons, distinguishing these experiences in Chesterfield from others in the New Latino Diaspora.

Literacy Programs for Adult English Language Learners
As demonstrated in the previous section, adult Latino newcomers, like all adult newcomers, do not have guaranteed access to educative services that will help them develop the language skills needed to navigate their new community. The services that they do have access to fall under the category of Adult Basic Education. Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs have had a long-standing, fixed position on the outskirts of American education. Referred to in the literature as the “step-child” or the “Cinderella” of education, ABE programs deal with the implications of being forgotten or ignored in the mainstream education world on a daily basis and in nearly all aspects of the program. Status, funding, and professional and curriculum development for ABE all seem to be an afterthought to education policymakers. Yet, adults throughout the country continue to enroll in programs that they perceive to help them advance in some aspect of life (typically social or economic). In 2011, more than 2 million adults were enrolled in ABE programs in the United States; of these, approximately 40% were adults enrolled in English as a Second Language programs (OCTAE, 2014). The state of Nebraska’s enrollment parallels that of the nation: of the 8,485 adults enrolled in ABE programs in 2010, 41% were English language learners (ELL) (NCES, 2010).

Adult ELL programs exist on the periphery of American education as a part of ABE and serve some of the nation’s most vulnerable adults. Determining the characteristics of a successful adult education program is imperative to taking steps in strengthening these programs and offering adult learners a high quality education. The aim of this section will be to review the characteristics of successful adult ELL programs. To do this, this section will first situate the adult English language learner experience within the general context of Adult Basic Education. Then, it will analyze the characteristics of successful literacy interventions of ELLs of all ages and will posit the implication that this research has for adult students. Finally, it will consider the implications for research in a family literacy program in Chesterfield, Nebraska that centers on an adult ELL program.

**Adult Basic Education and English Language Learners**

Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs have had a standing yet marginalized presence in the United States since the mid 20th century. Following World War II, efforts to channel human resources into
economic productivity resulted in corporate adult education programs sponsored by businesses such as General Electric and The Ford Foundation (Rose, 1991). The Adult Education Act of 1966 marked the first federal intervention in ABE; as a result, states could apply for federal funds that could then be used to support state-sponsored, corporate or community ABE programs (Rose, 1991). Most recently, ABE has been incorporated into federal legislation under the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, which is Title II of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2015). To obtain federal funding, states have always needed to meet certain requirements, a precedence that has carried over to current practice.

Since the passage of this Act, a different, more formalized approach for ABE has been felt with regard to how ABE is presented and discussed at the federal level. Within the time of writing this literature review (from April of 2014 to November of 2014), the federal government had completely revamped its Department of Adult Education and Literacy (DAEL) website. It now includes updated statistical and financial data about its programs presented in professional info graphics as well as profiles of the adult education target population in each state (OCTAE, 2014). However, this newer, more professional attention to ABE at the national level has not been reflected in the federal government’s financial investments in these programs. In 2014, the federal government invested $577,667,000 dollars in ABE grants, which is actually about $18,000 less than what was appropriated for these grants in 2011 (OCTAE, 2014). Current budget proposals do not project that the 2015 federal budget will increase by much, indicating that although the federal government continues to recognize the importance of these programs to its residents in most need of access to education, this importance is not reflected in budgetary decisions (OCTAE, 2014).

ABE has maintained a wide purpose: to provide for adults who need to acquire basic skills necessary to function in society (Rose, 1991). Programs are meant to serve individuals who: are over the age of 16; who are not currently enrolled in school; who lack a high school diploma or, who lack the basic skills to function effectively in the workplace and in their daily lives (U.S. Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, 2014). Although the focus historically has mainly been on acquiring print literacy and basic education skills, over time funding for ABE has expanded to include high school completion programs and
English language learning classes (Rose, 1991). To illustrate the ground that ABE can cover, federal grants can be used for workplace literacy services, family literacy services, and English literacy and civics education programs (OCTAE, 2014). The expansive forms of ABE programs, though, generally have been developed to center on individualistic learning for economic purposes as opposed to active citizenship and the common good. Cuban (2009) traces this shift to the Reagan era during which social safety nets were weakened and replaced with a contract culture; ABE programs were charged with “being shock absorbers of these neo-liberal reforms and economic launching pads for the new service-based economy and privatized public services” (p. 8). Employability was, and still overtly is, the desired outcome for adults participating in ABE programs.

In the U.S. Department of Education, ABE is housed in the Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education (OCTAE) under the Division of Adult Education and Literacy (DAEL). The DAEL states its purpose is to: “promote programs that help American adults get the basic skills they need to be productive workers, family members, and citizens” (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Current ABE programs across the country have been sculpted by the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA), which included the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (US Department of Education, 2013). The 2003 reauthorization of this act, in stride with the political cadence of the No Child Left Behind Act, called for creating accountability for results in ABE programs through testing and for funding researched-based ABE programs, a convoluted concept to be explored later on. The act’s focus on production symbolizes a philosophical shift in ABE from an understanding of human potential to one of human capital (Cuban, 2009). The legislation that has shaped educational programs for adults over time has a clear economic literacy sponsorship that is largely self-serving (Brandt, 2001).

The implications of the 2014 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) have yet to be felt in the ABE field. WIOA reauthorizes the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) with several major revisions. According to the OCTAE’s website, the department will ensure that “federally funded training programs are singularly focused on getting more Americans—particularly those hardest hit by the twists and turns of global competition, technological changes, economic isolation, or inadequate education
opportunities—ready to work with marketable skills” (OCTAE, 2014). WIOA, together with President Obama’s memorandum titled Ready to Work: Job-Driven Training and American Opportunity, has placed a heavy emphasis on education for career readiness and marketable skills. WIOA will require states to submit a Unified State Plan or a Combined State Plan that outlines a four-year strategy and that that includes the strategic vision and goals of the State and the operational elements that (OCTAE, 2014). The Act encourages states to establish common performance measures across core adult programs and to strengthen alignment between adult education, postsecondary education, and employers. It also establishes thirteen considerations to be used in awarding grants and contracts to local providers, which are outlined as: “an increased emphasis on alignment of activities with regional needs identified in local plans under Title I; serving individuals with disabilities; instructional activities based on rigorous research; effective use of technology; activities that promote integrated education and training; and coordination with education, training, employers, and social service providers to promote career pathways” (OCTAE, 2014). It also requires states to invest in leadership development activities in four areas: development of career pathways; establishment of high quality professional development programs to improve instruction; 3) technical assistance based on rigorous research; and evaluation and dissemination of information about promising practices within the state (OCTAE, 2014). The rhetoric of the newly minted WIOA is reflective of the neoliberal ideology that frames education as a good to be used in the free markets and that infiltrates other federal initiatives like the Race to the Top Fund and general conversations about education.

Yet, the ABE programs that are targeted with these expectations remain on the periphery of American education, receive limited funding and support, and serve some of the country’s most marginalized adults. Given that the federal funding allotted for the new 2015 WIOA initiatives has not substantially increased, it is unlikely that these programs will receive the economic and human capital that they need to provide adults an educational experience that fully meets students’ and governmental goals. Cuban (2009) characterizes ABE programs as borderlands: spaces of learning that exist in-between formal programs funded by government policies and marginalized people’s transactions of educational, linguistic and cultural resources. Because policy does not reflect the true educational and literacy needs of the people
it serves, it does not come close to adequately addressing them. Marginalized learners are not merely kept on the fringes of society, they may even be on the outskirts of the programs that are meant to be of service to them, as is the case of Purcell-Gates’ (1995) study of Jenny, a mother who did not read or write. Purcell-Gates (1995) found that Jenny’s print illiteracy prevented her from accessing not only community resources, but also the activities that were offered in an early literacy center. Jenny eventually learned to read and write by doing it for her own personal needs and purposes: activities that the researcher imposed on her, which often aligned with a seemingly meaningful context like employment, were not successful (Purcell-Gates, 1995).

English language learners are one group of adult students who are especially affected by learning in the borderland: they find themselves taking classes in a sociopolitical context that economically values immigrants but socially views them through a deficit lens, as “problems” that need to be “fixed” (Cuban & Stromquist, 2009; Santa Ana, 2002). Furthermore, ELLs generally learn from teachers who have varying and levels of preparation for teaching English as a second language to adults and with a curriculum that has a limited scope for teaching literacy, (Crandall, 1993). Perry and Hart (2012) found that teachers of English to adult refugees felt like they needed training that specifically covered areas like pedagogical content knowledge curriculum and lesson plans and teaching materials. The teachers in this study stated that, despite their professional training in other fields, they had little idea of what to teach and how to teach and that they did not have access to experts in areas like language acquisition or reading and writing (Perry & Hart, 2012).

Adult ELL courses are more likely to be attended by women newcomers and refugees than men (Cuban & Stromquist, 2009). As referenced earlier, mothers play a central role to fostering language maintenance and in making decisions about their family’s language policy (King et al., 2008; Velázquez, 2012; 2014). Nevertheless, the formal policies in place often ignore the needs of this particular group, such as self-esteem, time commitment and cost for childcare and transportation, by labeling these needs as personal as opposed to programmatic/structural barriers (Cuban & Stromquist, 2009). In a quantitative analysis of Hispanic adults’ reasons for deterring to participate in ESL programs, Hayes (1989) found four
factors that deterred Hispanic adults from participating in adult ELL programs: self/school incongruence, low self-confidence, lack of access to classes, and situational constraints. Her findings generated three types of adults. Adults least likely to deter from taking English classes were women who had lived in the United States for at least six years, who had at least a primary education, and who had elementary-aged children. A second group was likely to deter because of situational constraints: the majority (65.6%) of this group had young children and a somewhat lower percentage (40%) were unemployed. The third group had the largest proportion of women (72.2%) and was characterized as being unemployed and having young children. For these people, low self-confidence was the most significant barrier to their participation in ESL. Hence, planning for language instruction is only a small piece of the puzzle for adult ELL classes and programs that do not account for external and personal factors that affect students are not reaching potential participants and may not be attending to actual participants’ comprehensive needs.

Precisely because they exist in the context of the borderland, adult ELL classes do not have to succumb to the fate that educational policies outline. A lack of oversight and resources grants them a sort of autonomy in meeting language learning and print literacy goals. The fact that ABE programs are considered the “Cinderellas” of education, largely left unclothed and unfed by the system, forces them to use survival, borderland logics and strategies, similar to those that their students use, in order to develop and to mold pedagogies that can reflect learning needs while teaching the language and literacy skills needed to gain access to and to navigate the sociopolitical and economic context of the United States (Cuban, 2009). Although the general research field of ELL instruction continues to grow, its main focus tends to be on the language acquisition of elementary ELL students; the research about successful language and literacy specifically pedagogies for adult ELLs is limited. While this peripheral position in education is indeed disadvantageous, adult ELL programs can be viewed as positioned to benefit from the existing literature about the language and literacy learning of elementary and secondary ELLs. Their marginal context could actually permit certain flexibility in implementing theory into practice and, in turn, reflecting and creating new theory. The borderland adult ELL classroom also serves as a rich research site where teachers,
researchers, and students can work together to co-construct curriculum, pedagogies and learning activities that closely reflect the needs and characteristics of the students (Rogers & Fuller, 2007).

Language, Literacy and Adult English Language Learners

The attributes of “successful” ABE programs for ELLs are not readily accessible in the literature, possibly due to the fact that governmental expectations set for these programs revolve around standardized test scores and completion rate, as opposed to in depth studies about the adult ELL learning experience, and because limited research has been conducted about the language and literacy learning of adult ELL. Thus, this section begins to develop a theoretical framework to define high quality adult ELL programs that are situated in the nexus of several areas of research: education for adult English language learners, the use of the first language in the ELL classroom (ages birth to adult), and literacy learning. An analysis of key findings from these fields is imperative in describing the learning that happens in adult language learning programs and in paving the way for research to extend, confirm or disprove these findings.

Attributes of the adult ELL classroom. As reviewed in the previous section, ABE in the United States has ample room for improvement in order to be moved from the periphery of education and closer to the center. This has not gone unnoticed by researchers. One piece critical to this transformation process is the professionalization and professionalism of the adult ELL literacy workforce (Crandall, 1993). Instructors of adult ELL courses face equally difficult challenges in the borderlands. Due to funding issues, full-time positions are always scarce, requiring instructors to juggle part-time work in different programs. Many instructors wear multiple professional hats in the positions that they do hold and turnover rates in the field are high (Crandall, 1993). Crandall (1993) proposes that adult ELL education would be strengthened with through professionalization of the field, defined as status enhancement through certification or credentialing, contracts and tenure. While it is important that the professionalization meet the unique needs of the adult ELL educations, such as recognizing that most instructors come to the field via non-traditional pathways,
this change would situate the adult ELL teacher on par with K-12 educators in the ecology of American schooling.

Since the early 1990s, TESOL (2008) has outlined eight standards for adult ESL/EFL teachers that are categorized into eight domains: planning, instructing, assessing, [incorporating] identity and context, language proficiency, learning, content, commitment, and professionalism. TESOL (2002) also produced a book that described the standards for a high quality adult ESL program, which adds in depth indicators to these eight areas. However, more recent studies of teachers in ABE programs evidence that the trend the professionalization of adult ESL teachers has not changed in the twenty-two years that has passed since Crandall’s (1993) study (Anderson et al., 2009; McKenna & Fitzpatrick, 2004; Park & Hart, 2012; Sandman-Hurley, 2008; Ziegler et al., 2009). Most recently, Sun (2010) found that adult ESL teachers still list low pay, limited benefits, lack of job security, low status of ABE/ESL teachers in the education field, and lack of opportunities for professional development as main concerns.

Crandall (1993) warns that the professionalization of a field does not equate with the professionalism of the educators within that field, which she distinguishes as professional practice, involvement in program development, and continued learning. Instructors of adult ELLs need particularly to focus on gaining a special knowledge of theory and practice in first language (L1) and second language (L2) literacy, cross-cultural awareness, and the skills for teaching ESL literacy to adults in culturally appropriate ways (Crandall, 1993). Wong Fillmore and Snow (2000) argue that ELL teachers need a thorough understanding of how language figures in education, and for that reason they must receive systematic and intensive preparation in educational linguistics. To teach students who are learning English, teachers must have knowledge about the basic units of language, regular and irregular forms of language and how they relate, how lexicon and acquired and structured, orthography, and an understanding of vernacular and academic language, amongst other attributes of language (Wong Fillmore and Snow, 2000).

*Curriculum and assessment in adult ELL classrooms.* A major myth in the field of English
language learning that must also be countered in adult ELL is that children acquire a second language more rapidly than adults (McLaughlin, 1992). While children might show more motivation to learn English in a school setting (which they attend for seven hours a day), research has consistently proven that children perform less well than do adolescents and adults in all areas except pronunciation (Asher & Price, 1967 in McLaughlin, 1992). Adults have something that children do not when it comes to learning a second language: a longer lifetime of knowing and using language. Brandt (2001), Purcell-Gates (1995), and Rogers and Fuller (1997), amongst others, illuminate how adults’ literacies are deeply integrated in sociocultural realities, making it critical that adult ELL educators’ knowledge of literacy includes an understanding of literacy as a sociocultural phenomenon and integrates adults’ funds of knowledge into the language learning process (Gee, 2012; Moll et al., 1992; Street, 1995). Norton and Toohey (2001) suggest that because adult language learners bring with them multiple identities, a wide-range of potential, and a vision of belonging to and participating in an imagined future community context, teachers should utilize materials that meet the specific needs of the adult language learners in their particular contexts. Ananyeva (2014) argues that teachers can invoke a student-driven pedagogy in the adult ELL classroom that is aligned with sociocultural language learning research if they are not tied to a centralized, common curriculum. She suggests that teachers permit students to use the centralized curriculum and assessments as a basis for conversation about learning activities and assessments that would better match their lives and then implement these ideas as relevant (Ananyeva, 2014).

Recognizing that ABE teachers’ knowledge about cognitive literacy skills (reading and writing) and sociocultural literacy learning are generally limited, that programs work within the constraints of limited funding and materials, and that the funding they do receive often depends greatly on the outcomes of traditional, high stakes test, Giouroukakis and Honigsfeld (2010) claim that teachers can use culturally and linguistically responsive practices (such as culturally relevant texts, performance-based assessments, pop culture references, and students’ first language) to bridge students’ abilities to the mandatory tests. Park (2011) found that incorporating narrative writing in adult ELL classes created a space to incorporate the
transnational realities that the adult students were experiencing outside of the class. Santos et al. (2011) found that learners’ interpretations of health-related texts promoted English language learning and engaged learners in critical conversations around texts. Wood (2011) found that connecting oral and written storytelling practices to topics about childrearing and themes like fear and sharing permitted “fitting the curriculum to the learners and not the other way around” (p. 245).

Ewert (2014) suggests incorporating meaningful content learning tasks in adult ESL classes that integrate varying language domains. She offers a few examples of these types of tasks, such as a jigsaw activity with official court documents, but she also encourages teachers to draw upon their discipline knowledge and to ask their students to generate content for these activities. Furthermore, Ewert (2014) recognizes that adults are often hesitant to engage in these types of learning experiences and states that, “students may need to be informed explicitly about the efficacy of this approach to language learning, especially for future plans that involve high levels of literacy and content knowledge, and that attention to language concerns will be embedded in these practices as is necessary to achieve success in learning and communicating that learning with others” (p. 276). Adults bring various learning experiences with them into the classroom along with goals for learning English: it is important for teachers of adult ELLs to acknowledge how such activities may vary from past learning experiences and to articulate how they will help the students achieve their goals and acquire higher levels of English proficiency.

Besides teacher preparation and pedagogies, other attributes of the adult ELL classes need to be tended to in order for the structural aspects of the program to provide quality education. Because of funding requirements, adult ELL classes are normally adhered to using a central “research-based” curriculum for teaching and standardized tests to show “progress” (Crandall, 1993). These materials are normalized to a population that does not reflect the myriad characteristics of adult ELL student; they do not captured the nuanced and complex language learning experiences that happen in these classrooms (Crandall, 1993; Cuban & Stromquist, 2009). Furthermore, adult ELL programs are on tight schedules to demonstrate results despite research that shows that even young ELLs need seven to eight years to master the academic
English language (Jimenez & Teague, 2007). Cummins (2000) argues that when it comes to adult English learners, we do not even have a clear picture of what we are assessing. Traditional evaluations of the different language domains (speaking, listening, reading and writing) attempt to measure language proficiency in each of these areas through decontextualized assessments (Cummins, 2000). Hill and Parry (2002) argue that traditional reading tests play a dominant role in adult classrooms and undermine the communicative properties that are inherent to reading. Reading tests do a poor job of permitting language learners to exhibit: their knowledge of the writing system and the linguistic forms used in text, their possession and application of background knowledge, and their ability to engage in reciprocal exchange of the text being read. Communicative competence, or one's language ability as it is situated within an interactional, real-life framework of language use, is much more difficult to assess and attempts to do so often become watered down and context-reduced (Cummins, 2000). Riddiford and Joe (2010) found that English learners often have difficulty negotiating culturally appropriate content in particular speech acts in the workplace, even when they are able to identify the semantic features and formula required.

Understanding what communicative competence means for adults who live transnational lives and who have myriad purposes for learning English is a complex phenomenon. More research is needed about the English language development among adolescent and adult language learners to better understand how long it takes adult to reach this proficiency.

**Use of L1 in the ELL classroom.** An English-only perspective has dominated the popular parlance of ELL education at all levels since the early 20th century and has most recently been promulgated by the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which, amongst other things, increased pressure on public schools to demonstrate accountability of student learning through testing and the rapid acquisition of English for speakers of different languages (Auerbach, 1993; U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Adult ELLs who participate in programs that demand an English-only approach to learning find these programs to be inaccessible: the exclusion of their life experiences and language resources reinforces a sense of powerlessness, which may lead to dropping out or disengagement (Auerbach, 1993). However,
when the students’ first language (L1) is incorporated into instruction, the opposite is true. Language learning is facilitated and reduces anxiety (Auerbach, 1993). In their review of the empirical research concerning first-language oral proficiency and second-language literacy (defined as reading and writing skills), Geva and Genesee (2006) found that phonological awareness in a child’s first language predicted his/her English word reading and pseudo-word decoding skills. First-language oral-proficiency did not adversely affect any of the cognitive literacy skills associated with reading and writing.

Incorporating the L1 into adult ELL classrooms not only facilitates the actual language learning process, it places the adult students’ funds of knowledge (Moll, et. al., 1992) at the center of classroom learning and makes the notion of language regulation central to learning English (Auerbach, 1993). The power therein lies in the adult to decide when to use English and for what purpose. This reflects the decisions that multilingual adults face daily. Adult women immigrants, many who are mothers, constitute a large portion of adult ELL classes and are considered the main creators of a family language policy about language uses in their homes (Cuban & Stromquist, 2009; King et al., 2008; Velázquez, 2012; 2014). A family language policy is defined as “what families actually do with language in day-to-day interactions; their beliefs and ideologies about language and language use; and their goals and efforts to shape language use and learning outcomes” (King et al., 2008, p. 909). King et al.’s (2008) study found that middle class families tended to have additive bilingual family language policies. While more research is needed specially about family language policies amongst working class adult ELLs, trends in heritage language preservation show that communities wish to foster L1 development, but often lack the resources to do so in the face of pressures by the dominant language group.

Family language policies are important factors in the maintenance and development of L1 in individuals, families and communities, particularly in contexts like that of the United States where non-English languages are constantly threatened by the hegemonic imperialism of monolingual, English-only ideologies (King et al., 2008). Valuing parents’ first language in the ELL classroom is a key way to recognize their family language policies, whether they are overt or covert, and the complex negotiation they experience with language in their homes and communities. Auerbach (1989) writes that one of the principal
aspects of family literacy programs, which often intersect with adult ELL programs, is to support the
development of home language and culture. Adult ELL literacy programs can do this by investigating home
language use and family literacy practices, exploring cultural issues such as children's attitudes toward the
L1, and validating culture-specific literacy forms (Auerbach, 1989). This integration of the adults' first
language and imbedded cultural elements not only facilitates the learning of English, but it also recognizes
and integrates the various literacy sponsors of adult literacy that extend beyond the economic sponsors
determined by the dominant society (Brandt, 2001).

**Literacy in the ELL classroom.** All too often, English acquisition is associated with a narrowly
defined notion of English literacy (Auerbach, 1993). Literacy skills, especially in ELL curriculum, often
reference a set of cognitive skills associated with reading and writing that can be taught universally and
independently (Alverman & McLean, 2007; Auerbach, 1993; Gee, 2012; Street; 1995). Research in the field
of literacy has expanded this notion to situate literacy as a social practice embedded in daily life as a
phenomenon generated by social contexts (Alverman & McLean, 2007; Heath, 1983; Moll et al., 1992;
Street, 1995). Coined as the *New Literacy Studies*, this approach “attempts to understand literacy in terms
of concrete social practices and to theorize it in the ideologies in which different literacies are embedded”
(Gee, 2012, p. 76; Street, 1995; The New London Group, 1996). (This body of research will be discussed at
length in the following section concerning the research on family literacy.) Research amongst adolescents
and adult learners confirms that literacies outside of the school setting are integral to daily doings. In her
seminal study of literacy practices in American lives over time, Brandt (2001) demonstrated the integral
connection between literacy and the changing attributes of work and community. In her work with immigrant
adolescents, Sarroub (2002; 2007) illuminates social literacy practices that are closely connected to intimate
cultural practices, such the muhathara discussions attended by Yemeni girls, and day-to-day events, such
as ordering mayonnaise in a fast food restaurant.

Despite the richness and relevancy of sociocultural literacies, they are not typically reflected in the
curriculum or assessments of adult ELL classes (Cummins, 2000; Genesee & Riches, 2006; Hawkins,
However, Genesee & Riches (2006) found that school-aged ELLs perform best in an interactive instructional environment in which learning is indirect or mediated by social interaction. This framework gives students the opportunity to be active participants in the learning process and to take control of their own literacy practices (Genesee & Riches, 2006). This learning model permits space for the notion of literacy to be expanded. Hawkins’ (2004) study demonstrates how young ELLs’ literacy practices are integrally social and reflective of their socialization into a new community of practice, where multiple literacies and languages are needed to be successful. Hawkins (2004) claims that narrow looking at English acquisition in the content areas blinds educators to the other skills that are necessary to English language learning.

The interactive model for learning, unlike the whole language approach, also permits a degree of direct instruction that ELL students need in order to be recognized as legitimate learners in the institution of American education (Hawkins, 2004; Jimenez & Teague, 2007). Jimenez and Teague (2007) state that teachers of ELL students must teach explicitly about the language expected of students during lessons and must make it clear what the norms are for discourse and social transactions in the classroom. They must also be explicit about culturally and discipline-specific abstract concepts that are embedded in learning activities. The authors also add that in order for adolescent students to be successful in navigating the educational terrain of American schools, parents must understand the responsibilities that their children are expected to fulfill (Jimenez & Teague, 2007). In adult ELL courses, teachers should be explicit about all of the aforementioned aspects of education, as well as the expected responsibilities of the adult students (Auerbach, 1983).

Implications for Research in Family Literacy in Chesterfield, Nebraska

In the OCTAE’s (2014) report titled *Tapping Potential: Profile of Adult Education Target Population [in] Nebraska*, 39,354 adults, or 2% of the state’s population, are identified as not speaking English well and are considered targeted candidates for ABE. 74% of these adults had no high school credentials (OCTAE, 2014). Eighty-one percent of the adults were women that did not speak English well were not in the
workforce; of these, 72% were Hispanic. Forty-nine percent of the adults were women that did not speak English well and they were also unemployed; of these, 67% were Hispanic. Contrary to the other numbers, only thirty-eight percent of the adults who did not speak English well were women and were employed; of these women, 78% were Hispanic. Accepting that communicative competence in English is a cultural capital needed to successfully navigate the contact zones in which transnational families live, including the workplace, there is a substantial population in Nebraska that would benefit from attending adult ELL classes.

Understanding the intersect between adult ELL education, the use of L1 in the ELL classroom and literacy learning in the ELL classroom provides a framework through which to study the site of this dissertation study: a local family literacy program in Chesterfield, Nebraska which focuses on adult English language learners under the pretense that strengthening adults’ knowledge of the dominant language and school practices will benefit the children. Adult students in this program are identified as newcomers or refugees, many who are Spanish-speakers, and whom have children enrolled in the local school district. The literature in this section will be used in tandem with that of the following section on family literacy to situate this particular educational site within the literature.

Family Literacy

The field of family literacy is expansive and encompassing. Essentially it seeks to understand more thoroughly what its name implies: families’ practices of literacies. However, there is a multitude of motivating factors behind researchers’ and educators’ eagerness to learn about the details of these literacies and how they are enacted at home and in institutions of learning. By the end of the twentieth century, a clear strand of research had been established confirming the impact of the home environment on young children’s success in school (Brooks-Gunn, 2004 & Sidle Fuligni). Learning about the home environment became accepted as a way to better understand students’ learning needs and to give insights as to how educators and schools might learn from families to better support students. As a result, the family also came to be viewed as a site for literacy intervention. The resulting initiatives have mostly targeted families whose home
literacy practices perceivably do not match those of school: families who are low-income, of minoritized backgrounds, and have limited reading and writing skills in English. Immigrant populations are a typically targeted group.

The advancement of the field of family literacy is contingent on the development of new research that captures the changing dynamics of families, schools and the social contexts in which they are all embedded. In efforts to identify gaps in the research and to identify areas of need in the field, the following section presents a review of the literature in the field of family literacy. To select the pieces of literature reviewed in this section, I first conducted a search of the most recent literature reviews in the field (Compton-Lilly et. al, 2012; Hull & Schultz, 2001; McCarthey, 2000). The findings of these authors led me to the study of the theoretical underpinnings and the foundational research studies of the field. Empirical studies were then reviewed by reading both the first and second editions of The Handbook of Family Literacy (Wasik, 2004; 2012), by searching major electronic databases, and by analyzing the reference sections of articles in search of studies aligned to my specific research interests concerning Latino families and family literacy. A total of 186 pieces of literature were reviewed: 22 books, 112 book chapters, 46 journal articles and 6 websites were arranged in an analytical review matrix that delineated the claims, research design and questions, findings and implications of each study. This matrix paints a picture of the general history and current state of the field and illuminates gaps in the research that will inform a hypothesis for situating my own research of family literacy in the field.

Theoretical Underpinnings of Family Literacy

Since its inception, the field of family literacy has been intricately situated in the interrelatedness between context and language and literacies. Hull and Schultz (2001) trace the theoretical foundations of family literacy back to the work of psychologists who were particularly interested in the role of language and literacy in mediating how humans interact with the world. Particular psychologists noted for their work in this area include Lev Vygotsky (1978; 1986), Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole (1981; Scribner, 1984), and Urie Brofenbrenner (1979). Vygotsky theorized that there is an interrelationship between language and thought,
making possible the connection between individual cognition and the social world: language mediates between thought, interaction, and action (as cited in Hull & Schultz, 2001). In his empirical work with Alexander Luria, he found (albeit through biased methodology) that cultural change, such as being immersed in a school environment, affects cognition. In their ethnographic study of the Vai people in Liberia, Scribner and Cole (1981; Scribner 1984) found that executed literacy practices were greatly determined by their context, had a clear social meaning, and were seen in three metaphors: literacy as adaptation (functional), literacy as power (individual and group advancement), and literacy as state of grace (literacy endows special virtues).

Similarly, the social psychologist Urie Brofenbrenner (1979) developed the Ecology of Human Development model, illustrating the numerous societal influences on a child’s entire development, including language and literacy. Brofenbrenner’s (1979) model nests the different ecological systems of a child, which range from the immediate microsystems to the broad, ideological macrosystems within one another and shows their numerous and complex interactions. Mikhail Bakhtin’s (Holquist, 1990) notion of heteroglossia has been used in the field (McCarthey, 2009; Monzó & Rueda, 2009) to connect the ideas of language, social context, and resulting literacies: when invoking language skills, people express the multiple voices of those before them and those around them.

The work of social theorists Michel Foucault (1970; 1977) and Pierre Bourdieu (1982) have also influenced the structure of, as well as research and practices in, the field of family literacy (Kainz & Aikens, 2007; Maguire et al., 2005). In The Order of Things, Foucault (1970) unveils the latticework of signs that constitutes the social structure: a structure that has been historically constructed and continuously perpetuated by the most linguistically and economically powerful members of society. Foucault (1977) illustrates the symbolic power that social institutions, like schools, yield over individuals and society. In both books, language is the medium through which the ideas and ideals of the state are articulated, put into practice, and eventually embodied by people, transferring the symbol into practice. Bourdieu (1982) theorizes about one’s habitus, or set of dispositions inculcated over time, which incline individual’s to act and react in certain ways. According to Bourdieu (1982), a person’s habitus essentially regulates his/her
linguistic characteristics and use(s) of language; how these characteristics compare to a society’s notion of a legitimate language will determine his/her access to the linguistic marketplace and his/her ability to use language to access and exchange cultural capital for social advancement.

These theoretical underpinnings have formed the family literacy agenda to be twofold. On one hand it seeks to research the processes by which family members develop and employ literacy skills within a social space. On the other hand, it also views the family as a site of intervention for developing literacy skills that yield capital in the linguistic marketplace.

**Foundational Studies in Family Literacy**

It is important to recognize that the foundational studies in family literacy were and are a part of a bigger movement in the literacy world known as the *The New Literacy Studies* that began during the 1980s and 1990s and was formally conceived by the New London Group (1996). The New Literacy Studies is a movement that challenges the traditional view of literacy as the ability to read and write that functions as an asocial cognitive skill (Gee, 2012). Instead, it seeks to replace the traditional notion of literacy with a sociocultural approach and to “extend the idea and scope of literacy pedagogy to account for the context of our culturally and linguistically diverse and increasingly globalized societies for the multifarious cultures that interrelate and the plurality of texts that circulate… …Literacy pedagogy now must account for the burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies” (The New London Group, 1996, p.61; Gee, 2012).

Street (1995) envisions an ideological model of literacy that “understands [the technical and cognitive skills of] reading and writing as they are encapsulated within cultural wholes and within structures of power” (p.161). Street (1995) employs the notion of literacy practices that refer both to the behavior and conceptualizations related to the use of reading and writing; they are larger systems created by literacy events within a community. He is noted for his arguments for ‘local literacies’, which describe how preexisting social formations in a particular place could serve as important receptors or even catalysts for literacy development (Street 1997). Brandt and Clinton (2002), however, caution that this paradigm has
“created methodological and conceptual impasses that make it hard to account fully for the workings of literacy in local contexts” particularly because literacy in use is not invented by those who use it and “more often than not serves multiple interests, incorporating individual agents and their locales into larger enterprises that play out away from the immediate scene” (p. 338). These authors claim that literacy is always locally manifested, as opposed to locally constructed, and has transcontextualized and transcontextualizing potentials (Brandt & Clinton, 2002). Thus, it is important to recognize not only what people do with literacy, but what literacy is doing with people (Brandt & Clinton, 2002). Many studies in family literacy reflect the flexible and growing conceptualization of New Literacy Studies.

A few particular research studies published during this time frame are considered greatly influential to the New Literacy Studies and foundational to the development to the field of family literacy: Heath (1983), Taylor (1983), Moll et al. (1992) and Purcell-Gates (1995). In her review of the literature, Compton-Lilly (2010) writes that these studies are the most cited in the field. This section provides a brief summary of each of these foundational studies and their contributions to family literacy.

In her ethnographic work published in *Ways with Words: Language, Life and Work in Communities and Classrooms*, Shirley Brice Heath (1983) found that children growing up in three different Appalachian communities had very different experiences with language and literacy at home and in the community. For nine years, Heath studied the working class communities of Roadville and Trackton and the middle class community of Maintown. Each of the families exhibited literacies that were integral to their daily lives, but that aligned with the school’s notion of literacy to varying degrees. The practices of the working class European American families in Roadville included activities such as reading before bedtime and writing recipe cards and letters. The literacy practices of the African American families in Trackton tended to be centered on social activities and included reading the newspaper aloud and writing notes for memory support. Mainville residents’ ideologies and activities are tightly linked to the promotion of schooling: schedules resembled those of school and mothers' talk reflected the expectations of school. Heath (1983) worked closely with teachers and children to embed ethnographic methods into the teaching and learning
process so that students and teachers could learn more about their extensive literacies and how to use them as a foundation for learning in school.

Denny Taylor’s (1983) ethnographic work followed six white middle class families who had at least one young child who was identified as successfully learning to read and write. Her book *Family Literacy: Young Children Learning to Read and Write* follows these families for three years to document the familial literacy practices and the children’s development. Taylor (1983) found that parents’ histories affected their literacy expectations and interactions with children, which is reflective of Bakhtin’s notion of heteroglossia (Holquist, 1990). For example, parents with pleasant experiences learning to read wished to replicate those for their child while those with unpleasant experiences sought to provide the opposite experience for their children. Literacy became the mediator of experience for families and school literacy practices became naturally folded into families’ lives, often unnoticed or unplanned. Children began to mimic older sibling’s literacy behaviors, pick up books or play with writing in their free time, and even imitate the note-writing practices of their parents (Taylor, 1983). Taylor posits that in schools, we cannot teach children on an individual level the intrapersonal processes that they have never experienced on a social level as interpersonal processes of functional utility in their everyday lives. In order to facilitate learning, it is critical to learn more about the ways that children from a variety of social settings initiate, absorb, and synthesize the educational influences in their environments (Taylor, 1983).

Luis Moll, Cathy Amanti, Deborah Neff, and Norma Gonzalez’s (1992) ethnographic work focused on learning about the home experiences of Latino families in efforts to shed light on how schooling practices could be more congruent with and reflective of the funds of knowledge that students bring with them to school. By entering the home, the researchers sought to study how household members use their funds of knowledge in dealing with changing, and often difficult, social and economic circumstances. They focused on “how families developed social networks that interconnect them with their social environments and how these social relationships facilitate the development and exchange of resources, including knowledge, skills, and labor, that enhance the households’ ability to survive or thrive” (Moll et. al, 1992, p. 132). The researchers worked with classroom teachers to conduct the home studies and unveil students’ funds of
knowledge and then to use these findings to inform classroom practices. The teachers worked closely with
the students to generate science unit about Mexican candy that reflected the knowledge they brought with
them to school, incorporated parents in the classroom, and made authentic connections to school learning.
The authors state that learning about students’ funds of knowledge is a more precise manner by which to
understand the learning context of students because it focuses on strategic knowledge and related activities
essential in households’ functioning, development and well-being (Moll et al., 1992).

In stark contrast to the prior studies, Victoria Purcell-Gates’ (1995) book Other People’s Words: the
Cycle of Low Literacy tells the story of a child who has grown up in a home with parents who identify as non
print-literate. Purcell-Gates works intensely with both six-year-old Donny and his mother Jenny to build their
reading and writing skills. She finds that the family’s daily practices are dominated by the Discourse of non-
literacy and attempts to integrate practices from the Discourse of literacy were at odds with these ways of
being. (Gee (2012, p. 158) conceptualizes Discourse (with a capital D) as “a socially accepted way of using
language and other symbolic expressions to signal a socially meaningful role”.) Purcell-Gates (1995)
includes striking examples of the Discourse of non-literacy. In response to the researcher’s request to Jenny
to write words as she hears them and to read her own writing, Jenny exclaims, “Why I ain’t ever read my
own words before! See, I cain’t write.” (p.102). At another point in the study, Jenny asks Purcell-Gates if she
knows anything about “a big building that has lots of books in it”, which she has heard is called a library
(p.115). Donny’s notions of the purposes of reading and writing are akin to those of his parents: his primary
use of paper and pencils is for building and he is quick to negate mainstream “applied” literacy tasks.
Purcell-Gates (1995) forefronts the need to study differences as opposed to deficits in regards to family
literacy and states that literacy practices need to be functional for these families and introduced into their
households by them.

The foundational studies of the field point to the importance of the social context of the home and
its imperative role in shaping different literacies. All four studies demonstrate the different ways in which
families generate literacies that are important to them and how they utilize traditional literacies (reading and
writing) in meaningful ways. Beyond revealing the variances on traditional notions of literacy, these studies
posit that educative practices are most meaningful when they are closely aligned with and reflective of the skills and literacies that family members bring with them to a learning space. To learn about these attributes, the authors conducted in depth studies that went below the surface perception of the family and argue that in order to achieve the same relational knowledge about a family, educators must do the same.

National responses: policy and philanthropy.

As the interrelationship of literacy practices with family and community contexts continued being highlighted and studied in the research world just before the turn of the 21st century, a growing body educational policy and philanthropy efforts also emerged. On a national scale, the family became viewed as a site for intervention and the concept of family literacy began to denote the programs that were conceived to provide families, especially parents, with services to improve their reading and writing skills and to alter their literacy practices with their children in order to support school practices and prepare their child for academic success. Family literacy legislation and philanthropy efforts tend to view literacy through a traditional lens, as a social cognitive skill.

Two pieces of federal policy have been passed that have had a direct impact on the field of family literacy. In 1988, the Even Start program was created to offer grants to support local family literacy projects that integrate early childhood education, adult literacy, parenting education, and interactive parent and child literacy activities for low-income families (US Department of Education, 2012). In its description, it is stated that Even Start “offers promise for helping to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and low literacy in the Nation between parents and their children” and has three interrelated goals: to help parents improve their literacy or basic educational skills; to help parents become full partners in educating their children; and to assist children in reaching their full potential as learners (US Department of Education, 2012). A decade later, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act of 1998 was signed as part of the Workforce Investment Act of the same year. Family literacy is also included in the newest passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 under Title II: The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act. This Act reforms Federal employment, adult education, and vocational rehabilitation programs to create an integrated, "one-stop" system of workforce investment and education activities for adults and youth (US Department of
Education, 2013). Programs implemented under this Act must comply with federal guidelines and align with the core indicators used to measure program accountability.

The use of federal monies to fund family literacy programs that meet the aforementioned goals has generated a plethora of programs throughout the country seeking to strengthen families' literacy practices. In tandem with governmental services, private organizations have also sprung up to promote and fund family literacy initiatives. The most widely known of these programs include the National Center for Families Learning (NCFL, formerly known as the National Center of Family Literacy) and the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy. Both foundations operate on private donations; the NCFL is noted for its partnership with Toyota, which funds family literacy programs. Specific research studies about the efforts by both government and private family literacy programs will be discussed in the following section.

Both legislative and philanthropic oriented efforts to promote family literacy in the United States are enveloped in the broader endeavor of language planning and policy throughout the nation. Language policy and planning (LPP) is a complex entity that includes the multiple layers of how decisions concerning languages are made, interpreted and implemented, and the impact that these processes have on all of the people involved. Menken and Garcia (2010) cite Spolky’s (2004) definition of LPP as encompassing all of the “language practices, beliefs and management of a community or polity” (pg. 2) and explain that the field examines such topics as which language(s) will be official or national languages, which language(s) will be taught in school, as well as ideologies about language. Language policy and planning is also a site of social practice (McCarty & Warhol, 2011). Ideologies are defined by Scollon, Scollon & Jones (2012) as “the worldview[s] or governing philosophy[ies] of a group of people or of a discourse system” (p.111). It follows, then, that the literacies that family members enact in the home, community or school, reflect the efforts of LPP in the surrounding macrosystem.

As social institutions, schools are the primary sites for the implementation and contestation of language policies, making it critical for educators to be cognizant of their role as not only active transmitters of policies, but also as active policymakers (Menken and Garcia, 2010). Family literacy programs also take on a socializing characteristic: the directors, teachers and volunteers involved are in a position to
promulgate the ideologies determined by broader context of LPP. Over the past decade, the United State’s official policy towards students who speak languages other than English has reflected the belief that “the need for a common language is greater than any claims of language rights by minorities” (Wiley, 2013 p. 62). Title III of the No Child Left Behind Act directly labels these learners as “limited English proficient and immigrant students” and establishes the principle goal of education as the acquisition of English (US Department of Education, 2013). Parents of these children, who are also newcomers, receive the same labels from the American education system and feel the pressure to learn English not only to be successful in a new country, but also to be involved in their children’s education.

Claiming to support young children’s success in American schools, family literacy programs are aligned to this larger goal and transpose it onto parents and families by promoting the acquisition of English and the literacy practices that reflect those of the powerful, white middle class (and schools). Often, these programs use language instruction as a medium for parenting classes that also seek to modify families’ behaviors to match those of the group in power. In regards to newcomer populations, these programs offer a typical carrot and stick approach: English and its accompanying ideology is presented as the carrot while the threat of not being accepted into a new community lingers behind as the stick.

**Examples of Empirical and Theoretical Studies in Family Literacy**

Presently, the term family literacy is used in the research in several different ways: 1) to describe the study of literacies practiced within in the family and community; 2) to describe a set of interventions related to the traditional literacy development of young children; and 3) to refer to a set of programs designed to enhance the traditional literacy skills of more than one family member (Caspe, 2003). This section explores studies that fall under each of these conceptions of family literacy. While the list of studies is by no means exhaustive, it is representative of studies that have been conducted over the lifespan of the field and of those that have been completed by both notable and upcoming scholars in family literacy. These studies stem from the first and second editions of *The Handbook of Family Literacy* (Wasik, 2004; 2012), the three most current anthologies of literature about family literacy (Li, 2009; Dunsmore & Fisher, 2010;
Anderson, Kendrick, Rogers, & Smythe, 2005), searches of major electronic databases, key citations referenced in articles, and recommendations from scholars in the field (Dr. Loukia Sarroub, Dr. Ted Hamann, and Dr. Stephanie Wessels).

Studies of literacy practices within the family and community. Auerbach (1989) takes a theoretical stance to challenge the traditional underlying assumptions about literacy and literacy development and to expand the notion of parent involvement to include literacy practices that are not replicas of school activities in the home; she calls for a social-contextual approach to family literacy. Other studies that uncover the importance of home literacy practices and encourage more encompassing research action to be conducted include Hull & Shultz (2001), Lapp (2010), Ordoñez-Jasis (2010) and Sénéchal (2012). Several studies in the field have answered these calls and have employed qualitative research methods to shed light on literacies that are embedded in the home and in the community.

Most of the studies reviewed focused on learning about the literacy practices of families who identify as low-income and/or of a minority ethnic group. Exceptions include Park’s (2009) study of a mother’s attempt to foster bilingualism in Korean and English in her child, Souto-Manning & Dice’s (2009) study of a child’s experience with English and Portuguese bilingualism in a third space, and Enz & Foley’s (2009) report of a child’s literacy development in a white middle class family. While two of these families would be considered ethnic minorities in the United States, all of these studies took place in middle class families who face a different reality than families of low income.

Critical in understanding the literacy practices of low-income families is to challenge the view that these familial practices are deficient and do not provide rich background knowledge on which students can build. In their quantitative analysis, Orthner, Jones-Sanpei, and Williamson (2004) found that low-income families had a strong sense of resilience that came predominantly from their sense of confidence in their problem solving abilities, their ability to pull together in difficult times and their sense of cohesion. Duke and Purcell-Gates (2003) revealed genres of literacy that were prevalent in low-income households, some that were similar to school literacy tasks (children’s books) and others which were not (letters and religious
texts). This does not mean that living in poverty is not challenging: Orthner, Jones-Sanpei, and Williamson (2004) also found that families were uneven in their command of skills such as communication skills, social support, and economic assets, which influence what kinds of social supports of which they are aware and using.

Besides the foundational studies of Brice Heath (1983) and Purcell-Gates (1995), only one other study reviewed focused on the literacy practices of low-income white families (Li, 2009). Only two studies in this review focused on the home literacy practices of families of Asian background (Li, 2009 and Park, 2009). Hare (2005) and Ningwakwe/Rainbow Woman (2005) explored the literacy practices of the indigenous people in Canada. Several studies focused on the literacy practices of African American families (Johnson, 2010; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; 2005; McMillon and Edwards, 2008; Rogers, 2000; Rogers, 2002). In Ladson-Billings’ studies, she states that African American students experience success in schools when teachers employ culturally relevant pedagogies that are reflective and embrace of their funds of knowledge outside of school (1995; 2010). McMillon and Edwards (2008) posit that the African American church could be a site to learn more about these literacies and that connections can be made between church and school practices.

The majority of the studies, however, focused on Latino families. Latino families and students have a long-standing history in the United States, have long been the sites of organic formations of families learning (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990), and have long been the focus of family literacy initiatives. Besides the foundational work of Luis Moll and his fellow researchers (1992), Alvarez (2012), Reese (2009), and Scheffner, Hammer, and Miccio (2004) have also shed light on home literacies of Latino families. In these studies, Reese (2009) describes the genres of literacy found in Latino homes, Scheffner, Hammer, and Miccio (2004) discuss the practices of Puerto Rican mothers and Alvarez (2012) tells of Latino students “brokering” between English and Spanish to serve their best interests. Blair and Cobas (2006) report on the role of gender in Latino home literacies while McClain (2010) examines the literacy practices that Latino parents partake in when discussing educational decisions about their child. Two particular studies of Latino families include Orellana et al.’s (2003) description of Latino students transferring the academic skill of
paraphrasing into their home practices of translating and Souto-Manning and Dice’s (2009) findings of syncretic literacies in a bilingual home. In their study, Ryan et al. (2010) found that Latino parents greatly valued academic and social success. The role that Latino families have played in programs that seek to support these skills will be discussed later.

Interventions related to the literacy development of young children. A very large portion of the literature on family literacy has focused on the role of the family in supporting the literacy development of young children. Many authors report on studies in education and psychology that link the home context, relationships and resources to early literacy skills (Frey, 2010; Pianta, 2004; Pinkham & Neuman, 2012; Roskos & Twardosz, 2004; Sénéchal & Laura, 2008; Sparling, 2004; Taylor, 2010; Vernon-Feagan, Head-Reeves, & Kainz, 2004). The acceptance of this correlation has been reflected in the push for family literacy programs as a form of intervention to alter parent practices in order to prepare the child for academic success. Such interventions can be seen in the integration of adult education in Even Start (Alamprese, 2004), family involvement in Head Start (Boller et al., 2012), and the implementation of parent and child together (PACT) time in family literacy initiatives (Jacobs, 2004; Rodriguez-Brown, et al., 1999). This area has also seen a rise in the development and use of formal standardized and informal assessments to evaluate emerging literacy skills (Ginsberg et al., 2012; Johnston & Yanoff, 2004; Lonigan, 2004; Lonigan, McDowell, & Phillips, 2004) and the quality of the early childhood classroom experience (Dickinson, St. Pierre & Pettengill, 2004; Vick Whittaker & Pianta, 2012).

Analyses of these programs have found generally positive outcomes for the children involved, having mostly short-term impact as opposed to long-term (Mandel Morrow & Temlock-Fields, 2004; Von Steensal etl. al., 2012; Lonigan, 2012). Studies that have focused on the impact of programs on early literacy skills of young Latino students include Barrueco’s (2012) study of migrant farming families, Caberea et al.’s study of Latino infants, and Monzó and Rueda’s study of young children learning to pass as English proficient.
Programs designed to enhance print literacy skills. Auerbach (1995) describes three approaches of family literacy in the United States: the intervention prevention approach, the multiple literacies approach and the social change approach. Formal programs of family literacy typically reflect some sort of combination of these approaches; programs across the globe also illustrate this phenomenon (Benseman & Sutton, 2012; Brooks, Hannon, & Bird, 2012; Desmond, 2012; Hannon & Bird, 2004; McElvany et al., 2012; Shohet, 2012). The breadth of these programs encompasses initiatives that focus on any combination of children and parents doing conventional literacy tasks together, adult education, community partnerships, and parental involvement in school.

Baquedano-Lopez, Alexander, and Hernandez (2013) state that a neo-deficit ideology greatly affects parental involvement in schools. Most family literacy programs operated under some type of deficit ideology: the notion that the parents are in “need” of literacy skills to foster their own development or that of their children and the idea that families “need” to be empowered all reflect the ideology that these families are lacking skills. Kendrick et al. (2005) highlight the renewed attention to the hegemony of institutionalized literacies and language-based modes of representation in the field in current family literacy studies. Nonetheless, parents are attracted to family literacy programs because they view them as sites in which they can learn skills that will help them gain access to economic and cultural capital in society (Turner, 2009). Furthermore, they see their participation in such programs as a way to provide opportunities and experiences for their children to acquire basic knowledge about language and literacy (Philips & Sample, 2005).

Most of the participants in a family literacy program are women who are mothers (Prins & Van Horn, 2012); though fathers do participate in programs, little research has been done about their involvement in the programs (Gadsden, 2012). Several programs seek to help parents develop traditional literacy skills that can be shared with their child through activities such as storybook reading: Mandel Morrow, Mandelson, & Kuhn (2010); Rodriguez-Brown (2004); Shanahan, Mulhern & Rodriguez-Brown (2002). It is common for these programs to include a parenting class that supports participants with challenges at home and/or a home visit component that helps parents transfer skills into the home (Bryant &
Wasik, 2004; Gomby, 2012; Powell, 2004). Programs also focus on some form of adult education that may include job skills and literacy for the workplace (Askov, 2004), mathematics for adult learners (Ginsburg, 2012), technology (Edwards, 2006), basic education programs (Comings, 2004; Kruidenier, 2012; Sherow, 2012; Van Horn & Forlizzi, 2004), and English for speakers of other languages (Spruck Wrigley, 2004; Strucker, Snow & Alexander, 2004).

Programs that take on a multiple literacies approach attempt to acknowledge the parents’ home language and literacy practices while fostering meaningful relationships with participants that build off of their funds of knowledge (Anderson, Smythe, & Shapiro, 2005; Milliken-Lynch, 2009; Phillips & Sample, 2005; Rogers & Schofield, 2005; Turner & Edwards, 2009). These programs also work to organize meaningful systems of support for families that are reflective of their needs, their communities and their daily practices (Harbin et al., 2004; Naoon et al., 2012). However, these programs mostly resemble school, promote traditional notions of literacy, and integrate other literacies on a superficial level.

There have been several studies of grassroots family initiatives that have been developed and implemented by parents or in partnership with parents seeking empowerment. These efforts are mostly rooted in Paulo Freire’s ideas in his influential book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968): literacy, or reading the word, is the method by which peoples who have been oppressed by society can learn to read the world. That is, literacy empowers people to participate in society and reflect on their role within it in a way that cannot be done without print-literacy. Kozol (1980) takes a similar stance in his analysis of adult print-illiteracy in the United States in his book *Prisoners of Silence*, in which he calls on American educators to learn from Cuba’s literacy initiatives and put Freire’s (1968) ideas into action. Masny (2005) explains Freire’s ideas through a postmodern lens. “A person is a text in continuous becoming. Reading the world and the word through text influences the text that a person continuously becomes” (p. 180). In this sense, the fluid dialogic process of engaging with text through critical reading provides a space of between-ness that produces possibilities for engaging in reflection and redefinition.

Several of these types of programs have been implemented by and with Latino families and have provided the opportunity for parents to take on leadership roles in education, bring cultural aspects to the
center of learning, and define notions of parenting, support, and literacy in their own terms (Galindo & Medina, 2009; Jasis & Ordóñez-Jasis, 2004; Johnson, 2009; Mandel Morrow, Mandelson & Kuhn, 2010; Reyes & Torres, 2007). Such partnerships have also happened in American Indian and Alaska Native communities (Emberton, 2004; Faircloth & Thompson, 2012). Though not the norm in family literacy programs, such initiatives show promise for authentic endeavors to integrate a social-cultural approach to learning literacy within a structure of a program.

Identifying the Research Gap: Contributing to the Field of Family Literacy

Since its inception, a divide has plagued the field of family literacy (Edwards, 2003). One strand of research seeks to analyze the practices of families' literacies, as they are culturally relevant and contextually embedded. These researchers intend to amplify the definition of literacy and encourage socially just practices in all levels of education, including formal family literacy programs, which are culturally relevant. The second strand of research focuses on the development and implementation of family literacy programs that, despite their claims to be founded in families’ cultural practices, are neo-deficit and hold parents of diverse backgrounds to the literacy expectations of mainstream, White, middle-class families (Gadsden, 2004). Gasden warned about this divide first in her 1994 conceptual piece about the field and then again in 2004, demonstrating that it is not a divide that is easily bridged. Such a divide contributes to the stagnant nature of the field. I intend to contribute to this field by working within the space of this divide.

There is a need for more coherent analyses of institutionalized family literacy programs that promote traditional print literacies as well as speaking and listening skills. More research is needed to understand what attracts parents to these programs, even if they employ a deficit ideology (Cairney, 2005; Taylor & Edwards, 2009), to what extent these programs have fidelity in their implementation at all levels and amongst all stakeholders (Powell & Carey, 2012), and the overall effects these programs have on families (Paratore et al., 2010; Powell, Okagaki, & Bojczyk, 2004). Such an analysis would also shed light on how these programs affect interactions between schools, educational stakeholders (administrators, teachers, parents, children, etc.), literacy and overall achievement. Conducting an ethnographic study that
seeks to understand the goals, expectations, and perspectives of each of the participants (parents, children, teachers, translators, coordinators and directors) in a local family literacy program for English Language Learners as well as how all of these perspectives compare to each other, will contribute to these needs by providing a thick description of the family literacy program. An ethnographic study will likely show multiple literacies enacted by everyone involved in the program as well as moments of “infidelity” to the program's written policy, which might permeate the divide and shed light on the opportunities for teaching and learning practices that incorporate the parents’ interests and needs. Furthermore, it will illustrate for whom the program is working by showing whose goals are being met and in what way.

The local family literacy program that was the site of my dissertation was situated in Chesterfield, Nebraska and serves a newcomer population. It focused on the teaching and learning of English to adult learners, although there was also a parent education and parent and child together (PACT) component that each took place once a week. Many of the adult learners in the program had limited formal schooling experiences in their home countries and may or may not had been able to read or write in their native languages. Like several studies cited in this section, the title of family literacy of this local program was a bit misleading. The primary aim of the program was on the development of the traditional literacy skills of the parents and how strengthening parents’ language skills and knowledge of American schooling will strengthen children’s academic skills. The notion of family was actually subservient to the overarching goals of the program, as evidenced by the allotment of time to different learning tasks. Parents spent seven to nine of the ten hours allotted to the program per week isolated from their children in the adult education classroom learning English or other skills. When they did learn alongside their children, they took on the role of observer as opposed to active participant. For these reasons, my dissertation looked principally at adult education as it is conceived within the realm of institutionalized family literacy.

Finally, it is important to note that the site of the local family literacy program was chosen for my dissertation after the former program director mentioned to Dr. Loukia Sarroub, a professor at the University of Nebraska, that he would be interested in a research study to determine if the program was “working”, an idea that he also mentioned when I contacted him about the project. The notion of “working” can be
understood in several ways, depending on who is asked. Is there fidelity in the enactment of the components of the program as they are written in the policy? Are the participating adults learning what the program seeks to teach? Are the site directors and teachers meeting the overarching goals of the program through their programming and teaching techniques? Are parents transferring knowledge learned in the program to their home lives? Are children of the participants improving in school? Many more questions could be generated to determine whether the program is “working”.

A thorough ethnographic study needs to be conducted in order to unveil the cultural of the people who live the family literacy program experience every day, and what a “working” program might mean to each of those involved. Learning about the goals, experiences and perspectives of all of those involved will shed light on what each person expects to gain from the program and whether or not the program is meeting those expectations, or, whether or not it is “working” for them. Complicating this question will lead to a more authentic manner to look at how the program is functioning in relation to several goals: similarities or incongruences between perspectives will highlight areas for further inquiry and investigation. Furthermore, the patterns of behavior that emerge in an ethnographic study will provide the needed coherent and detailed analysis of what happens in a programmatic family literacy site.

It is important to recognize that while I have explored a facet of the family literacy program at three of its sites to determine how the program “worked” for the various stakeholders at those sites, I cannot establish if the full program is “working” in accordance to what the school district seeks to accomplish with the program. A formal evaluation of the entire program would need to be conducted alongside ethnographic work to determine to what degree the program is “working”.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research study was to understand the cultural space of a school-based family literacy program situated in a public school district in Chesterfield, Nebraska, with particular focus on the experiences of the Spanish-speaking participants (who in this case were all mothers) as they constructed and interacted with the space of the family literacy class. The central focus of the family literacy program was on adult English language learning, but it also included a Parent and Child Together (PACT) time in which parents learned alongside their children in the elementary classroom and a parent time class that aimed to educate parents on a plethora of topics. The parent time class was the only component during which interpreters translated instruction into the parents’ home languages. Childcare was an additional component of this program: pre-school aged children, ranging from infants to four years, participated in early learning activities in a daycare setting while the parents attend classes.

There is a persistent divide in the field of family literacy (Gadsden, 1994; 2004) that exists between the study of sociocultural literacies that occur in the home (Heath, 1983; Taylor, 1983; Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Moll et al., 1992; Purcell-Gates, 1995; Street, 1995) and the programmatic approach that privileges the cognitive skills associated with print literacy (Benseman & Sutton, 2012; Brooks, Hannon, & Bird, 2012; Comings, 2004; Desmond, 2012; Hannon & Bird, 2004; Kruidenier, 2012; McElvany et al., 2012; Sherow, 2012; Shohet, 2012; Spruck Wrigley. 2004; Strucker, Snow & Alexander, 2004; Van Horn & Forlizzi, 2004). Unfortunately, the latter often views participants through a deficit lens (Baquedano-Lopez, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013; Kendrick et al., 2005). The research in the field of family literacy calls for more coherent analyses of family literacy programs that shed light on what attracts parents to the program (Taylor & Edwards, 2009; Cairney, 2005), to what extent these programs have fidelity in their implementation at all levels and amongst all stakeholders (Powell & Carey, 2012), and the overall effects these programs have on families (Paratore et al., 2010; Powell, Okagaki, & Bojczyk, 2004).
One way to narrow this divide is to study the programmatic approach to family literacy using the same orientations and approaches as those that have focused on home literacies to learn more about the daily, interactive nuances in formal program implementation that go beyond reports of enrollment numbers and test scores and shed light on the inner workings of these programs. Hence, the central research question for this study was: How does family literacy become enacted in a public school setting? Phrased a complementary way that puts this study squarely in the domain of the anthropology of education policy implementation (Hamann & Rosen, 2012), how does the ‘policy’ of formal program design convert to the ‘practice’ that newcomer parents negotiate and make sense of in these programs? This big question (phrased either way) then positions us to consider the following questions as well: What were the goals and expectations of the Family Literacy Program according to each of the participants (parents, children, teachers, interpreters, coordinators, and directors)? To what extent did the program meet the expectations of the various stakeholders? For whom and to what extent did the program “work”?

Given that the setting of the particular school-based program was within the New Latino Diaspora (Hamann & Harklau, 2010; Hamann, et al., 2015; Wortham, et al., 2002), another guiding research question was: How did Spanish-speaking mothers interact with the cultural space of an institutionalized family literacy program in a setting where institutional educational responses to Latinos are comparatively new and often improvisational? Because this project used ethnographic research methods, sub-questions that fit under these overarching questions continued to emerge during both data collection and analysis phases.

**Theoretical Framework**

Family literacy programs create and delineate space where multiple people, languages, and literacies meet and interact. Viewing such spaces through a scholarly lens requires bringing several perspectives on social and cultural theory into a conversation that parallels the structure of the site and creates a space for analysis, discussion, and understanding. My research invokes Bakhtin’s (Todorov, 1985) notion of dialogical literature: a continuous dialogue amongst scholars that informs and is continually informed by literature in regard to theories about: the structure of society and culture and the actions of
people within them, (Foucault, 1972) and Bourdieu, 1991), social performance (Goffman, 1959), and individual agency (de Certeau, 1984 and Freire, 1968). The meeting place of these theories constructs a space fertile for understanding literacies that are multiple, complex, and embedded in social contexts (Gee, 2012 and The New London Group, 1996). (See Figure 1 for a diagram of this theoretical framework.)

**Figure 1: Theoretical Framework**

Foucault (1970; 1977) argued that social structure is semiotic and imposed. Social institutions utilize systems of techniques to use power so as to impose habits, rules, and orders with the intention to reform the mind and actions of those bound to the institutions (prisoners in prison, children in school, patients in hospitals, etc.). Discourse, itself a semiotic system, is the vessel through which ideas and beliefs flow from those in power to become embodied and enacted by the subjected (Foucault, 1977). People within these systems are viewed as objects, as discursive formations, subject to the absorption of the ideologies to be transmitted through the discourse of the state (Foucault, 1972). Foucault (1972) writes that discourses are “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (p. 49). In this sense, people are
formed by the discourses that are constructed about them. This is of particular interest with regard to educational policy: students participating in an educative program are defined as objects within that social space by means of the discourse used in the formal and informal policies in play.

Parents participating in the family literacy are defined by the program’s creators as English language learners who need a venue in which to learn about American schooling, with an emphasis both on school-like literacy practices and socialization to American society. While acknowledging some diversity within this objectification—for example, noting that the parent/students have varying levels of English proficiency—they remain constructed as embodiments of categories. This preconception defines these parents before they enter the classroom. Of course there is a degree of truth for these categories for the actual individuals—they are English learners, they are parents—but these categories that illuminate elements of who they are instead stand in as the whole. In turn, the coordinators and teachers continuously perpetuate these identities through their interactions with the parents and their choice of learning activities.

Bourdieu’s (1991) concept of symbolic capital is also of importance for understanding the phenomenon of people as objects of policy. Bourdieu (1991) wrote that symbolic dominance occurs in all linguistic exchanges, including the discourse that constructs the social structure, but that the linguistic relation of power is not defined solely based on the linguistic competences present in the interaction. “The weight of different agents depends on their symbolic capital, i.e., on the recognition, institutionalized or not, that they receive from a group” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 72, italics in original). Thus, languages (and the ideologies and cultures inherent to the language) are deemed to be legitimate (or not) depending on the degree to which they are recognized by the dominant power structure. Bourdieu (1991) warns, though, that this recognition appears to be based on the qualities of the person alone, as opposed to the contingency of the semiotic systems in play. What is actually occurring is obscured. Through his lens, however, we can consider how people interacting with the social structure depends on the amount of legitimate cultural capital (knowledge, skills and other cultural acquisitions that are exemplified by educational or technical qualifications) they have. Bourdieu explained:
The position of a given agent in a social space can thus be defined as the position he occupies in the different fields, that is in the distribution of powers that are active in each of them. These are principally economic capital (in its different kinds), cultural capital, and social capital, as well as symbolic capital, commonly called prestige. (1991, p. 230)

However, people are not merely at the mercy of the social structure as envisioned and constructed by the state and enacted on local levels, such as in a family literacy program. Because the social structure, both at the macro and micro level, is semiotic and discursive, people engage with it and their interaction simultaneously forms and changes it. This is the underlying principle of Goffman’s (1959) theory of performance. Although writing well before Bourdieu (and thus not directly referencing him), Goffman (1959) demonstrates how Bourdieu’s varying capitals are performed and perceived by individuals in a social setting and how these, in turn, construct the social setting. A performance is defined as “all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants” (Goffman, 1959, p. 15). Within the social space, individuals invoke fronts, which he explains are “equipment of a standard kind that are intentionally or unwittingly employed by a person during her performance” (Goffman, 1959, p. 22) and are determined by the setting, appearance, and manner of everyone involved. The performers, their fronts, and the semiotic structures of the situation envelop a complex interplay of discrepant roles between those who perform, those performed to, and outsiders.

Individuals can manipulate their roles and performances to project agency onto the semiotic social structure. One way they do this is through the use of strategies and tactics. According to De Certeau (1984), strategies are the calculations or manipulations of power relationships that become possible as soon as a subject with will and power can be isolated. Strategies are created by institutions and consumed by individuals who act within them and who often utilize tactics to do so. De Certeau (1984) defines tactics as calculated actions that are determined by the absence of a proper locus and used to navigate or to perform the terrain of the powerful and in order for an individual to meet her own goals or to execute her own philosophy within the established structure. Tactics are isolated actions that are responsive to and take advantage of opportunities that emerge within the social structure. These moments can be looked at as
moments of agency that individuals exercise in determining their trajectories in a social space. These actions, which are mostly subversive, also have an impact on the semiotic structure and can be viewed as a method by which people change the structures in their interests. De Certeau’s insights matter later when we consider how some family literacy participants participate not for (or not mainly for) the formal reasons for the program's existence, but instead to achieve additional or alternative goals.

The dialogic nature of agency within the social structure is at the core of Freire’s (1968) theories of critical pedagogies, as explained in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Invoking Hegel, Freire (1968) states that the oppressed exists in a dialectical relationship with her oppressor and that recognizing the contingency of this relationship is the first step to liberation. Differing from Foucault, Freire (1968) refers to individuals in this situation as “dialogical Subjects” (p. 168) who exist within the semiotic lattice of society. The tension of individuals confronting the stratifying social structure creates a space for tactics to be employed and the dialogue to be changed. Essential to this is the word and its transformative nature: intrinsic to conversations are two dimensions, reflection and action, that are in constant conversation with each other (Freire, 1968). Freire’s conceptualization is similar to Bakhtin’s notion of dialogism. For Bakhtin, there is a center (the individual and the time and space which she occupies), a not-center (the other and the time and space which she occupies), and the thirdness, or relationship, that is constructed amongst them (Holquist, 2002). Understanding and utilizing the word is critical in liberation from hegemonic structures; therefore, the Freire (1968) proposes a pedagogy for adult learners focusing on learning print literacy through methods that stem from their lives (‘knowing the word to know the world’). From Freire’s standpoint, adult learners’ task is not to master some third-party canon determined elsewhere by others, but rather to gain the language skills necessary to advocate for amelioration of one’s own particular circumstances. Applied to a family literacy program, Freire’s understanding suggests that the curriculum needs to be both differentiated (different learners negotiating different contexts) and co-constructed (not just the unilateral prerogative of the instructor). How participants coopt their learning experience for it to better suit their ends then becomes an important topic for the researcher to try to document.
Semiotic interaction creates spaces and breeds opportunities for literacies to evolve. Literacy defined through a sociocultural lens expands the traditional notion of literacy beyond the cognitive skills associated with reading and writing—or even reading, writing, listening, speaking, and thinking (Meltzer & Hamann, 2004; 2005)—and, more consequentially, views literacy as a social practice that is connected to power, to social identity, and to ideologies (Gee, 2012). This sociocultural definition of literacy recognizes that such practices may include reading and writing, but it also embraces oral and aural literacy skills, technology, and other literacies that are generated from the social context.

Still, sociocultural literacies and liberating uses of languages nearly always meet the expectations of the state and can still promote a standardized approach to learning that upholds cognitive literacy practices and standardized versions of language. Brandt and Clinton (2002) note that traditional literacies (reading and writing) also play active roles within society: as much as literacies emerge out of social contexts, they are also imposed onto them. Individuals, then, interact with and use traditional literacies in the social interplay described above, some with more adeptness than others. The space of the family literacy classroom, then, must be recognized as the context in which all of these semiotic structures and interactions co-occur and create various meanings and outcomes for those involved. Students get marked as proficient, or ‘wrong’. Their additions of words and underlying funds of knowledge are welcomed, or not. The family literacy classroom then is a much more complex and shifting environment than it may first appear. So the researcher’s challenge then is to determine how best to document it and then, in turn, analyze it.

Research Methodology

Depicting the cultural space and semiotic interaction of a family literacy classroom as well as the experiences of Spanish-speaking participants within that space necessitated the use of qualitative research methods as well as ethnographic research tools and perspective. The word qualitative implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on the processes and the meanings that reflect the socially constructed nature of reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Qualitative research seeks to answer how social experience is created and given meaning and involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. For qualitative
inquiry, the collection of data occurs in a natural setting and is depicted by the researcher through a series of representations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). A qualitative researcher is so broadly present in the study that Hatch (2002) refers to the researcher as a data-gathering instrument because that researcher directly gathers and processes the information from the field. As a result, the final presentation of phenomena in a qualitative study includes multiple sources of data—the voices of participants and the meaning they hold about the phenomenon, the reflexivity of the researcher, and a complex description and interpretation of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

Ethnography is a mainly qualitative research methodology that is well suited for educational research. Drawing from the classic work of Malinowski, Erickson (1984) explains that ethnography studies the “ethnos” (a nation, tribe or people) that is “any social network forming a corporate entity in which social relations are regulated by custom” (p. 2). Although we may not think of the stakeholders in an educational environment as a “tribe” or “people” per se, Erickson does clarify that schools and school programs do create the kinds of custom-governed social networks ethnographers study. He further notes that asking questions of the varying stakeholders whose roles are shaped by the school affiliation (i.e., parent, teacher, student, curriculum developer, etc.), we can then depict and question the taken-for-granted aspects of the institution, thus providing new vantage points for reflection.

Ethnographic research seeks to describe a culture by “grasp[ing] the native’s point of view, his relation to life, to realize his version of his world” (Malinowski, 1922 in Spradley, 1979, p. 3). To learn what the world is like for people who have learned to see, hear, speak, think and act in ways that are different requires the ethnographer not to study people (as objects), but to learn from them (Spradley, 1979). For my purposes, Malinowski’s “native” refers to the constituents of the family literacy program, or at least the adult constituents, including parents, teachers, and school administrators who construct the experience of the family literacy program and who participate in the cultural and social conversations that unfold.

For the studied program, parents’ transnational realities as newcomers or refugees were centrally pertinent, as they actively constructed and performed culture in this space. (It is relevant here to remember that ‘culture’ here does not refer to something someone has, but rather to what someone does and the
created explanatory systems that give that doing meaning. See Eagleton (2005) and Gupta & Ferguson, (1992).) However, the family literacy classroom was also the space where parents' backgrounds met a dominant social institution (school) that embodied and transmitted the societal norms and expectations of the dominant group in regard to language, literacy, parenting, and general social interactions. Using ethnographic methods to learn about “native” family literacy participants can illuminate the norms transmitted by those in power (the school personnel) and what happens when diverse parents come into contact with them. Ethnography captures the unfolding of Bakhtin’s notion of heteroglossia within this space: individuals invoking multiple voices from multiple systems of Discourses while conjoining in the dialogic present (Holquist, 2002). Gee (2012) Discourse with a capital D as “ways of behaving, speaking, and often reading and writing, that are accepted as instantiations of particular identities by specific groups…[Discourses] are ‘ways of being of the world’…They are socially situated identities.” (Gee, 2012, p. 3).

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) additionally define the task of ethnography, “[As an investigation of] some aspect of the lives of the people who are being studied, and this includes finding out how these people view the situations they face, how they regard one another, and how they see themselves” (p. 3). The space of the family literacy program reflected only a piece of the language and cultural experiences that participating families encountered while navigating life in the United States. Yet, that piece also was constitutive of their experience with their children’s school. The program design and implementation that I depict illuminates undergirding institutional perceptions that the schools held about English language learning parents and the language and literacy expectations that the school intended to transmit to them. In the ethnography of policy implementation, policies are depicted as containing problem diagnoses, strategies for those problems’ resolution, and imaginings of what ‘better’ looks like (Hamann & Rosen, 2012). It follows that we can investigate and scrutinize the supposed problems the family literacy program was created to solve. Through ethnography, the researcher develops a thick description of the patterns of behaviors and speech that unveil the structures of signification of people (Geertz, 1973). Thick descriptions can, then,
illustrate the complex reality of language and literacy learning in a transnational adult education/family literacy classroom.

I propose that it is this thick description of institutionalized family literacy programs that contributes to moving the field of family literacy research forward (as well as advancing New Latino Diaspora studies and additional subfields). There is a need to understand the nuanced details of what occurs in these programs on a daily basis in order to learn more about the learning process of adult English language learners and pedagogies that best support this process, to shed light on opportunities to integrate adult students’ funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) and sociocultural literacies (Gee, 2012; The New London Group, 1996), and to expose perceptions and ideologies in play so that programs can challenge deficit views about newcomer and refugee families and their related treatment as “objects of information, but never subjects of communication” (Foucault, 1977, p. 200). Ethnography not only permits the collection of multiple perspectives from multiple actors, but it also helps guide observations over a period of time in order to allow the researcher to learn about patterns of behaviors and interaction of all participants as they unfold naturally. There is an underlying ethics to ethnography that suggests the perspectives of the more powerful and the less powerful both matter. This methodology is not only appropriate for capturing the complexity of the experiences of the program family literacy itself, but also the complexity of the experience of literacy as it is understood through a sociocultural lens.

**Position of the Researcher**

As a researcher invested in this specific project, it is crucial to define the lenses through which I am approaching all aspects of the study, to delineate my posture (Wolcott, 1992). Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p. 3 as cited in Babchuck & Baidee, 2010) remind us that, “Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible…This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.” As a researcher, I am not objective or neutral in such a setting and should not feign to be (Wolcott, 1988). It follows then that I need to
explain part of who I am, so readers can account for my biography, my likely proclivities and blind spots, as they use me a medium through which to access the world of several family literacy classrooms.

My professional and personal backgrounds play integral roles in how I have approached this study. As an undergraduate student in Ohio, I studied Early Childhood Education with a specialization in teaching Pre-K-12 reading and I minored in Spanish. After graduating, I moved to Monterrey, Mexico to work as an English teacher at US-accredited private schools that recruit international teachers. In Mexico I taught high school English for one year and then worked as a second grade teacher in a bilingual elementary school for three years. At the elementary school, I was highly active in leading a balanced literacy initiative and conducting professional development opportunities in literacy with my colleagues. Furthermore, while living in Monterrey I studied my master's degree at the Universidad de Monterrey where I completed the majority of my coursework in Spanish. I also wrote a Masters thesis on a transnational community in the state of Georgia for my thesis. So I was an American in Mexico studying a predominantly Latino American community that has long been a research site of my Mexican advisor (Zúñiga, et al. 2002).

Thus, literacy teaching and learning, language learning and bilingualism, and consideration of transnational movement of families have been central to my development as a teacher and as a student. I have taken this knowledge and experience with me when I entered the research field. My advanced knowledge of the Spanish language and my experience living in Mexico for four years has greatly influenced my interests in the experiences of Latino populations in the United States. It has also facilitated how I communicate and establish rapport with my research participants. On more than one occasion, mothers and interpreters in the family literacy program have commented on the high quality of my Spanish skills and together we have reminisced about Mexico and Latin America. My knowledge of traditional foods like pozole and ponche at celebrations and my ability to translate colloquial phrases like te la bañaste (a phrase that can have multiple meanings, but generally means something along the lines of to exceed or take something too far) during class discussions has immensely helped in establishing credibility and relationships with the mothers in the class.
My knowledge of literacy and language learning has also influenced how I am received in the family literacy program. Directors, coordinators, and teachers view me as a professional in the field. They speak to me in teaching jargon and sometimes ask me to lead reading groups and other learning activities. Parents of all backgrounds also view me as a type of teacher, or at least as someone with sound knowledge of the English language and other things. They often approach me with questions about what they are learning in English or even about other topics, such as technology and access to higher education. Thus, it is not uncommon that on a visit to family literacy, I oscillated between the role of researcher, teacher, and confidant. I say all this to remind readers that, per Erickson (1984, p. 60), in the field,

It was I who was there doing the fieldwork, not somebody else. My fundamental assumptions and prejudices are part of my me... The desirable goal is not the impossible one of disembodied objectivity (I am a subject, not an object), but of clarity communicating a point of view as a subject, both to myself and my audience. (italics original)

**Research Design**

The site of this research study was a family literacy program that served newcomer and refugee families who were learning to speak English. The program was sponsored by the local school district and classes took place during school hours. The family literacy program had sites at eight different elementary schools within the district and all sites were expected to adhere to the four main components of the program: adult literacy, child literacy, adult education, and parent and child together time (PACT). The four-component approach to family literacy was adapted when the school district first received start-up funding from Toyota six years ago to implement the program. Toyota has partnered with the National Center for Families Learning (previously known as the National Center for Family Literacy) since 1991 to provide start-up funding for family literacy programs for three years; then programs were expected to find local funding collaborations to sustain their operations after the three-year period (Families Learning, 2014). While the district had finished receiving funding from Toyota at the time of my study, they did continue to use the
original model to structure the version program that I observed. (See Figure 2 for the Four-Component Family Literacy Model.)

**Figure 2: Four-Component Family Literacy Model**

During the adult literacy component, the parents focused on learning how to read, write, speak and understand English three days a week. The school district partnered with the local community college to hire English teachers. The community college also provided the textbooks and workbooks for this class. The children also learned English five days a week in their elementary classrooms and this was considered the child literacy component of the program. The adult education piece, or Parent Time, instructed parents on a plethora of topics one day a week. These classes were presented in English and interpreters translated the information into (one of) the home language(s). PACT time took place once a week for one hour when the parent learned alongside his/her child in the child’s elementary classroom. A childcare program that also focused on the acquisition of English and school readiness was provided for the pre-school aged children of the participating parents.
**Research Sites.** Preliminary and formal ethnographic data collection for this project occurred over the course of eighteen months (May 2013 – November 2014, with a break during the summer of 2013). I arranged the initial meeting with the district’s former director of federal programs during the spring semester of 2013 before he left the district to take a job at the National Center for Families Learning. This meeting served as my formal introduction to the program, as the then-director explained the components of the programs and put me in contact with his successor. I met with the new program director, Nancy (pseudonym), shortly after and arranged to visit the annual staff family literacy meeting and each of the sites of the family literacy program. After being introduced to all of the teachers and teaching assistants at the staff meeting in August 2013, I then visited each of the eight sites twice over the course of the semester. I observed one English class and one Parent Time class at each site, took field notes, and I conducted informal interviews with the teachers and coordinators about the particularities of their sites.

Based on this preliminary research, I selected three specific school sites to be focal sites of research: Aster Elementary, Blazing Star Elementary, and Verbena Elementary. (These names are pseudonyms for each elementary school.) I decided to study multiple sites for several reasons. First, while the family literacy program was sponsored by the school district, it was a multi-sited entity. To understand how the overarching program goals were understood and appropriated into practice (Levinson & Sutton, 2001), it was essential to take into consideration that this program played out differently across sites. Thus, an element of the family literacy program that constituted its cultural space were the distinctive characteristics of its sites. Following this reasoning, multiple schools were selected to capture site-specific particularities. I chose to select three sites for this study (as opposed to a larger number) to be able to spend a substantial amount of time in each site in order to establish rapport with the informants and observe the enactment of cultural patterns over time. Knowing all eight sites a little allowed me to be purposeful in my selection of focal sites.

Secondly, juxtaposing findings across three different sites serves as a synecdoche for understanding the entire program. Detecting similarities and differences across three of the eight program sites illuminates which cultural patterns may be typical, or experienced by most people in the program, and
which seemed to be exceptional, or unique to a particular site(s) or a participant(s). Not only does the three-site comparison illustrate how the program’s goals were being appropriated, changed, and/or enacted differently (if at all), it also captures the participants’ experiences and interactions with the cultural space of each site, depicting the role of the individual in the construction and reconstruction of cultural spaces (see Figure #). Because individual actions demonstrated how language and literacies were utilized in social spaces, these experiences showed how participants enacted the ‘literacy’ component of the program. For example, it was sometimes the case that the literacies that the parents invoked went unnoticed by the teachers or did not match the teachers’ expectations. Aggregating these experiences and looking at them across multiple sites enables an understanding of how their distinct attributes contributed to the conception by the adult learners, as well as of them, related to language and literacy learning.

Lastly, these sites were chosen based on the demographics and other characteristics of each school. The family literacy programs were well established and well attended at each site; Blazing Star Elementary and Verbena Elementary were amongst the original sites for the program and Aster Elementary joined during the second year of the program (well before my arrival). The program coordinators of the program at each selected school had longstanding tenures in their roles of family liaisons and had been with the program since its inception at the site. Moreover, all three schools had a significant Spanish-speaking Latino population attending the family literacy program regularly (which, because of the match between their language skills and mine raised the proportion of parents with him I could more easily construct rapport).

Demographic information about each school is presented in Table 1 and Table 2 below. Blazing Star Elementary and Verbena Elementary, respectively, had the highest proportion of Hispanic students in the district. At these sites, Latino mothers were the majority in the family literacy class. Aster Elementary was substantially different: Latino mothers were the minority in the class while the majority of the parents were from Iraq and Sudan and spoke Arabic and/or Kurdish. It is important to note that the number of parents of different backgrounds matriculated in the program varied, sometimes as frequently as week to week, as the fluidity of which parents enrolled and exited the program was similar to what others have reported for adult ELL-ABE efforts (Crandall, 1993; Cuban & Stromquist, 2009; Hayes, 1989). Nevertheless,
in the face of these fluctuations, the proportions of each subgroup generally remained the same over the timespan of my observation.

The majority of program parents at Aster Elementary were classified as refugees from Iraq, Sudan and Syria and they spoke Arabic and/or Kurdish as a first language. Given that the Chesterfield had been designated as a refugee relocation site (US Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2012), Latino populations shared neighborhoods, grocery stores, banks, libraries, social services, and other community spaces with refugees from several countries (e.g., Iraq, Sudan, Syria, and Burma). This made the research site different from most of the other New Latino Diaspora in this part of the Midwest. For this study to be reflective of Latino parents’ experiences in the family literacy program, I intentionally decided to learn about the experiences of Latino parents in sites where they account for the majority and the minority subgroup in the class.

Table 1: Demographics of Elementary School Sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Neighborhood Characteristics</th>
<th>ELL Students</th>
<th>Hispanic Students</th>
<th>Free &amp; Reduced Lunch Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aster Elementary</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>28.32%</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
<td>92.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbena Elementary</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>48.64%</td>
<td>46.57%</td>
<td>90.74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blazing Star Elementary</td>
<td>Blue Collar Subdivision</td>
<td>37.93%</td>
<td>44.47%</td>
<td>80.59%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 2: Family Literacy Class Demographics by First Language Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>Kurdish</th>
<th>Karen**</th>
<th>Vietnamese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aster Elementary</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4 (spring) 2-3 (fall)</td>
<td>8 (spring)</td>
<td>8 (spring)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbena Elementary</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blazing Star</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Elementary

Several parents spoke multiple languages besides English. This chart indicates which language in which they receive interpretation during Parent Time class.

The Karen are the largest of several ethnic groups from Burma that have come to this community as refugees.

Early on in the study, Aster Elementary School was the first research site that I identified for several reasons. I was first attracted to Aster Elementary due to the fact that the Latino parents in the program were the minority subgroup and that they attended regularly. Anne, the site coordinator for School, also played an active role in facilitating my entrance into this site. She responded quickly to my emails about conducting research at this site and eagerly met with me early in January 2014 to learn about my study. Anne also acted quickly to set up meetings with the school’s principal, the family literacy teacher, and the community college coordinator to ensure that my presence was welcome by various stakeholders/gatekeepers. I began observations at this site in February 2014. I observed three times a week for at least two hours each day (the length of class time) and observed two English classes and one Parent Time class per week. In the fall of 2014, I continued observing English class once a week and began attending PACT time with the Spanish-speaking mothers.

I also selected Verbena Elementary School early in my study to be a second site due to its high Hispanic population. During my preliminary site visits, I noticed that the family literacy teacher at the time used teaching methods that were very different than those used at Aster Elementary. John, the teacher at Aster Elementary, used a lot of direct instruction and alternated between whole and small-group instruction; he mostly used the textbook and student workbook to guide instruction with few supplemental materials. The teacher at Verbena Elementary worked mostly in small groups with parents and used the textbooks sparingly. I thought it would be interesting to compare how parents experienced the classes at each site.

At first, the teachers and coordinators at Verbena Elementary in the spring of 2014 were eager to meet with me and learn about my research project. However, after canceling our initial meeting in January of 2014, the site coordinator did not return my emails or calls during the spring semester of 2014. I decided
to focus on collecting data at Aster Elementary during the spring and follow up with Verbena Elementary to collect data in the fall of 2014.

In August of 2014, I contacted the principal of Verbena Elementary to set up a meeting about conducting research during the fall semester. I was received warmly by the principal and was granted permission to start my project during the fall semester. The principal asked me to make all research arrangements with her instead of the program coordinator due to the fact that the coordinator was also a classroom teacher and her schedule permitted her to spend only a certain amount of time on family literacy. I agreed and began observations at Verbena Elementary in September of 2014. I observed class at Verbena Elementary once a week: I alternated between coming to English class one week and Parent Time class the next. I also observed PACT time at this site with the Spanish-speaking parents.

During the summer of 2014, I learned that the teacher that I had first observed at Verbena Elementary had quit and John, the teacher who had been working at Aster Elementary, would be taking his place. This was important to my study for a few reasons. First, the parents at Aster Elementary would be getting a new teacher which meant that it was very likely that the characteristics of the class that I observed in the spring would be different. Second, while Verbena Elementary would also be gaining a new instructor, I anticipated that John would use many of the same teaching methods that he used at Aster Elementary. Knowing that high teacher turnover rates are a characteristic of adult basic education programs (Crandall, 1993), I was eager to learn about this switching of teachers in the family literacy program. However, I still wanted an additional research site that would capture the distinction between sites and was concerned that by following one instructor, I would not fully do that. I was also concerned that the new teacher at Aster Elementary might not want a researcher in her classroom right away and that I would not be able to contrast the two sites with new teachers. For these reasons, I chose to add a third site to my study.

I had initially considered Blazing Star Elementary to be a site for my study because of its high Hispanic population. However, during my preliminary visit in 2013 I learned that the teacher was new and, based on my observations, was not comfortable having a researcher in the classroom. She was incredibly nervous when I was there, evidenced by her hands and voice shaking and by the fact that she was
constantly watching me as she taught. I decided not to pursue the school as a site at that time in order to not interrupt instruction. Thinking that the teacher would now have a year of experience in the program, I decided in August of 2014 to see if Blazing Star Elementary would be interested in participating in my study.

I met with the principal at Blazing Star Elementary in September of 2014 and was again, received warmly. I learned that the teacher that I had previously observed had also quit and that her assistant had taken over the class. I scheduled a second meeting with the principal, program coordinator, and teacher to discuss my project and set up a schedule for observations. I began observations at Blazing Star Elementary in October 2014. I observed class at Blazing Star Elementary once a week: I alternated between coming to English class one week and Parent Time class the next. I also observed PACT time at this site with the Spanish-speaking parents.

During the fall of 2014, I observed the program at all three sites on a rotating schedule, logging the most time at Aster Elementary. Because the English teacher was new at Aster Elementary, I only observed English class during the fall of 2014 in order to learn about the experience with the new teacher at this school. In addition to English class, Parent Time, and PACT time, I also observed the childcare component at all sites and was able to attend one planning meeting with the coordinator, teacher and community college coordinator at Verbena Elementary. Table 3 and Table 4 present my observation schedules for each semester and Table 5 presents the total number of observation hours I conducted at each site.

Table 3: Observation Schedule Spring 2014, Aster Elementary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aster Elementary</td>
<td>X (English)</td>
<td>X (Parent Time)</td>
<td>X (English)</td>
<td>X (English)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Observation Schedule Fall 2014, Schools A, B, C

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aster Elementary</td>
<td>X (English/PACT)</td>
<td>X (English/PACT)</td>
<td>X (English)</td>
<td>X (English)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As I drafted my dissertation in the Spring of 2015, I continued to attend all three sites of the family literacy program. I also acted primarily as a volunteer in the class and worked in small groups and one-on-one with the parents. Even though that Spring 2015 engagement was not as centrally part of the study, continuous contact with the field helped me clarify questions that arose during my data analysis and dissertation writing. More generally, I liked that as I wrote and engaged with the abstractions of critical theory, advanced methodology, etc., I also worked with parents and teachers. My hope is that that preserved or augmented the desired ‘experience-near’ promise of ethnography. Or to phrase it much more bluntly, that it ‘kept it real’.
Participants. Keeping in mind the premise that ethnography studies wholes—i.e., whole social formations (Erickson, 1984), the participants in this study included everyone who was involved in the family literacy program: parents, children, directors, coordinators, teachers, interpreters, and assistants. These participants all interacted to actively construct the cultural space of family literacy. Because I was interested in what institutionalized family literacy looks like in the context of the New Latino Diaspora and because I speak Spanish as my second language and am a woman approximately the same age as many of the parent participants, I focused on the Spanish-speaking parents, particularly mothers, and how they interact with the family literacy program. As discussed in the previous chapter, in the U.S. context, Latina women play a central role in determining and maintaining families’ language learning policies (King, Fogle & Logan-Terry, 2008; Velázquez, 2014). While both women and men attended the program, there were more women and at all three of my research sites. Out of forty-four participants, only four were male. All the Spanish-speaking parent participants were women.

I decided to focus on the parents in the adult education class, as opposed to the entire family, in this study for two reasons. First, the notion of institutionalized family literacy, funded by federal sources, has developed out of initiatives for Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs that aid adults in developing skills for economic advancement. Under the logic of these programs, children have been seen as beneficiaries and not as the central learners and participants. While these programs may integrate the family’s background on a superficial level, the multiple, organic literacies that families use daily (as found in the research discussed in chapter two) are usually not central to the policies of these programmatic settings: the central concern has been on the adults’ reading and writing skills and how these skills transfer to their children’s skills.

The second reason for focusing on the parents within this setting is closely connected to the first. The local family literacy site was structured in a manner that privileged ABE, almost using the term family literacy as a disguise for adult education. (While Dewey [1902] long ago suggested schools should be sites for adult education, that logic has never predominated. So the premise that family literacy is ‘for the children’ supports the rationale of schools as delivery sites.) Parents met for ten hours a week and out of those hours, nine were spent in the adult literacy classroom. Only one hour a week was spent learning as a
“family”: during this hour in PACT time, the parent visited his/her elementary-aged child’s classroom and observed the learning activities that the child was doing in class. The degree to which the parent was involved in the classroom activity depended on the classroom teacher’s discretion. The notion of parents learning alongside their children within the boundaries of the program did not typically include younger or older than preschool or elementary-aged.

Nonetheless, I am including children as co-participants in the study. When they were participants in the family literacy program, they were observed and interacted with it. These observations happened almost exclusively during PACT time and during the childcare sessions. Additionally, at Aster Elementary, the young children waited in the adult education classroom as the childcare was set up in the morning.

All parents, irrespective of their home language or cultural background, were invited to participate in the study and all parents were included in the adult classroom observations. All parents gave their consent to be included in the study by signing the IRB consent form; by signing this form they also gave consent for their children to be observed in PACT time or in childcare. To gain consent, I met with the group during a parent time class and presented my research project. The bilingual liaisons interpreted both my presentation and my reading of the consent form. At all of the sites, all of the parents signed the consent form. However, not all parents indicated that they wanted to be audio-recorded for an interview so I did not invite them to participate in interviews. General observations included the activities of the entire adult class in order to accurately capture the family literacy experience. The childcare class was observed, whether or not Spanish-speaking children participated, because it was a component of the program.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all participants in the program: parents, directors, coordinators, teachers, interpreters, and assistants (see Table 6). I interviewed Jill, the Infant Toddler Coordinator of the school district who was in charge of the family literacy program as well as Nancy, the family literacy specialist who supervised the program. I also interviewed Linda, the district’s independent consultant who had retired from a lifelong career with the National Center for Families Learning and Marcia, the assistant director of ESL at the community college, who arranged the partnership between the school district and the college and who oversaw the program instructors. I interviewed all three site coordinators, all
three English teachers, two assistants, two bilingual liaisons, and one volunteer. I also interviewed a total of 12 mothers, spanning across all three sites.

Table 6: Interview Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Participant</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Directors</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinators</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpreters</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistants</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish-speaking Mothers</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I interviewed Spanish-speaking mothers to learn about their experience and interaction with the cultural space of the program. Following this logic, I also only interviewed the Spanish interpreters because they played an integral role in facilitating the Spanish-speakers experience during the Parent Time class. Initially, I planned to interview the children of the Spanish-speaking mothers as well. However, gaining access and establishing rapport to the degree where the mothers felt comfortable talking with me took longer than I expected. After months, some mothers were more eager to sit down and talk with me than others. Because the program focuses mainly on adult learners, I have only become familiar with the children from a distance (mostly during PACT observations). Because of this distant relationship, asking children to participate in a formal interview may have been a daunting experience for them. Furthermore, after months in the field it was not clear how their interview responses could further illuminate my research questions.

Data Collection. Once I established the three focal sites of this study, I spent a total of 142 hours in the field observing the different components of the family literacy program (see Table 5 above). As I met with the varying teachers and coordinators to explain my research project, I offered to be a participant observer in the class. What that concretely meant varied, per the goals and discretion of the teacher, and sometimes entailed nothing at all. When I was asked to actively participate in an activity or to lead a small
group of learners, I always enthusiastically accepted. These opportunities included leading small reading
groups, participating in conversation groups, and conducting one-on-one tutoring with a parent. During
PACT time, I was sometimes asked to fill in for the Spanish interpreter if she was called away. The extent to
which I was actively involved in the class varied depending on the teacher, the day, and the intended
activity. I was most involved in the class at Aster Elementary when John was the instructor, although I did
many of the same activities sporadically at the other sites. Over time, all parents began to see me as a kind
of a resource during class. It was common that they would ask me questions about English language
learning or technology while they worked. Spanish-speaking mothers and the teachers often asked me to
translate words, phrases, or entire conversations. In my time as a ‘helper’, I was careful to watch for any
signs that a teacher felt I was overstepping any boundaries and I am pleased to say that the welcome of my
presence seemed to remain.

Despite my willingness to assist, during most visits, the teacher was happy to have me sit in a
corner of the adult classroom, observe what was happening, and take down jottings that were then
converted into field notes on a daily basis (Emerson, et al., 2011). I did the same while visiting the PACT
time classes and childcare classes. While observing, I paid attention to general class activities in which
everyone was involved as well as “minor events” (Emerson, et al., 2011), or incidents that at first glance
might have seemed tangential, but that in later analysis might also prove to be sources of insight. While
even in ethnography one enters the field with some previously determined ideas about what might be of
interest, one of the virtues of ethnography is that it is not a rigid methodology (Wolcott, 1988). If something
unanticipated appears to be explanatory of something (a pattern that may not be immediately visible), then
the flexibility in rewarded. In the meantime, one gathers notes on a broader range of happenings than one
is fully sure are relevant.

While I was most interested in minor events that included Spanish-speaking mothers, I also
included minor events that included other participants because these also construct the general cultural
space of the program. After each session I wrote in-depth field notes that depicted the scenes of each
session. To write field notes in detail, I followed Emerson et al.’s (2011) guidelines that field notes should
included description, dialogue, and characterization. I also included any reactions or insights that I had while observing and/or writing fields in parenthetical asides in the text.

I wrote jottings and field notes for meetings that I attended as well. I attended meetings with two principals at schools B and C (the principal at Blazing Star Elementary agreed to my study without a formal meeting) and was invited to attend one planning meeting at Verbena Elementary during the fall of 2014. I was told that planning meetings happen at each site and asked to attend them; however, my inquiries never resulted in an invitation beyond to the first meeting I attended at Verbena Elementary. I also attended a meeting with the coordinator of Aster Elementary and the ESL director at the community college to discuss my project.

I began conducting formal, semi-structured interviews with the participants during the summer of 2014. Formal interviews were conducted outside of class time, per the request of Nancy, the program director in order to not interrupt the parents’ learning. Formal interviews differ from informal interviews in the sense that they follow Spradley’s (1979) method of conducting ethnographic interviews. In this sense, open-ended interviews are centered on revealing how an informant experiences a cultural scene. Descriptive and structural questions are used to ask an informant to talk about the research site on a grand scale (general questions about how things usually are) and on a narrow scale (questions that focus on a specific phenomenon or task) (Spradley, 1979). Informants are asked to provide examples of different things and talk about their experiences at the site. Native language and terms are points of interest in the interview: the interviewer picks up on the terms and asks the informant to define and explain them (Spradley, 1979).

I used semi-structured interview protocols to guide my interviews with both school personnel and mothers (See Appendices A and B). I began each interview by stating my purpose for my research study. I asked participants to first describe family literacy and then I followed up with descriptive, structural, and contrast questions (Spradley, 1979). I used a handout with information about ethnographic interview questions as a support me when I was crafting these questions in the moment (See Appendix C). Furthermore, I altered the protocol depending on the role of the informant. As interviews developed, I focused on following up on what my informant said as opposed to rigidly adhering to the interview protocol.
For example, when talking with the community college director, I asked specific questions about the role of the college and their instructors; when I interviewed the district’s federal program coordinator, I asked questions about the role and perspective of the school district.

It is important to note the difference between the processes for setting interviews with the school personnel and the Spanish-speaking mothers. When I asked the coordinator, teacher, assistant, and volunteer at Aster Elementary if they would be interested in participating in interviews in May of 2014, they responded by offering me their email addresses to contact them. This response could have been because I was requesting to do interviews during the summer break and this allowed me to communicate with them throughout the summer, including to arrange the interviews. But the exchange of email addresses with project personnel was a common enough trend throughout the study that I don’t think seasonality best explains it; when I asked for an interview, school personnel would tell me to follow up with an invitation to contact them via email to schedule a time. I scheduled all interviews except for one with directors, coordinators, teachers, assistants and the volunteers via email (as the one exception, I scheduled the interview with the NCFL contractor via telephone).

In contrast, my only form of communication with Spanish-speaking mothers was during class time. Like with the school personnel, I asked the mothers before or after class if they would participate in interviews. When I asked when they would be available for an interview, all mothers told me “cualquier día”, or any day. With further discussion, we would decide together to meet either that same afternoon or a day in the very near future.

The setting for the interviews was at the participant’s discretion, for both project personnel and parents. Most mothers invited me to their homes for the interviews while a few at Blazing Star Elementary asked to stay in the classroom to do the interviews. Instead of email addresses, the mothers gave me their home addresses and phone numbers as a means to contact them. In homes, I was offered coffee, water, desserts, and even tamales during interviews. The setting for the interviews with the school personnel was also at the participant’s discretion; I met with them either in their offices or at coffee shops and restaurants.
None of the project personnel interviews occurred at a home and if any food was consumed, it was because we individually bought it (like my having a cappuccino during an interview at a coffee shop).

Artifacts were collected throughout the study as appropriate. I collected any handouts that were passed out during the sessions I attended. Typically these handouts included information from a visiting presenter, such as a guide to understanding and upcoming trip to the symphony or information about middle school programs (for parents’ children). I also collected any worksheets or class materials that were used in the adult English class. With both types of handouts, it was often the case that there were not enough copies for me to take one. In these scenarios, I borrowed a copy long enough to jot down some characterizations for my field notes. In some cases and with the permission of the teachers, I took pictures of the artifacts and included them in my electronic files. I also collected information from relevant websites (e.g., the school district, the community college, and the NCFL) and from newspaper articles. All artifacts were dated and kept in a binder with an artifact reference slip. The slip identified the date, the school, the class, and a description of the artifact. Website artifacts often included screen shots or print outs.

**Data Analysis.** Field notes and artifacts were coded through open and focused coding that was inductive in nature and reflective of the significance of events and experiences to those in the setting. Open codes are words or short phrases that capture and signal what is going on in large pieces of the data and link them to a more general analytical issue (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2011). Focused codes zoom in on specific pieces of the data that fall under an open code. I wrote memos throughout the data analysis process: an in-process memo was written after writing each set of field notes to identify and explore initial theoretical directions and possibilities (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). These memos were intended to provide insight, direction and guidance for the ongoing fieldwork. Analytical memos were written as a cumulative and more theoretical analysis of patterns that were emerging throughout the data. Analytical memos connected the different sets of field notes and were more theoretically detailed in nature. Significant findings were captured in detailed vignettes and used in the findings section of this study (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011).
Interview data as well as verbatim talk were recorded in the field notes were coded through domain analysis. Spradley (1979) defines a domain simply as “the names for things” (p. 107). Essentially, conducting a domain analysis of the verbatim talk gathered from a cultural site unveils the culture’s principle for organizing symbols into domains, indicating in more detail how various stakeholders are making sense of the social space. Key to this analysis is identifying the relationships amongst the symbols and using these relational concepts to decode the meaning of the symbols (Spradley, 1979).

During domain analysis, semantic relationships between terms are identified first. Examples of these relationships include: strict inclusion (X is a kind of Y), spatial (X is a part of Y), cause-effect (X is a result of Y), means-end (X is a way to do Y) and attribution (X is an attribute of Y), to name a few (Spradley, 1979, p. 111). Once a semantic relationship is discovered, a possible cover term can be determined. A cover term is a name for a category of cultural knowledge. Each cover term has included terms, or terms that belong to the category of knowledge named by the cover term (Spradley, 1979). As researchers hypothesize about the cover terms of a site, they take their hypotheses back to the field and ask structural interview questions (formal or informal) to confirm or disprove how they perceive the semiotic structures of the place. Cover terms and included terms in this study are presented in both English and Spanish, depending on how they emerged in the field.

The entire data analysis process of this research project was facilitated by use of MaxQDA 11 Plus (Verbi Software, 2014), a qualitative analysis software package. This software not only permitted the organization of all data in one accessible space, it also assisted in the triangulation of all pieces of data. For example, when writing analytical memos, I could pull up frequency charts of each set of field notes and see how the codes compared to the previous set. Because these codes were linked directly to the text, I was also able to gain access to the text from the field note and re-read it during this process. Cover terms and included terms can be linked between field notes and interviews and reviewed in juxtaposition to other data. MaxQDA includes a Domain Table feature that exports a table that permits the researcher to see how the coded text interacts across artifacts, including field notes, interviews, and collected samples from the field. Through this process, I sought to identify patterns that emerged as significant in different contexts that
illustrated the experienced culture of family literacy across the three sites and the experiences of Spanish-speaking mothers as they interacted with it.

Documents that were collected in the field were initially coded in a similar manner, by assigning an open code that aligned with data collected in the field notes and interviews (Love, 2003). From there, documents that were relevant to the emerging themes were looked at more closely using ethnographic content analysis, or what Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) call “integrating the text” (as cited in Love, 2003). This involves asking questions of the text such as: What was the overt purpose of the text? What may have been the underlying purposes? How are the texts written? How are the texts read? For what purposes? On what occasions? With what outcomes? What is recorded? Omitted? Taken for granted? What assumptions, beliefs and values are being communicated and how are they being communicated? (Love, 2003, p. 94). These questions were in line with other questions asked during the analysis and memoing phase and the documents were taken into account in the conclusions.

I used the themes that emerged during the data analysis phase to come to conclusions that were both empirical and theoretical (see chapters 4 and 5). Empirical findings were presented as thick descriptions that articulated the cultural nuances of the family literacy program experience and the Spanish-speaking mothers’ interactions with it. These findings illustrated moments that informed understanding about the fields of programmatic family literacy, adult English language learning, and school partnerships with diverse parents. As they emerged, these findings also became a piece of the dialogical literature (Todorov, 1985) to become both reflexive and generative of theoretical conclusions.

**Significance**

The significance of designing and implementing a qualitative research study that employs ethnographic methods in a local family literacy program was two-fold. Theoretically, I intend for it to contribute to the field of family literacy by providing a comprehensive analysis of the program through the thick description of the experiences of the participating parents. Particularly, I sought to add to the understanding of the unique literacy experiences of Spanish-speaking families in the New Latino Diaspora.
to the field. This addition should help bridge the divide between sociocultural and programmatic family literacy and help construct a framework through which I and others can conduct future research.

Practically, this research project has also been intended to inform the local school district that hosts the family literacy program. Learning about the experiences and perspectives of all those involved sheds light on what each person expected to gain from the program and whether or not the program was meeting those expectations, or, whether it was “working” for them. Participants, especially school personnel, have requested to see my research findings. After the completion of writing this dissertation, it is my plan to schedule a time to share the findings with them. Given that from the moment I started collecting data I felt an ethical responsibility to share my results with various stakeholders, for the whole span of this inquiry I felt accountable to my participants. Sharing also presented me the opportunity to generate feedback concerning the extent to which participants felt like I captured their lived (and varied) experiences of the program.

I hope that the knowledge generated from my findings can inform programmatic, curriculum, and pedagogical decisions made by the directors, coordinators and teachers in the program and, through various means, have shared versions of the knowledge and discoveries shared here with them. In turn, my broader wish is to benefit the parents I studied and others who will follow them in this program.

Describing actions and interactions and unveiling the nuanced details of the enacted family literacy program demonstrates the extent to which varying participants’ goals are being met and how the participating parents are being perceived and storied by the school. It also highlights the literacies and language practices that are privileged, disregarded, undetected, or ignored within the program. This highlighting has the potential to result in changes in policy, making classroom instruction and daily interactions more responsive to and better reflective of parents’ goals and interests, therefore helping them achieve their goals.
CHAPTER 4: ETHNOGRAPHIC FINDINGS

In 2009 Chesterfield Public Schools (CPS) received a grant from Toyota Family Literacy (formerly known as Toyota Family Literacy) to implement a family literacy program. A school district with a growing newcomer and refugee population, CPS determined that families who were new to the city and were learning English as an additional language would benefit most from a program that taught print-literacy skills in English and sought to familiarize families with American schools and community resources. In line with Toyota’s aim to address the needs of Hispanic and other immigrant families by “by increasing English language and [print] literacy skills for adults while also supporting their involvement in their children’s education” (NCFL, 2015), CPS secured funding from the company to begin family literacy sites at three of the district’s thirty-eight elementary schools.

The original sites of the family literacy program were in schools that served large Latino populations and at first all program participants were Spanish-speaking families. Both Blazing Star Elementary and Verbena Elementary were original program sites. (Aster Elementary was added midway through the following school year.) After the initial Toyota funding ran out, the district secured funding from various sources to continue the program at these three sites. Within the second year of the family literacy program initiative, additional sites were added with received a combination of funding. Some came from local sources and were obtained through the Chesterfield Community Foundation. Other funding came from national philanthropic sources, such as The United Way and Dollar General, and/or from federal funds, like refugee grants or Title I monies. Under Title I, Part A, schools could utilize funds for parental involvement initiatives (US Department of Education, 2004). All three of the focus sites in this study allotted portions of their Title I monies to family literacy under this premise.

As family literacy sites were added throughout the district, the program began to serve a broader diversity of families. New sites were open to families of all language backgrounds. Eventually, the original sites that served only Spanish-speaking families at first welcomed parents from all language backgrounds.
During my observations, all three of the sites served families who represented three or four different home languages.

The findings in this chapter are presented as prominent themes that arose during the analysis phase of research. Themes that were considered substantial were those that were substantiated with findings that crossed field notes, interviews, and artifacts according to the open and focused codes that were assigned and to the ongoing memos that I wrote during analysis. Here, I present the overarching themes emerged from this process and selected pieces of evidence (field notes, interview data and/or artifacts) that illustrate the themes.

Section 1: The People and Characteristics of Three Focal Sites

While the demographic details of the three participating schools were outlined in the previous chapter, this section looks more in depth at the school district, each participating site, the community college, and the people involved with family literacy. Table 7 outlines the names of participants by site and each person’s role in the program. All names are pseudonyms. For parents, only the names of the Latina mothers who were interviewed are included in this chart. Other adult students and/or their children are referenced by pseudonyms in field notes as necessary. Because both mothers and fathers attended the program, I use the word parents to reference the general program participants. Since all of the Spanish-speaking participants at the focal sites were women and mothers, use the phrases Latina mothers or Spanish-speaking mothers when I reference this group specifically. Other times, I use specific pseudonyms to refer to all informants.

Table 7: Names and Roles of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chesterfield Public Schools: District Office</td>
<td>Jill</td>
<td>Infant and Toddler Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nancy</td>
<td>Family Literacy Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>Family Literacy Contractor, Retired from NCFL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Community College</td>
<td>Marcia</td>
<td>ELL Assistant Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Family Literacy Coordinator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Aster Elementary School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>Site Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amber</td>
<td>English Teacher’s Assistant (2013–2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fernanda</td>
<td>Volunteer (2013–2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nekabari</td>
<td>English Teacher’s Assistant (2014-2015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yolanda</td>
<td>Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sofia</td>
<td>Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloria</td>
<td>Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verónica</td>
<td>Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ale</td>
<td>Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camila</td>
<td>Bilingual Liaison (Spanish-speaking)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Blazing Star Elementary School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>Site Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melanie</td>
<td>English Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyle</td>
<td>Volunteer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabriela</td>
<td>Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blanca</td>
<td>Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyntia</td>
<td>Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flor</td>
<td>Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carolina</td>
<td>Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lorena</td>
<td>Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francisca</td>
<td>Bilingual Liaison (Spanish-speaking)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Verbena Elementary School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pilar</td>
<td>Site Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>English Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nichole</td>
<td>English Teacher’s Assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamilah</td>
<td>English Teacher’s Assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharon</td>
<td>Volunteer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xóchitl</td>
<td>Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martha</td>
<td>Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nora</td>
<td>Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belinda</td>
<td>Bilingual Liaison (Spanish-speaking)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Chesterfield Public Schools

Chesterfield Public Schools (CPS) was the second largest school district in the state of Nebraska.

During the 2013-2014 school year, the district educated more than 37,800 students in fifty-five different schools, including thirty-eight elementary schools. English language learners (ELLs) made up 7.21% of
CPS’s student population. The demographic characteristics of students who attended CPS during this school year are presented in Table 8 below. Just under half of CPS’s students qualified for free or reduced lunches during this school year. At the time of this study, eight elementary schools hosted a family literacy program; the program was being introduced in a ninth school during the writing of this dissertation in February of 2015.

Table 8: Demographic Profile of Chesterfield Public Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>American Indian/ Native Alaskan</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Black or African American</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Two or More Races</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chesterfield Public Schools</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>68.3%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Nebraska Department of Education State of the Schools Report

The family literacy program was housed under the school district’s Federal Programs Department and was primarily supervised by the Director of Federal Programs. I initially contacted the Federal Programs Director during the spring of 2013 to inquire about conducting research at CPS. The then director left the district during the summer of 2013 and his duties were distributed amongst other employees in the Federal Programs Department. Jill, the Infant and Toddler Coordinator, was charged with overseeing the family literacy program. She became involved with family literacy because of her experience working the district’s program for student parents, which followed a similar framework as the family literacy program. Jill oversaw the eight family literacy sites at the district level. Jill was an Anglo woman in her late thirties to early forties.

Jill worked closely with Nancy, the Family Literacy Specialist, who supervised the eight sites from a closer, on the ground position. While Nancy had responsibilities at the district level, such as compiling data and grant writing, she also served as the site coordinator for two schools. Nancy was an Anglo woman in
her mid forties. Most of her career had been spent doing educational outreach with different prominent nonprofit organizations, such as Planned Parenthood. She had worked extensively with Chesterfield’s growing refugee population since the early 1990s and had lived abroad for a couple of years.

Both Jill and Nancy worked closely with Linda, a private contractor hired by CPS who had a professional background with the National Center for Families Learning (NCFL). In her role, Linda advised decision making regarding family literacy, provided professional development and support to teachers and administrators, collected data through classroom observations, and sometimes taught parent time classes. Linda was an Anglo woman in her early sixties and had recently retired from a lifelong career with the NCFL and other state-sponsored family education initiatives. Originally from Kentucky, the state that is home to the NCFL, her work had taken her across the country to work with diverse populations in myriad contexts.

**Aster Elementary School.** Constructed in 1891, Aster Elementary School was one of the oldest schools in Chesterfield: its architecture of red brick and tall façade radiated historical importance. Aster Elementary was located slightly north of Chesterfield’s city center. It lay on the outskirts of the city’s public university and along the intersection of two of the city’s main roads. Along with the hustle of city traffic, multiple small businesses, convenient stores, community support centers, clinics and restaurants characterized the neighborhood. The diversity of the neighborhood’s residents was mirrored in the businesses that lined the streets: the city’s only Ethiopian restaurant, multiple Vietnamese restaurants, a Mexican bakery, a store with signs written in Arabic and English advertising halal products, and several other small markets labeled as “Asian” or “Mexican”. Sprinkled amongst these local businesses were American chains like Walgreens, McDonald’s, and Subway as well as a recruitment center for the United States Marine Corp.

At the time of this study, Aster Elementary School was a Title I public school that, according to its website, “served a multi racial and ethnic student population that face serious challenges associated with living near or at the poverty level.” Like many urban schools, the inside of Aster juxtaposed astute architecture and dated fixtures that begged updates. However, the school was well equipped with
technology and other learning resources. The school enrolled 541 elementary students in 2013-2014, grades preschool through five. 28% of students were English language learners and 92% were eligible for free and reduced lunches (Nebraska Department of Education, 2014). The school participated in the city’s local food bank’s Backpack Program, a program that sent a backpack full of food home with children each week. As mentioned previously, 21.6% of Aster Elementary’s students were Hispanic and the school served a large refugee population. Table 9 depicts the demographic profile of Aster Elementary School.

Table 9: Demographic Profile of Aster Elementary School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>American Indian/Native Alaskan</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Black or African American</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Two or More Races</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aster Elementary School</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>24.8%</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>36.6%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Nebraska Department of Education State of the Schools Report

Anne was the family literacy coordinator of Aster Elementary and her primary role at the school was as the Family Care Coordinator. In this position, Anne actively looked after the needs of the school’s families and connected them with resources, especially in times of needs. She took on the position of the family literacy coordinator as an extension of this role. Anne was an early woman in her early sixties. Before coming to the role of Family Care Coordinator, she had a career in the production industry: she and her husband owned and managed a cabinet production company.

John had been the English teacher at Aster for four years, since the program’s implementation in 2010. He had also worked as an instructor for Regional Community College (RCC) for many years before applying for the position as the family literacy English teacher. His first job with the family literacy program was at Blazing Star Elementary. He continued to teach a plethora of different leveled English classes at RCC while teaching in family literacy. John was an Anglo man in his early fifties. His background was in the
seminary and, during this study, he was studying Portuguese and Spanish. During the spring of 2014, when I observed John’s class at Aster, Amber was his teaching assistant. Amber had recently graduated college with a bachelor’s degree in Spanish and was working part time as the family literacy assistant teacher and as an English teacher for RCC in the evenings. Fernanda was a volunteer in the English class who had recently married and moved to Chesterfield from Brazil. She spoke Portuguese, English, and some Spanish.

In the fall of 2014, John left Aster and took an open teaching position in family literacy at Verbena Elementary. Both Amber and Fernanda became employed elsewhere and stopped working with the family literacy program after May 2014.

In the fall of 2015, Cindy was hired as the family literacy English teacher at Aster Elementary School. With a background in teaching English as a Second Language at both the high school and elementary level and in working in Adult Basic Education, Cindy had recently retired before taking this part-time job. As a matter of fact, Cindy was previously employed at Aster Elementary as an elementary ELL teacher before she retired. Cindy was an Anglo woman in her early sixties. Nekabari was Cindy’s teaching assistant during the 2014-2015 school year. A retired chemist who had immigrated to the United States from Nigeria in the 1970s, Nekabari had worked in several of CPS’s family literacy sites and was also very active in a local community center near Aster. Nekabari was an African man in his early sixties and he spoke English and Yoruba.

As mentioned in chapter three, the majority of the participating parents at Aster Elementary were Arabic and Kurdish-speaking refugees from Iraq, Syria, and Sudan. In the spring of 2014, there were four Spanish-speaking mothers in the program; in the fall, there were three. All of the Spanish-speaking women were from Mexico. Nineteen of the twenty students were women; one male participated in the program at Aster Elementary.

The family literacy class met from 8:30 – 10:30 AM on Monday through Wednesday. The family literacy classroom was in a classroom in the back of the school and down a long hallway. To arrive at the family literacy classroom, one needed to walk in a U-shape hallway of early grades classroom, down a small flight of stairs, past the cafeteria and the computer classroom to a classroom nestled in a back corner.
across from the gymnasium. The childcare class was housed in a small section of the cafeteria. On Fridays, employees and volunteers worked in the adjacent hallway to fill backpacks with food for students to take home.

**Blazing Star Elementary School.** Blazing Star Elementary School was constructed in 1955, before the school was annexed into the Chesterfield Public School District in February of 1959. Before the one-story brick building was constructed in the middle of a working class subdivision, the site housed a series of schoolhouses of various sizes since 1886. The Blazing Star neighborhood was located off of one of Chesterfield’s principle highways that ran across the north of town, toward the airport, and overlooked one of the city’s more industrious regions. The highway served as the divide between small factories to the south and a working class suburb to the north. An assortment of affordable housing characterized the neighborhood: newer homes built within the past fifteen to twenty years were sprinkled amongst those built in the late 1950s. A prominent mobile home community was located about five blocks away from the school. While a few gas stations, fast food restaurants, and small businesses lined the highway, the neighborhood surrounding the school was quiet and predominantly residential.

Blazing Star Elementary was also labeled on its website as a Title I public school that served a diverse population. The school’s interior was reminiscent of the mid-twentieth century, but there were clear traces of updates. Like Aster, Blazing Star’s classrooms were equipped with modern technology and many resources. Four portable classrooms had been constructed behind the school for additional learning space and the family literacy classroom was located in one of these trailers. The school served 443 students during the 2013-2014 school year: 37.9% of the students were English language learners and 44.5% of students were Hispanic. Table 10 depicts the demographic characteristics of Blazing Star Elementary. 80.1% of Blazing Star’s students received free or reduced lunches and the school also participated in the city’s Backpack Program.

*Table 10: Demographic Profile of Blazing Star Elementary School*
Amanda served as the family literacy coordinator at Blazing Star Elementary. Unlike Anne, she was not employed directly at Blazing Star; instead, she worked through Chesterfield’s Family Services as a supervisor for before and afterschool programs at schools throughout the district. She was stationed at Blazing Star Elementary to oversee the school’s Community Learning Centers (CLCs). In this position, Amanda coordinated the school’s clubs and family events; coordinating the family literacy program, then, was accommodated within Amanda’s responsibilities in this position. Amanda was an Anglo woman in her mid thirties. Melanie was the English teacher at this site. She had recently moved to Lincoln after living and teaching abroad in US Military schools in Korea. She had a background as a classroom teacher and had taught grades kindergarten through twelve. She began working in family as an assistant to the English teacher at Blazing Star in the 2013-2014 school year. In the fall of 2014, Melanie then took over as the head English teacher. She did not have an assistant at the time of this study, but Kyle was a volunteer in each class I observed. Melanie was an Anglo woman in her mid thirties. She spoke English and some Korean.

During the data collection portion of this study, the majority of the students at Blazing Star Elementary were Spanish-speaking women: eight out of fourteen. Of these women, all but one were from Mexico. One woman, Flor, was from Guatemala. The other students spoke Kurdish, Arabic and Vietnamese and were from Iraq, Sudan, and Vietnam. There were three men in the class: two from Vietnam and one from Iraq who spoke Kurdish.

The family literacy class was held from 9:15 – 11:15 on Monday through Friday. As mentioned previously, the class was held in a portable classroom located behind the school building. Upon arrival, one
needed to walk down a hallway, through the cafeteria and out the back doors to access the family literacy classroom. A key from a staff member was needed to re-enter the school building once outside. The childcare class was located in the front corner of the cafeteria, sectioned off by bookshelves that held a variety of supplies. It was common for parents to conjugate in the cafeteria and near the childcare before class began; they would often come to the classroom at exactly 9:15 and instruction was underway by 11:20.

**Verbena Elementary School.** Verbena Elementary School was constructed in 1928 originally as a junior high school. In the early 1990s the building underwent restorations and renovations, received some additions, and re-opened as an elementary school. Verbena was located on the south side of Chesterfield's downtown area, just south of the city’s capitol building and governor’s mansion. The neighborhood was characterized by the charm of its early twentieth century houses. While many of these houses had been converted into duplexes or apartments, some had also become restoration projects for the city’s professional class. The school sat a few blocks south of Chesterfield’s Esquina Hispana/Hispanic Corner, a strip of Latino markets, restaurants, bakeries, and ice cream shops well known across town for their authenticity. Verbena was also within walking distance to restaurants and cafés frequented by local residents and professionals who worked in the nearby government offices. The neighborhood’s diversity, affordable housing, and accessibility to local businesses had attracted a population of young and professional “hipsters” to move in. Not quite gentrified, Verbena’s streets were often filled with diverse people walking and biking to local venues.

Verbena Elementary was a Title I school with a diverse student population. Similar to Aster, the school’s physical building projected historical importance. Inside, however, reflected the modern realities of the school and its student population. A brightly colored mural depicting the school’s commitment to cultural diversity greeted students, families, and other visitors at the entrance. For the entire semester that I observed, posters that illustrated families’ heritage lined the hallways. 475 students attended Verbena Elementary during the 2013-2014 school year: of these students, 48.6% were English language learners.
and 47.6% of students were Hispanic. Table 11 depicts the demographic characteristics of Verbena Elementary. Furthermore, 90.7% of Verbena’s students received free or reduced lunches and the school also participated in the city’s Backpack Program.

Table 11: Demographic Profile of Verbena Elementary School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>American Indian/ Native Alaskan</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Black or African American</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Two or More Races</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verbena Elementary School</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>47.6%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Nebraska Department of Education State of the Schools Report

Pilar held the role as the family literacy coordinator at Verbena Elementary School. Unlike both Anne and Amanda, Pilar was an ELL classroom teacher and also served as an ELL team leader at the school. Pilar came to the United States from Mexico as a teenager and learned English in high school; she was in her mid forties and spoke Spanish and English. Her teaching experience began in Texas, where she also worked closely with parents to offer science and math classes for them on the weekends. Her past experiences in similar programs secured her the position in this family literacy program. Pilar had about an hour of time each day to devote to coordinating the family literacy program.

John became the English teacher at Verbena Elementary in the fall of 2014 when I began observing. Nichole was his first classroom assistant. She stayed in this position for about six weeks before leaving to take on more hours at her other part-time job. She was an Anglo woman in her early thirties. Jamilah was hired as the assistant at the end of October 2014. Jamilah was from Iraq, spoke Arabic and English, and had a bachelor’s degree in English Education. She was in her early forties. Prior to working in family literacy, Jamilah administered English tests for Regional Community College. In February 2015, Jamilah was also hired as the English teacher at the ninth family literacy site in the district.
All of the parents at Verbena Elementary were women and the majority, eleven, were Spanish-speaking women. Most of the Spanish-speaking women were from Mexico and two were from Guatemala. The rest of the class was comprised of women from Iraq who spoke Kurdish and Arabic as well as women from Burma who spoke Karen. Many of the women who spoke Burma had spent many years in refugee camps in Thailand.

The family literacy classroom was located upstairs, near some of the ELL classrooms, and across from the library. Class was held from 8:30 – 10:30 at Verbena Elementary School. The childcare location alternated: sometimes it was held in a separate classroom downstairs, near the check-in desk, and other times it was held on the stage in the cafeteria.

**Regional Community College**

Regional Community College (RCC) was established in the early 1940s as a trade school in a town west of Chesterfield. In the 1970s, the institution became a community college and expanded into four different cities in the southeast portion of the state. At the time of this study, RCC served students from fifteen counties and offered more than fifty programs of study. RCC’s main campus was located on the far-east side of Chesterfield; however, it had a new campus located in the center of the city and other outreach programs in different community centers around town. The English portions of CPS’s family literacy classes were offered by instructors who worked within RCC’s Continuing Education program, which offered courses in Adult Basic Skills, Citizenship, ESL, and GED. Additionally, RCC offered five different English as a Second Language classes at their campuses: beginning English, intermediate English, advanced English, ESL for academic success (college preparation), and a newcomer refugee ESL class.

Marcia, the Assistant Direct of ESL, was Chesterfield Public Schools’ main contact at RCC for setting up and maintaining the English teachers for the family literacy programs. She oversaw all of the adult English as a second language classes at the community college as well as the English portion of the family literacy program. Marcia was charged with hiring the adult ELL teachers for the program as well as developing budget proposals so the school district could contract with the community college. She was an
Section 2: The Enacted Family Literacy Model

The family literacy program in CPS at the time of this study (2014 – 2015) was largely influenced by the school district's early adoption of the National Center for Families Learning (NCFL) and Toyota Family Literacy comprehensive model for family literacy in the original three sites. “It’s called comprehensive family literacy. It’s a four-component model nation-wide. However, [Chesterfield] has a special program in the sense it’s technically 5 components. But, to say that you run...a comprehensive family literacy program, it has to have 4 components.” (Nancy, Family Literacy Specialist, Interview). As explained in the previous chapter, the comprehensive model is comprised of four components: adult literacy, child literacy, adult education or parent time, and parent and child together time (PACT). The initial funding from Toyota mandated the use of the four-component model. After that funding source ran out and more sites were added, the school district decided to keep the original four-component model as a framework for additional sites. Child care was considered the fifth component of the comprehensive model and was often highlighted by administrators and teachers as a characteristic that makes Chesterfield’s comprehensive family literacy model distinct from others.

The five components of family literacy served as an anchor of conceptualization that delineated what the program should be across all sites. Essentially, the model was the policy that guided the family literacy program in Chesterfield Public Schools. It was present in all of the printed material, material on the district’s website and in stories about the program in school newsletters and the local newspaper. All of the administrators, coordinators and teachers referenced the comprehensive model when asked to explain family literacy. Each of them also stated that while each site followed the comprehensive model, each site was unique and the program played out differently between each site. Most of the mothers who were interviewed also discussed this model when describing family literacy. While the mothers did not use the
phrase comprehensive model, they mentioned the different classes and activities that they participate in that aligned with each of these components.

While the five-component model described the types of classes that family members participated in each week, understanding the enacted experience of these components requires taking a closer look at how family literacy was conceived by the varying participants and how these ideas were appropriated into the actual lived experience of family literacy. The following sections look at the program through the interplay of the perspectives of my informants given during interviews, the actions I observed while attending the program, and artifacts that documented the experience of the program. While the five-component model is clearly present, it is also the case that the actual co-constructed and semiotic experience of family literacy is more complex than initially understood. The data demonstrate that there are more components to family literacy than the conceived and written policy recognizes. Hence, the following data are presented according to the themes that emerged from observations and interviews as opposed to strictly adhering to the formal policy of the five-component model.

What is Family Literacy?

The complexity of what the family literacy program actually was in Chesterfield Public Schools was revealed through my initial question to informants in the field. When asked, “What is family literacy?”, parents, administrators, teachers, and assistants all gave varying answers that reflected four general themes: parent engagement in schools, parental empowerment, helping children learn, and a support system. These responses provide a starting point for understanding the varying perspectives that guide involvement and interaction in the program.

Parent Engagement in Schools. Family literacy brought parents into the school building for a substantial period of time. Upon enrollment, parents committed to coming to the school five days a week for at least two hours each day. This meant that parents who fully participated in the program spent a minimum of ten hours a week at their children’s elementary school. Many parents also came early and some stayed
late. At Verbena Elementary, an additional family program titled Family Learning took place after the weekly parent time class and about six to eight mothers stayed for two extra hours per week at this site. (This additional program was not considered part of the family literacy program; it was open to all parents who wished to become more involved in the school and connect with other families. Funding for Family Learning, however, was granted through Toyota and it had similar components to family literacy.) Inevitably, parents entered the school, greeted the guard and signed in, walked through the hallways and visited classrooms. They were physically present in the school. Pilar, the coordinator at Verbena Elementary, explained that she viewed getting parents into the school as the first step of them becoming engaged in the school so that they can go on to support the educational endeavors of CPS.

“Well I think that the program is...an avenue to bring parents in schools...because when parents are here, kids are here. So if the parents come to school, the kids are here because they, kind of hold each other accountable. You know, we will think about how can we have better communication with parents, how can we um, bring parents into the school or...they become engaged. And so family literacy helps them. And it doesn’t have to be ESL. I mean I think that you have parents that maybe don’t need the ESL classes they need something else, you know. But, it’s a way to bring parents into schools and have a strong advocate for kids and for teachers. And for the education, because they see what we do first hand and they maybe become advocates for education. So I truly believe that the program has a great impact on schools.”

(Pilar, Coordinator, Verbena Elementary, Interview, December 15, 2014)

Similarly, Sofía, a mother at Aster Elementary, explained that the family literacy program permitted her to observe what was happening inside of her child's classroom and to learn more about what her children were doing and how they might be learning.

“Yo pienso que es, pues una buena oportunidad para uno porque aparte de que puede uno aprender, puede uno verlo que están haciendo los niños porque no es solo ir a aprender, es puede uno ir a ver las clases de los niños, a ver cómo están haciendo. Por ejemplo hoy yo descubrí que el niño, le pusieron a hacer un examen, entonces les dieron 45 minutos. Pero él en 5 minutos lo terminó, pero, no sé estar bien o estar mal, pero como estoy yendo a la clase y si no fuera nunca sabría yo que está pasando. Entonces ellos más que nada...a ver que si aprende uno pero también es importante que hiciera para que uno esté pendiente por los niños, lo que está pasando y también, este el niño ya tiene 2 años y también es que, yo creo que está aprendiendo.”

[I think that it is a good opportunity for someone because not only can a person learn, one can see what the children are doing because it’s not going [to the class] to learn, it’s going to see the children’s classes, to see how they are doing [things]. For example today I discovered that my son had an exam and they gave him 45 minutes. But, he finished it in five minutes, but, I don’t know if that is good or bad, but because I am going to the class and if I didn’t go I would never know what...]

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Sofía viewed family literacy as a way to enter her son’s first grade classroom and learn about what happened inside. She commented multiple times throughout her interview with me that she did not realize how difficult the work that her son was doing in first grade was until she observed the class. Sofía attended school in México through third grade and then completed her *certificado de primaria*, elementary certificate, through a home study program. She had not been in an elementary classroom since. Her older children had performed well in school, but concerns were raised about her son Daniel by both her and the school: not only was he not performing well academically, but he cried each day when Sofía dropped him off for school and repeatedly told her that he did not like school. Sofía attributed visiting her son’s classroom as a way to see what was happening inside and to be more aware of her son’s experiences. She also stated that he stopped crying when she took him to school and looked forward to her visits to his classroom.

The notion of family literacy spurring parent-school engagement did not only apply to parents visiting their children’s classroom. Jill, CPS’s Infant and Toddler Coordinator, explained that she viewed the program as a vehicle for drawing parents into other familial outreach initiatives sponsored by the schools.

“I think the focus is really that parent engagement, family engagement and bringing the [parents] in. I think the district’s focus and when they get all excited is when we talk about the amount of families that are part of this program, that English is not their first language, and we start talking about 100% parent-teacher conference [participation], about the families that are starting to come to the evening events. And really where that family literacy, you know, being a part of that family literacy program with pride, like they have this, got a degree or it’s just like this real positive, but really being a part of the school because that just, up until this program started, that just didn’t exist. Families were scared to go to the schools, they didn’t know, how to, you know get connected and we didn’t know how to welcome them. And so this has really been, not only for family literacy participants but the community they’re in. They’ve really kind of opened them up to be a part of the schools. And so that is I think the biggest, kind of…focus and, an area that the district has really gotten excited about. Also, just the families being able to support their children and that whole goal of graduation, you know. So that they have the support from parents that will continue through school all the way through high school.

(Jill, Infant and Toddler Coordinator, Interview, December 11, 2014)

According to Jill, the family literacy program served the district as a tool to help them connect with English
language learning (ELL) parents and connect the parents to the school. She perceived the program as providing a sense of pride for the participating families that played a factor in how they participated in school activities like parent-teacher conferences and evening events. This connection, in her opinion, would translate into the support their children would need to graduation from high school.

Jill’s perspectives about the family literacy program providing school connections beyond the elementary classroom were shared by a few of the participating mothers. Xóchitl, a mother at Verbena Elementary, described the program as *un aprendizaje más*, learning more:

“Pues, como un aprendizaje más. Una ayuda para los niños de uno mismo, ayuda por la comunidad, ayuda por la escuela, ayuda por los maestros…pues se me hace muy, muy importante este programa a mí…Tú estás ahí metido y te sientes confortable porque tú puedes entrar a la escuela a gusto y la importancia de este programa es que le dan a uno mucha enseñanza a los maestros.

[Well, it's like learning more. [It's] help for one’s own children, help for the community, help for the school, help for the teachers…well, this program is very, very important to me. You are involved there and you feel comfortable because you are able to enter the school at ease and the importance of this program is that the teachers teach you a lot.]

(Xóchitl, Mother, Verbena Elementary School, Interview, December 17, 2014)

In her description, Xóchitl family literacy helped or aided various aspects of the schools: children, teacher, community, and parents. Furthermore, she stated that the program made parents feel *metido*, involved, in the school because they could enter the school comfortably. (In her interview, Xóchitl used the English word *comfortable* with a Spanish pronunciation.)

**Parental Empowerment.** “Es un programa y ayuda mucho a los padres de familia que de verdad tienen interés de seguir adelantes por uno y por nuestros hijos. [It's a program and [it] helps parents a lot who have a true interest in moving forward for ourselves and for our children]” (Gabriela, Mother, Blazing Star Elementary School, November 14, 2014). In addition to connecting parents with the school, family literacy was also understood as something that helps parents *seguir adelantes*, or move forward. Linda, who retired from working with the NCFL and contracted independently with CPS, described the program in a similar manner with the English phrase *move forward*: “Now the parents that come to the program, they’re
being told and being shown that they are the leaders of the family. And so in order for the children to move forward, it’s important for the adults to move forward.” (Linda, Independent Contractor, Interview, December 9, 2014). Both women presented family literacy as something that could empower parents to *seguir adelante/move forward* in their own lives and effect change in their children’s lives. However, there was a key difference in how family literacy as empowerment was perceived by the mother and the contractor. Gabriela stated that the program helped parents who already had a true interest in moving forward while Linda said that the program told and showed parents that they were the leaders of their families.

Teachers and administrators enacted the idea that the actual family literacy class empowers parents during the class time. While this often happened through encouraging comments to parents during lessons on various topics, sometimes it became a focus of an entire class.

*(Field Notes; Verbena Elementary, October 9, 2014):* Linda was leading the Parent Time class at Verbena Elementary today. After asking the group of women questions about supporting their children in school, she said that it was great that they all thought that their children would graduate from high school. Linda then asked how many of them thought that their children would graduate from college. Most raised their hands, but some chuckled as they did so.

Linda told everyone to watch her. She said that she was going to pretend that she was going to a door and that she had something in her hand that would unlock the door. She walked across the front of the room toward the classroom door. She asked the parents what they thought she had in her hand.

The bilingual liaisons translated Linda’s comments and her question into the women’s first languages. There was some discussion amongst the mothers until one said, “the key.”

Linda exclaimed, “Yes! The key! The key.” She then said that there are many keys in this room that will help their children graduate college. After waiting a moment for the bilingual liaisons to translate what she had said, Linda then told the women to take their fingers and point at themselves. Watching the bilingual liaisons for instructions, the women then did this. Linda said that she wanted them to repeat after her.

Zara, a Kurdish-speaking mother was talking with Naza, a bilingual liaison. After listening, Naza told Linda that Zara wished that she could get that magic key to open the door for her children already. Zara laughed and many of the others did too.

Linda smiled at her and said that she understood. She stepped back to address the entire group and said, “I want you to say ‘I am the key!’ with me.” Linda said the phrase ‘I am the key’ and the women repeated it while pointing at themselves. Linda said the phrase two more times. The women joined in and each time repeated it a little louder, almost as if they were in a church. Linda told them that she wanted them to believe the phrase in their heads and in their hearts.

After this day, the metaphor of the key would become a running line at Verbena Elementary. John, the
English teacher, and Pilar, the coordinator, would often integrate the phrase “I am the key” into English lessons or other parent time classes.

Cindy, the English teacher at Aster Elementary, expressed a different conceptualization of how family literacy was a source of empowerment to parents.

“I hope it would be empowering adults to be able to access resources in the community and go about their lives successfully. And I also know how important it is that they’re able to communicate with their children because there can be that inequality or, yeah we’ll just use that for lack of a better word, that can develop when a child has more of the language skills than the parent. So that would be the higher goal that, that just, empowerment. And then education for education’s sake. Just knowing how to read and write and present your thoughts you know where people can understand you and understand other people when they’re talking to you. So I just consider it a basic human right. You know, to be able to participate in the world around you.”

(Cindy, English Teacher, Aster Elementary, Interview, December 12, 2014)

From this angle, family literacy empowered parents by developing skills that help them participate in the world and experience success in the community and with their children.

Helping Children Be Successful in School. During the first family literacy class of the fall 2014 school year at Verbena Elementary, John held up a poster that was meant to depict the family literacy program. The poster had three components of family literacy (English class, PACT Time, Family Class) with arrows that pointed to the phrase Family Literacy and then to the top where the phrase Child’s Success was written on a banner (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Family Literacy Poster**

John pointed to the phrase Child Success that was on the top and asked, “Why do we have family literacy?” Then he said, “To help your child.” He then reiterated several times that this class was to help their children be successful in school. (Field Notes, Verbena Elementary, September 2, 2014). In a separate interview
with me, John expanded on this by saying “It’s like, we’re helping you to exist at Clinton to help their children. ‘Cause they can get ESL for adults at another place. [At] Regional Community College, we have adult ESL classes in the morning at different locations. But what those places don’t have is the connection to the child’s education.” (John, English Teacher, Verbena Elementary, Interview, August 14, 2014).

The conception that family literacy was something that helped children become academically successful in school was supported by several administrators, teachers, parents, and assistants. Nancy, the Family Literacy Specialist, explained that the program empowered parents through learning English and learning about school in order to reach the overarching goal of preparing their child for academic success, as measured by test scores.

“We usually say English class plus more. Plus much more. More. You learn English but you learn how school is done and that’s going to help your child. Cause ultimately family literacy is not designed for the parent per se. It is designed to empower the parent but then what they learn in family literacy will support the child at school and ultimately the goal is that this child will do better in school and will raise those test scores. So it’s basically English class plus much much more. And it's free. We provide childcare…. it's a way also to give back to the community over time by attending this program and supporting their child.”

(Nancy, Family Literacy Specialist, Interview, February 28, 2014)

Other teachers and parents did not make the same explicit connections between empowerment, but still described family literacy as a venue through which parents learn about school in a way that promoted the academic success of their children.

“Es para ir a clases de PACT time con los niños y te sientes con tu niño y puedes aprender lo que el niño está aprendiendo y le vas a ayudar con la tarea y las clases de inglés también. A la vez nos ayuda a nosotros aprender y ellos también aprenden de nosotros. ¡Aprendes muchas cosas!”

[It's to go to PACT time classes with the children and you sit with your child and you can learn what the child is learning and you are going to help him/her with the homework and also, the English classes. At the same that that [they] help us learn, they are also learning from us. You learn many things!]

(Cyntia, Mother at Blazing Star Elementary, Interview, November 13, 2014)

“I think it’s the way to get the parents more involved with their child’s learning to benefit both the child and the parent because they are English as a second language people. The adults are learning. They’re learning their English at the same time that they are learning and going through what their kids are doing in the school. So it kind of brings it all together and makes a connection
so that the parents are more informed and better able to help their kids be successful in school. It incorporates the entire school.”

(Melanie, English Teacher at Blazing Star Elementary, Interview, December 9, 2014)

Both Cyntia and Melanie commented that the participating families learned English and what was happening in the school while attending the program. Both of these were presumed to contribute to the child’s success in school. Another way that family literacy was considered to support children’s academic success was through the parents’ learning experience within the school. This was different that the first idea of parent engagement, or presence, in schools and school events. Here, it was the act of participating in school activities that parents and teachers attributed to influencing the success of the young children.

“I think that family literacy is basically an opportunity for parents who are not familiar with the culture of the United States but who have children in the school system, it’s an opportunity for them to find a way to help the parents to explain to their children how the school system works. But unfortunately some of these parents have never been to school either, so the children need to explain to the parents and, and in both ways then the they go oh, okay this is how I can help my child, going to school, in America.”

(Nekabari, Teacher’s Assistant at Aster Elementary, Interview, November 26, 2014)

Nora and Nekabari explained that the actions that the parents took while participating in the program (i.e. attending school, going to class and completing assignments) helped them find out how the school system works so that they could share that practice with their children.
Support System. A fourth conceptualization of family literacy differed from the others in that it did not focus on the school. Instead, it highlighted the relationships that were formed during the program amongst the parent participants. Thus, these informants conceived family literacy to be a support system.

“I would say, I think where we’re at now, I really see it as a family. I think anybody who steps into our program can really tell our parents one, get along really well. They respect each other. They try to help each other out. So it is that sense of family… I just say you’re learning English but yes, you get connections with the school, you get, you know, [to] build a strong relationship with the classroom teacher and yourself and your child. Everybody’s on the same page. And you get connected with a group of parent who are a support system and kind of help you out. I mean if there are things, if you have new parents coming into our school, they’re a great resource. We have parents who have been in our program, who have been at West Lincoln since their kids, you know, kindergarten to fifth and had another child in there, you know, or two children in there, and so they know the routes. Then we bring in those resources for parent time [which] also is very beneficial too cause either they learn what’s going on in the community, here’s where you can go for if you needed assistance with this you know, if you have a question come ask me, ask the liaisons, we’ll try to get that solved.”

(Amanda, Coordinator at Blazing Star Elementary, Interview, December 15, 2014).

Amanda’s views of family literacy as a family were shared by Anne, the coordinator at Aster Elementary, who also referred to family literacy as a family both during the interview and while interacting with the class. Camila, the Spanish-speaking bilingual liaison at Aster, once called out to me during the final awards ceremony, “Jen, ven por acá! Siéntate. Eres parte de la familia de family literacy./ Jen, come over here! Sit down. You are a part of the family literacy family.” Her use of the phrase familia de family literacy/family literacy family supported the idea that relationships played a central role in constructing the program.

Several parents also accounted for the relational aspect of family literacy as well.

“Es un programa que es para mamás que tenemos niños en la escuela. Y que nos enseñan inglés. Yo pienso que es muy bueno porque la parte que nos enseñan estamos un rato con nuestros hijos. Y nos conocemos más a lo que están enseñando y lo que están aprendiendo a ellos. Aparte uno se relaja, se distrae poco de lo mismo de que está en la casa. Aprendemos y a veces platicamos de otros temas.”

[It’s a program that is for moms that have children in the school. And they teach us English. I think that it is very good because of the part that they teach us [when] we are with our children for a while. And we are more familiar with what they are teaching the children and what the children are learning. Aside from that, one can relax and be distracted from the same old things in the house. We learn and sometimes we talk about other topics.]
Both Gabriela and Sofía recognized that they were learning in family literacy, but that the relationships that they formed with the teacher and with each other provided a pleasant and relaxing context in which to spend their time.

**English Class**

“The adult ESL class really seems to be the hub of the whole program because that’s where the parents spend most of their time...The adult ESL portion of it is the hub and these others are like spoke[s] where those activities are a shorter duration, they aren’t as often as the adult ESL classes.” (Marcia, RCC ESL Assistant Director, Interview, December 10, 2014). The English classes were where the parents spent most of their time during the week as they participated in family literacy. Four days a week were dedicated to English language learning and all other classes, PACT time and Parent Time, were conducted primarily in English, although the information presented during Parent Time was often interpreted. On days when the parents visited their child’s classroom for PACT time, they did so for thirty minutes to one hour and then returned to English class for the remainder of the day; on average, the parents spent seven out of ten hours a week in English class. In fact, all of the Latina mothers that I interviewed stated that one of their reasons for joining the class was to improve their English skills. (The other motivating factor that they cited was to spend time with their child or help him/her adjust to school. This will be looked at more closely later on.)
Linda offered another explanation for the centrality of the English class within the family literacy program. She stated that

“I also think it’s funding changes because typically it’s more difficult to recruit and to retain families who are native English speakers, because they don’t have that survival skill instinct that a lot of the other families have. And so that’s why you see ESL programs generally with waiting lists, and I see that trend nationwide. But I don’t see that so much with native English speakers. But, on paper it looks better to have 15, 12, 20 families enrolled and participating with a high, 75% [attendance] rate than it does to have 10 participating at maybe a 40% [attendance rate]. So, when a funder looks at that, and only looks at numbers, well, it’s kind of a given that the ESL programs are going to be the programs that are funded. In addition to a lot of immigrant families moving in. I mean that drives it too, but I think that piece that we don’t often think about is the funding, money side of it.”

(Linda, Private Contractor, Interview, December 9, 2014)

According to Linda, offering ESL courses as a main component of family literacy was one angle from which to attract and maintain participants and to secure funding. While comparing data of nationwide trends of funding and attendance rates between family literacy programs with ESL programs and print-literacy programs for non-ESL families is outside of the scope of this study, the administrators of the family literacy program, at both the school-district and at the individual sites, explained that attendance was an importance piece of data that they needed in order to show accountability to their funders. This was something that John told parents at the beginning of the year and when they were experiencing low attendance:

(Field Notes, Aster Elementary, May 7, 2014): John told the class that it was important for them to come to class on Friday for the English test. He told the parents that they don’t pay any money for the class, but they pay with their attendance. He said that they would take the test to show that they learned while they were here.

John asked, “Does that make sense?”

Nisa said, “You pay by coming.”

John explained to the parents that they do not pay with money for this class but that their attendance in class showed the people who do pay that they were coming.

John’s comments to the parents reinforced the idea that attendance was linked to funding. Secondarily, his comments also reminded the parents of their economic positions within the program and that they attended a free English class, a term discussed in more detail below.
English Class Brought Into RCC. Marcia explained that the family literacy adult ELL class had been “brought into” RCC’s Adult Education program. This means that the family literacy ELL classes were regulated using the same policies for testing as the community college’s other ESL classes and that RCC collected and reported data about the classes as a part of their larger Adult Education program. Because it was part of the larger program, the teachers in family literacy could also make use of the community members who signed up to be volunteers through the college. These volunteers were registered with RCC and went through a short initial training session before being permitted to work with adult students in any of RCC’s classes. Volunteers could identify which class they wished to attend or teacher they wanted to work with; if they did not have a connection with somebody at one of the sites, the staff at RCC connected them with a site. Each English teacher, then, had the responsibility of maintaining a specific yellow sheet on which volunteers would log their hours. (To be able to work in the family literacy classrooms, I had to register with RCC as a volunteer and receive background approval from CPS.)

Contacting RCC was one of the first steps that Chesterfield Public Schools took when they decided to begin a family literacy program at a specific elementary school. After initial contact, Marcia then drafted the budget proposal for the English teacher at the particular site; meetings with the school principal and site coordinator ensued once this contract was signed. Marcia was also responsible for hiring the English teachers for Family Literacy. Teachers were selected based on their experience working with adult English language learners, with a high preference for those who had extensive experience with learners of multiple levels of English proficiency and with knowledge about the K-12 education system. When asked to describe her ideal teacher candidate, Marcia stated:

“I really look for individuals who have that broad experience with all levels of ESL and then adults. If there’s someone who has both, the ELL, has worked in the K-12 system, and has taught ESL, that’s our ideal candidate because they know the K-12 system very well and they also know about teaching adults very well. And, so, that is the perfect candidate…It’s rare to come across those people.”

(Marcia, Assistant Direct of ESL, Regional Community College, Interview, December 10, 2014)

Two of the three teachers (Cindy and Melanie) at the sites that I observed had K-12 teaching backgrounds and various experiences with adult students while one teacher (John) had extensive experience teaching
adults who were at a variety of levels of English proficiency, but no elementary experience. English teachers in family literacy could be paid for up to sixteen hours of work per week. They taught two hours each day, four days a week; they were paid an additional thirty minutes each day for planning for a multi-level class (explained below). If teachers had a teaching assistant, they were paid for an additional thirty minutes of collaborative planning with the assistant. They could also receive up to four hours worth of pay per week for collaborating with stakeholders within the school to obtain materials for the class. In addition to teachers, RCC also provided the non-consumable textbook for the family literacy class; the individual student workbooks were purchased and provided by the school district.

The family literacy English classes were distinct from the other classes offered by RCC. A regular class offered by RCC was considered to be a class that had adult students who had all placed at the same level of English on the initial exams. A regular class was also considered a tuition class because students had to enroll through the community college and pay tuition. Family literacy classes were considered a multi-level class because adults who had diverse levels of English knowledge, as measured by test scores, were grouped together. These classes were also referred to as free classes: because they were grant-funded, adult students did not need to pay money to attend them. Family literacy, in this sense, was a cover term for a free, multi-level English class. Because teaching multiple levels of English language learners (ELLs) veered from the norm of teaching the regular classes, the family literacy instructors were paid an additional half an hour per day for multi-level planning. This was referred to as the multi-level class overload. Family literacy classes were also distinguished from the tuition-level classes that the community college offered, which were classes that were not subsidized by grant funding and required a higher score to enter. John often referred to tuition-level classes as classes that the parents could take once they finished the family literacy program.

**Multi-leveled Class.** English class was a multi-level class. Fernanda, a volunteer who only attended during English class, described the family literacy class as such:
“I would describe it as English classes, English as a second language. And I would totally say that we have people from different levels so there’s no worry for them if they don’t feel like they know anything, it’s fine because we can work with all kinds of people with all kinds of levels and it’s just kind of a place where we can talk, you can feel yourself at home, kind of and go to learn so you can help your child or children.”

(Fernanda, Volunteer, Aster Elementary, Interview, July 25, 2014)

Fernanda said that parents could “feel at home” in family literacy, much in line with the idea presented earlier that family literacy was a family or a support system. Yet, Fernanda expanded this idea to include welcoming atmosphere to all levels of English speakers. The adults in family literacy did indeed reflect a wide range of English proficiency levels as well as general education level. Some of the parents did not attend school in their home countries. At the three focus sites, this was mostly the case for the Kurdish-speaking women from Iraq. Some had interrupted formal education; this was the case for many students who had spent time in refugee camps in countries like Thailand, Syria, or Egypt. The Latina women at the three sites had a range of formal educational experiences. Many had attended primaria, elementary school, up to third grade while others completed primaria through sixth grade. Sofia, for example, completed primaria through a home-study program in Mexico. Several had completed secundaria, junior high, through ninth grade. All of these Latina women stated that they left school early to begin working to support their families. A handful of Latina women had some experience in preparatoria, high school, in Mexico: two of the women I interviewed had graduated from preparatoria (Gloria and Nora). In the family literacy class, a few parents of other backgrounds also had graduated from high school. At Blazing Star Elementary, one Arabic-speaking woman had graduated from university. She was the only parent at the three focus sites during this time that held a university degree.

Some parents had been exposed to or had learned some English in their past educational experiences while some had never learned any English before arriving to the United States. Some parents had lived in the United States for five, ten, or fifteen years and had attended other community learning sites before joining the family literacy class. Others arrived to Chesterfield from their countries of origin and began attending family literacy within months of arrival. All of the Latina women I interviewed had lived in the
United States for at least five to ten years. Despite their prior experiences, all parents were tested by RCC to assess their English skills before entering family literacy. The initial test that was administered to all parents was the BEST Plus Oral Skills test. According to the Center for Applied Linguistics, the producer of the test, BEST Plus was “intended to assess interpersonal communication using everyday language used in practical situations. Test items reflect language used in everyday life in the U.S.: at home, at work, and in the community” (CAL, 2015). The test was administered individually and was a combination of oral and listening skills. It met the requirements outlined by the US Department of Education’s National Reporting System (NRS) for adult education (CAL, 2015). Parents were tested with the Best Plus after every sixty hours of instruction that they received in the family literacy program. After the parents tested out of the five levels of the BEST Plus exam, they moved on to the TAB reading test.

The TABE reading test assessed cognitive, print literacy skills including: letter recognition and phonics skills, interpreting graphic information, recalling information, determining meanings of words in context, constructing meaning, and evaluating and extending meeting (McGraw Hill, 2015). The TABE reading test generated a reading grade equivalent score, which was aligned to an elementary grade level. The beginning reading level was labeled as equivalent to a grade level ranging from kindergarten (0.0) to the fifth month of second grade (2.5); the high beginning reading level was labeled as the sixth month of second grade (2.6) to an end of third grade (3.9). A score of 4.0 or higher (fourth grade or higher) indicated that a student should move to take the COMPASS ESL test. This was also the cut-off for the free classes, or grant-funded classes like family literacy; after passing the TABE test, if adults wanted to continue English education then they would need to enroll in RCC’s tuition level classes. RCC included the scores from the family literacy classes with the other scores that they submitted to the NRS.

Figure 4 below is a picture of the form that the English teachers used to keep track of parents’ performance on these exams. Parents had access to these forms to monitor their process, but they were kept in the English teacher’s files. The chart also explained how the students moved through the testing procedures according to their scores.
Section 4 will take a closer look at the extent to which the teachers used these test scores, what kinds of English learning groups were created during English class, how teachers made decisions about language learning activities, and what happened with regard to English learning and literacies during English class. At this point, to understand the general characteristics and appropriation of the family literacy program, it is important to know that the English classes at all three sites were generally were arranged by a similar structure. The teacher would begin class with some type of whole group activity in which all parents were expected to participate. Then, the class would typically work in two or three different groups arranged by English proficiency levels to complete activities that were typically, but not always, from the textbooks provided by RCC. Teachers, assistants, and volunteers worked with the different groups; sometimes groups worked independently if a teacher or assistant were not available to lead their activity. The English teacher circulated through groups and individual students either daily or over the course of the week. Occasionally a parent worked independently with a teacher, assistant or volunteer on something different, such as a specific skill or on a topic like preparing for the citizenship exam.
English class as the hub of family literacy. Marcia’s contention that English class served as the hub of the family literacy program could be seen in the daily execution and experience of the class. In her interview, Marcia explained that the English class was where parents brought questions concerning the other program components such as PACT time. All three English teachers explained that they tried to integrate concepts from the other family literacy components (PACT time, parent time, and the child’s education) into their classroom. The teachers were also expected, from a contract and pay standpoint, to invest time in making these connections with the other components. Furthermore, the coordinators also described explicitly asking the English teachers to incorporate vocabulary or other language skills that correlated with an upcoming topic that would be discussed in parent time.

Sometimes the integration of the different components was purely administrative and/or logistical. Often coordinators entered the classroom during class to check in about something with the teacher or to deliver a message to one or more parents. Sometimes a bilingual liaison also came in to speak with parents. Or, the English teacher would pass along a message to a parent or the group from either the coordinator or bilingual liaison. English teachers were also viewed by the parents as the point people to go to in order to discuss PACT time. They answered questions about where parents should go for PACT time or followed up with a request from the site coordinator. For example:

(Field Notes, Blazing Star Elementary, November 13, 2014): Before class began, Gabriela walked over to Melanie and began to talk to her about PACT time. She asked if she could go to the classroom during the first hour because when she goes during the second hour she doesn’t get to see the teacher teaching. She explained that the kids are always working in a small group with the teacher or they are working independently at their seats. Melanie said that she thought it should be fine if Gabriela changed the time that she went to PACT time, but that she will talk with Amanda first to make sure. She told Gabriela to go to PACT time at the normal time today and that she would see if they could switch it for next week.

Other times, the connections between the other family literacy components and English class were integral to the lesson being taught. The following vignette demonstrate how Melanie used a number line, a math concept that several parents had seen in PACT time, to teach how to use a negative form of a verb.

(Field Notes, Blazing Star Elementary, October 30, 2014): Melanie reviewed that the present tense of regular verbs for the pronouns he/she/it end with an s. Hasna, an Arabic-speaking mother, asked her if this happens all of the time. Melanie said that it happens most of the time. She said that sometimes the verbs change for the third person. She asked if they knew what this was called and no one answered. Melanie wrote I have and She has on the board. She said that this is called an irregular verb. She told them that
they know the word regular and that the prefix ir means not. “So, she explained, “the word irregular means not regular.” Melanie said that they would get a list of irregular verbs in the past tense soon. Hasna nodded as she watched Melanie speak.

Melanie checked to see if they had finished a worksheet from earlier in the week. She commented that they hadn’t reviewed negatives with verbs yet so they would do that first and then complete the worksheet. She walked to the board and wrote:

negatives
positives

Melanie said that she wanted to review what the words negative and positive meant. She drew a number line with a zero in the middle and the numbers 1, 2, and 3 to the right of the zero. Then she added the numbers -1, -2, and -3 to the left of the zero. Melanie turned to the class and commented that in PACT time, they might have seen the students working with negative and positive numbers on a number line. Several parents nodded in agreement. She told them that in English they also have words that make things positive and negative. She turned to the board and wrote as she read them out loud:

will not
do not
can not
am not

Hasna said, “Is not.”

Melanie said “yes” and added this phrase to the list of words on the board.

Melanie explained that these are opposites. She told the class that if they say you will do something, the opposite is that you will not do it. She said that they could also make these negative words into contractions.

Integration of content from another family literacy component was also, at times, imposed on the English class. The vignette below demonstrates how Cindy integrated a lesson about creating a healthy meal using My Plate (USDA, 2015) in order to prepare the parents for a presentation about nutrition that they would have the following day in parent time class.

(Field Notes, Aster Elementary, December 9, 2014): Cindy said that she would demonstrate making a balanced plate today so that the class would be ready to use it with Miss Anne during Parent Time tomorrow. She said that they would use the picture dictionary to review the types of food that go on a balanced plate today.

Cindy had a piece of chart paper on the board and began to trace a plastic plate on it. She then traced around a smaller plastic cup to the top right of the plate. When she was done, the poster looked like this:
Cindy pointed to each section on the plate at a time and asked what kind of food went in each place. Nisa, a Kurdish-speaking mother, started to name off categories of food. Cindy told her, “Just a minute Nisa. Thank you.” Nisa then raised her hand and sat quietly.

Cindy looked around the class asked for the parents to tell her what kinds of food went in the different spaces on the plate. No one answered at first and Nisa remained quiet with her hand raised. Cindy started to point to the different spaces and to name off different kinds of foods that belonged in each space. For example, she named off broccoli, corn, and zucchini and then several parents called out, “Vegetable!” Cindy labeled the spaces on the plate one by one.

The parents stood up and went to the front of room getting big pieces of construction paper that Yolanda and Nisa had helped Cindy bring in before class began. Some were also getting markers. As they returned to their seats, they started to pass around two plastic plates and two plastic cups to trace. Each parent replicated the plate that Cindy had drawn on the board and wrote the labels in the spaces.

Once the plates were completed, Cindy passed out a picture dictionary to each person. She instructed them to open it to the pages with the different types of food. Cindy pointed to each picture and as a group they read the name of the food. Parents shared which foods they liked and didn’t like as well tidbits concerning their eating habits. Some parents stated that they made their own yogurt and cheese while others expressed delight or disgust when lobster and shrimp were read aloud for proteins.

They continued reviewing foods that were not in the dictionary and placing them in the different categories. Before cleaning up and breaking into groups, Cindy reminded the class that they would use these balanced plates in Parent Time class on Wednesday and then again in English class on Thursday.
The English class exhibited overarching characteristics as an extension of RCC and as a hub for the all of the family literacy components throughout the three focus sites. This played a key role in the class’s conceptualization and execution within the program. There were many more unique and important features of the family literacy English class, including the particularities of English language learning and literacies, will be discussed in detail in Section 4.

**PACT Time: Where the Rubber Meets the Road**

“But I kept pushing, pushing, pushing that this is where the rubber meets the road. This is what it’s all about. This is why you’re here. That’s what I tell my students. This is why you’re here.” (John, English teacher, Aster/Verbena Elementary, Interview, August 14, 2014)

PACT time happened twice a week at all three sites. To schedule the PACT time visits, coordinators worked with the teachers of each parent’s youngest school-aged child to arrange the best time for the parent to visit the classroom in the morning during the family literacy class hours. The administration had decided that the parents should visit the children’s classrooms during language arts or mathematics instruction because these were considered to be most important in regard to supporting their child’s school success and to the parents’ own English learning opportunities. The parents left the English classroom to go to their child’s classroom once a week for one hour (Verbena Elementary), twice a week for one hour each time (Blazing Star Elementary) or twice a week for thirty minutes (Aster Elementary). Besides a couple of special programs that I observed, such as award ceremonies, PACT time was the only time that parents and children were deliberately together during the family literacy program. On the designated PACT time days, parents first arrived at the family literacy classroom and typically took part in a whole group lesson with the English teacher. From there, parents left English class at designated times to attend PACT time. This procedure looked slightly different at each school.

At Verbena Elementary, the parents were divided into two groups and attended PACT time once a week on either Wednesday or Friday for one complete hour. On these days, John dismissed the group to leave PACT time at 9:20 AM and they returned at 10:20. John then worked with the remaining parents in the
English classroom. At Aster Elementary, all parents attended PACT time twice a week on Tuesdays and Thursdays for thirty minutes each day. Parents were divided into five different PACT time groups and left for PACT time at different time intervals: 8:15 AM (these parents started PACT before the family literacy class officially began), 8:45 AM, 9:00 AM, 9:15 AM, and 9:30 AM. The parents were responsible for monitoring the time and left for PACT time independently. A Blazing Star Elementary, parents attended PACT time twice a week for one hour each time and were divided into two groups. Dismissal for PACT time differed at Blazing Star because parents had leave the portable classroom and be let into the locked school building with the teacher’s key. This meant that either Melanie, a volunteer, or another parent needed to leave with the groups and open the building.

Buying into PACT time. According to the coordinators and administrators, PACT time was something that parents needed to “buy into” and become familiar with before they enjoyed and saw the value in the experience. She explained:

“PACT time, once parents buy into it…Once they’re into it and kind of get used to it they really love it. At first sometimes parents have some anxiety about going into the child’s classroom. You know, how will I be received? Gosh, I don’t understand the language, how, how can I sit in PACT time. Once they’re in it, uh, and they’re and that they’ve been in it a bit, they usually truly understand the value of it.”

(Nancy, Family Literacy Specialist, Interview, February 28, 2014)

Anne offered similar perspective about a period of warming up to PACT time:

“The first few times of PACT time, can be…difficult….with certain, you know, in a lot of ways. Either they’re incredibly shy and they just kind of stand and don’t want to get into the classroom at all or they get, can become disruptive. And we’ve got that whole gambit and so we have to find that middle of the road. And that can sometimes be difficult.”

(Anne, Coordinator at Aster Elementary, Interview, June 18, 2014)

However, the Latina mothers that I interviewed countered the notion that PACT time was not something in which they wanted to participate. Instead, they cited spending more time with their children as one of the main reasons they joined the program (as mentioned before, the other reason was to learn
English). They viewed PACT time as a way that they could spend time with their children, particularly the young children who just began going to school.

“Primeramente fue por mi niña [de cinco años] porque mi niña lloraba mucho, estaba solita en esta escuela ella, o sea ahí son más niños pero nadie de su familia. Entonces, yo para que ella no llorará, yo me metí a la clase y le dije, “Yo voy a estar todo los día contigo.” Pero a mí me gustó porque fue la importancia de aprender inglés y todo eso. Pues sí, sí me ha gustado mucho y me siento muy a gusto ahí.”

[Primarily [I entered] for my daughter (who is five-years-old) because my daughter cried a lot, she was alone in this school, in other words, there are other children [there] but no one from her family. There for, in order for her not to cry, I enrolled in the class and I told her, “I am going to be with you everyday.” But I liked it because it is important to learn English and everything. Well yes, yes I have liked it a lot and I feel at ease there.]

(Xóchitl, Mother, Verbena Elementary, Interview, December 17, 2014)

The preparation period for PACT was evident during the first months of the school year. Both the teacher and the coordinator took time during English class and parent time class to discuss expectations for PACT. I began observations at Verbena Elementary on the first day of class during the fall of 2014. Parents did not begin to attend PACT time there until the last week of October yet weekly updates were made about the expectations for PACT time. During this time, however, Pilar was working to coordinate schedules with the classroom teachers and finalize the list of parents who would be attending family literacy classes this fall. At all three of the sites, many parents were returning family literacy students and were familiar with the expectations, but some were new and were hearing the expectations for the first time.

The Latina mothers, both veteran and new, mentioned spending a few weeks observing in PACT time before they began doing academic work or other things alongside their children. However, this time period was viewed by them as a period during which the mother and the teacher were getting used to each other: the mothers stated that when the teacher became accustomed to their presence in the classrooms, she began giving the mother papers and inviting her to participate in activities. They had been informed of PACT time when they joined the program and knew that they would be spending time with their children during family literacy. The buying into process, for them, was more about the teacher and parent becoming familiar with each other.
Regulating parents during PACT time. As Anne alluded to, the administrators and teachers reported that they had experienced issues in the past with parents’ behavior at PACT time or their attendance at PACT time. Issues were defined by the teachers and administrators in the following categories: using a cellphone in class, giving their child food or other things in class, completing the child’s work, or talking with teachers about things that were off topic. Attendance was also considered an issue during PACT time. Teachers and coordinators reported that parents might not come on PACT time days or that they might leave the family literacy classroom for PACT time, but not actually go to their child’s classroom. During my time in the field, I observed coordinators talking to two different parents about using a cellphone in class and asking classroom teachers about things that were off topic. Both of these instances occurred at Aster Elementary.

Parents were expected to follow strict rules set by the administration when participating in PACT time. Ample time was spent at the beginning of the year discussing expectations for PACT time and the rationale behind PACT time. Preparing parents to go to PACT time extended beyond convincing them to buy into the experience: the parents were extensively prepared for what their role should be in PACT time. Nancy, the Family Literacy Specialist, explained that process:

“We prepare them before we go into PACT time. Basic rules, you know. No chewing candy, no chewing gum. When you go in, you be quiet when you walk in. Don’t take your cellphone or if you have to take your cellphone, don’t answer it, put it on vibrate. Your child should not sit on your lap but sit beside you. And, it’s not a time, a social time, it is – you’re there literally to learn alongside your child. So we do prep them and then they go into PACT time...The teacher’s, their instruction is to include the parent on whatever activity is going on in the classroom. They are to give the parent any papers or handouts that they give the child and even some parents are willing to take, like the spelling test that their child will take. So that’s, that’s quite fun.”

(Nancy, Family Literacy Specialist, Interview, February 28, 2014)

Not abiding by rules and expectations set by the administration typically resulted in a meeting with the coordinator and, if available, the bilingual liaison/translator. (These terms were used interchangeably and are discussed in more detail in the next section.) During this meeting, the coordinator discussed the
issue with PACT time and suggested how the parent needed to change his/her behavior. Anne explained how she went about these situations:

"I’ll get a liaison in here and I want them to understand cause I did have an incident with a mom who thought that she was going to get the teacher to set her iPhone, deal with her iPad and all sorts of things that had absolutely nothing to do with the child’s learning. Come in and hug the child, change the child’s, what the child was doing on her work, and there, in my opinion, there…I mean, maybe I’m too abrupt but that’s my style. I’m direct, I’m pretty you know, it’s you’re a student, this is the expectations, this is what you did, this is what, this is the choice that you made, this is not the right choice, let’s look at different choices on how to approach this. Now [if] the parent doesn’t get involved [in PACT time] obviously, I’m a little not quite as…I’m softer about it. OK…Don’t get me, you know, I’m softer. But I had a mom who really had a hard time getting, she just pushed the envelope. I said finally, you cannot do this. And if you choose to do this, if you choose to be disruptive in the classroom, then I will have to ask you to….to not be in the class anymore."

(Anne, Coordinator, Aster Elementary, Interview, June 18, 2014)

During my time at all three sites, I witnessed a few of these meetings happen in the hallways or a separate office space during the parent time class. On a few occasions, the coordinators called a parent and the bilingual liaison out to discuss an incident. I learned about meetings that addressed the issues of asking classroom teachers for help with the iPad, using a cellphone in class, and not attending all of the family literacy components. In each of these cases, the parent involved stayed in the family literacy class and presumably altered his/her behavior

Parents were also expected to take notes during PACT time. To do this, each parent at all of the sites had a spiral notebook. (Notebooks or loose leaf paper were available in the classrooms for parents to have if they did not bring these materials from home.) Parents at Aster and Blazing Star also took PACT time forms with them to their children’s classrooms. At Verbena Elementary, John gave parents a PACT time form at the beginning of the semester to take with them to class, but copies were not continuously provided and parents did not continue to use this form throughout the semester. When John taught at Aster Elementary, the parents there did not use the forms either. They did, however, use the forms consistently with Cindy at Aster Elementary.

Each of the PACT time forms looked different at each site. (See Appendix D for scanned copies of the PACT time forms.) The form at Aster Elementary was a half sheet of paper that the parents picked up a
new form out of a clear bin next to the door before they left for PACT time each day. It had three questions on it:

1) What did you see in the classroom?
2) What did you learn in the classroom?
3) What questions do you have?

Parents were instructed to write, draw or copy down the answers to these questions. The form at Blazing Star had spaces for parents to write what they learned in the classroom and it also asked for specific details about what they saw in class. They needed to answer the following questions:

1) What did you and your child learn today?
2) What was the title of the book your child read?
3) What was the book about?
4) Please give an example of a math problem your child worked on.
5) List 3 vocabulary words you learned today.
6) Do you have any questions.

I did not receive a copy of the PACT time form that was initially passed out at Verbena Elementary, but it had a few questions on it that were similar to those at Aster Elementary.

**PACT time as observation time.** The following vignette depicts a typical day in PACT time with Cyntia at Blazing Star Elementary:

*(Field Notes, Blazing Star Elementary, December 10, 2014): Cyntia pulled out a chair from an extra desk and sat next to her son at the front of his third grade classroom. The students were sitting in a U shape and her son was on the edge at the front, near the board. Diagonal from them was the screen/ELMO where the teacher was projecting most of the work. They were working on math and the topic was multiplication and doubling.*

*Cyntia greeted her son quietly by leaning in and whispering. The teacher said hi to her. Cyntia took out her notebook and started copying what was projected on the board. She was also watching the teacher as she read the problem that the teacher read out loud:*

*A tarantula has 8 legs. How many legs do 6 tarantulas have?*
Cyntia wrote down the problem. Her son, Miguel, took out his whiteboard and wrote the problems and drew a picture of it on the whiteboard. Soon, all of the kids started to show the answers to the teacher by holding up their whiteboards. Cyntia looked at Miguel’s whiteboard as he held it up.

The teacher reviewed the problem and the answer on the large whiteboard in the front of the room. She then talked about the communicative and distributive properties and showed several slides explaining these properties. Both Cyntia and Miguel watched as she explained these concepts.

The teacher asked the class to give a thumbs up if they got the correct answer. Miguel held his thumb up. The teacher asked for a thumbs up if the students used the distributive property. Miguel put his thumb up for this answer too.

Cyntia peered over her son’s should and looked at his work.

The teacher reviewed what the problem would look like using the two different strategies by projecting slides on the screen. Cyntia watched and copied each slide into her notebook. Miguel yawned and put his head down.

The teacher announced that today they would have a new strategy. Both Cyntia and her Miguel were watching. They both had their hands on their faces as they watched. The teacher showed some new problems and Cyntia began writing them down. Examples of the new problems were:

**Jeff:**
9 x 8 = ?
8 x 8 = 64
64 + 8 = 72
so, 9 x 8 = 72

**Elena:**
9 x 8 = ?
10 x 8 = 80
80 – 8 = 72
so, 9 x 8 = 72

Cyntia watched as the teacher explained these problems. The teacher asked for students’ input about how the fictional students were solving the problems projected, but explained most of the problems by herself without input from the students. Cyntia took notes as the teacher walked the class through the problems.

The teacher told the children to tell a partner which of the two strategies on the board they liked better. Miguel turned to the girl next to him to talk. Cyntia watched on as her son discussed the problems with his classmate.

Then the teacher projected several new problems to solve on the screen. She walked over to the whiteboard and began to solve them. Miguel began to write the problems on his personal whiteboard while Cyntia copied the problems into her notebook. The problems were:

1) 5 x 8 = 2) 4 x 8 =
3) 1 x 8 = 4) 10 x 8 =

Miguel solved the problems on his whiteboard independently. Cyntia worked in her notebook.
The teacher walked over and asked Cyntia, “How are you doing?” Cyntia laughed. The teacher her told her quietly that the distributive property was kind of tough. She looked at Cyntia’s notebook. She asked if she understood the strategies on the whiteboard. Cyntia said, “Yeah, yeah” and smiled at her. She continued to work in her notebook as Miguel worked on his whiteboard.

The teacher posted a new problem and told the class to try to solve it with the new strategy. Cyntia was writing in her notebook and her son was writing on his whiteboard. They were not talking to each other. Soon, Miguel completed the problem. Cyntia looked over at his whiteboard and then moved back to writing in her notebook. Then, Miguel began watching Cyntia writing.

The teacher called on Miguel to bring his whiteboard to the front. He went to the front and the teacher showed his whiteboard on the ELMO. The teacher explained what Miguel did to solve the problem. Cyntia was watching the teacher explain Miguel’s work with a serious expression on her face. When the teacher was done, Miguel took his whiteboard and sat down quietly next to Cyntia.

Next, the teacher asked the class to answer the problems 1 x 8 and 10 x 8. Miguel called out the answers in a loud and confident voice: “8. 80.” The teacher said that for these kinds of problems they didn't need to show their work.

The class continued to do multiplication and Cyntia continued to watch both her son and the teacher closely, always writing down what they were doing in her notebook. Soon, they began completing an input/output table with a rule of “multiply by 7”. For this, students needed to fill in the table below with either the input numbers (the first factor) or the output number (the product).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Input</th>
<th>Output</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rule: Multiply by 7

The teacher asked the students to explain the rule to a partner and Miguel did this with the girl sitting next to him. Then, Miguel worked on the table on his whiteboard and Cyntia worked on it in her notebook.

Cyntia then looked at her son’s whiteboard closely. In a whisper, she asked him a question about one of his answers: they both looked at his whiteboard. Miguel turned to go back to working independently, but Cyntia asked him more about a problem. He looked at her paper again and explained how to solve the problem 7 x 9 to her in whispered Spanish.

Cyntia then asked him, “¿Es por siete?/Is it times seven?” Miguel answered her, “Sí.” She said, “No” and pointed to the board where the problem was written incorrectly: Miguel had written 7 x 7 instead of 7 x 9. Miguel erased his whiteboard and wrote 7 x 9. He then solved the problem. Cyntia said quietly, “Asi tienes/ There you have it.”

Cyntia went back to writing in her notebook. Miguel looked over her shoulder at what she was writing and then they both looked back at his small whiteboard. They had the same problem and answer. They spoke quietly to each other in Spanish.
The teacher went on to quickly review the distributive property with a PowerPoint slide. Cyntia and Miguel quietly watched the teacher and Miguel called out the answers to the different math problems along with his peers. Cyntia sat quietly with her hands folded in her lap.

The teacher then passed out the math homework and handed a copy to Cyntia. As the teacher instructed the class to put their names on the homework, Cyntia wrote her name on the paper as well. The teacher explained that the homework was to multiply when 8 was a factor. Both Miguel and Cyntia looked at the homework as the teacher explained it.

The teacher began going over the first problems on the homework page and Cyntia began to write on the paper. Miguel watched Cyntia begin writing and then he too wrote the answer on his paper. Then he laid down his head on his desk and continued answering the other homework problems. Cyntia continued to watch the teacher review the first homework problems. Then, she signaled to me that it was time to leave.

This day in Cyntia’s son’s classroom was representative of the other days that I observed the Latina mothers participating in PACT time. The mother would enter the classroom quietly, observe the activity, and take notes. She would only interact with her child minimally and when she did, her actions were tightly connected to the learning activity and she spoke with her child in whispers. The classroom teachers greeted the mothers and provided them with handouts and other materials that they might need for the class. In one observation of PACT time with Juana and her son at Verbena Elementary School, the first grade teacher included Juana in the morning routine and asked her how to say words they were discussing in Spanish. Juana told the class the words for hot and leopard in Spanish [caliente and leopardo]. (Field Notes, Verbena Elementary, November 14, 2014).

Observations during PACT time seemed to be the main objective set by the English teachers as well. Cindy described PACT time as, “They visit, at our school, for thirty minutes; they go to the classroom of their youngest child at school. They observe, some teachers allow them to sit next to the child and they actually interact with the child and help the child with school work, but, parents take very seriously that their kids not be, not lose focus because mom or dad is in the classroom. So mostly they’re observing. They have to write on a piece of paper what they observe and answer questions about what they learned and whether they have any questions about what they saw during the day.” (Cindy, English Teacher, Aster Elementary, Interview).
In one PACT session with Yolanda, her daughter was not physically present for PACT for nearly fifteen of the thirty minutes. First, the girl was late to arrive for PACT because she was at the school’s morning bank. Then, the teacher asked her to do multiple errands while her mother was in the classroom. The third grader passed out books and papers to her classmates and then was asked to leave to take something to a teacher down the hallway. Yolanda sat next to her daughter’s desk quietly while she was gone and copied down the vocabulary activity that the rest of the class was working on. When PACT time ended, her daughter was out of the classroom and Yolanda left (Field Notes, Aster Elementary, November 18, 2014). Other parents across sites were instructed by the English teachers to attend PACT time even if their child did not attend school on a certain day. On these occasions, they were told that they should observe and collect the child’s homework. A few times, a parent returned to the family literacy classroom and told the teacher that her child was taking a test today and that the classroom teacher had told her that there was nothing to observe. Under these circumstances, the parent was permitted to stay in the English classroom.

The mothers also explained PACT time as an observation in their child’s classroom.

"Es mirar la maestra, observar lo que está enseñando a nuestros hijos y llevarnos una libreta para notar como no- que nosotros podemos entender. Lo que no entendemos, lo traemos aquí en la clase y la maestra nos lo explica y quedamos un poco mejor para nuestros hijos. Si necesitan ayuda, les podemos ayudarles."

[It's watching the teacher, observing what s/he is teaching our children and we take a notebook in order to note how, what we are able to understand. What we understand, we bring it here to the class and the teacher explains it to us and end up slightly better for our children. If they need help, we can help them.]

(Carolina, Mother, Blazing Star Elementary, Interview, December 11, 2014)

"El PACT Time. Yo lo que hago es nada más observar lo que están haciendo los niños lo que les enseñan….Yo lo que hago es que está haciendo ella. Si ella está escribiendo unas palabras yo las escribo. Pues porque ya nos preguntan allá y es que contestamos nosotros. O lo escribimos en el papel que nos dan, nos dan un papel. Y allá nos preguntan y a ellos es lo que contestamos. O misma mi niña me escribía ahí. Mija ¿qué es lo que están haciendo ahora? Póngame aquí o algo. Y ella me lo pone….De lo que veía ahí en el salón. De a veces están enseñando a escribir o leer o les pongan sentencias o como examen, como a veces les hacen exámenes, como ahorita están, hacen exámenes…Pues a veces aprendo letras nuevas o así. O letras que no he visto acá. Pues las adjunto y preguntar a la maestra lo que quiere decir."
[PACT time. What I do is just watch what the children are doing, what they are teaching the kids...I do what she is doing. If she is writing some words, then I write them. Well, because they ask us there and that is what we have to answer. Or we write it on the paper that they give us, they give us a paper. And there they ask us and that is what we have to answer to them. Or my daughter writes it [on the paper]. “My daughter, what are you doing now? Put it here for me.” or something. And she [writes] it for me....about what I was seeing there in the classroom. Sometimes they are teaching how to write or read or they give them sentences or like an exam, like sometimes they take exams, like right now they are in exams....Well, sometimes I learn new words or something. Or words I haven’t seen here. Well, I attach them and I ask the teacher what they say.]

(Yolanda, Mother, Aster Elementary, Interview, November 6, 2014)

“I write on the paper from the teacher, right, and there it says that we [need to] write three vocabulary words, and put math examples, what they, if they read a book, the title of the book, that passed in this book, ¿cuál era la historia de este libro? Y ahí pongo las palabras que yo escojo de vocabulario, las pongo ahí. Nadia más yo vengo y la maestra pregunta que quiere decir....Me gusta que voy a dos lugares con mi hijo va a él a un salón donde le enseñan la lectura con el libro. Palabras – cómo escribirlas y pronunciarlas. Y luego a otro salón, lo mismo también de lectura, pronunciar palabras. Y le ponen a hacer ejercicios ahí también...Y ahí voy aprendiendo. Como por ejemplo, las pronunciaciones, como pronunciar las palabras. Sí, las palabras que [él] escribe, la pronunciación.”

(Flor, Mother, Blazing Star Elementary, Interview, December 11, 2014)

Martha’s experience of PACT time in her son’s kindergarten classroom at Verbena Elementary, however, was more interactive. She described:

“Esa se me hace bien. Es muy interesante el PACT time porque a mi niño le da mucho gusto que vaya a su salón. Las primeras veces pues llego y me siento, verdad. No queríamos interrumpir la clase. Ya hago apuntes que me tarde usar el español y luego me tarde mucho de sacarlos del diccionario a ver que palabras son. Pero ya unos días, con la maestra, cuando ya van a hacer una actividad los niños, ella me invita a ayudarle como repartir las hojas, cuando van a salir. Me toca de ir los viernes cuando van a ir al parque a jugar, me toca ese ratito. Le ayudo abrocharle la chamarra, las cintas de los niños, porque son muchos niños para ella sola. Son puros niños de cinco años. Entonces como los niños, ellos saben que yo ayudo a la maestra van y ya me dicen que si le abrocho la chamarra, que si les amarro las cintas, les ayudo poner los guantes, los gorros. Y ya me voy y le ayudo abrir las puertas al parque para la maestra para que ella los llevan....
I think this is good. PACT time is very interesting because my son likes it when I go to his classroom. The first times, well, I arrive and sit right? We don’t want to interrupt the class. I take notes and it takes me awhile to use Spanish and later it takes me a long time to find them in the dictionary to see what the words are. But after a few days with the teacher, when the children are going to do an activity, she invites me to help her, like hand out the papers, when they are going to leave. I go on Fridays when they go to the playground to play, I go during this time. I help her button the coats, tie the children’s shoes, because there are a lot of children for her. They are all five-year-old children. Therefore the children, they know that I help the teacher and they ask me if I will button their coat, if I will tie their shoe, I help them put on gloves, hats. And then I go and I help her open the doors to the playground so that the teacher can take them out in a line. I think that this is nice. When the children arrive and say to my son, “Hey, your mom! Your mom is here!” It makes everyone happy, I feel.

(Martha, Mother, Verbena Elementary School, Interview, December 18, 2014)

Martha explained that her involvement in helping the classroom teacher pass out papers and help the students prepare for recess was something bonito, or nice, and made a pleasurable experience for everyone. Martha also explained that her involvement in these activities was dependent to the teacher’s extended invitation. Pilar explained that the transition from observing to helping could be typical at Verbena Elementary: “Sometimes when they go there at the beginning of the year and just observe the kids, their own kids. They don’t talk with them. They don’t sit with them. They just want to observe how they act. So that will be at the beginning of the year. And then later on, then they’re able to help with the kids and stuff”

(Pilar, Coordinator, Verbena Elementary, Interview, December 15, 2014).

**PACT time debriefing.** PACT time, however, was not meant to only be an experience that took place within the child’s elementary classroom. Parents took notes during PACT time with the expectation that they brought back into the English classroom for debriefing. Below, the English teachers explain this process:

“But overall, the PACT time is really, gone well as far as parents paying attention to what’s going on in their child’s classroom, coming back and asking questions. They’re able to see some words. You know, I explain to them you know when you go in there you can learn also. And, so write down some things something you see that you don’t know, or maybe new words or something else you don’t understand.”
“Parent and Child Together Time is when the parents go into the classroom twice a week for an hour and they sit with their child and they’re supposed to be doing the same activities that the child does. The teachers here are great about having an extra paper for the parent, if there’s a test, the parent takes the test. Then they get to be more directly involved with their child’s learning. They get to see what the child, what the teacher’s teaching. And then if they have questions, they come and ask me about that so that they can go home that night and help their child with their homework. A lot of them come in with math work because the time that they go into the classroom, the teacher’s doing math. Many of them don’t understand the different methods. So we’ll sit as a small group after PACT time, the PACT time debriefing, and I will re-teach it to them and they’ll have the paper that there child gets for homework, so we’ll go, I’ll go over it with them and we’ll fill the answers in so that they can better help their child at home.”

(John, English Teacher, Aster/Verbena Elementary, Interview, August, 14, 2014)

“They have to write on a piece of paper what they observe and answer questions about what they learned and whether they have any questions about what they saw during the day. And so it’s, it’s in the course, and then we process that at the end of our class. We sit around in small groups and we share what we saw and we ask questions and in the course of that it can, um, reaffirm what we’re doing in class or bring up something new that they have never heard about before.”

(Melanie, English Teacher, Blazing Star Elementary, Interview, December 9, 2014)

The process of debriefing after PACT time looked differently at each school and with each different teacher. In John’s class, the parents came back to the classroom after PACT. When the parents entered, it was a signal for the other parents who were working in groups on English to disperse and move the tables back into a U-shape. As everyone sat down in their original seats, John asked the parents one by one what they saw in their child’s classroom. They read out of their notebooks and said things like: “The teacher read a story.” “I see my child count the units, 10, 20, 30, 40.” “The students draw pictures.” John typically verbally confirmed what the parents saw and asked if they understood it. During all of my observations, the parents stated that they understood everything they saw.

Debriefing at Blazing Star Elementary was a much more individualized process. The parents returned from their PACT time session, sat down, and immediately began filling out their PACT time form. Melanie walked over to each person and reviewed his/her PACT time form. She asked them to tell her what they saw and asked if they had any questions. If the parents had seen similar topics in PACT time, she
discussed the forms in smaller groups of two or three. For example, once Melanie asked Cyntia if she had understood what her son had learned in PACT time. Cyntia said that she understood what was happening in class, but that she did not understand how to do the same kind of problem on the homework. The math homework had a problem that asked the students to count backwards “two sets of three from thirty” on a number line. Melanie did this problem with Cyntia and marked off two sets of three with a highlighter on the number line. Cyntia told her that she still did not understand. Melanie did the problem again and this time asked Cyntia to mark off the sets with a highlighter. Cyntia did this and then said that she understood.

Melanie then moved on to Cyntia’s neighbor to ask about her PACT time (Field Notes, Blazing Star Elementary, November, 13, 2014). After Melanie checked in with each student individually, she collected their PACT time forms and filed them away.

At Aster Elementary with Cindy, the PACT time debriefing session took place in small group discussions and Cindy referred to it as their PACT talk. Cindy stated that, “We process that at the end of our class. We sit around in small groups and we share what we saw and we ask questions and in the course of that it can reaffirm what we’re doing in class or bring up something new that they have never heard about before” (Cindy, English Teacher, Aster Elementary, Interview, December 12, 2014). In this classroom, once all of the parents had returned from their rotation of PACT time, they typically had about ten or fifteen minutes left to work in their leveled English groups on assigned workbook pages. Then, Cindy announced for the parents to get into their PACT groups for debriefing. Parents separated into two groups that were diversified by home language and by level of English proficiency. The groups’ discussions were guided by the three questions listed on the PACT time forms; both Cindy and Nekabari led the discussions.

Cindy also explained that the PACT talk was used to practice and develop certain speaking skills:

“I’m very pleased with PACT. I think that’s a great, um, component of it. At first I thought, oh this is going to get so boring. What, how, how are we going to keep it interesting? And we’ve been able to do that. First we added, they were all saying no, no, I don’t have a question. Sofía said she did have a question one day and that got us going. So that became an assignment, you must ask a question and it must be for your child. So we worked on that for a little while. Now we’re working on listening to your classmates share and asking them a question. So I think, number one, they see their child in school. Two, they bring that to our class, things their kids are doing that help us come up with activities and objectives. And, three, they’re talking about it lends itself to language too. So, I, now I’m excited about it. You just have to continue to make it interesting.”
The question asking activities in the PACT time debriefing developed throughout the semester that I observed Cindy’s classroom. Cindy asked parents to say a question that they would ask their child when they went home that day. Parents responded with questions about a certain phrase they learned in the elementary class, like when Sofía said she would ask her son what the phrase “cold feet” meant, or they would ask about a learning activity or topic, like to ask their child about the week’s spelling pattern. Parents also began to ask each other questions about their PACT time experiences. At first this was due to Cindy’s direct instruction: she identified one parent to ask another parent a question. Overtime, the questions amongst the parents happened more easily when Cindy or Nekabari asked the groups if they had questions for each other. Parents asked each other questions like, “What did you see your daughter do on the computer?” or, “How did you feel when you saw your son?”.

**PACT time: a means to teaching children academics.** John’s previous statement that PACT time was “where the rubber meets the road” captured the views of the administration, teachers, and parents who stated that family literacy was a means to learn about and support children’s academic learning. From this perspective, PACT time was the space where the parents learned most about what happened in the classroom and, in turn, could plausibly use that knowledge to support their children with school-based learning at home. Pilar explained this by saying:

“And a lot of the parents say that their students say that, well that’s not how my teacher teaches me math, you know. And so that way, cause we learned math in different countries differently. It was a different method. So, I think it’s, it’s a good idea, but they, they’re there to see what is being done in the school first hand and then, if they have questions they can ask the teacher. They build better relationships with the teachers…then, they just, it’s a good thing to have parents in the classroom. And just see what’s, what really goes on in there. Through all aspects you know.”

(Pilar, Coordinator, Verbena Elementary School, Interview, December 15, 2014)

Pilar’s comment that PACT time permitted parents to learn about how certain subjects, like math, were taught at Chesterfield Public Schools also pointed to the idea that parents might uncover differences when
they go to PACT time. Sofia viewed PACT time has having a close connection to her son’s success in school. She stated, “El año pasado no era muy importante para mí ir a las clases, al PACT time. Era importante y no mucho. Pero este año como voy viendo que el niño está subiendo las calificaciones pues, sí que yo también estoy esperando que se llegue la hora para ir y me gusta estar en la clase de él/ Last year it wasn’t very important for me to go to the PACT time classes. It was important, but not very much. But this year I am going and [my son] is raising his grades, well, yes, I am also anticipating the time to go because I like going to his classroom” (Sofía, Mother, Aster Elementary, Interview, November 6, 2014).

According to Sofia, her son’s improvement in his grades made PACT time worthwhile.

Later, Pilar went on to explain that a parent’s presence in PACT time also supported any behavior issues that the teacher was having with a child. This was also affirmed at Aster Elementary. An Arabic-speaking mother was once asked by her son’s classroom teacher if she could come back to do PACT time during the math period in the afternoon. The teacher had explained that her son behaved better when she was present and wanted her to come back. (The mother expressed interest in doing this, but could not because she did not have a childcare provider for the afternoon.)

This school-based learning, according to Anne, could also enhance the parents’ English skills and overall language learning experience.

“PACT time being the component which brings parents into the their child’s classroom to observe and to interact with their actual learning during the day. Which familiarizes them more with curriculum, with the teacher, also I think has the ability to enhance their learning of the English language because they’re really expected to go in there, observe, and understand you know and bring back to their adult literacy class what they’ve observed, what they’ve learned, what their child was learning, which I think moves them forward in their whole process of learning the language.”

(Anne, Coordinator, Aster Elementary, Interview, June 18, 2014)

To some, PACT time was a way for parents’ to realize and act on their role as their child’s first teacher. Again, this role was connected to school-based learning.

“Going into the classroom and learning alongside child, the children, not only to understand more about how they’re being taught, but also again, be a part of that and being able to take what you learn and what you see home so it’s consistent, so that you are able to be your, the child’s first learner, or – teacher, and be able to learn in a more consistent way”.
“And PACT time is the heart and soul, that’s the thing that’s different. And that helps parents: the intent is to help parents to understand what the children are learning. And so when they know what the children are learning then it gives them some different facets of thinking about their role. One and we see that happening, is just attendance. Because parents go into the child’s classroom and they’re observing all that happens. It’s no longer that ok, you miss a couple days, you come back, I give you a worksheet, you go home, you do it, and you’re caught up. That doesn’t happen anymore. I mean everything, everything is so integrated and so many activities that you can’t replicate on a worksheet. You know it’s really teaching to the whole child and to the moment. And so therefore, then, when parents recognize what the kids are missing, they really want their children to be in school….And so then two, the parents, not only that but they’re beginning to see what their children are learning and what they need to know in order to support the child.”

(Linda, Family Literacy Contractor, Interview, December 9, 2014)

“Vamos juntos”: the role of PACT time for Latina mothers. The Latina mothers all reported that they liked going to PACT time to spend more time with their children and become aware of what they were doing in school. This was especially true when the child was in kindergarten; many of the mothers said that their attendance in PACT time was a way to calm their kindergartener down so that s/he would stop crying at school. Furthermore, the mothers mentioned that the idea of going to school together, vamos juntos, was an important factor in motivating their child to do well in school and to enjoy attending school. Martha, a mother at Verbena Elementary, explained that her son was motivated to go to bed at night because he knew that they would all go to school together the next day.

All of the mothers also reported that their children liked it when they attended PACT time, though, as Carolina put it, “Sí a ella le gusta cuando me vaya. Está en tercero pero todavía le gusta. Cuando va creciendo más, dice, ‘No vayas conmigo!’ (risa)...pero ella todavía quiere que vaya con ella. [Yes, she likes it when I go. She is in third grade but she still likes it. As she grows up more, she says, ‘Don’t come with me!’ (laughs)...but she still wants me to go with her]” (Carolina, Mother, Blazing Star Elementary, Interview, December 11, 2014). Generally, the oldest grade level represented at PACT time was third grade, but arrangements were made for parents and children who had been involved in the program for several years, had moved into the upper grades, did not have younger children, and wanted to continue in the program.

This was the case for one man from Sudan who was attending PACT time with his fifth grade son at Aster
Elementary.

PACT time was also viewed as means through which to stay in the family literacy class. Cyntia explained, “El programa es este que uno tenga niños aquí. Ya se está acabando el niño terminar aquí ya no pueda unir uno al programa. Pero si tiene otro niño que va más abajo, puede seguir con él. Bueno, si tengo un niño nada más y el niño terminó la escuela, ya no puedo venir. Pero si tengo un más, pues puedo seguir viniendo. [The program is for a person who has children here. If the child is finishing school here, a person cannot enter the program. But if you have a child going into a younger grade, you can continue with him. Well, if I have only one child and he finished [elementary] school, I can’t come anymore]” (Cyntia, Mother, Blazing Star Elementary, Interview, November 13, 2014). The mothers mentioned that seguir con sus niños or to continue going with their children to PACT time until the finished elementary school was a goal that guided their participation in the program.

“No sé si voy a graduarme de aquí porque no estoy segura que pueda pasar. Pero mi pensamiento es seguir todavía con la niña hasta que termine. Si es que todavía me dejan ir al cuarto y quinto. Sino continuo, pues de empezar de nuevo con el niño.”

[I don’t know if I will graduate from here because I’m not sure that I could pass. But my thought is to stay with my daughter until she finishes. That is if they let me still go to fourth and fifth grade. If not, well I will start again with my son.]

(Blanca, Mother, Blazing Star Elementary, Interview, November 13, 2014)

“Yo lo que digo es que yo voy a estar hasta la niña salga es que me dejan ahí. Y a ella faltan ya dos años. Yo digo que ya entre este dos años yo tengo que aprender de perdido la mitad. O la tercera parte [de los libros de inglés].”

[What I say is that I am going to be there until my daughter finishes, that is if they let me. She has two years left. I say that within these two years I have to learn at least a half or a third [of the English books].]

(Yolanda, Mother, Aster Elementary, Interview, November 6, 2014)

PACT time was a way that the mothers could stay in the program, spend time with their children, and continue learning English. Few of the mothers expressed interest in finishing the program and continuing English classes at the community college or studying a GED; however, the majority stated that they wished to remain in family literacy for as long as possible.
Influence of PACT time on home life. The Latina mothers attributed PACT time to some changes in the way they interacted at home with their children. Everyone mentioned that they paid more attention to their child’s homework. The mothers stated that they checked for their child’s homework and reminded them to complete it. They also tried to answer questions if their children had any about the homework.

“Como en las tareas. Todo eso. Por ejemplo, a veces me pregunta si está bien o es otro. Ya lo que yo puedo decirle, yo digo…Como de una historia que a ella le encargaron y me dice si le puedo ayudar. Y pues yo ya le decía como decía…Si pues a veces trae libros y me dice, ‘Mami. Quiero que leas conmigo.’ ‘Ok.’ Y me pongo a leer con ella. Y pues ella también me ayuda con eso. Porque son puros libros en inglés. Pues en español ni uno.”

[Like, with the homework. All of that. For example, sometimes she asks me if something is right or if it’s something else. Now I can tell her, I say…like about a story that she was assigned and she asks me if I can help. And well now I tell her what it said…If, well, sometimes she brings books and tells me, ‘Mom, I want you to read with me.’ ‘Ok.’ and I read with her. And well she also helps me with this because the books are in English. Not even one is in Spanish.]

(Yolanda, Mother, Aster Elementary, Interview, November 6, 2014)

However, Gabriela had a different understanding of how to work with her daughter at home. Like several of the mothers, she mentioned that her daughter was advanced and was working ahead of her class in certain areas. Gabriela stated that she did not help her daughter with her homework, but used her homework as a way to learn about language and mathematics. “No le ayudo porque ella hace la tarea sola. Casi no, no me dice, ‘Mami, ¿Qué quiere decir eso?’ o ‘¿Qué es esto aquí?’ porque ella sabe. Yo le digo a ella, ‘¿Qué significa esto o qué palabra es esa? o ¿cómo hacer este problema en matemáticas?’ [I don’t help her because she does the homework alone. She almost never tells me, ‘Mom what does this say?’ or ‘What is this here?’ because she knows. I tell her, ‘What does this mean or what word is this?’ or, ‘How do you do this math problem?’]” (Gabriela, Mother, Blazing Star Elementary, Interview, November 14, 2014).

Sofía, a mother at Aster Elementary, stated that PACT time helped her to see how difficult her son’s schoolwork was and then she started spending time with him to make sure he completed the homework at home. She offered the following example of how she would work with her son at home after he took a test in school. Sofía had stated earlier that she observed her son taking a test that day in school, but
that he had finished it very quickly and she was not sure if he had done well on it or not. She then explained what she would do when he arrived home from school:

“Si están leyendo una historia [durante PACT time], me dan una copia. Yo sé de que trata o que están haciendo o que tan difícil es para contestarla para él, si necesita ayuda o no y ya cuando llega a la casa pues yo le pregunto. Pero si no voy, entonces no sé que pasó ni como ayudarle. Por ejemplo, hoy que llegue pues yo sé que le voy a decir que a la mejor para hacer el examen que él hizo necesita leer más veces la historia para que comprenda lo que pasó y no, y no las hace mal las palabras.”

[If they are reading a story [during PACT time], they give me a copy. I know what it is about or what they are doing or how difficult it is for him to answer it, if he needs help or not and when he comes home, well, I ask him. But if I don’t go, I don’t know what happened or how to help him. For example, today when he comes home, well, I know that I am going to tell him that, for the exam that he took, it is better if he reads the story several times so that he understands what happened and not answer the questions incorrectly.]

(Sofía, Mother, Aster Elementary, Interview, November 6, 2014)

Besides homework, the mothers also mentioned that they had started reading more to their children at home. While the mothers at Aster Elementary attributed this to PACT time or to completing homework, the mothers at Verbena Elementary and Blazing Star Elementary said that their weekly trips to the school library during family literacy class influenced their reading with their children at home.

“Luego yo llego con libros de la librería de la escuela y [mi hijo] también. Luego sale que a veces traemos, él ya trajo unos y yo traigo el mismo. Entonces él se motiva y dice, ‘Mami yo también ya lo traje’ y luego, ‘Sí mijo porque a mí también me da permiso a ir a la misma librería donde tú vas.’...Traigo libros del inglés, traigo de los dos idiomas, del inglés y español...Pues me traigo como cinco libros para leerle uno como cada día. Y él también sabe traer. Yo trato agarrar los más grandecitos y él los trae más chiquitos.”

[Then, I arrive with the books from the school library and so does my son. Then sometimes it happens that we both bring, he brought some books and I bring the same [books]. Then he is motivated and says, ‘Mommy I also brought it’ and then, ‘Yes my son because they give me permission to go to the same library that you go to’...I bring books in English, I bring [books] in both languages, in English and Spanish...Well, I bring about five books in order to read him one everyday. And he also knows to bring [home books]. I try to get the bigger books and he brings home the smaller books.]

(Martha, Mother, Verbena Elementary, Interview, December 18, 2014)

At Blazing Star Elementary, Melanie, the English teacher, assigned weekly book reports for the parents to complete with their children. Similar to a reading log, the parents needed to write the title, author,
and genre of the stories they read with their children each week as well as a short summary or picture depicting the beginning, middle and end of the story. The class visited the school library every Monday to select books to take home. Each parent was also charged with selecting one book to read aloud to the class on Wednesday. Their homework was to practice reading the book out loud to their children at home and then on Wednesday they would take turns reading these books out loud to the family literacy class. Weekly trips to the library were slowly being introduced to all of the sites. John had also begun taking his class to the library at Verbena Elementary in the fall and Cindy was making arrangements to begin this activity in the spring of 2015.

**Parent Time**

The parent time class took place one day a week for two hours at each site. Different participants also referred to the class as *parenting class, parenting, family class, la clase familiar, or simply los [viernes/miercoles] or la clase de [miercoles/ viernes]*. This class was organized and, for the most part, facilitated by the coordinator of the site. The coordinator took the lead on managing and structuring the parent time class and, according to the administrators, played the key role in making this particular component of the program look different at each site. Jill credited this to the different types of coordinators that oversaw the family literacy program:

> “And, the family literacy coordinator and how they structure [parent time] and manage the time with the family literacy program at each site. And it's not necessarily has to do with their personality or the way that they do things, it's the amount of time that they actually have in a day to dedicate to the family literacy. So for instance, one school, two schools, we have ELL teachers that are the family literacy coordinator. And so they really only have about an hour a day unless they do it off, off time you know during like, not during the school day, after school or weekends or whatever, to really dedicate to family literacy because they have kids all day. And so the way they have it structured, which they've done a great job in managing that time and really being able to, to pull everything together, they still don't have time to dedicate. So in some ways that's good because they really do have to lean on the other staff in the building to be a part of it. And so, in those schools it feels like the whole school really understands the other teachers, the nurse, the cafeteria workers, paras in the building, everyone really understands what that is because the whole building really needs to pull together to make it happen when those parents are in the schools.

And then we have sites where we have the, CLC, the, the community learning center coordinators running the…they are the family literacy coordinators. Um…and those sites are unique from others I feel because the, they are not connected to the school. And, even though they do the parent time
and they’re able to really be a part of it, they still don’t have…they’ve got a good connection with the school and that parent engagement, just in a different way than an employee of the school. And at those sites it seems that the resources, like, pulling in resources from the community is really more of a focus than doing lesson plans and like lesson plans that they would teach themselves...Not that I mean it’s not good or bad, that’s just a different, a different approach and a different focus that they’re that they’re bringing to the program.

And then you have our family engagement specialist type employees of the district, that are, they may have education or may not have education background, but they really want to give those resources but also give them parenting skills and, and do some of those teachable moments and lesson planning that they, that they incorporate into those times. And so that parent time looks a little but different as well. So that’s kind of, that’s where the differences really do begin. Is that, that family literacy coordinator, is kind of what I’ve seen. And again, not, none of them are better than others in my mind, but I just think that it’s just the approach and the different way of looking at how to do things.”

(Jill, Infant Toddler Coordinator, Interview, December 11, 2014)

Jill described three different types of family literacy coordinators, all of which are represented in this study. Anne was the Family Care Coordinator at Aster Elementary, or what Jill referred to as the family engagement specialist. Amanda was a CLC coordinator at Blazing Star Elementary and Pilar was an ELL teacher at Verbena Elementary. The structure of the parent time did generally differ across these sites. This section will look at those differences as well as at some common themes that emerged from all three sites. Section 3 will look specifically at the Latina mothers’ involvement in this class.

Parenting class at Aster Elementary. Anne managed the parenting class on Wednesdays at Aster Elementary. Prior to coordinating the family literacy program, Anne taught a class about parenting twice a month that was open to all parents with children enrolled at Aster. This class was a part of the school’s Parent Involvement Resource Center (PIRC); because of her experience with this class, Anne stated that it was logical that she was in charge of the parenting classes for the family literacy program. For the first year, she worked with the school’s social worker to implement The Incredible Years curriculum during that class. The Incredible Years is a curriculum that focuses on learning about child development, improving parent-child interactions, and building positive relationships (The Incredible Years, 2013). Because The Incredible Years required special training for implementation, Anne was not able to use the
program in the parenting class, but it influenced her decisions for organizing the class in the subsequent years.

Parenting class at Aster Elementary was a blend of bringing in community service providers to present to the families and a discussion of parenting practices. A typical Wednesday began with Anne, referred to as Miss Anne by the parents, greeting the class and introducing the day’s presenter. The presenters were from myriad organizations, such as the local police department and the community garden organization. (Different topics discussed during these classes are presented below.) The community representative would make a presentation for the first hour of class and, to varying degrees, engage in a discussion with the parents. The bilingual liaisons were present for this time and would interpret the information presented for the parents. The class took a break after the presentation and then reconvened to talk about more specific parenting practices, which ranged from discipline to facilitating activities with children at home.

Sometimes Anne had the parents do a special PACT debriefing exercise in the parenting class. In the spring of 2014, the parents were given a homework assignment to make posters about what they learned in PACT time and then present them in class. Other special activities were held during this time as well. Parents brought in food for a surprise celebration of Anne’s birthday. They also visited the childcare class to observe a typical day in childcare. At the end of the year, they went to the cafeteria for an awards ceremony that included the parents, their school-aged children, and their youngest children in childcare.

**Parent time at Blazing Star Elementary.** Amanda stated that she viewed parent time as a time to connect parents to community resources. Like at Aster, the parent time classes at Blazing Star centered mainly on presentations from the community. A community representative came to the class at a scheduled time, not necessarily right at the beginning of class, and the bilingual liaisons were present to interpret the information presented. What happened before or after the presentation differed from Aster Elementary. Amanda scheduled a PACT time debriefing once a month during the parent time class. During this activity, parents worked in grade level groups to make posters about what they had seen in PACT time over the past
month. They utilized their PACT time sheets to make these posters and then presented them to the class. Amanda also facilitated team-building activities during parent time. For example, parents worked in multilingual teams to construct a structure out of Legos. A model structure was located in the classroom next door and only one person from the team could view it at a time. When s/he returned from viewing the model, s/he had to show the team how to build it. No one was permitted to talk during the activity. (Field Notes, Blazing Star Elementary, October 24, 2014).

Melanie, the English teacher, attended all of the parent classes at Blazing Star. While she did not have an active role in planning the class, she was present to help Amanda as needed. Often she interacted with the parents as the completed activities. The parents also brought food to each of the parent time classes. They sat the food on the back table and parents could eat the food either during a break midway through class or for the last fifteen minutes of class. Sometimes parents stayed after class to eat. A typical parent time class also included a raffle of household items as “prizes” for those in attendance. Fransisca, the Spanish-speaking bilingual liaison, received the raffle items from the Center for People in Need. Each Friday the parents would draw a number out of a plastic container and then choose a prize according to the order of their numbers. So, if fourteen people were in attendance, they drew the numbers one through fourteen and then chose prizes in the order of the numbers the had drawn.

**Parenting at Verbena Elementary.** Pilar’s approach to parenting at Verbena Elementary was in a transition phase. She explained that in the past, parenting had always included presentations from many community organizations; however, during the 2014-2015 school year she was trying to implement a theme about reinventing oneself in a new culture. She explained, “I always think that, how do reinvent yourself in a new culture? Not to forget about your culture. But reinventing yourself could mean how do I do things a little bit different than what I used to do in my country. And then, also how to…how should I adapt to this culture and how should I feel about it?” (Pilar, Coordinator, Verbena Elementary, Interview, December 15, 2014). The structure of the sessions at Verbena still revolved around community presentations, but from sources that Pilar felt aligned with this goal. For example, a psychologist attended parenting three times in six weeks
to talk about stress and self-esteem.

John, the English teacher, was present at all parenting sessions and was charged with beginning each class at 8:30 AM because Pilar was teaching ELL students in her classroom until 9:00 AM. John greeted the parents and made announcements; sometimes he conducted a short English-learning activity, like reviewing spelling words, and other times he implemented an activity that was related to the day’s theme, like showing a YouTube video. Belinda, the Spanish-speaking bilingual liaison, was nearly always present at the beginning of class and often made announcements or handed things out to the parents. Pilar entered the classroom at 9:00 and the other bilingual liaisons also arrived by 9:00. Typically Pilar introduced the speaker and stayed for the beginning of the presentation. She was often in and out of the classroom during parenting. When Pilar was present, she took on an active role facilitating discussion and asking questions of the speaker; sometimes she led an activity. When Pilar left, Belinda took over as the classroom leader. John typically sat at the teacher’s desk in the back of the classroom for parenting. He stood up at the end of the class to make closing remarks and any pending announcements, and to dismiss the parents.

At Verbena, parenting was also a place where parents could win items by having their names drawn from a plastic container. Typically these items were books, school supplies, or bags of groceries. Some days Pilar announced that she had donated items in her classroom, such as shoes, and the parents could go and select some of these items to take home. From time to time, food was brought by the students and teachers to share. Once during my fieldwork Jill and a NCFL representative visited the class. Pilar and the school principal ordered fruit trays and pan dulce, Mexican sweetbread, for the occasion. Several other times the women made special dishes or brought store-bought treats to the class to share. When this happened, the food was set on the counter and parents were instructed to serve themselves throughout the class. Coffee was always available at Verbena five days a week, including during parenting.

**Interpretation.** Parent time class was the only component of family literacy that included interpreted information in (one of) the parents’ home language(s). The bilingual liaisons were expected to be present at the parent time class each week in order to interpret the presentations and any other information
presented during parent time. Ideally, they were there for the full two hours. When I began fieldwork in the spring, however, the sites were in the middle of adjusting to a new schedule with the bilingual liaisons. It became difficult for the bilingual liaisons to be present at each site for a full two hours because they were often needed for interpretation at different sites throughout the district. Often bilingual liaisons arrived and left at different times because they had commitments elsewhere; they also took several phone calls and checked email messages during parent time. Jill explained that they eventually came to the agreement that the bilingual liaisons needed to be at the parent time class for the first hour and then stay for the second hour if they could make it work. During the fall of 2014, the bilingual liaisons attended the parent time class according to this schedule. Because of the new schedule, any presentations needed to be one hour long and at sites like Verbena, the coordinator was not available to cover the second hour of class. This was why John stayed during the entire parent time class: to fill in for Pilar when she needed to go and teach her elementary students.

Formal interpretation time with the bilingual liaisons typically followed a strict rule: interpretation was offered only when a bilingual liaison was present for all of the different language groups. According to the program personnel, it would not be fair to offer interpretations for some parents and not for other. This notion came into play when a person who was not a bilingual liaison but who spoke more than one language was in the room and was working with the parents. In English class, these people were told that they were not allowed to use a language other than English when instructing parents because it would not be fair that some parents received instruction in (one of) their first language(s) while others did not. These rules were mostly articulated in John’s classroom to Amber, Jamilah, Fernanda and I. We all spoke at least two languages but were instructed by John to only use English. Nevertheless, parents often spoke with us in Spanish (Amber, Fernanda, and I) or Arabic (Jamilah) when they did not understand and we responded. (They also spoke to each other in in their home language when they did not understand. In interviews, the Latina mothers reported asking someone to translate the material as a main strategy they used when they did not understand.)

A similar rule happened in parent time class: if there was not a bilingual liaison present for
everyone, another person could not step in to translate for one group. This became clear one day when a visitor from the Chesterfield Symphony Orchestra came to Blazing Star Elementary. The presentation was put on hold because the bilingual liaisons had not arrived and Cyntia, a mother, asked Amanda if I could interpret for them. Amanda said no because the other interpreters were not there and it would not be fair. The bilingual liaisons never arrived and the presentation went on without interpretation. After class, however, some of the Spanish-speaking mothers asked me to explain pieces that they did not understand. (Field Notes, Blazing Star Elementary, November 7, 2014). However, if any of the coordinators or teachers needed help translating something into another language, they asked the assistant, volunteer, or researcher. These moments ranged anywhere from asking how to say one word or asking to interpret an entire conversation.

The bilingual liaisons, as several parents and administrators explained, were “more than translators” (Jill, Infant and Toddle Coordinator, Interview, December 11, 2014). They had relationships with the families outside of the family literacy program and worked with them for other school events, such as parent-teacher conferences. The bilingual liaisons played a key role in recruiting parents for the program: the coordinators relied on them to tell parents about family literacy and to help recruit parents that would be a “good match” for the program. (The notion of a “good match” will be discussed in Section 3.) At Blazing Star Elementary, all of the Latina mothers credited Fransisca, the bilingual liaison, for their participation in the family literacy program. At the other two schools, some of the mothers stated that the bilingual liaison reached out to them while others stated that they became involved with the program after hearing about it from friends and inquiring about it on their own.

The relationships that the bilingual liaisons had with the parents were evident during parent time. On these days (like most days) parents sat together in groups based on their first language. When the liaisons entered, they greeted the parents and asked about their personal lives. Often mothers and liaisons huddled into personal conversations about their lives and families before the start of class. This was the case for the women liaisons and the mothers in the class: the only male liaisons that I observed in the field were Arabic-speaking and while the liaisons and the mothers were friendly, personal conversations mainly
happened between the male liaisons and the male Arabic-speaking students. Parents of all genders, however, often asked the bilingual liaisons to help them with verbal or written translations and/or to address some type of problem that they were having inside or outside of school. Parents brought in forms from the school that were sent home with their child, documents concerning housing and other social benefits, applications for passports, and financial paperwork. They showed these things to the liaisons before class, during the break, or right before the liaison needed to leave.

The parents, teachers, and coordinators asked the bilingual liaisons to interpret on their behalf if they had personal or school-related concerns. If these conversations were about leaving early, missing a class, or schedules, they often took place in the classroom either near the teacher’s desk or off to the side. If the conversations were personal or dealt with an issue concerning the parent’s performance in class, such as attendance or participation in PACT time, they took place in the hallway; at Blazing Star Elementary, these conversations happened in classroom next door that served as Amanda’s office when she was at the school. These conversations typically happened out of my earshot but one day at Verbena Elementary the sensitive topic of discussion was considered necessary to share with the class:

(Field Notes, Verbena Elementary, September 23, 2014): Before class began, Zara, the Kurdish-speaking bilingual liaison, left the classroom with Yekta, a Kurdish-speaking mother. The class began and after about fifteen minutes, Zara and Yekta returned. Yekta went back to her seat and Zara stopped at the teacher’s desk to talk quietly with John.

At the end of the class, John stood up and said that he needed to tell the class something. He explained that they are all friends in this class, that they learn together and it is important that they are all friends. He said that earlier he talked with Zara and that they have just learned that Yekta’s father died in Iraq last week. He told the group that they all know about the group ISIS that is very violent and that there is a lot of violence in Iraq right now. He said that something happened and her father was killed.

Belinda interpreted this in Spanish. The other bilingual liaisons had already left for the day.

The classroom fell silent. Everyone’s face looked distraught and the women turned to look at Yekta with concerned faces. One of the Kurdish-speaking women placed a hand on her shoulder and Yekta wiped away a tear.

John asked Yekta how many years she had been in Lincoln and she responded that she had been here years. John told the class that it had been three years since she had seen her father. He said that they all understood that she was sad and that it must be especially hard because she just had a baby. John ended by saying, “We are all your friends here.”

Belinda interpreted this in Spanish.
After the class was dismissed, several women gathered around Yekta, gave her hugs, and offered her words of sympathy.

During the parent time class, the bilingual liaisons followed a typical interpretation model. The coordinator, teacher, or presenter said a portion of the announcement, presentation or any other comment and the liaisons would then interpret it into (one of) the parents’ home language(s). If the parents had a question or comment, they told it to the bilingual liaison in their first language and the bilingual liaison then stated it in English. My ability to speak and understand Spanish permitted me to listen carefully to the interpretations offered by the Spanish-speaking liaisons. Mostly the interpretations were close to being direct translations of what was being said; other times the liaisons adapted the message slightly or added additional details or comments. Occasionally parents and bilingual liaisons veered away from the strict interpretation pattern and engaged in conversations about the material.

Bilingual liaisons also took on a role as teacher-participant in this setting. Before, during, and after class the liaisons would talk in English with the coordinators, teachers and other liaisons and by doing so, they demonstrated that relationships with these people that were distinct from parents, who were also bilingual. The liaisons helped coordinators pass materials out and even organize and lead class activities. For example:

**Discussing compost. (Field Notes, Aster Elementary School, February 26, 2014):** The class was engaged in a lively conversation with visiting presenters from the local community garden organization. The representatives had presented about the gardening supplies that were available for families at their organization. They representatives had just past out brochures to everyone and the parents were discussing the pictures and information in their home languages. An Arabic-speaking mother asked a question through the bilingual liaison about a picture of raised garden beds that were featured in the brochure. Another Arabic Speaking woman asked a question about getting soil and the representative began explaining that the organization had compost available for them to use.

Anne, Camila (the Spanish-speaking bilingual liaison) and Zara (the Kurdish-speaking bilingual liaison) began talking to each other about using compost in their home gardens. Anne commented that she made her own compost and that when she was growing up on the farm, they often used manure. Camila told Zara and a few of the Kurdish-speaking women that she used grass in her garden. Zara said that she had put down grass too but that she didn’t know that they could get compost. The community garden representative came over and told the three women that they could get compost from a company in Chesterfield called [Chesterfield-Grow]. They continued to talk for a few minutes as the rest of the class spoke to each other in their home languages.
**Leading BINGO.** (Field Notes, Blazing Star Elementary, November 14, 2014): Amanda was leading a game of BINGO with site words today during parent time. The Arabic-speaking bilingual liaison asked if he could talk with her and a parent privately. Amanda said yes, but before she left she asked Fransisca, the Spanish-speaking bilingual liaison, if she could read the words for the game. Fransisca said okay and went to the front of the room.

Before she left, Laura asked Mag if she would read the words. Mag said okay and went to the front. As Fransisca read the words, Melanie wrote them on a grid on the whiteboard.

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As she read the words, Fransisca also looked at the parents’ BINGO boards to see how they were doing. Parents called out the numbers and letters that they needed and Fransisca yelled, “I’m trying!” and laughed. She dropped a card on the floor. Hien looked at the card on the floor and then said, “I need it!” Fransisca picked it up. She laughed and said that she would mix it back in.

Fransisca continued to call words and monitor who was close to winning. Melanie told her too slow down because she was calling faster than she could write. Fransisca laughed and apologized. After about ten minutes, Amanda returned. Fransisca told her to come and take her job back because it was too stressful for her. The whole class and the teachers laughed.

Bilingual liaisons also interjected during presentations or class discussions without interpreting any information. It was very common for a bilingual liaison to ask a question, to answer a question, or to make a comment that did not come from a parent.

(Field Notes, Verbena Elementary, September 25, 2014): Belinda was standing behind the group of Spanish-speaking women eating an apple as she interpreted for the visiting nutritionist. They had been discussing the different food groups and the appropriate serving sizes for each group. The nutritionist was asking each different language group about the common dairy products in their diet.

Zara said that the Iraqi women are very healthy. She said that they make their own yogurt and cheese and that they don’t have any preservatives. The nutritionist said that she had tried some of their yogurt before and it was delicious. She said that when she tried to make her own yogurt, it flopped. She then turned to the Karen-speaking mothers and asked if they make their own cheese. The Karen-speaking mothers said no, they did not. Belinda said that the Iraqi women should bring some so that everyone could try it.
The groups were talking in their home languages. Belinda explained to the Spanish-speakers that she told the Iraqi women that they should bring their homemade cheese for everyone to try.

The nutritionist asked the class if they knew the differences between the colors of the caps on the milk bottles. She said that there were red, pink, blue and green cap colors. The bilingual liaisons interpreted this. Then, the nutritionist told the class that the difference between the colors was the amount of fat in the milk.

Belinda asked what the colors meant. She said that she knew that the red meant whole milk but that she wasn’t sure about the others. The nutritionist began to explain that red meant whole milk and green meant 1%. As she began to say the other colors, Belinda joined in and said them almost simultaneously: pink meant skim milk and blue meant 2%. Belinda nodded her head as they wrapped up saying all of the colors. Then she interpreted this to the Spanish-speaking mothers.

The nutritionist commented that everyone in the class was a woman. Then she asked them if they know what would happen if they didn’t get enough vitamin D in their diet.

Belinda said, “Osteoporosis.” and then she began interpreting for the Spanish-speaking mothers. A couple of mothers began talking to her in Spanish about osteoporosis, telling her about some family members who had had the disease. Other Spanish-speakers were talking in small groups of two or three people.

Below is another example of how Camila, a Spanish-speaking bilingual liaison at Aster Elementary, interpreted for and interacted with the Spanish-speaking mothers during parent time.

(Field Notes, Aster Elementary, April 9, 2014): Anne reminded the parents of their homework assignment last week: they were supposed to have a definition for the word addiction. She wrote “Addiction” on the board. The previous week the class had been discussing smoking with a local health official. The conversation had turned into talking about different kinds of addictions and Anne had instructed parents to go home and find a definition of this word.

The bilingual liaisons and the parents began talking to each other in their home languages. Camila was on the computer and she looked up periodically to talk with the Spanish-speaking mothers about their definitions.

Camila said, “Verónica!”

Anne said “Verónica. Listen, Verónica will tell us a definition of addiction.”

In Spanish, Camila told Verónica that she could tell to tell her the definition in Spanish first. Verónica’s eyes grew big and she made a weary face to Camila. She quietly told her the definition in Spanish. Camila interpreted her definition word for word out loud for the rest of the class: “When you are tied to drugs or something, alcohol.”

Anne reminded them of some of the addictions that they listed on the board last week. She asked them to come up with one addiction that burdens their home countries.

Camila turned to the Spanish-speaking women and said “Tobacco verdad?” The women nodded and agreed. The other groups continued talking.

Camila turned and told Anne, “Tobacco and alcohol.” Then she told Anne that in Colombia (her home
country) it was “la droga” (drugs).

The other groups continued talking. The Arabic-speaking bilingual liaison said that in Iraq one addiction could be gossiping.

Camila got Anne’s attention by calling her name. She said that in the US an addiction could be obesity. Ann told Camila that this was a good idea and turned to the class. She said loudly that Camila said that one addiction in the United States is obesity, or being addicted to food. Anne then explained that it is not how much we eat, but what we eat. She said that obesity would become a major problem for the United States in the future.

The bilingual liaisons oscillated between the roles of confidant, interpreter, teacher, and participant in the parent time class. Parents also interacted with the bilingual liaisons within the frame of these different roles for different purposes. This interaction will be looked at in detail in Section 2.

“Parents” needs and wants: planning parent time topics. According to most of the administrators and coordinators, the parent time class was driven by the parents’ needs or wants. How the administrators and coordinators defined parents’ needs and then acted on them, however, varied. Amanda explained how she approached planning parent as the coordinator at Blazing Star Elementary:

“Then we ask [the parents], what do you want to learn? Because really parent time is for the parents. I may have an idea of what I would love to teach, but it really may not be anything that the parents want. They're not going to one, really pay attention because it’s not something for them, and it's just putting my ideas into there, so really we ask them, what information would you like to know more about? I mean, are there resources in the community? Things going on in the school you want to find more information about? So we just make a huge list. Usually, I mean they’re things like finding math curriculum that we have in the school, the specials that they have, fire department, police department, health, different health topics, is really big. And so then my job is to kind of find those resources and either one, bring a presenter in which is most beneficial cause it’s nice for them to get connected with outside resources, to see somebody else, to see the person doing it, to see the actual police officer in our area and ask them because that person knows about what’s going on in the community and knows about….I mean and we’ve people from the department of health and human services talk about Medicaid and we’ve had the food bank come. So it’s nice having those people come and one, they see those people but also, they can ask them questions, and you get more information from it.”

(Amanda, Coordinator, Blazing Star Elementary, Interview, December 15, 2014)

Amanda made a list of what the parents' wanted to learn about during parent time class and then contacted community resources that could speak to those areas. During the fall of 2014, a health professional came to Blazing Star to specifically talk about asthma because two of the parents in the class, a married couple, had
a daughter with severe asthma and were interested in how to help her. After the presentation about asthma, several other parents voiced concerns about their children getting ear infections and the health professional came back the following week to present about ear infections.

How Nancy, the Family Literacy Specialist, presented a very different way of how the sites assessed and attended to parents’ needs and wants:

“Then, the parents also have one day a week for two hours what we call parent time. And that is kind of driven by the needs of the parent, or perhaps the needs of what the principal or the faculty is seeing the parents need to understand about…how school is done here. So, parent time could be anywhere from learning how to use the crosswalk properly, why would we want to do that. It could be bringing a community service officer in from the [Chesterfield] City Police to talk about what one does when you’re pulled over in a traffic stop, what constitutes child abuse in our society. It’s a huge wide variety of topics that we can cover. We ask the parents at the beginning of the year in August or September, whenever we start the program, what they would like to know about. Then if issues come up along the way, um, that are indicated to us, from perhaps principals, faculty or community in general, we try to touch on those issues as well.”

(Nancy, Family Literacy Specialist, Interview, February 28, 2014)

According to Nancy, parents’ needs were assessed at the beginning of the year in a similar way that Amanda approached the process. However, the parents’ needs were also then determined by the school administration, school faculty and community members. Nancy went on to explain that she developed the parent time classes around the school calendar and focused on preparing parents for school events and expectations in parent time class. At Aster Elementary, Anne mentioned that she did not have a big say in who came to present at her site were going to be because the schedule was determined mostly by Nancy. To plan for the class, she anticipated the presenters’ message and then facilitated a follow up discussion that integrated the theme and parenting practices that she determined were connected.

Instead of generating a list of topics with the parents at Verbena, Pilar gave the parents a survey to respond to about what they might like to learn during the parent time class. She stated:

“We have a survey. I give them a survey at the beginning of the year about what, for parenting, about what topics they want to learn more about and there’s, you know, how to advocate for my child, how to learn more about nutrition…and so we’ll bring speakers that talk that way. So…if they want to learn more about how to read to my child, then we’ll do that or how to, you know, so more specific.”

(Pilar, Coordinator Verbena Elementary, Interview, December 15, 2014)
The survey that Pilar mentioned was a typed list of topics and the parents indicated which were of interest to them. However, Pilar also integrated her own ideas about what parents needed in parent time by focusing on the theme of “reinventing yourself in a new culture”. Pilar expanded on this idea by explaining how she brought in a psychologist to address this process and what questions and tensions she expected the parents to be grappling with.

“How should I adapt to this culture and how should I feel about it? So that’s why I brought that psychologist that talked about stress and motivate, you know and self esteem. Because all of those things play a role when you move to a brand new country and maybe you did not decide to move to a new country. Maybe your husband decided. And so you’re here and then you have those, those feelings that I should be home. I used to do this at home and now I’m here, and I have to deal with the cold weather, or the language, or the food or con grocery shopping. I could walk in my country to pick up something from the market. I could call my neighbor and ask them to ·, can I borrow this. But now I can’t. So, I think I always thought that reinventing yourself in any culture is not a bad thing, it’s just like you’re trying to balance things up. So I try to bring that into the c-, in to the, the parenting and even to learn new things like what do the schools expect of me? What do they expect of my children? How can I be a better parent in this society? Never forget about my customs or what I do with my kids…but just to, for them to feel better here. And, just not to feel like they have given up so many things, and then the new life is not what they thought.”

(Pilar, Coordinator, Verbena Elementary, Interview, December 15, 2014)

In this excerpt, Pilar addressed how she brought in the psychologist to talk about different things that she expected the parents to be experiencing. At the end, she also included the expectations that the schools have of parents, their children, and their parenting skills.

In an interview, Nancy indicated more than 25 different kinds of “needs” that are determined for the parents by the administrative team. Table 12 presents a list of the different topics that I observed being discussed at the three sites during parent time. The topics are arranged by how they were open-coded during data analysis.

Table 12: Topics Discussed in Parent Time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School-Related Topics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Topics Discussed in Parent Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chesterfield Public Schools elementary math curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>School events: conferences, book fair, family nights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic learning activities at home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekend activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PACT debriefing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading and telling stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition to middle school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Topics About Home</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities during breaks: planning and reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekend activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holidays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children's heritage</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cooking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Schedules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disciplining children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community Visitors/Programs</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chesterfield Police Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community gardens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic violence: information and shelter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addictions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutrition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chesterfield Symphony Orchestra (family outing event)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Habits and Skills</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cooperation and team building</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Empowering or ayuda or neither?**. On one hand, several administrators, coordinators and teachers claimed that family literacy empowered parents to develop the knowledge and skills to better their lives and the lives of their families. On the other hand, others declared that family literacy taught parents
how to ensure their children would be successful in school and that the comprehensive model was a vehicle through which to teach these skills: all components were contributing factors in these goals. This section takes a closer look at how the Latina mothers’ perceptions about parent time align with these overarching goals.

“Los viernes. Llevan otras personas a veces para hablarnos de cosas de salud, de cualquier otro tema que a nosotros interese. Nosotros decimos que, que nos gustaría saber y ellos traen a una persona que nos dice, nos explica, nos explique y este…o a veces de los mismos programas que hay aquí en las, en [Chesterfield] y a veces uno no sabe….donde te pueden ayudar o donde puedes ir a buscar ayuda o para cualquier que uno necesite, ellos allí tiene mucho información.”

[Fridays. Sometimes they bring people to talk with us about things like health or any other topic that interests us. We say what, what we would like to know and they bring in a person that tells us, explains to us, that explains to us [about this topic]….Or sometimes it’s about programs that are here in [Chesterfield] and sometimes a person doesn’t know…where they can help you or where to go to look for help or for whatever you need, they have a lot of information there.]

(Gabriela, Mother, Blazing Star Elementary, Interview, November 14, 2014)

Gabriela began by stating that the parent time class is based on themes in which the parents are interested and on topics that they want to learn about. When asked to describe some of these topics, Gabriela continued:

“Nos dijeron en, como, en que lugar uno puede notarse para, dan comida, comidas y te dicen por ejemplo por el 27 hay un lugar donde dan comida que se llama People, People in Need. Y ahí nos dicen que hay un sitio donde te dan comida. Luego va una persona para platicarnos de las estampillas. Nos dan tarjetas para que nos pongamos en contacto con ellas para si necesitamos ayuda para la aplicación o también…Por ejemplo este de los diabetes. O como comer mejor, saludable. A veces van estas enfermeras. A veces van los, los bomberos a deciros como podemos dar los primeros auxilios. ¿Qué más? Y también van más personas como usted, del colegio, del college? A dar información y también quieren de saber como que uno piensa y esto. ”

[They told us where you could go to find out where they give food, food, and they tell you, for example on 27th [street] there is a place where they give food that is called People, People in Need. And there they tell us that there is a place where they give you food. Then a person comes and talks to us about food stamps. They give us cards so that we can be in contact with them if we need help with an application or also…for example this [presentation] about diabetes. Or how to eat better, healthily. Sometimes the nurses come. Sometimes the firemen to tell us how to do first aid. What else? And also people like you come from the college, from the college? To give information and also [because] they want to know what you think and stuff.]

(Gabriela, Mother, Blazing Star Elementary, Interview, November 14, 2014)

Gabriela described a mix of topics that were discussed during the class, but it is not clear which
topics were requested by the parents and which were brought in by the school. She talked about resources for accessing food in the community and using food stamps as well as about health issues, both topics Amanda had confirmed were brought up by parents. Firefighters and nutritionists, however, were also community representatives that visited the other school sites. Finally, it is probable that people from the university who come to do research in the program (like me) do not come per the parent’s request. When asked if she had used any of these community resources after class time, Gabriela answered no.

Of the mothers I asked, all of them reported that they had not utilized or acted on a community resource that had been presented during the parent time class, unless it was a community center that they were already familiar with, such as local food banks or services offered by the city’s Latino Center. But, they did mention that the information helped them know about things.

“La clase de jueves, pues…sí nos ayuda mucho por la informa-, a veces traen personas que nos ayudan o es que un señor que es como un terapeuta y la importancia que cuando uno nace que nace con hambre, llorando…y esa no lo sabía y ya lo aprendí. Es es una. Y la otra de la otra persona, la otra señora que viene es que nos ayuda que tenemos que tomarnos tiempo a nosotros, administrar del tiempo bien, saber organizarnos y este más de nada, saber cada cosa que uno va a estar haciendo cada día. Y tener en cuenta que todo de eso es importante para todo nosotros. Y pues la semana pasada que fue la abogada y nos enseñó algunas cosas. A veces va la enfermera de la escuela y también nos ayuda, la higiene de las manos, y todo eso nos ayuda mucho a nosotros.

Por ejemplo, a mí me ayudó mucho de que como este señor que fue que nos dijo que uno nace llorando y uno nace estresado, pero no debe de seguir uno así diario luchando no, del estrés y eso que uno siente. Esa es una. A mí me ayudó personalmente en que debo de salir, de fuera…Yo tengo muchos años que he estado aquí…y ya voy a, ya voy a salir mejor de aquí, poner una meta. Voy a trabajar, voy a hacer esto y ahorita también dice que ellos ya nos están puchando que vayamos a algún lugar entretenido como a gimnasio y todo eso. Y también es una meta que me estoy poniendo a mí solita. Y todo es lo que he aprendido de ahí.”

[Thursday’s class, well…yes, it helps us a lot because of the informa – sometimes they bring people that help us or like an older man that is like a therapist and the importance of when a person is born, you are born hungry, crying…this I didn’t know and I learned it. That is one. And the other, of the other woman that comes and helps us so that we have to take time for ourselves, to manage time well, to know how to organize ourselves and this more than anything, know each thing that you are going to do everyday. And to take into account that all of this is important for all of us. And well, last week the lawyer came and taught us some things. Sometimes the school nurse [comes] and also helps us, hand washing and all of this helps us a lot.]

[For example, it has helped me a lot, the man who came and told us that you are born crying and you are born stressed, but you shouldn’t continue like this, fighting daily no, because of stress and all of that that you feel. This is one thing. It helped me personally in that I must get out…I have been here for many years…and now I will, I will do better than this, I will make a goal. I am going to
work, I am going to do this and right now they are encouraging us to go to an enjoyable place, like
a gym and all of that. This is also a goal that I am making for myself. And all of this I have learned
there.]

(Xóchitl, Mother, Verbena Elementary, December 17, 2014)

Xóchitl used the verb ayudar [to help] six times to describe what happened in la clase de jueves, [the parent
time class]. In the first paragraph she listed the community representatives that came to help her and her
classmates. Later, she connected some personal goals that she had set for herself with one particular
presentation from a visiting therapist. (This was the psychologist that Pilar mentioned bringing in.) In a
similar vein, Martha spoke about her behavior changed with her children and her husband after listening to
the visiting psychologist: she tried to spend more time with her children and to dialogue more with her
husband.

Sofía presented another point of view about parent time and which things she found helpful:

“Hay días que sí [la clase de miércoles] es importante. Pero, hay por ejemplo hay algunos
miércoles que no hacemos nada...bueno, yo me siento que para mí no es importante este día. Por
ejemplo, este miércoles, el pasado, si fue importante porque fue la maestra para explicarnos de
las matemáticas, la maestra de matemáticas para explicarnos lo que están haciendo los niños.
Entonces, sí pero puede ver en el mes puede ver un miércoles que nos interese pero puede a
verlos demás que no hay mucho que hacer. Pues allí siento que es tiempo perdido.”

[Sofía, Mother, Aster Elementary, Interview, November 6, 2014]

Sofía was very blunt about her opinion that parent time class was not always interesting or worth her time.
She pointed at a session about the school mathematics instruction as a class time that was important and
stated that these sessions happen maybe once a month. Sofía went on to state that the sessions with the
community police officer and nutritionist were important and that she learned while attending them. She said
that the sessions when they discuss their homework assignments, like sharing stories of something they did
with their children at home, that were given by Anne were not important and she considered these sessions
a waste of time. Sofía often did not come to the Wednesday parent time class because it was tiempo perdido [wasted time].

Separation of Families

Despite its title, the participating families were rarely together during family literacy at all three of the sites. As families arrived to the program, each member went his/her separate way into what Nancy referred to as a dedicated classroom. Children arrived at the designated school hour and headed to their elementary classrooms. The parents, mostly mothers, arrived around fifteen minutes later at the start of the family literacy with small children in tow. At all three sites, the childcare classroom was on the way to the family literacy classroom. At Verbena Elementary and Blazing Star Elementary, mothers dropped off their children in the childcare classroom or in the sectioned off corner of the cafeteria. At Aster Elementary, the childcare providers were not able to begin setting up the childcare section of the cafeteria until the school’s breakfast service was over and cleaned up. Mothers who arrived with small children even five minutes before the class started brought these children with them to the family literacy classroom and waited for the childcare providers to come to the classroom, call for the children, and lead them down the hallway to the cafeteria. The following scene depicts this act of mothers relinquishing children to the childcare providers at Aster Elementary.

(Field Notes, Aster Elementary, May 14, 2014): I arrived to the classroom this morning at 8:20 and there were six parents already there with five small children all under the age of four. One of the Kurdish-speaking mothers held her son on her lap and he had a pencil that he was using to write/draw on a piece of paper. Several children were playing together on stack of chairs. The child jumped off his mothers lap and joined the others to play on the chairs.

The children were climbing on the chairs and laughing with each other. One child fell off the chairs, face down to the floor. A few parents looked over and gasped, and his mother went to check on him. The boy stood up and seemed fine, but his mother told him to sit next to her. Another mother called her child over to sit on her lap. The other children continued to play. One opened the door to the computer cart and two others were looking at a cellphone and watching a video with music.

The childcare teachers came into the classroom and asked the children if they were ready to go. The children walked over to the childcare teachers and lined up. The mothers with children on their laps picked up their children and maneuvered them over to the teachers. The children followed the teachers out of the room and down the hallway to the cafeteria.
Besides the morning when the parents entered with their children, the only other times that the parents were with their children was during PACT time and during special events. PACT time, as explained earlier, was regulated by several rules and the parents interacted with their children under these conditions. I only observed two special events where the parents and the children were together during family literacy and both of these events were at Aster Elementary. One day during the parenting class, Anne had arranged for the parents to visit the childcare classroom to observe some of the activities that the children were doing with the childcare teachers. At this event, the childcare teachers read an ABC book with the children and sang a few songs:

(Field Notes, Aster Elementary, April 2, 2014): There were two childcare teachers, one head teacher and one assistant, standing at the front of the cafeteria. A carpet was laid out and a pocket chart, toys, puzzles, and other supplies were arranged in an area marked by bookshelves. It appears that one is the head teacher and one is the assistant. Both teachers were Latina and spoke Spanish as a first language.

The parents gathered around the front of the cafeteria where the childcare class was set up. The sat on the cafeteria benches. There were 4 children sitting on the carpet and 1 child in the stroller. There were 2 children that were about 3-4 years old and the others were toddlers.

Anne said that they were here to see a presentation about what their children have been doing in childcare. The teacher confirmed this and said that they were going to start with a book. She showed the students and the book The Very Hungry Caterpillar. She told the parents that this is a classic American book and it helps the kids learn counting. She looked at Anne while she was talking. She read each page aloud with a lot of expression. On each page, she stopped and counted with the children. The children held up their fingers as they counted.

The teacher said that next they would read an ABC book to help the students practice their letters and sounds. She told the parents, while looking at Anne, that the students have this memorized and will fill in the blank for each letter. She said that even thought they have it memorized, it still shows that they know their letters. Anne nodded.

The teacher continued to read each page and when she said “A is for ________” the children filled in the blank with the appropriate word, like apple. When they came to the page for H, the children all yelled “Chicken!” The teacher looked up and said that she has taught them the word for Hen several times, but as soon as they see the picture they say chicken instead.

Anne said, “The can say ‘hen’”

The teacher said that the picture is a chicken to them, but that they try to teach the kids. Anne nodded and she continued reading.

When she came to Q the students yelled “Quilt” and pointed to the back of the cafeteria. On the back wall there were several squares of paper hanging up. The teacher said that this was a classroom quilt that a class of elementary students made. Anne said, “Oh, quilt!”
When she came to Z the students said “zipper!”. The teacher told them to “Show me your zipper.” All of the students stood up, went and got their coats and showed their zippers by pulling them up and down.

The parents laughed! One of the mothers was video recording the presentation with her cellphone.

Next, the teacher said that they would sing the ABC song. The students sang loudly. Then, the teacher said that they would sing BINGO. She looked at Anne and said that they do this for the letters. Anne said, “Great! I love it!” The children sang BINGO. As they dropped each letter, they clapped their hands and several students jumped up.

At the end of the presentation, Anne stood up in front of the parents and told them that it is very valuable that their kids are here at FLIP with them. She said, “Your children will be ahead of the game.”

This scene depicts not only some of the daily activities that the children did in childcare, but also the degree of control that Anne exerted over what happened during the childcare class. The head teacher consistently looked to Anne for approval on the activities that she was demonstrating to the parents.

The other event that I observed at Aster that included both parents and children was the awards ceremony at the end of the school year. The school-aged and young children came to the cafeteria to observe their parents receiving awards for their participation throughout the year. In this case, the parents sat in a semi-circle of chairs and their children sat on a rug in front of them. The parents were called to the podium one at a time to receive a certificate and the children clapped for them. There was some informal mingling before and after the ceremony between children and parents, but then everyone went back to their designated classroom. I did not observe any other events besides PACT time where parents and children were together.

Referenced Children. References were made about children frequently throughout the different components of family literacy across the sites. While children were not their physically, the idea of children was constant. Children were often referred to as the reason why parents should learn about a certain topic during English class and parent time class. For example, when introducing a speaker from the state health department who would talk about tobacco use, Anne said to the parents, “Why? So that you can share it with your children, at some point.” She then told the parents that tobacco may or may not be used in the
family, but eventually their children would be exposed. Later, when discussing other addictions, she mentioned that they could not be sure if their children would become addicted to something in the future, but that they were talking about it now so that the parents would be ready (Field Notes, Aster Elementary, April 2, 2014).

Referencing children’s academic work was very common in English class. At times parents were told that they were learning something that their children would also be learning in school and at other times parents were told that a certain topic would help them do something with their children. For example, in English class John wrote the following words on the board: cold, flu, cough, sneeze, sore throat, headache, earache, body ache, stomachache, nausea, throw up, tempera, fever. John explained that these were words that would help the parents when their children are feeling sick and have to go to the doctor. John read through these words one by one. He read the words and then the parents repeated them. (Field Notes, Verbena Elementary, September 17, 2014).

Professional Development Opportunities

The staff of the family literacy program was expected to participate in professional development periodically throughout the school year. Linda, Jill, and Nancy developed and oversaw these opportunities. My entrance into the field took place when I attended the first professional development/staff meeting of the coordinators and English teacher when I was conducting preliminary fieldwork. Everyone was together at CPS’s district office in August 2013 for a morning for an implementation training, which entailed going over the different components of family literacy and discuss ideas about teaching and learning activities. Another similar meeting took place during November 2014 on a CPS staff development day, only that meeting specifically on PACT time and early childhood education for the childcare providers. The childcare providers attended the November 2014 professional development day, but not the August 2013 day.

Professional development opportunities for the family literacy staff took place throughout the school year and cover PACT time, childcare, and parent time. Additionally, coordinators, English teachers, an RCC representative (Marcia or Victoria), and a school administrator (the principal, Nancy, and/or Jill) met once or
twice a month for a planning meeting. The English teachers were also expected to attend staff meetings at RCC with their other English teachers.

**Linda's classroom visits.** Before Linda was an independent contractor with CPS, she worked for the NCFL and assisted in implementing the Toyota model of family literacy. In this role, she observed all of the classes, filled out detailed observation forms, and submitted the data back to NCFL. As a private contractor with the district, her role became more flexible and changed toward supporting professional development within the program. She visited the different sites several times to do observations of parent time and PACT time. While she did observe some of the adult English classes, she stated that she felt that Marcia was in charge of supporting the English teachers prepare and implement instruction. When Linda visited the classes for observations, she took down notes and then had a follow up meeting with the teacher. She stated that these meetings entailed, “…Just talking and getting ideas from them, and just what they feel is important and then I’ll ask them questions, you know, like I’ll have an opportunity to see how are you scaffolding or are you not? Can you tell me how you felt this worked? What’s your plan? Have you thought about…or things like that. That’s how I do them this year” (Linda, Family Literacy Contractor, Interview, December 9, 2014).

Depending on what she saw in the class or what the teacher expressed to her as concerns, she offered feedback or advice. Below she explained how she assisted a teacher in developing a solution to recording attendance accurately.

“What do you think is happening? Because a lot of the time the teacher knows what’s happening. So how do you think we could do this? What ideas do you have that could make this better? And then I could say well this is what I suggest, how do you feel about trying that for a certain amount of time? How do you think about this or something? You know, and lots of times it's just so simple. I know like one time, one time the attendance it looked like the attendance was falling or whatever…and so I just, like you know you’re pretty busy in the morning, what if a parent took on that role to be certain that the sign in sheet was there and they just kind of hung around so when people came in they reminded them so that if somebody was late, they went and reminded that person to sign in. I mean it was simple! But, because teachers are so busy, and so it's that kind of thing that I think would just be so helpful.”

(Linda, Family Literacy Contractor, Interview, December 9, 2014).
Sometimes, though, Linda took on a more active teaching role during her visits. She explained that she did this mainly during parent time class in order to talk about PACT time or to do some other relevant activity with the parents. Previously I described a part of Linda’s visit to Verbena Elementary where she led the parents in a chant about how they are the key to their child’s success. During this same class period, she conducted a team building activity where the parents had to collaborate to build a tower out of selected materials (paper, paper clips, rubber bands, tape, etc.). There were also various rules in place about who could touch the materials and who could talk. After the activity, Linda connected this back to the importance of Parent and Child Together time and how when they work together or learn together as a family, they can better their lives.

Profession development for childcare. The childcare program was amidst a transition when I began my fieldwork and was becoming a focus of professional development within family literacy. Before the childcare was viewed differently at different sites and ranged from being considered babysitting or, as Linda put it, custodial care to being structured like a preschool with emergent print literacy activities for the children to do. The childcare providers or teachers were also in transition. At the beginning of the program, the childcare providers were mostly Anglo, monolingual women. However, to be able to better communicate with the young children and with the parents, the district began hiring women who more closely reflected the cultural backgrounds and spoke the languages of the families. At some sites, including Aster Elementary, the childcare teachers were mothers who had graduated from the family literacy program.

Linda and the site coordinators worked closely with the childcare teachers to integrate emergent print literacy activities into the childcare class. Nancy explained that the childcare teachers were being trained to go through a routine.

“So they go through a routine, they do days of the week, they sing a song, they talk about the weather, they have craft projects and actually during the actual craft project or whatever they’re manipulating they’ll talk about colors, they’ll talk about letters, they’ll read books to the children, they take them out on the playground. But it’s a daily routine just as if you were in school and so we’re teaching them the benefit of a daily routine. And then there’s a snack served, and then some free time, or free play.”
Nancy and the other administrators and coordinators stressed that these activities were in English and that the children were learning in English during childcare. The Latina mothers also commented that their small children were learning words in English, such as the words *book* and *car*.

The childcare teachers were also referred to as paras or paraprofessionals. Attending the professional development day in November 2014 was the first time that they had been included in an official training, but Linda was planning to collaborate with Jill in order to set up observations in the childcare. She was planning on having meetings with the childcare teachers to discuss what was going well and what could be improved similar to those that she had with the classroom teachers and the coordinators.

**Development of parent time curriculum.** Jill, Linda, and the coordinators of all of the family literacy sites, including the three focus sites of this study, began working on developing a common parent time teaching guide, or curriculum, for the parent time class during the summer of 2014. Jill explained the reasons:

“And so, we, started doing some professional development with the family literacy coordinators with what types of lesson plans could be incorporated into the time, when available, and then try to figure out how we can, those, those family literacy coordinators that couldn’t be in there and only resources figure out how we can get them that information. Because on the surveys it was really, it was evident that they were, they knew what was happening within the communities, but that parent….child, interaction focus, like going to library, like going to the park and, and doing homework together, that type of thing wasn’t as strong as the resources and connecting to community resources. And so, actually this year, finally are putting together a parent time guide, so that we can kind of have something available for the family literacy coordinators to really pull out of so that it’s more consistent across the board and so that we make sure that there is some key pieces during parent time that is um, provided to parents.”

(Jill, Infant and Toddler Coordinator, Interview, December 11, 2014)

The begin stages of developing this guide took place during four different meetings between Jill and the coordinators. Jill went on to explain:

What we’ve done is we’ve met four times and it’s any family literacy coordinators that are available, I mean they can come together, and what we’ve done is, is put together lesson plans, all in the same type of a structure and focused on lesson plans that could be done at each building. So, one
of the focuses we had was health and safety...like, the cold and flu season and what, you know, what you can do to, what information you, we can give to parents basically...well part of the health and safety is for the parents to understand the importance of fire drills, tornado drills. First understanding what they are, and then understanding how it, they're incorporated into the school and why. And then how you can make a plan at home. Because a lot of parents don't understand what that is. If they're at family literacy and something's happening, they need to know you know that's going to be there. And then also that safety of you know, how do you do this at home? And, what do you do if there's a tornado? You know those types of things.

One of the other plans that they're working on, and that's hard, this one is hard across the board because it's, behavior is the focus. And, some of the coordinators really wanted to have a lesson plan about BIST... And so, I think, they're kind of leaning more towards the PBIS model and looking at how to help the parents to understand that. Positive Behavior Intervention Supports and it's really just kind of...creating an environment that, and for the it's really the teacher looking at themselves and how they are setting up the environment to, you know, have the best environment for the kids. And then, kind of putting a twist on that and for the parents to look at, you know, how they're interacting with their children and how they can help if there is some behavior issues or whatever.

But, but really not just coming up with, you know fifteen lesson plans that they could do during the year that really is going to happen in any of the schools, but then also looking at when is a good time of the year to do those plans. So I think it's just going to be a more consistency, it's going to be, it might interesting to pull some data from that and see if, you know, that does help with...kind of those connections or relationships with their kids. Or from their perceptions. Or from their perspective.*

(Jill, Infant and Toddler Coordinator, Interview, December 11, 2014)

The coordinators at the three focus sites expressed excitement about the new guide. Pilar explained that this guide would help correlate what different schools were doing for parent time and that this guide would give them all a clearer focus. Anne mentioned that the guide would provide her with a lot of resources that she previously did not know about. For example, she said that Linda gave them lists of children's books that tied into the lessons they were teaching that she had not known existed. She was excited to have access to these resources because she did not have a background in education and felt like the collaborative curriculum was a way to learn about ideas that she had been missing.

Data. All of the coordinators and teachers stated that they wished that they had access to the data that was collected by the school district about the families participating in the program. (English teachers did receive the English test scores of their students from RCC, but that was the only data that they were given.)
Families participated in an initial interview when they began the program and then they completed another interview at the end of each school year. Anne explained that the interview was actually a survey that the parents completed with the bilingual liaisons on a computer. The questions were a mix of demographic questions and questions about how they interact with their children and the community. At Aster Elementary, one parent time class was dedicated to completing this interview at the end of April. Parents left one at a time to complete the interview one-on-one with the bilingual liaisons. Anne lamented that she would never see this data and that she suspected it was only used to secure funding.

Linda felt that the data could help them see the program’s strengths and weaknesses and inform decision-making. “Because I feel like if I had access to the data, if the schools or the teachers had access to the data, then I could say then you know, let’s look at this. I mean that’s the way that I’ve done it with other programs I’ve worked with….But, so that I could say – oh, let’s look at this. To me this would represent that you’ve got these strengths going on. This is great, this is happening. I wonder why though in this part it’s falling down from last time or it just doesn’t quite meet the benchmark, you know the actual data.” (Linda, Family Literacy Contractor, Interview, December 9, 2014). Anne, Pilar, Amanda, and all of the English teachers also stated that they never saw the data that was collected but felt that this data could inform their program if they had access to it.

**Section 3: Perceptions of Parents and Parents’ Responses**

The majority of the family literacy class included interactions between adults within the context of an elementary school. The adults that were involved in the program could be observed as fitting into three different categories: those who represented the school district or local community college (administrators, coordinators and teachers), the parents who represented transnational communities, and the bicultural liaisons who were situated in between the school district and the parents. The interaction amongst adults in this setting was essential to determining how each person perceived the others and how the family literacy classroom experience was constructed through these enacted perceptions.
Perceptions of Parents

The perceptions held about the newcomer and refugee parents by the CPS, RCC, coordinators, and teachers were evident through the manner in which they addressed and interacted with the adults. Administrators, coordinators, and teachers took clear steps to make sure that the family literacy classroom space was physically constructed for adults. Adult-sized tables and chairs were available in each of the sites. The three sites also had a coffeemaker in the classroom, though John was the only teacher of the three who brewed coffee each day (both at Aster Elementary and Verbena Elementary). Everyone addressed each other by their first names, with the exception of Anne: the parents and other teachers referred to her as Miss Anne. This was also what the children and other families in the school called her. Generally, parents chose their own seats in the classrooms, which were arranged either in a U-shape or in table groups, and most often sat by parents who spoke the same first language as they did.

Other actions were taken, though, to determine the roles and balance of power between the coordinators and teachers and parents. Coordinators and teachers always stood in the front of the classroom, presented the topic of instruction or discussion for the day and completed managerial tasks like answering the classroom phone when it rang or greeting visitors. More subtle actions also constructed the power structure in place. For example, At Aster Elementary, Anne announced during the parent time class that parents were expected to follow certain rules when they are in the school building. Anne explained that they had had some complaints of parents walking through the production room in the morning: the narrow room held materials and the copy machine, but it also served as a shortcut from the front of the school to the hallway closest to the family literacy classroom in the back of the school. Anne made it very clear that the parents may not enter the production She told them, “Staff go through there all of the time, but that is staff. People who are not employed cannot go through” (Field Notes, February 26, 2014). Similarly, at Blazing Star Elementary the parents had to be accompanied by a school employee when they wanted to leave the portable classroom to enter the school building: the building was locked and only the teacher held the key. However, often Melanie or Amanda would give the key to another parent or volunteer to open the
door for a parent that was leaving. In both cases, the participating parents were distinguished from the other adults that are in the building during the school day.

More detailed perceptions of parents were observed during the classes of the family literacy program and were confirmed in interviews. These perceptions fell into five different categories: parents as learners and decision makers, parents as culturally distinct, parents as a good match, parents as children, and parents in need of help.

**Parents as learners and decision makers.**

“A few of the things I remembered from when I did teach adults was that most adults have an idea of what they want to learn. And so they often have a drive and a goal in mind and when you’re teaching for the public schools, they provide the goal! (laughs) They tell you, today you’re gonna do this, so, I…have to remember to make sure that I talk to my adult students, what are, what are your goals, what do you want?”

(Cindy, English Teacher, Aster Elementary, Interview, December 12, 2014)

Viewing the parents as adult learners who came to the program for specific purposes was one perception of the coordinators, teachers, and administrators within family literacy. Parents were viewed as coming to the program in order to learn English and the literacy skills needed to 1) get a job, 2) support their children in school, or 3) continue studying English or another subject at an institution of higher education. Overtly, teachers and coordinators acknowledged that learning English was a difficult task but encouraged parents to continue working to accomplish their goals. They frequently told the parents that they were hard-workers and that they were brave for studying and trying to better their lives.

In the same vein that teachers and coordinators attempted to make connections between their involvement in the program, they also frequently transmitted the notion that parents were the decision makers in the home. After discussing a topic or completing an activity, parents were encouraged to take action at home, but it was “up to them” how they did it. Before spring break, Anne asked the parents to make a schedule of the weekly activities they wanted to do with their children. She told them, “I'm going to give homework for next week. I want you to write out of schedule of what you will do with your children
during spring break. This is your schedule - if you’re going to let them run free the whole week, that’s okay but I want a report of how well that works.” (Field Notes, Aster Elementary, February 26, 2014).

Cindy often transmitted this idea during the PACT talks at the end of class. She consistently asked the parents which language she would talk with their children in when they asked about their classroom experience that day. The following example illustrates how Cindy encouraged Sofía to make a decision about her son’s sleep habits at home.

(Field Notes, Aster Elementary, October 28, 2014): The class was participating in PACT talks. Sofia told her group that she saw that her son was very tired today and not paying attention. She said that she thinks he needs to sleep more.

Cindy very gently and positively told her that she could write, “I learned he needs more sleep.” She said that we could learn a lot about our kids when we see them in a new place. Sofia said that yes, she will tell him to go to bed earlier today.

Parents as culturally distinct. Parents’ diverse backgrounds and languages were a key component to the program and the administrators, coordinators, and teachers all recognized that. Each expressed an interest in working with international families and had had experiences in other jobs and personal affairs with the international community. Furthermore, all of the staff expressed an interest in learning more about the families’ cultures. The term culture was generally used as a noun to represent people from a similar national or ethnic background. It was common to hear phrases such as, “we have many cultures and languages in the program” (Amanda, Coordinator, Blazing Star Elementary, December 15, 2014). Teachers and coordinators stated that they did research on the different cultures by looking things up on the internet and by mostly talking with the parents. They attempted to integrate cultural components into their teaching and typically did so by discussing food, holidays, and traditions.

“We always do a whole thing on, you know, important things in your culture… you know, holidays. I talk about, you know, and what are traditions, what are your family traditions, you know, we start with something incredibly, non…religious and non…in very…you know I talk about Thanksgiving and how different Thanksgiving is from family to family in this country, and how it’s totally non religious based. It’s not a religious based holiday, it is, you know, when you talk about that and then traditions and what are those different traditions. I talk about different things like some families have some really strong for birthdays. What are yours? You know. Some people have some very strong traditions when people choose to get married. What are, you know, so we talk about that. And then I do lots of research on…you know, just to find out, truly the most complicated, in my
opinion, this is just my, it’s what I’m dealing with. I deal with Sudanese, Iraqis, Syrians, Kurds, and people of Spanish-speaking, that are predominately from Mexico.”

(Anne, Coordinator, Aster Elementary, Interview, June 18, 2014)

“I ask them. We just did a project on family trees. So, they made a family tree and they had to use the vocabulary dealing with family: aunts, uncles, brother-in-law, sister-in-law, whatever, to explain it. And present it to the class and in doing so I got to ask a lot of questions. Some of them have 15 siblings so, we would…I know (laughs) talk about is that common where you’re from and you know just things like that, it opens a lot of doors. Also, right now with the holidays coming up it’s a huge time to talk about customs and traditions and so we’ve, I’ve got a whole unit that we’re doing on that they get to share what it is that their family does and where did the custom come from and do other people in your country celebrate the same way or is it something that just you picked up on? So, yeah. Otherwise, just in general conversation. You know, they’ll say something about something happened at home or you know I talked to my mom from home this weekend, so we talk about so what’s going on in Guatemala? How’s everything going down there? You know. So, just general conversations.”

(Melanie, English Teacher, Blazing Star Elementary, Interview, December 9, 2014)

“I try to recognize their holidays…There’s like, for the Muslim students when Ramadan…the Yazidis have a special holiday. Acknowledge the ones who are Catholic, the Hispanic students. To acknowledge the holidays and just kind of, you know we’ll talk about the…we’ve even done lessons about holidays. I’ve written on the board holidays from a different culture so okay, what do you do? How do you celebrate? And so they can see that they all have food, family, friendship, games, gifts, things like that. So to help them see that there are some similarities. Their holidays might be different, a different purpose of the holiday but there are some similarities.”

(John, English Teacher, Aster/Verbena Elementary, Interview, August 14, 2014)

It was also the case that integrating different cultures in family literacy resulted in tensions that teachers and coordinators needed to navigate. These tensions mostly arose around religious practices and interactions between men and women. There were generally two approaches: discussing the differences that arose with the families or avoiding contentious topics within the space of the classroom. (Anne mentioned in the excerpt earlier that she avoided religious topics.) Whether or not these topics were discussed, it was also the coordinators’ and teachers’ overarching goals to facilitate cooperation amongst parents by having them work with people of different backgrounds.

**Muslim and Yazidi at Aster Elementary.**

“And we have different cultures. We have the Muslim Iraqis, the Sunni Muslim, we have the Yazidi Iraqis, we have the Hispanic…so we have some very different cultures. And some, with like the Yazidi in Iraq and the Muslims in Iraq…in Iraq there might be some tension. At and that was, that
was really kind of a just a persistence about working, community, talking about what are some culturally universals. You know we all love our children, we all want our children to have a good future, we, you know, things they have in common and make those a focal point. And also, assigning them to work together (laughs). Which at first they didn’t you know want to you know. But I assigned, put them in some group work so that they had to work together.

So, we went from Muslim students, the Shia, not even wanting to come if we had a special celebration day because they would not share food with people, especially the Yazidi. I actually had one student say “You know teacher I can share food with you because you have a [religious] book.” “Cause for Muslims, if you’re Jewish you have a book, if you’re Christian you have a book. We’re people of the book, it’s just we have the wrong book. But at least we’re people of the book so, like, eat with me. To the point where now they all will come…and celebrate together. You know, so we’re, so they’re integrated. I saw where they’d help each other with their children...We had the one student who’s visually impaired and now she has special contact lenses so that she can see. So to see how some of the, she’s Yazidi, and you see how a couple of the, some of the Muslim women would help her. So community has been developed and some…has it eradicated all of the cultural biases and tension? No. But, but when they are in the classroom they get along. And I think there’s really some growth for them as individuals, as far as those issues are concerned.”

(John, English Teacher, Aster/Verbena Elementary, Interview August 14, 2014)

A Sudanese male at Blazing Star Elementary.

“Then when we started hav- adding additional cultures and languages into the program, that, we were not expecting. That actually changed our community in, in the class. Because again, different cultures have different customs, different manners, different, yeah, manners. Just a lot of, I mean, a lot of differ - differences. Just a lot of, I mean, a lot of differ - differences...Even adding a male to it, because it was all females, adding a male even to the class changed and so, we really had to navigate that. It was completely new to us, we thought it would be an easy thing, um...but it took a lot of work.

So, when we had our first male, um, he was a Sudanese male, ok. Came into the program, please and thank you are not really in their language. As a male in many Sudanese cultures, you are, um…I don’t want to say superior, or you...how do I say this...Like you are not respected the same as women. So a male coming into this whole group of women within a, a woman, a woman teacher, girl teacher…really was, different...One of the things though that really stands out is...if they were working on a group project, there’s a pencil he wouldn’t ask for a pencil, he would just tell you to give it to him. Give me your pencil. Or he would just take it from one of, or from our parents. So there were just a lot of things he had not, or he’d tell me to get him...he’d kind of ordered you to get him the things instead of him getting up and getting it himself, or saying please and thank you.

Well I would say ...for our families, our Hispanic families, please and, manners are, were very important...so having somebody come in it, it really...they were very upset with that. Because imagine having somebody, you’re showing respect and you’re saying “can I please have that”, you know, and...he did not. So really we had, we had a lot of conversations, our principal had to end up coming in. Had to talk about the seven norms of collaboration and, talk about, we actually ended up having conversation with the liaison, the Sudanese liaison, or Nuer, and this parent and the teacher just talk about, because we were wondering - ok, we’re noticing in class he’s not saying
please and thank you, he is not, you know he’s ordering our parents to do this and you know, they’re getting very upset with this...And we come to find out, there really isn’t a word for please or thank you. It’s not part of it, so he doesn’t have, he’s not used to that. So that’s part of his culture. Same thing as a part of, there’s certain things in other cultures that are just there, and so we ended up, you know, and they did things in class, they worked with him one on one, I mean one on one with manners, but we also talked with the parents too to say, this is what’s going on, you know. It’s not….he’s not trying to out right be rude or disrespectful, it’s just something that he is used to, it’s the norm for him. So that really (laughs), there was a change there.

It just like it really changed that sense of community cause I think um….they really had to kind of go out of their comfort zone, they had to push and ask questions. We did activities then after that, talk about something from there. Their childhood or from their own, you know, community…and what, what that was. Somebody brought just a bag of beans and that was like what their family…I mean, they just told their personal stories. And a family that had…a jacket or a little, yeah sweater that was handed down to generation to generation for girls and what it meant. I mean, just telling those personal stories and opening up, really brought our community back together. And I think now, it’s just part of it. I mean, they walk into it and they feel welcomed.”

(Amanda, Coordinator, Blazing Star Elementary, Interview, December 15, 2014)

The teachers and coordinators also took varying actions to navigate the relations amongst the different cultures in the class. I did not observe any direct conversations about religion or gender roles, which were the most cautionary issues that all of the staff in the program mentioned. The approach to navigating these issues, instead, was more indirect. John explained that he intentionally looked for moments of interaction between parents of different backgrounds and gave positive reinforcement, such as when Abir, a Sunni Muslim woman, helped Sabat, a Yazidi woman. Anne often alluded to traditional gender roles in the home and encouraged women to break them by refusing to feed their husbands or by insisting that their boys cook food.

Anne also explained that one of her goals for the program was to help the families’ understand the expectations that the school had for them with regard to culture:

“They need to understand what our routine is, what our expectation is, what the expectation is for the child…I mean we talk, I talk about appropriate clothing for the weather. You know, I mean…it just blows me away when I’ve got kids coming in here with flip flops on and there’s snow on the ground. You know, so we talk about, you know, what those kinds of things are. We talk about teacher conferences, we talk about how to approach teachers, I mean all of those kinds of things, those are very basic…I kind of just look at the very basic things that you’re going to need as a parent and as a parent of a school-age child...One of the things that I think has been the hardest for some of our cultures is understanding how important it is to play with your children. To establish trust with your children, to be able to do appropriate and meaningful discipline. So, that’s something else that we work on and we work on that every year. Even though I might have the
same people in...like I've got several that have been with us since the very beginning...we still repeat a certain amount of things... The other thing I talk a lot about is dual parenting. Both parents should be involved. That's a little harder for some cultures. You know I try to respect that and at the same time I try to show how valuable it is for children... I have a dad in there who's very active with his kids and that's been I think really beneficial for those moms to hear what he does with those kids and how much he enjoys it.”

(Anne, Coordinator, Aster Elementary, Interview, June 18, 2014)

John also spoke about needing to put his opinions aside about the traditional gender roles that some of his students practiced at home with their families when he taught English class. He did not bring the topic of contention into the classroom, but often spoke about traditional gender roles in class. It was common for him to ask the women what they would make for lunch or dinner for their families and if they would clean their homes. John frequently joked about how he did not know how to cook and how he hated cleaning his apartment.

Parents who are a good match. Parents who could attend and did attend all components of the family literacy program were considered a good match for the program. Nancy explained:

“First of all we tell parents before they enter the program, you need to think about can you come to class everyday? It’s very important that you come everyday. If this is, if you have a job that takes you away and you can’t make it everyday we don’t, this is not a good match for you. We can connect you with other services for language, but this is probably not the best match for you. So we always make sure ahead of time they understand what a family literacy is and what the time commitment is.... Sometimes we simply have to exit people out of the program because of attendance, it’s just not a good match. Something perhaps has changed in their life, maybe a job, a health status, and it’s not a good use of our time or their time, but we always try to connect them with services before we exit them out of the program.”

(Nancy, Family Literacy Specialist, Interview, February 28, 2014)

Thus, a parent who was considered a good match for the program was someone who could attend for two hours during the school day, five days a week. These parents must have had time during the day to dedicate to the program and their attendance needed not be disrupted by a job, health issue, or something else, like an appointment or different commitment. Parents signed in each day on an attendance sheet when they arrived to family literacy. Despite efforts to encourage parents to schedule appointments outside of
class, it was common for one or two parents per week to talk with the English teacher about missing a class.

Sometimes parents would ask a bilingual liaison to explain to the teacher why they needed to miss a class or leave early from a class for things like housing appointments, immigration appointments, doctors appointments, and out of town trips. At all three sites, attendance dropped significantly after a major school break, such as spring break or winter break. (During the time of writing, Blazing Star Elementary had actually changed from a Latina majority site to a Latina minority site: only three Latina mothers remained in the program after the winter holiday.)

The responses to parent who were absent at each site varied. As mentioned previously, attendance was often referred to as currency: parents “paid” for the free classes through their attendance. According to Anne, parents were not only responsible for their own attendance, but to advocate for the attendance of others in the class:

(Field Notes, Aster Elementary, March 19, 2014): Anne called the class’s attention. She told them that they needed to have a dialogue about attendance. She said that she was proud of all of the parents that were there, but that they needed to tell their friends that if the attendance remained low, they would not get funding for next year. She said, “Obviously, I don’t want to see this class not be here, especially for the children. They are making gains because you are here.” Anne then told the parents that they were good role models for their classmates because they were there today.

Anne said that because the parents are role models, they should be advocates. She said that an advocate was a person who talked about and promoted positively a certain issue. She said that she was an advocate for lifelong learning. Anne continued and told the parents that they were advocates for family literacy by their actions because they come everyday. She said that they could also be advocates with their words. She told them that they should tell their classmates that the program was important for us, that it was important for their children and that it was important for the program.

At both Aster and Verbena Elementary, John spoke with parents independently when they told him that they needed to miss a class. He reminded them that they needed to schedule appointments outside of class time, but parents typically said that they could not. However, Both Melanie and Cindy responded to parents’ request for an absence with a simple, “ok” and did not discuss attendance after the parents initially signed in. During my observations of their classrooms, neither Melanie nor Cindy spoke about attendance during class.
John also stated in an interview that he tried to be proactive about parents’ attendance if he felt like an outside factor was going to interfere with their participation. John noticed that two of the four Latina mothers at Aster Elementary worked during the week and would come to class tired.

“Being tired, is an, could be, an impediment towards learning. You know, and that’s why sometimes I actually make a cup of coffee. You know like oh here you go, here’s some coffee for you, like that…I could tell when they had a long hard day at work the day before. They’d come in my class and they work, like they have to in the evening. And I could tell if they had a hard day at the restaurant, the night before, especially by the time that Friday would come around. I could just see, I could just tell just by how they looked that they were tired. And that would be an impediment to learning.”

(John, English Teacher, Aster/Verbena Elementary, Interview, August 14, 2014)

Working was one characteristic of the Latina mothers in family literacy. Several of the mothers worked evening jobs and reported having to stop attending the program in the past in order to work. Before the winter holiday, several Latina women at Blazing Star Elementary and Verbena Elementary were talking about searching for a job and these same women did not return after the break. Verónica, a mother at Aster Elementary, had an interview for a job in housekeeping during the last week school in May 2014. She did not return to the program in the fall.

During classes, however, other specific practices indicated if parents were considered a good match for the program. Parents received praise when they completed their homework assignments or received a high grade on a spelling quiz. The participating Latina mothers mostly fell into the category of parents receiving praise for these tasks. Melanie explained:

“Again, the Spanish-speakers are the ones that bring the homework back each time. The other ones, not as often....well, if you look through their book reports, you can see that I have 18 from most of [the Spanish-speakers] and zero from most of the other people, or maybe one or two here or there. But...they do it almost religiously. The same thing with their reading logs. If you look through their reading logs, they are the ones that have the whole month filled in versus others who don’t...The homework, if they aren’t sure at home exactly what to do, they will do something on it and then bring it back and say I’m not sure I understood or I don’t know if I did it right. And, and they will let me know rather than just not doing it.”

(Melanie, English Teacher, Blazing Star Elementary, Interview, December 9, 2014)
Melanie reminded parents about the need to complete their homework and stated that it was not optional. John and Cindy, on the other hand, both frequently assigned homework but did not react negatively if it was not completed. If a parent did not complete the assigned homework in these settings, s/he often rushed to complete it before class or while the others were reviewing it. However, the Latina mothers and other parents consistently received praise from John if they received a one hundred percent on the weekly spelling test.

The degree to which the parents’ home practices matched the expectations of the program also came into play. Melanie’s earlier comment about completing homework and reading at home was also related to the parents’ home practices. Often coordinators and teachers alluded to what the parents should be doing at home with their families. Anne and Pilar often gave advice about what the parents should do at home with their children. Sometimes this involved integrating academic activities into daily tasks, like when Anne suggested that the parents do math with the children as they pick up toys or cook together or when Pilar demonstrated a math game that the parents could do with the children over the winter holiday. Other times, the coordinators offered advice to the parents concerning their home lives.

Advice from Anne. (Field Notes, Aster Elementary, February 26, 2014): Anne told one Arabic speaking mother that, “Dads can show what they know and that’s a good thing…tell him to teach them something. Or, tell them to teach him something. You have girls right? Have them teach him how to make something, soup”

Advice from Pilar. (Field Notes, Verbena Elementary, December 18, 2014): Pilar began telling a story about her daughter. She said that her daughter was studying an art degree so her husband bought her an easel. She said that her daughter did a project where she was drawing with black chalk and at the end of the project there was a huge circle of black left behind. At the same time, Pilar’s son was making a project and was building a bridge with toothpicks. Pilar said, “You should have seen my basement!” and laughed. Pilar said that these things are okay to allow children to do and that they can clean them up later. She said it is okay if their things get messy: if their kids get motivated about doing a project, let them do it. Pilar told the group to not be worried about the children marking the table. She said that they could re-stain it or get another table. She said that they should let them have space for their projects.

Discipline and scheduling were two other topics about which the coordinators gave advice. Parents were discouraged from using corporeal punishment with their children and were encouraged to use tactics
such as taking away privileges and holding children accountable for their actions. One of the lessons for the
parent time handbook that the coordinators were developing, according to Jill, was centered on the Positive
Behavioral Interventions and Supports model (PBIS, 2015). Sessions were also dedicated to discussing the
importance of routines at home and having parents make schedules for their daily routines. Before spring
break in 2014, Anne assigned creating a schedule for the week off as a homework assignment and
encouraged parents to integrate school activities like math and reading into their daily schedules.

Parents as children. Quite often in family literacy the parents were referred to as children or kids
directly by the coordinator or teacher. Below are several excerpts from different class sessions at each site
when the instructor directly addressed the adults by calling them a word typically used for young learners or
referencing their actions in the same capacity as those of children.

Kids. (Field Notes, English Class, Aster Elementary, April 28, 2014): The class had erupted in
chatter. Verónica had told the class that her son had been diagnosed with the chicken pox and that he was
in the childcare class today. John turned to the class, spread his arms and waved his hands. He said loudly,
“Ok! Kids!”

Friends. (Field Notes, English Class, Aster Elementary, December 9, 2014): The parents had
completed the My Plate activity and were cleaning up the markers. Cindy called their attention: “Friends,
you have got to have lids on tight so that the kids can use the markers too.”

Children bring homework. (Field Notes, English Class, Blazing Star Elementary, December 10,
2014): Melanie asked the class to hand in their homework. She asked Alan, a Kurdish-speaking father, if he
had his homework. He responded with, “No, sorry teacher.” Melanie said, “Homework is not optional,
remember? You can’t opt out. Bring it tomorrow.” The same thing happened with two other parents. Melanie
told them that they needed to bring their homework tomorrow. Melanie then asked the entire class, “What
happens if your children don’t bring their homework? Do it and bring it tomorrow.” The class laughed at
her comment.

I’m their mom.

“I’m kind of their mom here in the US. That mom they don’t have here. Or that, I wish that I could
be their big sister but I’m way too old to be their big sister, I’m their mom… well, these families
often came out of cultures where they were so entrenched in the whole family moms and
grandmas ran the house, but then they got ripped out of those environments and they’re here. And,
so they don’t have that mom that’s there to…kind of help them with all of those how do we do this.”

(Anne, Coordinator, Aster Elementary, Interview, June 18, 2014)
The frequency in which these kinds of references happened as well as the context in which they happened differed according to site. These instances fell into three categories (using words associated with children to refer to parents, asking parents to take on the role of a child-student in the school, and using elementary concepts to determine learning material for the class) and at least one of these categories was noted in each of my visits to the focal sites. John often used the word ‘kids’ to address the parents at both Aster Elementary and Verbena Elementary. He also used parents as examples when talking about a concept that was meant to be for children. For example, when teaching how to spell the word trouble in English class, John said, “When Hassan (an Arabic-speaking father) gets in trouble, he goes to the safe seat” (Field Notes, Aster Elementary, April 7, 2014). During PACT time debriefing, John often asked his assistant or a volunteer how students who did not attend PACT time but stayed in the classroom for small group work performed that day. He joked that the parents did PACT time with the assistant or volunteer and then asked the assistant or volunteer, not the parent, how their PACT time went. He followed up by saying, “We know it’s not really PACT time.” (Field Notes, Verbena Elementary, December 10, 2014). In a similar vein, Nekabari also joked about this at Aster Elementary when a group of women asked him if he did PACT time and he said, “Yeah, with you!” (Field Notes, Aster Elementary, December 16, 2014). In both scenarios, both the teachers and parents responded with laughter.

While attending PACT time, parents behaved like their children did in the classroom. They sat next to their children and were expected to do as their children did in the classroom. While the teachers were instructed to provide the parents with an adult-sized chair, this only happened in the older classrooms I visited. In the younger classrooms, mothers sat on the carpet with their children or in child-sized chairs at the tables and desks. The classroom teacher typically greeted the mother upon arrival and provided her with any handouts or materials that the children were using. The teacher also checked in with the mother about her understanding of the material, like she did with the elementary students. The children, however, did not look at their mother as another child. This was evident when the teacher asked the children to do something like share an answer with a partner or do a task like pass out materials. In these cases, the children spoke
with their peers and not their mothers or gave materials to their peers and not their mothers. Martha’s experience of actively helping the teacher during PACT time was unique amongst my informants.

Connections between parents and children were also made in regard to the content they were learning in class. Cindy reported using the content that parents were learning in PACT time as material to cover during English class.

“I have a daily objective and I choose that objective from several sources. One would be from our PACT discussion. If they see something in the classroom and they asked about it, or I hear a lot of them mentioning it then I think that’s a good topic for us…We are supposed to collaborate with the classroom teachers so I have a pacing chart and I can take things off of there, for example, community. I can take animals, I can take the science experiment that we did before.”

(Cindy, English Teacher, Aster Elementary, Interview, December 12, 2014)

As mentioned previously, Cindy integrated topics like My Plate into her lessons to learn about the vocabulary for different foods. She also integrated topics like different spelling patterns and writing a story from the elementary curriculum guide. John dedicated a portion of his classes to studying the first and second grade spelling lists. Melanie drew upon the teaching materials that she had used to teach all levels of elementary school for her instruction in family literacy. Most often, this meant using copies of grammar worksheets.

It is important to note that making explicit connections between English learning and the elementary concepts that the children were learning was a part of the English teachers’ contract and it was considered something that they were expected to do. The teachers’ actions, then, were more reflective of the structural aspects of the family literacy program’s overarching goals and of the elementary context in which they were embedded.

**Parents in need.** The notion of parents in need of different kinds of economic, social and emotional supports was inherent to many aspects of the family literacy class. This was evident during one of John’s announcements to the class at Verbena Elementary:

*(Field Notes, Verbena Elementary, October 1, 2014): John said that he wanted to remind them that there was an event that day at Pinnacle Bank Arena. He asked if they knew which place that was. He told them*
that it was where the basketball games were. John drew a map on the board to show where the arena was. He said that today from 9 – 3 they could take children there for services. He said that they could get flu shots. He asked, “Who likes shots?” and then made a whispering shhh sound and told them not to tell their kids about the shots.

On the board an announcement was written:

Today:
Pinnacle Bank Arena
Dental
Vision
Flu shots
Employment
Bike repair

John pointed to the board said that he wrote a few of the services that they will be offering today on the board, but that there are more. He said that they might ask to see your tax papers, or W-2s, if you go. John explained that they would do this because the event was only for people with low income. He said that if he went there they would say, “No no no” and not allow him to come in.

Helping parents based on these perceptions, then, was also a common action within family literacy. Physical resources were often handed out to parents at the different sites, thought this happened most frequently at Verbena Elementary. At this school, parents were periodically offered to select donated shoes and clothes to take home. Pilar often brought in donated books or other materials for the parents, and, school supplies and food were given way at the end of classes. To a lesser degree, similar materials were available to parents at Blazing Star Elementary: Fransisca, the bilingual liaison, collected home and personal items from a local homeless shelter to use as prizes for games like Bingo or the parent time raffles. At Aster, it was not common for donated items to be given away to the class. Once I observed Anne have the parents select donated books to take home. At all sites, school materials like notebooks, pencils, and binders were available for parents to use.

Announcements about community resources and free events were also common in family literacy. The program Toys for Tots was advertised at the sites before the winter holiday and parents were given the correlating forms to fill out in class. It was often the case that the coordinator and bilingual liaisons followed up with parents during parent time about forms, like this one, that had been sent home with the students. Other forms that were discussed were those offering information about free tutoring and summer school
opportunities. Several community events were advertised throughout the year at both sites. These included school events (such as concerts or races), family events at RCC, free visits to the Nebraska State Museum and other city centers, local celebrations of different holidays (such as the Karen New Year) university events, and church events. These announcements were made by the coordinators and the bilingual liaisons and often included a correlating flyer or handout.

The perception of parents as being in need was also clear during the presentations in parent time class. The premise of most of the presentations was to help parents by telling them certain information and connecting them with community resources; however, sometimes the assumed personal needs of the parents were acted on. This was clear during two visits: one from a representative at a women’s shelter at Aster Elementary and one from a psychologist at Verbena Elementary.

Visit from the women’s shelter. (Field Notes, Aster Elementary, March 5, 2014): Diane, the representative from a local women’s shelter, had just finished introducing the theme of the day: domestic violence and how it affects children. She put up a new slide that said: Abusers Pose Risks. On the slide was a list of things that could happen to children if they lived with abuse. Some of these things were:
- physical abuse
- sexual abuse
- neglect
- endanger children emotionally and physically
- prevent adult from caring
- coerce children into abusing mother

The room fell quiet as Diane read the list. The bilingual liaisons began interpreting. Verónica and the other Spanish-speaking mothers laughed nervously. Diane clicked on the next slide and began to read:

Children who have witnessed domestic violence need...
- Safety
- Stability
- To talk about what happened

Diane said that she would talk about maintaining safety for the children when they are in an abusive household. She continued to read the following off of the next slide.

Safety
- Try to meet batterer’s needs or wants
- Send children to a room/neighbor
- Have code words
- Stay away from home
- Call police
- File an order of protection
- Escape the relationship
The room was silent as Diane read. The bilingual liaisons began interpreting. Again, the Spanish-speaking women laughed. Diane then presented a slide about stability, from which she read:

**Stability**
- Maintain routine
- Maintain consistent rules and discipline
- Maintain stable housing and school
- Encourage extracurricular activities
- Encourage meaningful relationships
- Maintain supportive relationships with self

As Diane read each of these, she elaborated with a few examples but did not go into much detail. She then moved on to the next slide quickly. This slide was about talking about what happened.

**Talk About What Happened**
- Ask how feel
- Allow to be angry, sad, etc.
- Tell them it’s not their fault
- Encourage them to find ways to share feeling (ex: art or play)
- Encourage to talk with friends or trusted relatives

Diane read through this slide and then told the class that she had a handout about the signs and symptoms of abuse. On the handout was a diagram of a wheel that was presented during the introduction to the presentation. The words Domestic Abuse were written in the middle and different types of abuse were written on the different spokes that came out of the center. The parents and bilingual liaison began to look at this handout together and discuss it in their first language.

Diane began by presenting on how domestic violence affected children in homes where domestic violence was presented. She immediately offered suggestions about what parents should do with their children in a situation of domestic violence. By doing so, she assumed that the parents in the class were likely to be exposed to domestic violence and would therefore be in need of help or advice to navigate their situation. While Diane’s visit and advice were well-intended and were focused on the safety and wellbeing of the parents and children in the class, the premise of the presentation was that the newcomer families would need to hear this message.

**Visit from the psychologist.** (Field Notes, Verbena Elementary, October 23, 2014): Dr. González had just listened to the women’s thoughts about the areas of their lives over which they felt they had control. He said that the decisions that we make in life lead to an outcome or consequence. He wrote the words outcome and consequence on the board. Dr. González explained that this was universal and that they couldn’t let the environment dictate who they were.

The bilingual liaisons interpreted this. (There was a typical pattern of interpretation after Dr. González spoke, unless otherwise noted.)
Dr. González said, “You can’t listen to society when they say that women can do something or minorities can’t do something. Like when they say that women can be a doctor or that a minority can’t do [something].”

Dr. González asked who had a cell phone. He looked around and no one said anything. He took Zara’s cellphone off of the table and held it up. He told the class that the youth use their cellphones all day and that the parents can’t get them off of them. Laughter. He said that they even keep their phones on at night and asked the parents why. Dr. González explained that the kids didn’t want to miss a call and that it was amazing the control that cellphones can have on us. Dr. González then said that we couldn’t let the culture control us. He said that we couldn’t let husbands, institutions, other women, even God control us. He added, “And I’m a good Catholic.” He then said that this was true because God or Allah gave us free will.

The class fell silent. Dr. González paused and then said that he wanted to get back to controlling thinking and behavior. Dr. González said that we can unlearn almost everything that we learn. He said that each of the parents have a culture like Mexican or Iranian and that they have a family or religion telling who to be and how to behave. There was some laughter amongst parents. Dr. González went on to explain that in the culture of the United States, when kids graduate high school when they are 17 or 18-years-old, the parents tell them to go and leave. Some of the parents laughed. Dr. González said that animals do this too and that as parents we have to prepare our children to go. He repeated that it was their responsibility as parents to prepare their children to leave.

Dr. González said that they all want the best for their children, but that they had to begin preparing them now. Dr. González told the parents to look around the room and look at the professionals. (Pilar, John, the bilingual liaisons and me) He said that the professionals were here today because they studied a lot and because they wanted the best for their children. Dr. González said, “Look at me” and went on to explain that he was the son of Mexican immigrants, that he got a scholarship to play baseball and he also served in Vietnam. He said that he nearly died a few times and that he got shot during the word. He said that he could talk about these things because he understands what he can control and what he cannot. He said that he made decisions in sixth, seventh, and eighth grade to prepare for college.

The class was quiet. Most of the parents were watching as Dr. González spoke. A couple were drawing on papers and a few looked tired.

Dr. González erased the board and told the parents that it was time for another test. He said that they were going to go to a hospital where babies are born. He asked what they would see there when they’re there. Yekta called, out “crying” and Dr. González wrote this on the board. He asked why the babies would be crying and Yekta said, “hungry.” Zara added, “Their home is now different.”

Belinda interpreted for a Spanish-speaking mother. She said, “The environment is different.” Dr. González asked why the environment was different and nobody responded. He then said that the babies were hungry and stressed in the hospital, but that when they are in their mother’s stomach, there were no worries.

Dr. González turned and drew a diagram on the board:

```
    B --------------------------- E
```

He pointed to the B and traced down to the E with his finger and said “From the beginning until the end. What do you see? They are hungry and stressed from the beginning to the end.”

Dr. González said that sometimes the women don’t want to accept that her husband doesn’t treat her well or that her son is in a gang and, instead, they just say that “Todo está bien.” He said that they say that until they get a call from the school or the police or something. Dr. González asked if anyone new how they could...
cope with these things. Nobody responded and then he said that they have to have self-respect and dignity. The parents were quiet.

Dr. González said that they could cope by coming to classes like this one. He told the parents to think of the people who are not here. He said that the parents that were present in class today were to be applauded because they were here. He said that those who are not are going to have consequences.

Juana, a Spanish-speaking mother, raised her hand and said, “Pero ¿y los que quieren estar aquí pero trabajan?/But, what about those who want to be here but they work?” Belinda interpreted her question into English. Dr. González said that these people wanted to be here and that was what was most important. He said that they see something similar with people who drop out of high school. He explained that there are those people who drop out, but then there are those people who go back and get their GED. He said to do this takes confidence and perseverance.

Dr. González’s message was a little difficult to follow, but he introduced a few themes that he returned to throughout the hour and during his two sequential visits to Verbena’s parent time class. He spoke of: not letting one’s “culture” or life situation control her; coping with stress; and, attending family literacy as a way to have a better future. While he began his lesson by telling the women to not listen to society when they are being told that they cannot do certain things, inherent to his message was that a woman’s “culture” was controlling her, that she was under stress, and that the family literacy class would prevent her from suffering consequences.

Parents’ Responses

The way the parents, particularly the Latina mothers, responded to the perceptions of the people running the program provided key insight as to how they were experiencing the program. Generally, the parents’ responses fell into three categories: silence, subversion, and cooperation.

Silence. Silence was a common response from the parents during both English class and parent time class. Parents often watched the teacher or presenter quietly. Depending on the presentation or topic, though, this silence could be interpreted to be out of respect/habit, interest/engagement, lack of knowledge, or discomfort.
Silence out of respect/habit. Parents most often listened quietly when a person began talking to them in class. Each teacher and coordinator began class with some kind of greeting and an anecdotal story about the weather or his/her personal life. On this cue, parents stopped speaking to each other in their home languages, quieted down, and watched the teacher or coordinator. If anything was written on the whiteboard in the classroom or projected onto a screen, some parents wrote this down in their notebooks.

Cindy wrote daily schedules on the board that looked like this:

Nov. Tues.
11-18-14 is ________________
I can count.
There is ___________ ____________.
There are ___________ ____________.

Citizenship questions
Counting
Individual work
- family picture
- spelling
- SB, WB

(Field Notes, Aster Elementary, November 18, 2014)

All of the Latina mothers at this site copied the daily schedule into their notebooks. Cindy began class by reviewing this schedule and filling in the blanks about the date and other whole group activities. In this case, she wrote: 11-18-14 is today’s date. There is one teacher. There are twenty students. She then continued to give examples and then began to call on parents to give examples. Cindy went through the daily schedule and the parents listened quietly. John also wrote a daily greeting, but not a schedule, on the board that he referred to as he began class. Melanie did both a greeting and an overview of the day’s schedule verbally.

Parents followed suit with other information. For example the local women’s shelter and the community police officer both used PowerPoint during their presentation. The Latina mothers quietly copied down the information from each slide provided they had time between slides. Whenever the English teacher wrote information on the board, such as spelling words and patterns, verbs, or a short grammar lesson, the Latina mothers quietly copied this down in their notebooks.
Silence out of interest/engagement. Sometimes the parents’ silence indicated interest or engagement. When a math specialist from CPS came to Aster Elementary to discuss the newest math curriculum, parents watched quietly with intent as she explained how to do different math problems; then, in small groups, they immediately began discussing what they saw in their home languages (Field Notes, Aster Elementary, February 12, 2014). Parents responded similarly during a presentation about middle school. This was also mostly the case when new material was presented in English class as well:

(Field Notes, Blazing Star Elementary, October 30, 2014): Melanie said that they were going to review the be verbs today. She wrote: (be)verbs on the white board, but then said that these verbs have nothing to do with the word “be”. She wrote on the board:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{is} \\
\text{are} \\
\text{am}
\end{align*}
\]

Melanie said that they were going to match up the verbs with the correct pronoun. She said each pronoun out loud one by one and then the form of the verb that went with it. Melanie wrote these partnerships on the board and said that they always go together. This was what she wrote on the board:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pronouns</th>
<th>(Simple) Present Tense Verbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you</td>
<td>are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He/She/It</td>
<td>is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>we</td>
<td>are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they</td>
<td>are</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Melanie said that these are always pairs, even when you flip the order to make a question. She gave a couple examples of this, like when a person asks, “Are you going to class today?” All of the parents were watching Melanie quietly. Four of the students had a binder with papers in it out; those who had their materials out were writing down notes from the board as Melanie spoke. This vignette highlights common actions taken by the parents when new information was presented during English class. Parents watched as Melanie wrote the new information on the board and they took notes in their notebooks.

Silence out of lack of engagement or knowledge. During class, however, silence also indicated that the parents were not engaged with or did not understand the topic being taught or discussed. The following scene depicts John reviewing spring weather words with the parents at the end of class. Based on my observations, this was at least the fourth time that the parents had discussed this topic.

(Field Notes, Aster Elementary, March 31, 2014): John told the class that they were going to review the weather words. He asked them which phrase was worse: thunderstorm or sever thunderstorm. The parents
were quiet. Two murmured, “Severe.”

John asked the students, “What do you do in a thunderstorm? Ride your bike?” The parents were quiet. Eventually Amber, the assistant, said no. John continued to ask about words like hail and lightning. The parents sat quietly and a few held their heads in their hands. Amber and Jessica, a volunteer, answered John’s questions about the different types of weather.

John then asked the parents what town they should be listening for when the news reports about the weather. No one said anything and John finally said, “City of Chesterfield.” Nisa sighed and said, “Yes.” She drew the word out a bit and sounded annoyed.

Other times, parents were engaged, but remained quiet when asked a question, indicating that they did not know the answer.

(Field Notes, Aster Elementary, December 16, 2014): Hana, an Arabic-speaking student, had just finished reading a short story she had written about a memory she had in Iraq when the war ended. People were celebrating in the streets and her mother had been burned from the ash that had fallen from celebratory gunfire. Nekabari asked Hana if the people were happy that the war was over and that is why he mother didn’t mind the injury.

Hana and the class were quiet. Nekabari commented that his question was very long and chuckled. He repeated his question, but this time he broke up the sentences in smaller chunks. Hana nodded as he did this and then responded with, “Yeah yeah. Was over. Was cold.”

A similar pattern occurred if a parent was asked something about the English language or the meaning of a specific word in English.

**Silence out of discomfort.** Silence was also an indicator of discomfort during family literacy. This happened when taboo or emotional topics were introduced to the class. In the earlier vignette about the parent time session about domestic abuse, one of the parents’ responses during this class was silence. During a discussion about addiction, parents participated openly and lively; yet, when Anne suggested that some people could become addicted to pornography, the class fell silent. When the death of Yekta’s father in Iraq was announced at Verbena Elementary, everyone was silent. (This announcement took me off guard as well. My gut wrenched and I dropped my pen as my hand involuntarily moved to my mouth.)

Another time that silence was an indicator of discomfort was when the topic of discussion was punitive or overtly regulatory about how parents should behave. This was most often linked to conversations
about attendance. When John and Pilar discussed how parents’ attendance was a form of payment for the
class, the parents were silent, looked down at their desks or looked wearily at each other. This was also the
case when Anne expressed frustration about low attendance and told parents they should be advocates for
attendance in family literacy. The coordinators and teachers reminded the parents that there was a waiting
list for the class and that if they were not going to come, someone else would be asked to take their place.
Or, even worse, they would not be able to offer the program anymore.

Sometimes a punitive or regulatory stance was taken when discussing how the parents should
behave during PACT time or a special event. The parents response was again silence. For example, to
prepare the parents for an event at the Chesterfield Symphony Orchestra, a representative from the
orchestra came in to talk about how parents were expected to behave. They were told when they could clap
and what to do if a child was crying or needed to use the bathroom. When this visit took place at Verbena
Elementary, Belinda followed up by telling the parents that last year the parents who went to the symphony
were talking and eating during the show and that that behavior was not permitted. Pilar expanded on this
and stated that if parents behaved like this this year, they would not be invited back. The parents sat quietly
as they received this information. (Field Notes, Verbena Elementary, November 20, 2014).

Silence through absence. The Latina mothers sometimes decided to not attend class not
because they had an appointment or other commitment, but because they either did not feel like the class
was worth their time or because they did not feel like they were learning in class. Earlier, Sofía explained
that she often did not attend the parent time class at Aster Elementary because she did not feel like it was
worth her time. She also expressed that she sometimes skipped English class.

“Pero con esta maestra está uno muy a gusto porque el tiempo se le va muy rápido. Muy rápido. Cada
minuto se aprovecha y pues ahorita estoy contenta por eso. El año pasado faltaba mucho y en este año no he faltado. No he faltado mucho porque, porque, pues sí me gusta la clase. Pues sí, estoy contenta con la clase y con la maestra. Y siento también que estoy aprendiendo más…el año pasado [el maestro] ponía mucha atención en una persona que no sabía nada, que va empezando y las demás que entendemos un poquito más pues no, nos quedábamos igual porque él ponía atención en la persona que no sabía nada. Como que se enfocaba más en esa persona y a los demás del grupo nos dejaba solos.”
[But with this teacher, a person is very happy because time goes by very fast. I missed a lot of classes last year and this year I haven’t missed. I haven't missed a lot because, because, well, I like the class. Well yes, I am happy with the class and with the teacher. And I also feel like I am learning more...last year [the teacher] paid a lot of attention to one person who didn’t know anything, who was just beginning and the rest of us who understand a little more, well, we stayed the same because he paid attention to the person who didn’t know anything. It was like he focused more on this person and left the rest of us on our own.]

(Sofía, Mother, Aster Elementary, Interview, November 6, 2014)

Similarly, Gabriela also mentioned that she stopped attending English class at Blazing Star Elementary when she felt like she was not learning with the teacher from the previous year.

**Subversion: shifting the locus of control.** In some cases, parents’ utilized various resources in class to shift what was happening to better meet their interests, needs or goals. Most often, parents utilized the bilingual liaisons and/or their home languages to achieve a shift in control. The following vignette depicts how the parents initially responded to Diane’s presentation about domestic violence.

(Field Notes, Aster Elementary, March 5, 2014): At the beginning of her presentation, Diane showed a definition of domestic violence on the PowerPoint. The bilingual liaisons began interpreting the slide. There was a lot of discussion about this slide in the parents’ home languages.

Marcia told the class, “It is important to remember that violence is a choice.” She said that violence does not have to leave physical marks and showed a list of the nonphysical effects of violence on a slide. Next she showed a circle graph of different types of domestic violence. At the center of the graph was a smaller circle that said “Power & Control”. Around this in spokes were different kinds of domestic violence.

The group of Spanish-speaking women were talking and laughing.

Gloria, a former family literacy student who was filling in for Camila as an interpreter today, asked Diane, “When the kid is not very nice, what is the correct way to say no?”

Marcia told the class that each family has different ways of disciplining. She told Anne that she would look to her to explain this to the parents.

Anne asked the class, “How can you discipline a child? Is it okay to spank a child?” She went on to say that discipline is up to the family. She said that it is legal to spank a child, but if it leaves a mark on the child, then it is not okay.

The groups of parents broke out into an animated discussion in their home languages.

Once the conversations had quieted down, Anne said that a belt or a board will leave a mark. The groups
listened quietly and then went back to talking.

Anne said, “Think: what message are you sending to your child when you use physical discipline? You need to think about that.” Anne then said that there were different forms of discipline for different children. She told them that they would expand on this topic a different day. She gave an example of a small child touching a hot stove and said in that case, you would want to scream and hit his hand away. But, she said, there are other moments when that would not be the right thing to do.

Anne said to the parents, “We call it currency. Well, maybe that’s too complicated. You should find what is very important to the child. If you take that away, you will have more success than you will have with spanking.” Anne continued to say that if they use physical discipline they send the message that it is okay to be violent.

Diane then continued with her presentation about domestic violence. After the presentation, Anne and the class continued to discuss effective methods of discipline for children.

In this scenario, the Latina mothers utilized the bilingual liaison in order to ask a question that changed the conversation from focusing on domestic violence to disciplining children. Later that day, the conversation continued to focus on disciplining children but not necessarily corporeal discipline: instead, parents discussed what to do if children talk back or do not clean their rooms. They also asked about the school’s discipline system.

Another example of parents shifting the locus of control at Aster Elementary did not happen with the Latina mothers, but with the Kurdish-speaking mothers:

(Field Notes, Aster Elementary, March 5, 2014): About 15 minutes before the parenting class was scheduled to begin, four Kurdish-speaking women were gathered around Zara, the bilingual liaison. All of the women had notebooks out in front of them and held pencils in their hands. They were quiet and watched Zara intently. They were discussing the homework assignment from the previous week: make a schedule of activities to do with their children during spring break.

Zara spoke to the group in English: “Write art. A-r-t.” All of the women began writing in their notebooks. Zara and the women continued talking to each other in Kurdish. She then spoke in English again, “Maybe you can do cleaning time.” The women wrote on their papers. Zara instructed them to write clean and then spelled it for them: “c-l-e-a-n”. She suggested to the women that, “You can even put TV time.” The women continued writing what Zara instructed and speaking to each other in Kurdish until Anne, the Parent Time teacher, walked in.

Later during the class, after the bilingual liaisons had left, Anne asked the parents to share their homework assignments. Belim, a Kurdish-speaking mother who was working with Zara that morning, eagerly raised her hand. Belim read from her paper, “On Monday [we] will do spelling words. [We] will go to the library.” Anne nodded and said, “Great! Anything else?” Belim answered, “Art. Draw pictures.”

Anne called on Sabat, another Kurdish-speaking woman, to share her schedule. Sabat, who had also worked with Zara, read from her paper: “On Monday we will work with math. And watch TV.” Anne
responded to Sabat’s plan by exclaiming, “Oooh, I like that. Get a little school in there. Good job.” Sabat smiled brightly at the teacher’s comments and nodded her head.

Other times, parents reallocated control in more subtle ways. Generally, parents’ home languages were welcome in the family literacy classroom but sometimes the teacher enforced an English-only rule. This typically happened out of frustration and when the teachers were trying to gain control of the class (a phenomenon that will be discussed in more detail in the next section). The parents sometimes responded to the teacher’s request with silence or by speaking English, but sometimes they continued to speak in their home languages.

(Field Notes, Aster Elementary, April 7, 2014): John sat at the table in the front of the room and graded the spelling tests that the parents had just completed. Some parents sat quietly as they waited for their scores; others looked at their phones and notebooks. A few parents began speaking to each other softly in their home languages. Slowly, more and more parents began having conversations in their home languages.

John looked up from his grading and said loudly and sternly, “Practice English! Talk English!” He then asked the two volunteers who were in the class to go and talk with the parents in English. One of the volunteers walked over to two Arabic-speaking women who were continuing to speak to each other in Arabic quietly. They looked at the volunteer and then turned back to their conversation in Arabic. The volunteer sat quietly until the women finished speaking and turned to speak with her.

Parents responded similarly each time when a teacher or coordinator asked them to use only English: they typically continued to have quiet side conversations in their home languages.

Cooperation. Parents also engaged with the family literacy program by cooperating. They listened to the presentations, participated in class activities, and attended PACT time. They also expanded and sustained conversations about some of the topics that the coordinators and teachers planned for the class by commenting and asking questions. The following vignettes portray times when parents were not only quietly listening to the teacher or coordinator, but also cooperating and contributing to the conversation and/or activity. One vignette is from the parent time class while the second is from an English class.

Chesterfield community gardens. (Field Notes, Aster Elementary, February 26, 2104): Jason introduced himself and said that he was representing [Chesterfield Community Gardens]. He asked if anyone was familiar with their organization. A few of the Kurdish-speaking women said that yes; Zara told Jason that they had been members before and wanted the applications to apply again. Jason smiled and said that they would get to that in a bit. He then explained that Chesterfield Community Garden was a
nonprofit organization interested in growing local food to be sold in markets and that they also wished to
provide tools and resources for people to grow their own food.

The bilingual liaisons began interpreting and the parents erupted in conversation. As they quieted down, one
Arabic-speaking mother continued to talk with the Ahmad, the bilingual liaison.

Jason said that the organization had three programs and that he would talk about all of them, but would
focus on the community gardens. The first program Jason talked about was the farmers’ training program,
which taught people how to grow crops organically and start their own business. He said that this program
had advanced farm training and business training for markets. The second program was the youth
education program, which taught kids how to garden and how to grow food. He said that they have after
school programs at three of CPS’s elementary schools and that during this time, they also give cooking
classes and nutrition lessons to the kids.

An Arabic-speaking mother asked, “You can do it at any school?” Jason answered that they only do it at
schools with community learning centers. He said that soon they would start working with Verbena
Elementary.

An Arabic-speaking volunteer said, “Hey, I work there!”

Jason continued to say that they also work with a foster care organization to work with teenage mothers.

Lastly, Jason said that the third program was the community garden program. He explained that it began in
2003 and that there were 13 community gardens across the city.

Zara was talking with Nisa, a Kurdish-speaking woman. Nisa said, “P street? U street?”

Jason said that they could sign up for an individual plot within a community garden that it would be theirs to
use for one year.

Ahmad asked, “Does it cost?” (It did not appear that he translated that question for anyone.) Jason
answered, “I’ll talk about that in a second. There is a small fee.”

Nisa said, “How much is it?” followed immediately by, “But you will talk.”

Jason said, “We do charge a small fee. $50 for the smallest plot.” He then said that they wave the fee based
on income status. He said that if you qualify as low income, it is free.

All of the parents were talking animatedly in small groups. Most were smiling as they spoke to each other
and the bilingual liaisons.

Ahmad said that he had a question from a student. He asked, “Do you provide seeds?” Jason answered this
question affirmatively and all of the Arabic-speaking women quieted to hear Ahmad interpret Jason’s
response. Jason said that they also provide seeds, transfer plants and offer some classes.

One Arabic-speaking mother asked a question about making a garden at their houses and Ahmad
translated. Jason said that the program is trying to start working with gardens at homes and at this point,
they could always give people seeds to start their own garden. He said that the parents can come to the
office for seeds, they have a ton.

Zara interpreted for a parent and asked, “Do you know where the plots are?”
Jason said, “Yes. Everyone lives around here?” He then explained that they would be beginning a new community garden at Aladdin Park nearby and that this location would be the closest to the school.

One Arabic-speaking mother asked about the place on Wooster Street. Jason said that the owner of that land wanted to build a garage there so it would not be a garden anymore.

Another Arabic-speaking mother asked if there was a garden at the “melon center”. Jason paused and looked at her confused.

Brooke, Jason’s assistant, chimed in and asked, “Do you mean the Malone Center?” The mother smiled and said yes. Jason then explained that there are some programs there for the kids in the summer.

Ahmad translated for one Arabic-speaking mother and asked, “Are there seeds now?” Jason said that there are, but that he recommended that they begin by getting cold weather plants like kale to grow now.

Several students then asked through Ahmad when they should start planting the seeds. Jason said that because there was cold weather, they could start to grow cold weather plants but that they would need to wait a few weeks to start the summer plants. He said that the second week in May is a good timeline for planting the other seeds.

All of the parents were talking in small groups with the bilingual liaisons, including the Spanish-speaking mothers.

Jason told the group that the first day of May was the date that they could start planting on their garden spot.

Zara interpreted a question for a Kurdish-speaking woman and asked, “If parents were in the program a few years ago and want to attend again, do they have to attend the orientation?” Jason said that they ask everyone to attend the orientation.

Ahmad asked if Jason had business cards. Jason took some cards out of his pocket and handed them to Ahmad. The students eagerly reached for the cards.

One mother asked Jason, “Free seeds?” as she took his business card. “Yes” he said. “We can get you free seeds.”

English class: a worksheet about consonant blends and prepositions. (Field Notes, Aster Elementary, November, 4, 2014): Nisa and Ale were working on a worksheet about consonant blends and prepositions; they were talking about the answers. They were presented with a picture and needed to select the correct sentence. Then, Cindy had instructed them to find the blends in the words. For example:

**Figure 5: Blends Worksheet**
Ale asked, “It is frog, yes?”

Nisa said yes and then she said, “It is difficult this one.”

Sofía and Yolanda sat down nearby Ale and Nisa and started to work on the worksheet together. Layla, an Arabic-speaking mother joined them.

Nekabari checked in on Ale and Nisa. He reminded them to underline the blends in the words. He pointed to the fr in frog and said that they should underline it. He said that this is a blend because there are two letters together and then pointed to the Blends poster at the front of the room. Nisa exclaimed, “Oh, it’s blending!”

Sofía, Yolanda and Layla were talking about the worksheet. Yolanda pointed to Layla’s worksheet and told her how to mark the correct answer. Layla thanked her and marked the answer on her paper. While they worked, Sofía and Yolanda spoke with each other in Spanish.

Cindy came over to work with Sofía, Yolanda and Layla. She asked them if they had any questions and Yolanda confirmed the answer to one of the questions. Cindy then handed out markers to each person. She told them that they were going to circle the prepositions in each sentence. She read aloud the first sentence and then asked, “What is the preposition?” They did this one by one. Cindy sometimes asked, “Is there a preposition?” The women looked at the board and read off some of the prepositions as they checked for them in their worksheet.

Nekabari began to look for prepositions with Ale and Nisa as well. Nisa gave some examples of prepositions, like “in the trash.” She asked Nekabari about the word above and he told her that if something was above something else, it was on top of it but it was not touching it. She put her hand above her head and said, “Above the head. No touching. The sun is above the earth.” Nisa held both of her hands above her hand and said that Cindy did this motion yesterday when she taught the word.

Nisa then asked, “I no touch or it no touch?” Nekabari said that it could be either one.

Nisa nodded and said, “Oh. No touching. Can I say the clock is on the wall? Above the earth?” She started laughing loudly. “I’m sorry” she said while laughing. Ale and Nekabari joined in and laughed hard as well. Nisa wiped away a tear from her eye.

Nekabari said that she could say that the clock is above the whiteboard. He said that it is also next to the screen and below the ceiling.

Ale then asked Nekabari a question about the words front and behind. Nekabari said he was going to show her what behind meant. He stood up and then walked and stood behind Ale. He said, “I am behind you. You are in front of me.”
Ale nodded and said, “Oh ok.”

Nisa said, “Behind. You cannot see him.”

Section 4: English Language Learning and Literacies

This section describes what the English language learning experience was like at each of the three family literacy sites. Like with the other components of family literacy, the adult English class was both similar and different across the sites. Marcia explained that each English teacher followed a general format during class time that was a combination of whole group and small group instruction:

“Our experience has been that if a teacher can divide the class into groups of 2 to 3 in terms of skill level, then that works out best for the, the students. So, each instructor may do large group activities that are accessible to all of the students regardless of level and then have time during the class each day then to divide into different skill groups. So then a volunteer, under the direction of the paid instructor, would guide the volunteer with what they want to do and maybe write out a plan for an activity and go over the objectives for the activity and then the volunteer takes that. Some of the instructors rotate around so that the instructor touches each group everyday or maybe a couple of times a week to be sure that what the volunteer or the paid assistant is doing is really following the guidelines of what the instructor has laid out.”

(Marcia, ELL Assistant Director, Interview, December 10, 2014)

To illustrate the similarities and differences amongst the three focus sites, the English language learning experience is described according to each teacher and his/her site(s). Each explanation includes a description of common whole group and small group methods and activities used to teach the English language, and the literacies that were present in the class (with or without the teacher’s knowledge).

John, English Teacher: Aster Elementary and Verbena Elementary

John’s classes were conducted in a similar manner at both Aster Elementary and at Verbena Elementary. Because I observed him in both the spring and the fall of 2014, I collected the most data about English learning in his classroom. John began each English class by greeting the students and checking in
about the weather. He also typically asked a yes or no question, often with a bit of sarcasm and humor when the weather was cold.

(Field Notes, Aster Elementary, February 14, 2014): John stood at the front of the room to begin class. He called the class’s attention and said, “Happy Monday.” He asks the students if they were happy to see the snow this morning. Most replied in low voices, “no” and John commented that Fernanda, the volunteer, was happy to see the snow. She shook her head no and John chuckled.

John then introduced the new volunteer to the class; she was an education student from a local college. He said that there were four helpers here today, so that meant that he would be able to go and take a nap. The students laughed.

As one mother sat down, John asked her how her baby was. She said that her baby stayed home today and John asked if the baby was still sick. The woman responded that yes, she was still sick. John commented that health had been an issue lately and that a lot of people have been sick.

John then announced that there was a special thing about today: today they would take the spelling quiz. He gazed around the class and smiled. Some of the students groaned. John said that after the spelling quiz they would work in groups. He told the class that tomorrow they would change up the groups and that some people would begin working on reading.

Sometimes John had written announcements on the board of upcoming events that he read aloud to his students. In the fall, John consistently wrote the date on the board and asked the student to either say the date with him or fill in the blank to complete the date at the start of class.

Large group activities. After the introduction, John would begin review vocabulary words, spelling words, or a short story with the entire class. He explained:

“The large group time is when I use, I use that typically to cover, oh for example, I might do the three weeks...how to communicate with the doctor. For their kids. We’ll do three weeks on shopping and what to look for when they’re shopping. When we do the three weeks with the doctor, I’ve actually had it where...the assistant was the doctor and I was the secretary and they had to check in and then say “Ok the doctor will see you now.” Like and they go back, like that. To give them kind of the feel for like going into the doctor’s office. And then they had to tell the doctor a symptom. They had to tell two or three symptoms you know that we’ve been practicing you know like cough, congestion, you know things like that. So that, that way they feel a little more like confident about going to the doctor. And normally they have a translator but at least so they understand what’s being talked about.

Also large group time is when we’ll go with spelling words, also for all of the class. Now I’ve had a few like, if they have kids in the upper level grade that if their English is ready for it, I might go and get the list for them and go over it individually...But most of the students are not ready for fourth and fifth grade spelling words. The first grade...even the second grade words might be a stretch for them.”
For the vocabulary words and the spelling words, John typically wrote the words on the board and reviewed each word with the parents. With the vocabulary words, John reviewed the meanings of the words and not necessarily the spelling. He acted these out and did some interactive activities with the group, like have each parent use one of the words in a sentence. Below is the list of health words that John presented and reviewed with the class:

(Field Notes, Verbena Elementary, September 17, 2014):

cold
flu
cough
sneeze
sore throat
headache
earache
body ache
stomachache
nausea
throw up
temperature
fever

John collaborated with the first and second grade teachers at the elementary schools to secure the spelling lists for each week. On Mondays he wrote the week’s words on the board and reviewed them with the parents by giving verbal explanations and by drawing pictures. The parents copied the words into their notebooks. Each day during the initial large group time, John reviewed the spelling words with the parents. They said each word together, John reviewed what it meant, and then they spelled in chorally. Most days, reviewing the spelling words happened after the class looked at other vocabulary words, such as those about health or weather. Writing, defining, and spelling all of these words was fast-paced.

Depending on the time of year, they would look at only the first grade list (in the fall) and other times they would look at the first and second grade lists (in the spring). The spelling words were always focused on different spelling patterns. John briefly discussed the patterns with the parents. At Aster Elementary in the spring, John also presented different levels of spelling words to the parents: the
elementary spelling list was divided into three sections at that school (approaching grade level, meeting grade level, and above grade level). Out of all of the words, he selected ten to twenty words that the parents were responsible for learning for the spelling test given each Friday. At Verbena Elementary, John only presented one list of words to the parents and for the entire fall semester, they only looked at the first grade words. Parents were then tested on the words on Fridays. Sometimes, however, John would give a practice test on Friday and tell the parents that they would practice the words over the weekend before the real test.

The following vignette illustrates a time when John reviewed the spelling list with the parents. This scenario happened immediately after the class had looked at weather words and vowels and had discussed the sound that the letter y made when it was attached to the end of a word, like rainy or sunny.

(Field Notes, Verbena Elementary, October 1, 2014): John told the class, “Let’s do our first grade spelling words.” He turned and wrote the word drip on the board. The parents took out their notebooks and opened them.

John then moved to the back of the room. He told Nichole that he didn’t have time to talk to her before class and then asked her if she could get some construction paper. He explained that they would do a couple of activities today. He and Nichole walked over to the cabinets, checked them for paper, and then Nichole left the classroom and John moved back to the front of the room.

Nichole greeted someone in the hallway and soon returned to the classroom with Victoria. Nichole walked over to the table that she was sitting at, took out a paper from her bag and handed it to Victoria. Victoria asked John to sign a paper and he walked over to sign it and talk quietly to Victoria. The parents were talking to each other in their home languages.

Victoria turned to the whole class and said, “Goodbye everybody! Have a nice day!” She waved at the class and left.

John went back to the board and continued to write the spelling words. The class quieted down. He wrote:

- drip
- drop
- grab
- grass
- branch
- spill
- spin
- stamp

John said that he wrote the list differently this time. He pointed out that each word has two consonants at the beginning and demonstrated that drip had both the d and r sound together. He then asked the class to say the words with him. He read each word one at a time and all of the parents read them along with him. Most of the parents also wrote the words in their notebooks.

John then began to review each of the spelling words one at a time. The parents read each word out loud
with John; then, they spelled each word together chorally. John paused and gave some examples when he read the list. The examples he gave were:

**drip** – John said that water drips.

**drop** – John dropped his pen several times, each time saying “drop” as it fell. He said that you could also have a drop of water.

**grab** – John asked the class what grab meant. One student pretended to grab at her neighbor with her hand. John said, “yes, to grab and get something.” He grabbed a whiteboard marker and said “grab”.

**grass** – John asked what grass was. A few parents spoke in Spanish and then a Spanish-speaking mother said, “outside”. John drew a house with grass. He said that grass was the green stuff outside. He asked the parents if they liked his picture.

**branch** - John asked what a branch was. He then drew a tree. A Karen-speaking mother said “tree branch”. John said yes and added it to the drawing.

**spill** – John said this word three times and about half of the class said it with him. Then he asked what is spill. No one responded. John asked, “What if I spill my coffee on Xóchitl’s purse. Will she be happy?” Many say, “No.” John repeated this question twice more and then asked Xóchitl if she would be happy. She said no.

Another Spanish-speaking mother said, “She cry.” John said, “She cry? Oh no, don’t do that.”

**spin** – John said “spin around” and he spun around.

**stamp** – John said this word and spelled it with the parents. He asked what a stamp was and no one responded. John drew an envelop on the board and said, “If Nora sends a letter in the mail, she needs a stamp.” Then he drew in a stamp in the upper right corner.

**two** – After saying and spelling this word, John said, “Two. Does this mean me too?” A few parents said no. John said that this is the number two. He said that they have two sisters in the class, Martha and Nora and that they have two women from Guatemala. These women smiled and some of the Spanish-speaking women pointed out who was who.

John asked, “Do you have two eyes?” The parents answered yes. He asked if they had two ears and they said yes. Then he asked if they had two noses. One Karen-speaking mother said yes. John looked at her and pointed to his nose. He said that this was his nose and asked if she had two noses. The mother giggled nervously and said no.

Some women began talking in their home languages.

**move** – John asked, “Do you like to move?” No one responded. John said, “I think Juana likes to move.” Juana said that no, she did not because it was a lot of work.

John said that was all for the first grade list.

A Karen-speaking woman said “My brother move[d] yesterday.” John asked her if she helped him move and
she said yes. John asked if she helped move all of the heavy stuff and she said, “No not heavy. The kitchen.” John nodded, said, “Okay” and turned to erase the board. The parents were talking in their home languages in low voices.

Occasionally, John also read short stories with the class as a large group. These stories were short - no more than two pages long - and told a relevant story mostly in the present tense. When the class at Verbena was studying the health unit, John read a story on shellfish allergies with the class several times over the course of a week. He read short segments of the story out loud and the parents repeated the phrases. At the end of the story, John explained any words that the parents did not know and they completed comprehension questions as a group.

**Small group activities.** John grouped parents into small groups primarily based on their abilities in English. He consulted their scores on the initial BEST Plus oral test, but found that the test did not always describe all of the parents' language skills:

“When we do the testing, the testing only gives me a certain amount of information. The first tests are given, this is by federal and state mandate, is the BEST Plus Oral Skills test. So that only gives me an idea about their oral skills but it doesn’t give me an idea about their reading and writing skills…So when they come to my class, I give them their initial testing but then I also do some in class assessing before I start group work…It’s usually for about the first month I don’t really do much group work…I might have some returning students who I know a little more about, but as far as the new ones, I try to get a gauge about where their other skills are at for reading and writing before I start to do group, to really get into some group work.

What I’ll do, I’ll…I give them some simple assignments. I want to see how they write. I might get the actual picture dictionary out. I’ll have them describe the picture to me in writing…Another way I’ll do it is have them read to me to see how their decoding is. And then, we’ll work on a story and see how, how they do with comprehension, being able to answer some of the simple for the low level, for low level reading. Things like that. That’s where I get my information from.

The reason I do that is because I might have a student. For example, a student, she almost tested out of the BEST Plus, but she couldn’t write. She didn’t know the alphabet. So I had a talk with her and I said, you know, your talking level is really high for my class and that’s really good, but we need help with reading and writing. So I explained to her that I was going to have her work with the low level but only because to help her reading and writing and she accepted that.”

(John, English Teacher, Aster/Verbena Elementary, Interview, August 14, 2014)

Based on this information, John generally divided the class into two groups to start the year: a low
group and an intermediate group. He explained these groups during an interview:

“So like last year I started off with two groups. And I just called them group A or group B....And in group A, they work with the Ventures book one. And within that group were some, some people were generally grouped on that level with both the Best Plus Oral Skills test and also the reading and writing skills. A couple women in that group who their verbal skills were higher than that level, but their reading and writing were not. Then group B were a lot of people who had returned and that was the group that were on the high end of the Best Plus Oral Skills test and I knew that they were getting to that point where I knew that they would test out of it, and they would take the TABE reading test. And for that we were going to use Book 2, Ventures Book 2, and a lot of reading materials...What really made it nice was to have an assistant so that we could go over the lesson plan, with my assistant Amber, so that that was also a part of mentoring her. So then we got to group work, Amber would work with one group and I would work with another and then we would switch off. So that way they wouldn’t just have the same person. I don’t want one group to feel like the teacher’s not with them. That’s why it’s kind of like one week we’d do one week each and then switch. And things like that, so there’s a rotation going on.”

(John, English Teacher, Aster/Verbena Elementary, Interview, August 14, 2014)

In the different groups, John and Amber worked mainly out of the Ventures books. These textbooks were leveled and were arranged in units around different themes, such as family and shopping, and grammar topics, such as asking questions and using different verb tenses. Activities included listening, filling in blanks with verbs and vocabulary words, writing questions, reading short excerpts and answering questions, and oral role playing exercises. (See Appendix E for a sample page from the Ventures Book 2.) Typically, John or Amber began the group work by either completing the reading or discussing the picture at the beginning of a unit. They discussed vocabulary words for the story and addressed words that the parents did not know. Both John and Amber mostly followed through the text and worked with the parents to complete the book activities. Often, they extended these activities and had the parents complete additional questions that followed the same format. Homework from the unit was assigned out of the student workbook at the end of the lesson, to be reviewed at the start of the group lesson the next day. The following vignette depicts a typical learning exercise in John’s class.

(Field Notes, Verbena Elementary, October 27, 2014): John sat down with a group of five parents. They all took out their yellow Ventures books (level one), notebooks, and pencils. John said that today they will review the to be verb, are and is. He turned and wrote the different forms of the verb on the board using black and red markers.

I am         I’m
You are      You’re
John said that most Americans say it like the second column. He read all of these words out loud, from left to right, and the women repeated them. The three Spanish-speaking mothers in the group were copying the words into their notebooks. The Kurdish-speaking mother and the Karen-speaking mother were not writing the words.

John gave examples for each of the pronouns. He pointed to each woman and said, “You’re from [home country].” John briefly reviewed the gendered differences between the words he and she. He then told the group that the words they’re and their had the same pronunciation, but different meanings. He gave examples of how to use each word and told the parents that they had studied these words last week.

By now, Yekta, the Kurdish-speaking woman in the group, began writing.

They practiced the difference between his and her and practiced pronunciation.

He said that they’re and their have the same sound. He gave examples of each words and talked about how they studied their last week.

As the women wrote, John first watched Jamillah for a minute as she worked with a small group. Then, he turned to the board and wrote more contractions in black and red marker.

I am not  I’m not
You are not  You’re not  You aren’t
He is not  He’s not  He isn’t
She is not  She’s not  She isn’t
It is not  It’s not  It isn’t
We are not  We’re not
You are not  You’re not  You aren’t
They are not  They’re not  They aren’t

John said that we could shorten how we say these phrases in the negative too. He read the list of words aloud one by one. Four of the five women were writing these words down as well. The Karen-speaking mother was the only person who was not writing.

John then said that they could say the negative in two different ways. He read the list and emphasized the different ways. John pointed to the last two columns and said that most Americans talk like that. One parent asked why and John said that “we” like to make things short and quick.

He said, “She is not here today” very slowly and then said, “She isn’t here” very quickly. He said that it the second way was shorter and easier.

John asked if it sounded different when they spoke in their languages quickly. He asked each woman one at a time if it sounded different. Some said yes and some said no. John said that Americans use contractions when they speak fast. He paused as the women wrote. He asked the Karen-speaking mothers why they were not writing. One said that she didn’t have a notebook. John asked why not and she said that she forgot
it. John asked why again and she smiled at him. He said that she could write it on a piece of paper and add it to her notebook. He went and got a piece of notebook paper from a notebook and gave it to her.

Yekta asked a question about the workbook. She held it up and pointed to a page that was not completed. John said that they would do that for homework. He said that they should bring the book on Wednesday and that they would have homework for the weekend.

The classroom was quiet. The group was copying from the board. All but one of the women were writing. The Karen-speaking woman who was not writing was watching the others write.

John went to answer the classroom telephone and then came back and said that he had something else to show the group. He wrote on the board:

Martha is a student.
She is in my class.
Is she from France?

The women started copying as soon as John wrote. John turned back to the group and explained how the word order changed when the statement turned into a question. John read the first example and asked if Martha was from France. One Spanish-speaking mother said, “No, Mexico.”

John then wrote on the board: No, she’s not. She’s from Mexico. And the group wrote this down what was on the board. One of the Spanish-speaking women was switching between using a pencil to write most of the sentence and a marker to write the verbs. Everyone was writing quietly.

John said that they were going to look in the book on page 10. Everyone sat up straight as John explained the assignment in the workbook page.

John began to review the pronouns with the group. He asked questions like, “If I say John, what do I say?” The women then responded with, “He.” John then read aloud examples from the book and the women responded. John then told the group that they were to write out the sentences from the book on to the paper and fill in the words is or the are. Some started copying right away.

John told them to wait and said that they would do number two on the board together. He wrote:

______ they from Somalia?
Yes they ______.

John asked the group which word would go in each blank. Several women said “are” and John wrote this word in each blank. He then instructed them to do numbers three through eight by themselves. All of the women began writing and John watched.

Another common group activity that John conducted at least once a week was small discussion groups. Parents were broken into groups of three or four and were instructed to ask each other questions that he had written on the board. This activity took place nearly every Friday and on Fridays the parents were instructed to ask each other three questions: 1) what will you do this evening?; 2) what will you do tomorrow?; 3) what will you do on Sunday?. Sometimes the parents were instructed to ask a specific person
all three questions individually and then report the person’s answers back to the entire class: person A would ask and report about person B, person B about person C, and person C about person A. During these conversations, parents began by adhering to the questions and they often wrote down each other’s answers. The parents normally stated that they would do things like clean their house, go shopping at a grocery store, relax, watch T.V., and maybe travel to a nearby town. (Once they had answered all of the questions, they would either continue talking to each other in English, sit quietly, or begin speaking in their home languages. Answering the questions during these activities was considered very important. When parents got off topic and spoke about something different due to a question or an idea, they scrambled to write down the answers to the questions so that they could report back to the whole group.

The group conversations were a time when parents needed to speak to each other in English. John intentionally organized the groups so that people with different home languages were mixed together and parents needed to rely on English and other skills to communicate with each other.

(Field Notes, Verbena Elementary, November 12, 2015): Xóchitl was talking loudly with her group. She asked the questions that were written on the board and then looked to her group members to answer them. She asked, “What will you make for lunch?” For the second question, she asked, “What will you make for dinner for your child?”

Xóchitl asked Mya, a Karen-speaking mother, “What will you do in the evening?” She read this question off of the board and then she added, “In the night?” She put her hands to her head as if she were sleeping. She then said, “In the house?” and drew a picture of a house in her notebook. Mya answered her quietly. Then, Xóchitl and Nora spoke to each other in Spanish while Mya wrote in her notebook.

Xóchitl continued to talk with Mya. She told her, “I will make fish and vegetables. Ok? Will you do that?” Xóchitl was looking at Mya directly in her eyes as she spoke and was using a very gentle, calm voice. Mya nodded and said yes. Xóchitl then said, “I will clean my house and watch TV. Ok?” Mya continued to nod.

Sometimes during these activities, parents also taught each other their home languages. For example, Hassan, a man from Sudan learned how to say phrases like buenos días and hasta mañana in Spanish and used these phrases when he communicated with his Spanish-speaking classmates during the small groups and throughout class. Another Arabic-speaking woman at Verbena Elementary learned how to count up to at least twenty in Spanish from her peers.

Sometimes students worked in small groups or one-on-one with the assistant or volunteer on
specific skills and topics. During the spring 2014, two women worked consistently with Fernanda, the volunteer, to prepare for the citizenship test. They reviewed a set of flashcards that had the possible questions and answers that would be on the exam. Amber worked independently with Yolanda to practice her verbal skills. John explained that, from his perspective, Yolanda was very shy and did not like to talk. He felt that practicing with Amber would help her to feel more comfortable for the test. Parents also worked individually with the assistant or volunteers on reading: this was the case of parents who were beginning readers in English or more advanced readers.

**Literacies.** Print literacy was most prevalent during English classes with John. The parents were expected to read, write, and complete traditional grammar exercises and spelling tests. John also utilized the pictures within the student workbook or in a story as texts to facilitate practicing verbal skills: he asked parents to talk about the pictures in the same way that they would be expected to talk about the pictures during the BEST Plus exam. During these practices, John referred parents back to some of the grammar activities that they had completed and instructed them to follow these rules and to speak in complete sentences.

Class events sometimes invoked other literacies or literacy practices that broke the mold of the traditional exercises completed during whole class and small group time. These events were influenced by a happening in the class, but were generated by the parents and often included interactions between people who spoke different home languages. Three of the scenes that involved Latina mothers are described below:

**Religion in the classroom.** (Field Notes, Aster Elementary, April 7, 2014): I was reading a story with a group of three women, two Spanish-speaking (SS) one Kurdish-speaking (KS), about teaching babies sign language. Sabat had just explained that sign language in Kurdish was different than sign language in Arabic. Verónica (SS) asked Sabat (KS) if she was from Iraq. Sabat said yes. Verónica pointed to two other women in the class who are also from Iraq and asked Sabat if they were from Iraq. Sabat said yes that they were from Iraq, but that they speak Arabic and she speaks Kurdish.

Verónica made a sign of wrapping a scarf around her head with her hand. She said, “They put” and made the sign and then said, “And you no.”

Sabat explained that the women who wear the hijab are Muslim. They are from Iraq but they are also
Muslim. She said that she was not Muslim.

Verónica asked Sabat, “Muslim is [a] religion?”

Sabat said, “Yes. Religion.” Verónica then confirmed that Sabat was not Muslim. “No” Sabat said. Verónica said that she was Christian and Sabat asked her if she went to church. Verónica told her that she went to Catholic church and Yolanda (SS) said she did as well.

Verónica asked Sabat if the Muslim women read the Bible. Sabat said that they read the Quran. Verónica looked at her intently and nodded. Sabat said that the Muslim women believed in Mohammed and read the Quran. Sabat asked Verónica if she read the Bible. Verónica answered, “Yes the Bible.”

Verónica asked Sabat why she spoke Kurdish if she was also from Iraq. “Do you speak Arabic?” she asked. Sabat said that she spoke a little Arabic, but that she speaks mainly speaks Kurdish. She explained that some people in Iraq speak Kurdish. She said they were a group of people and that she didn’t know why they spoke different languages.

I told Sabat that I thought that the Kurdish people from Iraq mostly live in the north of the country. She agreed and then said, “But Jen, I am not Kurdish. I am Yazidi. Zara? (the Kurdish translator) is Kurdish.”

Verónica said, “Yes. She wears the scarf.”

Sabat said, “It is her religion.”

**The price of Indonesian food.** (Field Notes, Aster Elementary, March 31, 2014): John left the small group to go and make copies. Once he left, the three group members began talking amongst themselves. They had just completed a story about a man who enjoyed traveling and liked to try new foods. Before John left, they had discussed the word cuisine.

Hassan, an Arabic-speaking man from Sudan, asked Sofía a question.

Sofía asked, “What?”

Hassan said she was late today and then asked, “Work?”

Sofía said, “Restaurant. Police give me ticket 3 times.”

Nisa asked, “Which restaurant do you work?”

Sofía said, “Because I don’t stop. Because I go fast.”

Hassan said, “Ahhhh.”

Nisa asked again, “Which restaurant do you work?”

Sofía said The Oven.

Nisa asked, “P? B?”

Hassan said, “Downtown.”
Nisa said, “P and 8. What’s name? Is it a Mexican restaurant?”

Sofía said, “No, ummm. Oven.”

Nisa said, “Oh I think I see this. This is no[t] [a] Mexican restaurant.”

Sofía said, “Indian.”

Nisa said, “Indian!”

Hassan said, “Yes!”


Sofía said, “Yes.”

Sofía turned to Hassan. She said, “Now the owner is Chinese.” She and Hassan talked softly.

Nisa tapped Sofía’s shoulder and asked, “Is it expensive?”

Sofía said, “Yeah it’s expensive.”

Nisa asked, “How much each person?”

Sofía said, “I don’t know because I work in the kitchen.”

Nisa asked, “Is it good? Is it spicy?”

Sofía said, “No it’s like....” and she spoke with Nisa softly.

Nisa responded softly back.

Sofía said loudly, “I don’t like it” and shook her head.

Hassan said that he knew someone who ate there and that they paid a lot of money for the food. He then spoke quietly.

Sofía asked, “15 and 24?”

Hassan said, “It’s true.”

Nisa left the classroom and Sofía continued to talk with Hassan.

Hassan explained, “Before 15 and now 25 cents.” He wrote these numbers on a paper and held it up to Sofía as he spoke. He told her that it was expensive.

Sofía said, “Now 25?” and pointed to the number on the paper. Hassan nodded and said yes.

**A sympathetic card.** (Field Notes, Verbena Elementary, September 25, 2014): It was Thursday
and a small group of the women had stayed late for an additional session of Family Learning after the parent time class at Verbena Elementary. Earlier during parent time class, John had announced that Yekta’s father had been killed in Iraq. The class had been struck by this news and many had consoled Yekta after class.

After the Family Learning class had dismissed, Juana and a small group of Spanish-speaking women followed Belinda out of the classroom. Juana walked out the door, paused, and came back into the classroom. She grabbed a small stack of green paper that was near the door. She said out loud that she was going to make a card for the woman whose father had died. Juana hung her head and said to no one in particular, “Qué lástima.[What a shame.]”

Technological literacies were also abundant in John’s English class. There was a cart of laptops that could be used at anytime. Periodically, the parents worked on the computers during small group time. They generally visited the site usalearns.org. John helped each parent set up an account: he created email addresses and passwords for each student and instructed them on how to log in. Once in, the parents completed English exercises that were similar to those in their Ventures books, only with the option to listen and to record their responses. Parents were responsible for navigating the computer during these activities. When they had questions, the teacher, assistant or volunteer took control over the mouse to solve the problem. Parents helped each other with this as well by using the same strategies.

(Field Notes, Verbena Elementary, December 17, 2014): Norma, a Spanish-speaking mother returned from PACT time. She said that the students had an exam again today. John instructed her to work on the computer for today. He asked her if she could get on the computer by herself and she said yes. He told her that if she needed help he would help her today.

Norma got out a computer and sat with Cruz, who was waiting for her test, at the side table. Cruz was working in a workbook.

Htwe, a Karen-speaking woman, was also working at a computer at the side table. Norma’s website was not working. Htwe showed her what to type on the computer and the CPS webpage came up. Norma looked confused and sat back away from her computer. Htwe went over and typed something in the browser. She typed in usalearns.org. She kept on clicking and then instructed Norma to log in.

Norma did this independently, but it didn’t work. Htwe woman asked Norma for her log in information and then typed it in. It worked.

Norma exclaimed, “Thank you!”

Htwe smiled and told her, “You’re welcome” and moved back to her computer.

Outside of English-learning activities, technological literacies were omnipresent during John’s English classes. Parents kept their cellphones nearby and used them throughout the class. Before class
even began, children used cellphones to watch videos and play games. (Sabat's four-year-old daughter watched the video and sang the song Let it Go most mornings before class during the spring of 2014.)

Often, they used a translating device to look up English words in their home languages and write the corresponding word in a notebook or on a worksheet. This was common for the Spanish-speaking mothers and the Arabic-speaking mothers; it was not common for the Kurdish-speaking mothers. Parents shared photos with each other, sent text messages, and answered phone calls during class. Yolanda brought a tablet with her to the end of the year awards ceremony so that she could record it and take pictures.

Sometimes parents took out the laptops independently and used them to check email or search for something online. Hassan did this often and John explained that he had used the school computers to communicate with his family in Sudan ever since his home computer was stolen.

**Cindy, English Teacher: Aster Elementary**

Cindy posted a schedule on the board each day that included the day’s date and the activities that the class would complete that day. Reading this schedule together marked the beginning of the class. Each week that I observed, Cindy wrote the date slightly different with varying blanks for the parents to fill in. She always began class with this exercise. Below are two examples of how the schedule was used as an activity at the beginning of class.

**Example 1.** *(Field Notes, Aster Elementary, October 21, 2014): Cindy said that they would get started with the date. She asked who could fill in the blanks. On the board was written:*

Today is ________________, ________________, 2014.

*Abir, an Arabic-speaking mother, volunteered to fill in the blanks. She wrote:*

Tuesday, October 21

*While Abir wrote the word October she sounded out the short ‘o’ sound and said “O-o-o October.” Cindy told the class that she heard Abir saying “O – o – o” and that making the sound helps us when write it. Abir sat down.*

*Cindy looked at the board and said that they were missing a silent letter in the word Tuesday. Sofia called out from the back corner, “E”. Cindy said that was correct and wrote in the letter e.*

*Cindy quickly went over the schedule for the day on the board. It was written below the date like this:*
I can blend the letter sounds.

- review vowel sounds
- PACT 8:45 9:00 9:30
- groups
- spelling
- PACT discussion

Cindy read through the schedule. When she talked about blends, she drew a blender on the board next to the word and explained that they will be blending the sounds of the letters together. She said they would have a celebration at the end of class because Abir is a citizen now and brought treats to celebrate.

**Example 2.** (Field Notes, Aster Elementary, December 2, 2014): On the board Cindy had written:

- We are in a new month.
- The month is ____________.
- The number is ________.
- Today is __________________________.

Cindy stood at the front to begin the class. She read the first sentence out loud and asked the class to fill in the blanks. Nisa said that the month is December and Cindy wrote it in the blank. Before she could call on someone else, Nisa said that the number is two. Cindy then called on someone else to say the full date and as they said it, she wrote Thursday, Dec. 2, 2014 on the board. She asked another student for the numbers for the date and the parent said 12 – 2- 14. Cindy wrote down the numbers underneath the full date.

Cindy announced cheerily that she was happy that Ale was here today. She sent her with a woman to take a test. Cindy then told the group to remember to use all English. She said that if they have a question they should raise their hand. If they don’t know how to say something, they should try first and then after that, they should get an interpreter.

Cindy pointed to the schedule and read off the board. It said:

- I can talk about my break. (time off school)
- Share spelling with kids
- Write
  1) Groups
  2) Calendar
- PACT Talk

Cindy pointed to the word break. She asked what it meant and said that they could break their pencil, but that this was a different break.

*Nisa said, “It means no school.”

Cindy shook her head yes to confirm. She said that they had the last five days off school and that is called a break. She explained that they were going to talk about their breaks first and then do the other activities today.
Large group activities. After reviewing the date and the day's schedule, Cindy then facilitated a large group activity that all parents participated in. The topic and activity for the whole group varied based on an objective that Cindy had selected. These activities typically lasted for about fifteen to twenty minutes and sometimes contributed to subsequent small group work that the parents did next, but not always. She explained how she approached planning the large group in an interview:

“I have a daily objective and I choose that objective from several sources. One would be from our PACT discussion. If they see something in the classroom and they asked about it, or I hear a lot of them mentioning it then I think that's a good topic for us. We are supposed to collaborate with the classroom teachers so I have a pacing chart and I can take things off of there, for example, community. I can take animals, I can take the science experiment that we did before. I would say that it comes from, it all, you know from student request. Something that they ask about. So…the pacing chart, the PACT, the student request. If, oh I know, I meet with Anne the coordinator. She does the parenting class, so she might say it’s really important that they understand the school behavior plan – that will become our objective for the day. So I choose a bigger objective and then maybe some smaller things that correspond. And then I plan, that would be our large group.”

(Cindy, English Teacher, Aster Elementary, Interview, December 12, 2014)

Each week that I observed in Cindy’s classroom, the class did something different for large group time. These activities ranged from completing a worksheet about blending consonant sounds to reviewing words for different emotions with the picture dictionary to having a conversation about what they did over the Thanksgiving break. During these activities, parents were eager to share answers or stories, but Cindy also called on parents who did not raise their hands or who were new to the class. The large group activities were conversational and included several participants. If the parents completed a worksheet during this time, Cindy and the assistant also walked around and checked in on their progress independently.

(Field Notes, Aster Elementary, October 21, 2014): Cindy said that they would review vowel sounds. There was a poster at the front with the vowels written on it. She pointed to each letters and said a word with that sound. The parents said the words with her.

\begin{align*}
a & \rightarrow \text{ant} \\
e & \rightarrow \text{elephant} \\
i & \rightarrow \text{Iraq} \\
o & \rightarrow \text{octopus} \\
u & \rightarrow \text{umbrella} \\
\end{align*}

Cindy said that they don’t have a word for y because that letter can make many different sounds.

Cindy said that they were going to do a practice worksheet to review the vowels. She showed the class the paper and pointed to the box at the top of the page. She said that this is called a word bank. She said a
bank is where you keep your money and you can take it out. She said that at school, a bank can be the words that you can take out and use on the worksheet. She told the parents that their children are taught to cross off the words when they use them in school.

Cindy started to pass out the worksheets. Victoria, who was filling in for Nekabari, went to the front of the room to help her. Cindy told the class to match the pictures and words by writing the words in the blank and to cross out the word each time they use it. She said that is what their kids do.

Victoria worked one-on-one with a new Arabic-speaking mother. Some parents filled in the blanks very quickly. Cindy told them that if they finish writing the words in the blanks, they can draw pictures of the words they didn’t use on the backs of their papers.

Victoria said that some of the parents needed to go to PACT time and Cindy said, “Yes.” Five women stood up to go to PACT time. They stopped at the door to get a half sheet of paper out of a plastic container before they left.

The other parents continued to work on the worksheet. Cindy and Victoria were walking around helping parents with their worksheets.

Cindy was asking people, “What is this?” and pointing to pictures. She had them respond by saying, “This is a ________.”

Victoria was helping people with the pronunciation of words. She was having them repeat each word multiple times with her by sounding out each of the numbers.

A group of women were speaking Arabic and looking at each other’s papers.

Cindy was practicing spelling the word tub with Abir. She asked Abir if she bought a tub for her new house. Abir smiled broadly and said “Yes, 3 tubs.” She showed with her hands that the house has three floors.

Cindy exclaimed, “Wow! That’s a lot of cleaning!” Cindy moved on and practiced spelling with others.

Victoria was talking with the group of Kurdish-speaking women at the front table. One woman was talking about a classmate who had two appointments today. She said that the person had to go to the emergency room yesterday. Victoria asked her if the person was in pain and the women shrugged. Cindy joined in the conversation and said that they could tell that the person didn’t feel well yesterday in class.

Cindy moved to the front of the room said that they would practice spelling now. The class quieted down and looked at her. Cindy began asking how to spell each word that was on the worksheet. She asked how to spell the word bed. She sounded it out slowly. She segmented each sound. A new Arabic-speaking student told her how to spell it and she wrote it on the board.

She did the same with the other words and wrote them on the board. She first drew three blanks and then filled them in with letters:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{b a d} \\
\text{b e d} \\
\text{t e n} \\
\text{t a n}
\end{align*}
\]

For the word ten, Cindy sounded it out and said “10 fingers.” One woman spelled ten “t-e-n” very quickly.
Cindy then said the word tan. She looked around for something tan. Meanwhile, the same student spelled the word tan five times out loud. Cindy pointed to Victoria’s sweater. She said, “Victoria’s sweater is tan!”

Cindy finished spelling and explaining the differences between the words bag and bug with the class as other students left for PACT time.

**Small group/ independent activities.** Cindy divided the class into small groups nearly everyday. If they did not work in small groups, they worked independently on an assignment while collaborating with others. The class was divided in three different groups that she described as:

“One group is the very beginning. They’re learning basic greetings, letters, sounds, um, pronouns, he, I, she, they…forming letters, lots of vocabulary. We try to do a lot of talking so that they’re developing probably oral skills first, lots of visuals, lots of pictures to help in the books and in the dictionary. The middle group is… has enough reading and writing skills to work more independently. They’re working on mostly grammar… Asking questions and answering questions, vocabulary…the emphasis is, is still on oral but with more reading and writing. The third group is the highest group, more difficult reading and writing, lots of real practical, they’re reading phone plans and taxi and bus schedules, things like that. Very realistic things from life that they should be able to use but much more reading and writing.”

(Cindy, English Teacher, Aster Elementary, Interview, December 12, 2014)

Each small group always worked with the Ventures books: Cindy included the page numbers on the daily schedule that each group was expected to complete in both the student book (textbook) and in the workbook. These page numbers correlated amongst groups, which meant that the groups were working on the same pages of the textbook, but the topics and grammar lessons and activities varied. To place parents into groups, Cindy initially looked at the BEST Plus and TABE test scores and consulted with Victoria. She was very hesitant about how to get the class up and running because it was her first year and had revisited the groups since. She stated that once she got to know the students better, she was able to make more informed decisions about which group they should be in. This was particularly the case for Yolanda. On my first day in Cindy’s class, Yolanda consulted me about her unhappiness with her group. She had been placed in the intermediate level group, which was studying from Ventures Book 2. Yolanda showed me that she had already completed the entire student workbook at this level and said that she felt that she was learning the same thing that she did last year. She wanted to be moved to the third group.

*(Field Notes, Aster Elementary, October 21, 2014): I entered the classroom, walked toward the back corner*
and stopped to greet Yolanda along the way. We spoke in Spanish:

Jen: “Cómo te va?/ How is it going?”

Yolanda: “Aquí? Pues mal. [Here? Well, bad.]”

Jen: “Oh no! Por qué? [Why?]”

At first I could not hear Yolanda very well and misunderstood her. She told me that the other teacher left and that this teacher put them into groups. I thought that she said that her current group was too difficult. She told me that they had new books: a red and a blue book. She said that they just gave her the blue book yesterday. I asked if that one was better and she said that she just started to look at it. I asked if it was easier and that was when Yolanda corrected me and said that the first book wasn’t too hard, it was too easy for her.

Yolanda: “No no, es que este libro es el mismo libro del año pasado. Se repiten las cosas. [No, no, it’s that the book is the same book from last year. It repeats things.]”

Jen: “Oh. Entiendo. Pensé que fue difícil pero es lo mismo que año pasado. Es fácil. [I understand. I thought that it was difficult, but it’s the same as last year. It’s easy.]”

Yolanda: “Sí. El nuevo libro, el azul, tiene cosas que no he visto. Es nuevo. [Yes. The new book, the blue, has things I haven’t seen.]”

Jen: “¿Y los otras? Sofía y Ale? Que piensan ellas? [And the others? Sofía and Ale? What do they think?]”

Yolanda: “Pues están bien. Ellas están con el azul. [Well they are okay. They are with the blue [book].]”

Jen: “Oh.”

Yolanda: “No sé si nos van a cambiar los grupos. [I don’t know if they are going to change our groups.]”

Jen: “Tomarán un examen? A la mejor cuando tomas otro examen, ellas cambiarán los grupos. [Will you take an exam? It is likely that when you take another exam they will change the groups.]”

Yolanda: “No sé.”

Cindy called the class together to begin and we both sat down. Later during the class period, Yolanda returned from PACT time and sat down with the group that was studying the Ventures Book 3. She pulled out this book, the more difficult book, looked at me, and said, “Voy con este grupo. [I’m going with this group.]” She then turned to Hassan and asked him in English if they had homework in that group.

Cindy approached Yolanda and said, “Remember, you’re in this group.” and pointed to the intermediate group that was working with the second book.

Yolanda stood up and did not look happy. Instead of going to the intermediate group she came to me. “Jen, ¿me puedes ayudar con la maestra? [Jen, can you help me with the teacher?]”

I told her that I would and Yolanda called the teacher over. (I had already had some difficulty gaining access to Cindy’s classroom this year. I was a little nervous that interpreting for Yolanda would leave a bad impression on Cindy, but at the same time I could tell that Yolanda was very frustrated with this situation.)
When Cindy approached I told her that Yolanda had asked me if I could interpret for her. I tried to translate exactly what Yolanda said in Spanish.

Yolanda first if they were going to change groups. Cindy said that they would change groups, but it would likely be after they take the test again. She asked Yolanda if she remembered the tests that they took at the beginning of the year and Yolanda said that she did.

Yolanda then said that she had already completed the red book last year and that she was doing the same activities this year in that book.

Cindy said that she looked at the test scores with Victoria and that Victoria felt that this group would be better for Yolanda. She said that Yolanda could practice the skills and practice speaking part in this group and then move on to the next group. I told Yolanda this in Spanish.

Yolanda sighed heavily and said that she had already completed the skills in the red book and she was doing the same things again now. She said that the blue book has things that she hasn’t studied yet and that these things would be new to her. I interpreted this in English for Cindy.

Cindy suggested that they pick a random page in the red workbook and see how well Yolanda knew it, as a type of test. She said that when Yolanda was ready she could bring her red workbook to her and they would choose a page for her to do. I told Yolanda this in Spanish.

Yolanda then worked independently for the rest of the class with Victoria on a few pages that Cindy assigned in the Ventures Book 2. After class, she and Cindy had a meeting about her performance on those pages. In the following weeks, Yolanda stayed in the intermediate group but seemed more content about the situation.

When working in small groups, both Cindy and Nekabari followed the textbook and completed all of the activities. They also expanded on the information that was presented in the textbook to facilitate more discussion about what was being studied. These additional activities were nearly always oral: Cindy and Nekabari rarely used a whiteboard or other material to write down information. Sometimes, however, the students did write additional notes in their notebook or completed activities like writing sentences or writing the answers for an activity from the textbook (as opposed to the workbook) in their notebook. The following vignette depicts a typical group activity.

(Field Notes, Aster Elementary, November 4, 2014): Cindy had finished going over the worksheet about blends with the group. She said that next they will practice talking with pictures. She explained that they were going to use the red book today because it has different pictures than the blue book. The group included Sofia, Yolanda, Hassan, and Aliya.

Cindy opened the book to a picture that took up two full pages. She said that they can talk about anything on these pages and that one thing they might want to talk about was the color. She said that, for example, the woman in the picture had a black book.

Yolanda said, “It falls.”
Cindy said, “Yes! And it is falling down.” She asked if anyone else wanted to say something about the picture.

Sofía said, “The notebooks are red.”

Cindy nodded and asked her how many notebooks there were. They counted together to five. She said that they could use numbers when they talk about pictures too. She said, “Five notebooks are red.”

Cindy told them that when they are going to talk about a picture, they could say the words and make the sentence in their heads before they talk. She said that this was something that they could do on the test as well.

Yolanda said, “I see erasers.”

Cindy asked her where they were. Yolanda pointed and Cindy said that now she saw them. She asked, “How many? What colors?”

Yolanda slowly said, “I see two pink erasers on the book.”

Cindy told her that that was a long sentence and that it was great. She asked her to repeat the sentence for everyone to hear and Yolanda did.

Hassan said, “I see a gray calculator.”

Cindy continued to ask the group what they saw and they gave answers with the number, color and a preposition to say where it was. She encouraged them to repeat their answers in full sentences if they did not do so the first time.

On days when parents attended PACT time, they participated in a second group activity for the last fifteen minutes of class. Cindy called this time PACT talk. They parents were divided into two groups and Cindy and Nekabari facilitated a discussion about what they saw and learned in PACT time. They mostly used the questions on the PACT time form to facilitate the discussion (see Appendix A), but often provided more details about what the parents had seen in the classroom or answered any questions that they had. Eventually, Cindy and Nekabari also began asking parents to ask each other questions and provide answers during this discussion. It was common for parents to use their home language during this time and help each other translate what they wanted to say into English. This was mostly the case for the Arabic-speaking and Kurdish-speaking parents; the Spanish-speaking women were often divided into different groups and only spoke English during this time.

The PACT forms also became a focus of the English class. As parents returned from PACT time,
they took time to fill out these forms. Cindy and Nekabari also consulted with the parents on these forms as they made their rounds to the different groups. Parents also approached me quite often to ask me about words in English or to explain something that they had seen in PACT time in more detail so they could write it on their form. When I first began observing in Cindy’s class, the parents were quiet during the PACT discussion the teachers needed to ask each person to answer a specific question on the form. By December of 2014, the PACT discussions were more relaxed and parents eagerly participated. The following vignette depicts a PACT discussion in mid-November; it was the first session that I observed the parents stay late (without being told not to leave) because they were participating in an activity.

(Field Notes, Aster Elementary, November 18, 2014): Cindy announced that it was time for the PACT time talk. She said that they would split in half for the talk. The parents started to move around. They seemed to know where to go. They arranged the tables into two big tables and sat around them. The two Spanish-speakers who were there today, Yolanda and Sofía, were in different groups.

As they started talking, Cindy commented that their conversation helps her to know what they can do in their classroom too. She began by asking each person what they saw in PACT time.

Hanifa said that she saw o sounds and said the word float. She read several words from her half sheet of paper. The parents listened to her.

Both groups seemed to be very relaxed. The parents volunteered to read from their PACT time sheets and sometimes responded to each other’s comments with laughter or a comment.

Yolanda said, “I saw the kids reading the story, Jane’s Discover. And they write…” Yolanda said a word and Cindy didn’t understand it. Yolanda gave her the paper so she could see the word.

Cindy said, “Amazement.” She defined this word as being in awe of something and then acted it out. She said that it looked like they also talked about the word bravery. She asked Yolanda if she had a question that she would ask her daughter.

Yolanda said, “What are those words?”

Cindy asked Hassan if he heard Yolanda say the title of the story that he daughter read.

Hassan said, “huh?”

Cindy asked, “What is the title?”

Nisa said that it was the person who wrote the story. Cindy said no and held up a book. She pointed at the book and asked what the title was.

A couple parents said “Name of the story.” and Cindy eagerly nodded and said, “Yes.”

Hassan said that today he learned the title of his son’s story and some new words. He read the word
conventions.

Cindy said, “Writing conventions.” She pointed to the posters at the front of the room and said that those were also writing conventions.

Most of Cindy’s group started talking in Arabic after Hassan said this. Cindy said, “Tell us in English. Yolanda and I don’t speak Arabic.”

Sofía was in Nekabari’s group. She was talking about the words cause and effect. She said, “I think the cause is because. The cause is because he went to…”

Nekabari nodded. He explained the concept of cause and effect as something happening because something else happened. He walked over and turned the lights on and off. He said that the light or darkness in the classroom was caused by him flipping the light switch. He said that dark clouds cause rain.

Sofía nodded and said, “You drive fast…”

Nekabari said, “Crash!”

Sofía laughed. She said, “Or a ticket.”

Nekabari used the light switch as an example again. He said the word cause and pointed to the switch. He turned off the light. He said the word effect and pointed to the light that turned off. Nekabari then acted out walking and hitting his leg on a chair and falling down. He said cause and effect. He acted out hitting is arm and then having pain.

Sofía asked, “How do you spell mean? Like, what does it mean?”

Nekabari asked, “Mean? Angry?”

Sofía said, “No, how do you spell mean. What it mean?”

Nekabari said, “Meaning. What is the meaning?” He said that the word mean means not nice. He spelled the word meaning for Sofía and she wrote it down.

At 10:31, the class was still talking in groups. All of the parents were engaged. No one was moving to leave. In Cindy’s group, most of the members were helping a Kurdish-speaking woman spell a word.

In Nekabari’s group, they were figuring out a word that someone was reading off of their PACT form. Finally someone said, “Cricket!” and guessed it. There was a lot of laughing. Nekabari asked, “Grasshopper? Bird?”

Nekabari began telling a story about people eating grasshoppers and insects in the desert when they didn’t have any food. A couple of students asked him if he ate them. Nekabari said that he had eaten them before, but not in the desert. Nekabari said that the people ate them when there was no kabab. The group laughed! He said that there was no kabab, there was no food so everyone ate the insects. The group laughed.

Cindy was asking her group about which language they would use at home when they spoke with their child about what they saw in PACT time. One Kurdish-speaking woman said that she would use English to talk to her child. Cindy told her that she could use both, Kurdish and English. She said that they saw PACT time in English and they talk about PACT time here in English, but when they go home they would probably talk with their children in their language about what happened. Cindy said that was good.
At 10:35, five minutes past the class time, the last person in each group began reading their answers on the PACT form. All of the students were sitting and listening as the last person finished.

Cindy was reading the words from one student’s list. She read the words: nine, time, shine, like. She asked the parents to listen to the middle sound and asked them what it was. A couple said “I”. Cindy said, “Yes!” She said that it wasn’t like the short i sound, and made the sound, but a long i sound and said, “I, I, I.”

The parents started to give their papers to Cindy. Her group started to break up and Nekabari’s shortly followed.

**Literacies.** Print literacy was abundant in Cindy’s classroom: parents were expected to read and write in English and did this in the workbooks, on separate worksheets or by producing a type of project. A common independent learning activity in Cindy’s classroom was to draw a picture, label it, and then talk about the picture or use it to write a story. During my fieldwork, Parents drew and labeled pictures of their families and of their Thanksgiving break. The picture-drawing sessions were also an opportunity for the parents to share and discuss their pictures with each other while they were working. Because Cindy had asked parents to sit next to people who did not share their home language, parents often consulted each other about the content and language of their drawing.

(*Field Notes, Aster Elementary, December 2, 2014*): Hanifa showed Ester, who was sitting next to Yolanda, her picture. Yolanda looked at Hanifa’s picture and asked her, “Black Friday?” Hanifa’s face lit up. “Yes! Shopping – everyday. I went.” She pointed to her picture and said the word for each thing that she bought. Yolanda responded with a loud, “Ooooh!”

Cindy came by and looked at Yolanda’s desk and commented that she didn’t have a paper. She walked to the front to get her one and brought it back. When she did, Yolanda told her, “I have” and showed her the paper. Cindy exclaimed, “Ooh!!” She looked at Yolanda’s paper.

Yolanda told Cindy, “No shopping. I stay home.” Cindy said that she stayed home too and that she doesn’t like going out shopping on those days. Yolanda showed her the picture she had drawn of the outside of her house decorated for Christmas. She explained each picture and read the labels: lights, deers, ornaments. She spoke confidently and in short sentences. She said, “It was a nice day. We were outside cleaning.” Then she talked about the decorations that she put up.

Cindy asked her questions about her house. She asked if Yolanda put up decorations every year. She explained the word decorate to Yolanda and then Yolanda said that yes, she does it every year. Cindy then moved over to talk with Nisa about her drawing and Yolanda continued to work on her paper.

**Nekabari came over and checked on Ester and Yolanda. He told Yolanda that she had many Christmas decorations. He then moved on to Anifa and another Arabic-speaking woman and looked at their pictures. Yolanda watched as he spoke with Hanifa about her picture. Nekabari pointed to her picture and told her**
that is a merry-go-round. She repeated this word and then and then wrote it down. Nekabari moved on.

Yolanda asked Hanifa what the word was that Nekabari had told her. Hanifa said, “Merry-go-round.” She repeated it two times and then she showed Yolanda her picture and pointed to the merry-go-round. She laughed a little.

Ester turned around and asked, “Merry-go-round?” She looked at Hanifa’s picture. She then looked over at Yolanda’s picture and told her that it was pretty. Yolanda pointed to each of the objects in her picture and said the word for each of them.

Ester said, “I go to Omaha. We eat at restaurant, buy a bed, you know, that stuff.”

They continued to talk about their pictures and Yolanda asked about Ester’s daughter.

Nisa began talking with Ester in Kurdish. She turned back to Yolanda and spoke in English. Then, she turned back to Ester and spoke in Kurdish. Hanifa started talking with Ester, Nisa and Yolanda. They were all laughing.

Yolanda told Hanifa, “Gloria is very sad. Her mom died.”

Nisa turned and told me, “Gloria’s mom died.”

Hanifa responded to Yolanda with, “Ooh…” and a very concerned look on her face. Yolanda asked her if she remembered Gloria. She said that she was short and fat.

Hanifa said, “Oh, I thought you meant Sofía, here.”

Yolanda told her, “Other woman.”

Hanifa asked if her mom was in Mexico and Yolanda told her yes. Hanifa asked if Gloria would go to Mexico. Yolanda told her no. Both women shook their heads and had sad faces.

Another Kurdish-speaking woman returned and sat down. Hanifa began talking to her in Arabic. The women then turned to Yolanda and asked about Gloria’s mom. Yolanda began talking to her in English and telling her that Gloria’s mom had died.

Sometimes the conversations that were centered on a learning activity sparked a different literacy practice. Such was the case when the class had learned about a former student’s stillborn baby.

(Field Notes, Aster Elementary, November 18, 2014): Yolanda sat down next to Nisa. They were working on drawings of their families. Nisa started to talk animatedly to Yolanda.

Nisa said, “Sabat, you know her? Almost delivery, 2 days. 2 days to have baby.” Nisa explained that Sabat went to the hospital to check the baby and that it wasn’t moving. It had died.

Nisa got my attention. She asked me, “You know her. Sabat. She was pregnant.” I said yes and then Nisa said, “Her baby died. Only two days until delivery. It was not moving. 2 days! Can you believe?”
My heart fell and I said, “Oh my gosh. Is she okay? That is so difficult.”

Nisa said, “Maybe she’s not okay. She is very sad.”

Cindy was sitting down and talking with Sofia. Nisa was talking across Cindy to another woman in Kurdish. She was talking animatedly.

Cindy asked Nisa to speak English. She said that Nisa needed to work on her drawing and that she was working with Sofia and it was very loud. Nisa told Cindy about Sabat and then said that the woman she was talking to was Sabat’s neighbor.

Cindy’s tone changed immediately. “Oh my” she said. She said that she had Sabat’s daughter in class. Cindy asked more questions about the situation and Nisa answered them. Cindy said, “I hope her and her family are okay. How sad.”

Nekabari was listening as Nisa told Cindy about Sabat and her baby. Nekabari then said, “You could make a card for her from the class.” Nisa said that yes they should do that. Nekabari turned to get a piece of paper from the cabinet.

Yolanda and Cindy started to talk about Yolanda’s drawing of her family. They were counting how many people were in the family. At first Yolanda said four and Cindy asked her to count again. Yolanda immediately corrected, “Five.” and started laughing hard. Cindy was laughing too. Cindy asked her about the names of people in her family. Their conversation was very relaxed and Yolanda seemed very comfortable with Cindy now. Yolanda told her the names and Cindy commented that she has all girls in the family including the cat.

Yolanda said that her husband was the king of the family and laughed. Cindy said that means that Yolanda was the queen. Yolanda said that meant that her daughters were the princesses. They laughed. Yolanda said that she and Chiquilina, the kitten, were the only ones that stayed at home during the day. Cindy asked Yolanda about the kitten and asked if it was an inside or outside cat. Yolanda smiled at her told her more about the family’s new kitten.

Cindy stood up and went to talk with someone else. Yolanda and Nisa began talking. Yolanda pointed to her husband in the picture and said, “My king.” and laughed. They talked and colored in their pictures.

Nekabari was helping to make a card for Sabat. He asked the group how to spell her name. Abir said several times “Sabat. Ssss. Sabat.”

Abir then said that they could write, “Sorry for your baby.”

Nekabari said that in English they would say, “Sorry for your loss.” Abir nodded and said ok.

Nisa asked Nekabari, “Can you write down those words please?”

Nekabari turned and wrote on the board:

- Sorry for your loss.
- Our condolences.
- My symphony.

Another woman returned from PACT time and joined Yolanda, Nisa and Sofia. Nisa immediately told the woman about Sabat and her baby. The woman’s face dropped and she said that this was very sad.
card, a white piece of construction paper, was being passed around and Cindy told the class that they needed to write to Sabat in English so that she would know what it said. When Yolanda received the card, she copied a phrase from the board and signed her name.

The women continued to color their family pictures. Nisa was upset because she used black for her family members’ eyes instead of blue or green. She told Nekabari that her picture was damaged and asked if she could have another paper so that she could fix the eye colors. Nekabari went to get her a new piece of paper.

The women told Nisa that it was okay, but she was very concerned that her picture was damaged.

Yolanda asked Nisa, “Have blue eyes? Your husband have blue eyes?”

Nisa responded, “Yes, blue eyes.”

The class continued to buzz about writing a message to Sabat about her baby. The women also continued to color their family pictures.

Nisa began drawing a new picture. Yolanda watched as she did this and then asked Nisa if she remembered the color of the eyes. Nisa said, “Yes, blue! Blue eyes!” She and Yolanda both laughed.

Nisa said something about the color yellow and Yolanda said that yellow was her last name.

Nisa asked, “Your last name is yellow? It’s true?”


Nisa watched them. She said, “Really? Yellow?”

Yolanda said, “Yes.”

Sofía asked, “De donde viene el apellido?”

Yolanda said, “De mi mama.”

They continued to talk and work. Yolanda jokingly asked Nisa one more time about the color of her family’s eyes.

By the end of the semester, Cindy had begun to integrate story writing into the class activities.

Parents with more advanced writing skills were asked to write about an important moment in their lives and share it with the class. The parents read these stories out loud and then Cindy facilitated a class discussion about the stories. Hanifa was the first parent to share her story with the class.

(Field Notes, Aster Elementary, December 16, 2014): Cindy said that they would start class with a story from Hanifa. The class turned and looked at Hanifa. Hanifa said that she would tell her story from her seat. Cindy nodded and said that when she was finished, they would have a discussion.

Hanifa spoke in a loud, clear voice. She read a story that she had hand-written on a piece of notebook
paper. She said that she was born in Iraq and that when she was a girl there was a war between Iraq and Iran. She said that there was fighting for a long time and then one day there was no fighting. She said that all of the people went into the street to celebrate but then they were shooting and ash and fire was falling. She said that the fire landed on her mother and they had to go to the hospital.

The class was silent as Hanifa read. Afterwards, they clapped. Cindy asked the class in a serious tone, “What did you hear?”

Nisa said, “War in Iraq and Iran. She is from Iraq.”

Another Arabic-speaking woman said, “There was fire.”

Cindy asked each student if he/she heard Hanifa say that there was fire and they all said yes. She then asked how to say fire in Arabic and the women told her. She asked me how to say it in Spanish and I said “Fuego.” Yolanda nodded in agreement.

Cindy asked, “What else did you hear?” She started calling out random names for answers.

An Arabic-speaking woman said, “Mother, father, son.”

Hanifa said, “Cousin too.”

Cindy told the class that they need to listen for words. She said that it is hard, but they have to listen for those words.

An Arabic-speaking woman spoke first in Arabic. Another woman listened to her and then said, “War” and the first woman said, “Yes.”

One woman leaned over and looked at Hanifa’s paper.

Cindy laughed and told her “Don’t read! Listen.” The women also laughed.

Two women were raising their hands. Cindy called on others instead. Then, she asked Hanifa to re-read the part about the hospital.

Cindy asked Ester what she had heard in that part of the story.

Ester said, “Visited father in the hospital.”

Hanifa corrected her by saying, “My mother. My father died.”

Cindy called on people one by one to tell what she heard. All of the parents answered when they were called on. Then Cindy asked if anyone had any questions for Hanifa.

Nisa asked many questions. Cindy asked if anyone else had questions for Hanifa and six people raised their hands.

One question was, “How many days did your mom sleep in the hospital?”

Hanifa said only one day because she was not hurt.
Someone else asked “How many years in the war?”

Hanifa said, “Eight years.”

Cindy said, “Oooh! My goodness” with a concerned look.

There was some talking in parents’ home languages.

Nekabari asked her if the people were happy that the war was over and that is why they didn’t mind the injury.

The class was quiet.

Nekabari then said, “That was a long one.” and chuckled. He repeated his question and broke up the sentences to smaller chunks as he re-stated it.

Hanifa said, “Yeah yeah. Was over. Was cold.”

Nisa said, “The weather was cold. She said she was born too.”

Cindy said that was a good question. “How old was she?”

Hanifa responded by saying the year that she was born.

Cindy asked, “Nisa, did you hear the year?”

Nisa said, “Yes. 1980.”

Cindy wrote this on the board. She asked Hanifa when the war ended and she said 1988. Cindy wrote:

\[
\begin{array}{l}
1988 \\
1980 \\
\end{array}
\]

She asked a student, “How old was she?”

Nisa answered, “Eight.”

Cindy said that she was waiting for the other student to answer. She told Nisa that she has to wait so that others can think.

Cindy asked, “Hanifa, were you scared when you saw mom bleeding?”

Hanifa said, “Yes, but mom no.” She laughed.

Cindy told the class that Hanifa had tears in her eyes when she told the story. She said that the story had a lot of emotion. She said that was good because it made a good story to share.

The class clapped.
Melanie, English Teacher: Blazing Star Elementary

Melanie began each English class with a verbal overview of the topic that they would review for the day. Then, Melanie instructed the class to pull out their fluency sheet to practice. The fluency sheets were short stories that the parents read out loud with Melanie. Melanie read short chunks, about three or four words, of each sentence out loud and the parents repeated her. As they read, parents underlined or highlighted any words that they did not know. After reading, Melanie asked for any words that they did not know. She wrote these words on the board and told the class their meanings. Melanie defined most of the words by providing examples of how to use them. Either before or after defining the words, Melanie put the parents into pairs to practice reading to each other. Each parent was always partnered with someone who did not share his or her home language. The parents then took turns reading the passage out loud. Melanie often reminded the parents to practice pronouncing things that they sometimes have difficulty with, such as leaving of the ending sound or saying “es” at the beginning of a word that began with the letter s, such as “es-school”.

(Field Notes, Blazing Star Elementary, November 13, 2014): Melanie told the class to take out their fluency papers. She said that they would practice for Monday, when they would each read the fluency paper out loud to her.

Melanie read the title of the fluency paper: “Clean Up Day.” She read the fluency paper out loud in short phrases of two to four words and the class repeated after her. Each parent had a paper and each had different words highlighted on their papers.

After they finished reading, Melanie said that she would put them each with a partner. She said that as they read with their partner, they should highlight words that they are not sure of, even if they are words that they have discussed before. Melanie put the parents into pairs. Each person was with someone who spoke a different home language. Gabriela was partnered with Kyle, a volunteer.

The parents began reading right away. Cyntia helped the Arabic-speaking mother that she was working with pronounce several words in the passage. They then switched turns and Cyntia began reading.

Kyle and Gabriela were discussing what the phrase “of course.” Kyle told her that he didn’t know how to explain it and then he asked Melanie how she would explain it. Melanie looked puzzle and searched for words to explain the phrase. She said that the word of is normally a preposition but in this case it is different.

Melanie turned and asked me how to say of in Spanish.

I said “De.” Then, I said that the phrase of course could mean “de acuerdo” or “claro”.

Melanie laughed and said thanks. Gabriela nodded her head and thanked me as well.
Rajan, a Kurdish-speaking father, raised his hand and asked Melanie about the word basically. He asked, “Could you give me an example?”

Melanie began giving examples of the phrase basically. She was having trouble explaining the phrase but she gave several examples of how to use it in a sentence Rajan pointed to where the word was used on the page and said that he still didn’t know what it meant. Melanie said that she would try to use it more in class so that he could hear different uses of the word.

Melanie told the class to grab a computer. There were black computer bags on a side table. Rajan stood up and began to pass out computers to people.

Rajan yawned and said, “Basically, I am tired teacher.” He laughed and so did Melanie.

Melanie explained that after practicing the fluency paper, the class also completed a comprehension exercise about it. The comprehension exercises were multiple choice and fill-in-the-blank questions.

**Large group activities.** After completing the fluency exercise, Melanie began the large group lesson and activity. During this time, Melanie gave a short lecture about English grammar. During the time of this study, these lectures focused on the different verb tenses. It was common for the large group activity to take the entire class session. Melanie presented information and then had the parents do an activity such as writing sentences or completing a worksheet. Melanie explained her approach to planning for the class in an interview:

“I plan for it based on…what I did as a classroom teacher. Having taught all different grade levels I can see that when you’re in kindergarten you learn verbs, when you’re in first and second and third and fourth, all the way up to twelfth you’re still learning verbs — you’re still learning what they are and how they work and how to use them in this sentence. So, I’ve taken their levels which is most of them I kind of average it as second grade, some are lower some are higher, but in order to get them all involved I kind of average them at a second grade and I kind of go with what I would have done if I were teaching second graders English. And it seems to work….It’s definitely a student-directed type of learning because I don’t have a, I don’t have a set lesson plan where I’m teaching this and this and this and this and we have to get through it and that’s all there is to it. It’s catered to them based on what they are or are not getting. If I have to spend three months on past tense verbs, then we’ll spend three months on them. There’s no sense of going forward or moving on if they’re not understanding it.”

(Melanie, English Teacher, Blazing Star Elementary, Interview, December 9, 2014)

The following vignette is an example of a common verb lesson and exercise. Melanie began by reviewing
the simple present tense and then asked the parents to write sentences using that tense. After reading the sentences, Melanie also included the present progressive tense into the lesson.

(Field Notes, Star Elementary, October 30, 2014, Blazing): Melanie said that they would begin class by reviewing verbs. She asked the parents if they remember the pronouns that they studied and they said them one by one: I you, he, she, it, we and they. She wrote these words on the board.

Melanie said that they would start by reviewing the be verbs. She wrote: (be)verbs on the board and then told the class that this verb had nothing to do with the word be. She wrote on the board:

\[
\begin{array}{ccc}
\text{is} & \text{are} & \text{am} \\
\end{array}
\]

Melanie said that they were going to match up the verbs with the pronouns. She said each pronoun-verb partnership one by one and said that these words always go together. She wrote the following on the board as she spoke:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pronouns</th>
<th>(Simple) Present Tense Verbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you</td>
<td>are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>he/she/it</td>
<td>is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>we</td>
<td>are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they</td>
<td>are</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Melanie said that these are always pairs, even when you flip the order to make a question, like when you say, “Are you in class today?”

Melanie then said that yesterday they reviewed different verbs in the simple present tense and wrote the following words on the board:

| go       |
| walk     |
| talk     |
| speak    |
| love     |
| look     |

Almost all of the students had a binder or folder and a notebook out. They flipped through pages in their notebooks to find the notes from yesterday.

Melanie told the class definitions of the words and pointed out that all of these verbs change for the he/she/it pronouns. She said that they were: goes, walks, talks, and speaks. She asked the parents to read aloud all of the forms of these verbs. They said each pronoun and the correct corresponding verb form for each of the verbs.

Melanie reviewed that the form of the verbs for he/she/it end with an s. An Arabic-speaking woman asked her if this happens all of the time. Melanie said that it happens most of the time. She said that sometimes the verbs change for the third person. She asked if they knew what this was called and no one answered. Melanie wrote I have and She has on the board. She said that this is called an irregular verb. She told them that they know the word regular and that the prefix ir means not, so together it means not regular. Melanie said that they would get a list of irregular verbs in the past tense soon.
Melanie checked to see if the parents had finished a worksheet from earlier; they had. She commented that they hadn’t done negatives for these verbs yet. She walked to the board and wrote:

negatives  
positives

Melanie reviewed what the words negative and positive meant. She drew a number line and pointed out that in PACT time they might have seen the students working with negative and positive numbers. She told them that in English they also have words that make things positive and negative. She turned to the board and wrote as she read them out loud:

will not  
do not

can not

One woman said, “is not.”

Melanie said, “yes” and added this to the board.

Melanie explained that these are opposites. She said that if you say you will do something, the opposite is that you will not do it. She said that they could also make these words into contractions. Melanie quickly reviewed the contractions for each of these phrases and wrote them next to them. She wrote I’m not next to the phrase I am not. She said the others out loud but did not write them.

All of the students were writing in notebooks. They were writing down everything that Melanie wrote on the whiteboard.

Melanie asked if there were any questions about what they learned yesterday. One parent quietly said, “I no.” Melanie paused and then told them that they were going to do a quick assignment and then work in the Ventures book.

She started to write on the board and the marker didn’t work. She threw it away.

Melanie turned to the class and said, “You’re gonn….I almost used lazy English again. Gonna is something that you’ll hear.” She wrote on the board:

sounds like --- gunna  
written - gonna  
supposed to be - going to

Some of the parents laughed.

Melanie then assigned the class ten sentences to write in their notebooks. She said and wrote:

5 (be) verbs  
5 “clean”

She reviewed each form of the verb clean in the simple present and wrote it on the board.

She told the class to begin writing the sentences now. She said that she, Jen and Kyle could help them if they have questions. She told them to not be afraid to ask.

Kyle stood up and walked around. He looked at the parents’ papers. All of the parents were writing. Melanie sat down with a student and talked about the sentences that she was writing. Everyone was writing quietly.
After looking over most of the class’s sentences, Melanie walked to the front of the room. She told the class that they did a nice job with the sentences and that the be-verb seems to be easier for them. She commented that some of them have started using the present progressive.

Melanie told them she had given them a verb paper with all of the forms on it. One Spanish-speaking mother turned through her binder and took out the verb paper. She held it up. Melanie borrowed her paper. She pointed to the present progressive column on this paper. She said that this is when you take the be verb, an action verb and add -ing on the end. She said that if they wrote their sentences that way, they are not wrong, the just didn’t use the simple present tense.

Melanie wrote the present-progressive tense of clean for each pronoun on the board: I am cleaning, you are cleaning, he/she/it is cleaning, we are cleaning, they are cleaning. She said that they would do the present progressive in class next week with even more verbs. Melanie said again that if the parents wrote this, it was okay and it was correct English. She said that this is something that people use all of the time but they don’t know that it is the present progressive. She said that if you asked someone on the street if they knew what the present progressive was, they probably wouldn’t know. She asked Kyle if he knew what it was and he said no. The parents laughed.

Melanie said that if they wrote it, it is correct English and this is what is most important. She looked at the clock and said that they probably would not do the Ventures books today. She asked the class to pull out their fluency sheet again to practice instead.

Occasionally, Melanie assigned computer activities for large group time. These activities involved the parents completing grammar exercises on a website. Once, the parents were instructed to spend time listening to and reading children’s stories on Tumble Books. Another common large group activity was a read aloud day: on Monday, parents checked out books from the school library that they felt they could read and understand and then read the book to the class on Wednesday. The class listened quietly while each parent read his/her book out loud.

**Small group activities.** Melanie placed the class in small groups based on their English-language abilities. After large group time, she visited these groups to address parents’ language needs. Melanie explained:

“It’s just like I would do in my classroom. That’s where my experience comes from, is from the classroom, so I use a lot of that. In a regular classroom…fourth grade classroom, you have readers at a high second grade, you have readers at a seventh grade, you know they’re all different levels as well, so I do the same thing in here. I teach a whole group lesson, so I teach one thing to everybody, but then they’re grouped in tables by ability. So then when I’m done giving the overall lesson, they’ll have an assignment and I’ll go around to each table and work with them at their level. So those that speak English very well we work on you know, maybe we need to write it in a complete sentence. You didn’t write what you just told me. You said one thing and then you wrote
another. So let’s work on writing out the whole sentence. Some of them, it’s just getting the idea of what I just talked about and sitting with them and re-teaching the whole thing again, to the lower level ones. So yeah, they work in, I guess you could call them ability groups.

Well the testing that they do gives a pretty good indication [of a student’s level] sometimes. Sometimes they get the scores back and think that’s really low or that’s really high based on what I experience with them in the classroom. Which, again, isn’t really any different than any standardized test with any student…Well, I have one student who…doesn’t seem to understand much. He, he, does not answer questions, just smiles and nods when a question is asked…But his test score shows that the he, he’s understanding at a much higher level. So, you know, that test score doesn’t do a whole lot for me in the classroom. Even if he is at that level, if he’s not producing or showing in the classroom then, I can’t do a whole lot with him…I had another student (laughs) who she felt, she was really low and then I got her test score back and she’s one of the highest, to the point that I took her Ventures book away and said “You’re not working in that one anymore! You need to jump up two levels!” and gave her a new book (laughs). And that was just her perception of herself. She didn’t speak English, she didn’t know. When I speak with her she understands and she uses English pretty well, so I thought she was a little bit higher than what she thought she was…but not to that extent. So, we moved up in the books and we’ll see what happens. She actually almost tested out of the Best Plus and into the TABE, so…"

(Melanie, English Teacher, Blazing Star Elementary, Interview, December 9, 2014)

Melanie worked individually with the students in a similar manner that was illustrated in the previous vignette each day. Unlike in John and Cindy’s classes, the Venture books were not the focus of small group learning. Instead, parents worked through their books individually. They completed the student workbook at their own pace, starting at the beginning. Sometimes they had class time dedicated to this, but were encouraged to also complete these activities at home.

### Literacies

Traditional reading and writing activities were most common in Melanie’s classroom. The parents practiced reading fluency exercises, took notes, wrote sentences, and read aloud children’s stories. They also completed book reports about books that they read with their children at home. Often, moments in class also sparked conversations and other literacies.

*Helping at the school.* (Field Notes, Blazing Star Elementary, November 12, 2014): Melanie announced the groups in which the parents were supposed to practice their fluency papers. Lorena moved over to sit with Blanca. Blanca immediately started reading. As she read, Hien, a Vietnamese-speaking man, came to join them.

*Lorena and Blanca read the fluency sheet very quickly. Lorena then whispered, “Hien, your turn. Read [to] us.” Hien picked up his paper and began reading. He also read quickly and loudly. The group was finished before the others. The story they had read was about spending a day to clean up a park.*
Loren asked Hien, “And you one day went to somewhere to clean? In the school?”

Hien said that he helped in the summer. He said that he helped with kids and their bicycles.

Loren asked, “In the school?”

Hien nodded yes and said, “In the summer. One day the teacher and the kids come together and do the bicycles.”

Loren had a puzzled and a surprised look on her face. She said, “I don’t know. They like help but I don’t know when is that day.”

Hien said, “In the summer.”

Loren told the group that she knew about a day when they cleaned the leaves at the school but she wasn’t sure when it was. Hien said that it was on Sunday. Loren said that she didn’t know. They continued to talk. Hien said something about taking his kids to basketball practice at the school last weekend and Loren said that her kids did not go. They continued to talk about school events that they had attended until Melanie called the class together again.

Writing a check. (Field Notes, Blazing Star Elementary, December 19, 2014): It was the last class of the semester and Gabriela was talking with Blanca and Carolina about paying for the gifts that they had bought the teachers. They had all decided to go in on a gift together and were figuring out who else besides Gabriela still needed to pay. The three women talked and looked around. “Cuántas faltan?/ How many are left?” one woman asked. They named a couple of students. Gabriela took out a paper and looked at a list of names on it. They continued to talk in a huddle.

Gabriela walked over and asked Hien how she should pay him. She asked if a check would be okay. He said yes and she took out her checkbook. She gave it to him and asked him to write his name. She and Hien giggled a bit when she did this and he wrote his name on the check. Then, she took the checkbook back to the table where her purse was, a different table than where she had sat with the other women, and filled out the rest of the information.

Gabriela asked Cyntia, who was sitting across the room, how to write veintiuno in English. Cyntia spelled out twenty-one in English. Gabriela didn’t hear her and came over to Cyntia’s table. Cyntia took out an index card from her checkbook. She said, “Sí. Así es. Aquí lo tengo./ Yes, that’s how it is. I have it here.”

The card had a list of the numbers through one hundred with the English words written out next to them. She pointed at the number twenty-one. It looked like this:

21 twenty one

Gabriela wrote the number on the check and then showed the completed check to Cyntia. Cyntia told her that it was correct and Gabriela quietly walked over and gave the check to Hien.

As mentioned earlier, the students often used computers during English class. Often they used English-learning websites to practice grammar exercises or read books; sometimes they did other activities
like practice sending emails. Parents also used their cellphones during class, mostly for translation purposes. The following vignette depicts a class when parents were using technology.

(Field Notes, Blazing Star Elementary, November 13, 2014): Each parent had a laptop in front of them. Cyntia asked Melanie if they would play games today. Melanie said that they would put their translator’ name in their contacts and then they will practice sending an email. After that she said they would play English games.

Shula, an Arabic-speaking woman, opened her computer and sat quietly. The others were putting in their password. I moved over and helped Shula by telling her to click on guest and put in the password that was written on the board: Guest. She needed to put in the password about 3 times because at first she did it without the capital G. I instructed her to press the caps lock key first to get a capital G.

After all of the parents signed into the computers, they sat quietly and waited for instructions. Melanie told the class to go to Gmail and log into their accounts.

Melanie helped Rajan sign into Gmail. She dictated what he should write when signing in. She showed him a sheet with his email and password. His password was Rajan54321.

I helped Shula and Blanca with their computers. Blanca signed into Gmail quickly and without a problem. I noticed that she had a lot of emails from Craig’s List in her inbox.

Shula did not know her email address. When Melanie was finished helping Rajan, we called her over to help Shula with her email address. Melanie showed Shula where she had written the email address and password down in her notebook. Shula began to type it in one letter at a time. She used the laptop’s touch screen feature to put the cursor in certain places and did not use the mouse. I helped her find the contacts icon once she was in Gmail so she could put in the name and email address of the translator. She did this by touching the screen and typing letter by letter.

Blanca said that she had a question about her iPhone. At first she asked if she could put this email address on her phone. I told her that she could, but I didn’t know how to do it on an iPhone because I wasn’t familiar with the iPhone settings. I asked Kyle if he had an iPhone and he did. He took her phone, went to settings, and showed Blanca where she could enter a new email address and password. He asked her to put in her password and then the emails synced.

Blanca then went to the app store. She said that when she tried to download something, it asked her for the password. She asked if she could put in her email password. Kyle and I realized that she was talking about her Apple ID and password, not her email password. We explained that these are not the same. Kyle said that he didn’t know if she could change her Apple ID password on her phone, but that she could do it on the computer. Or she could go to the phone store and they will help her change it.

Melanie came over and told Blanca and Shula to be sure to write an email to her. She said that they could practice sending her an email and then if they want to practice at home they could send her one too. Blanca turned to her laptop and typed a short email to Melanie the email quickly. She used appropriate punctuation in her message, but did not use capital letters. She typed very quickly.

I showed Shula where to click to open a new email and showed her that if she pressed M in the “To” section, Melanie’s name would appear. She did this but Melanie’s name did not appear. I told Shula to check and see if Melanie’s name was in her contacts. It was not. I asked Melanie what her email address was and she wrote it on the board. Shula wrote Melanie’s name and email address in letter by letter under
contacts.

We then walked through the steps of writing an email again. I explained what the subject line meant and Shula decided to write Hello. I helped her spell it. I told her that she could then write whatever message she wanted to Melanie.

The parents were sending Melanie emails. Melanie checked her phone when it made a sound indicating that she had a new email and then wrote a short email back to each parent right away.

Lorena logged in to the guest account with the password quickly. She then told Melanie that she didn’t know where to go. Melanie explained that she should go to Firefox and type in Gmail. Lorena clicked on Firefox and began typing. She put in her email address into the web browser and it came up as an error. I told her that first she has to put in gmail.com. She did this and then correct page came up. Then she typed in her email and password without any problem.

Melanie was helping Cyntia. Cyntia had logged in without a problem. Melanie showed her where to go to add a contact and told her to put in Fransisca’s, the bilingual liaison, information. Cyntia looked at the board and typed it without a problem. Melanie told her that then she should practice sending her an email.

Lorena was stuck on a page from Gmail that was asking her for her phone number. I asked her if she wanted to put her phone number in and she said no. I showed her where she could click skip. She clicked on skip by using the mouse. Lorena quickly went to contacts and added Fransisca’s information. She started to write an email to Melanie shortly after that.

As they wrote, Blanca asked Lorena how to spell the word everyday. Lorena spelled it for her in Spanish and Blanca typed it in her email.

Cyntia asked me if I could read her email. I saw that she had written the entire email in the subject line. I explained that the subject line was to just give a title to the email. I told her how she could copy and paste the information from the subject line and into the body of the email. She followed my instructions and did this. She added the word Hi to the subject line and then sent the email to Melanie. Cyntia then sat quietly. I asked her if she was going to play the games next and she said that she was waiting for the teacher to reply before she started the games. She kept the webpage open. Melanie replied pretty quickly and Cyntia read her response. She then typed in the address of the games website that was written on the board and began playing a game about adjectives.

Lorena was still writing an email to Melanie. She was writing a long email about her kids helping her neighbor who was sick.

Melanie told the class that they can write to her whenever they want. She said that they can send her an email from home if they are bored and want to practice English.

Everyone was quiet and working on the computer, either typing an email or playing a game. Lorena asked Kyle if he would help her with some words. Kyle showed her that if the word has a red line under it, it meant that the computer would correct it for her. He showed her how to right click to find the correct word. Lorena tried this and it didn’t work. She had clicked on the left side of the mouse pad. Kyle told her to use the other side of the mouse pad. She did and it worked. She beamed and told Kyle thank you.

Cyntia finished the adjective game. She didn’t click on the box that said Play Again. Instead, she scrolled up and selected another game from the top. This time she selected a game about to be verbs.
Lorena was still writing her email. She asked Kyle, “How can I see it is correct?”

Kyle asked if she was talking about the red line. She said yes and he told her to click the right side of the mouse pad, “This side” he said as he pointed. She did this. Then, Lorena pointed to the screen. The word had disappeared. Kyle told her how to spell it correctly and she did.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

This final chapter presents my conclusions about the ethnographic data gathered from Chesterfield Public Schools’ family literacy program. It describes the theoretical and analytical interplay between the empirical findings, theoretical framework, and literature review. Through this analysis, I consider how the conception of family literacy at CPS changed from the idea of intergenerational literacy practices to that of partnerships through adult education as it was appropriated into practice by the key stakeholders. From there, I consider how this space influenced literacy and language learning. I draw conclusions about how the physical context of the program, an elementary school, influenced the deficit perspectives that program personnel held about parents. I then suggest that a school-sponsored family literacy program has the resources to advance the professionalization of the field of Adult Basic Education for English Language Learners in a way that incorporates culturally relevant pedagogies and sociocultural literacies. I conclude with remarks about the remaining task of learning about programmatic family literacy sites.

From Comprehensive Model to Practice: The Appropriation of Family Literacy

One way to understand how family literacy was enacted and experienced in Chesterfield Public Schools is to consider how the comprehensive model of family literacy was appropriated by the individuals in the focal sites. Levinson and Sutton (2001) wrote that policy “is always appropriated by practitioners and intermediaries; it is the creative way through which, “agents ‘take in’ elements of policy, thereby incorporating these discursive and institutional resources into their own schemes of interest, motivation, and action” (p. 3). In CPS, the comprehensive model took on the role of the family literacy program’s policy: it was present on the districts’ promotional materials (brochures, posters and websites) and was the adhesive that bound discourses of the multiple players in the program, particularly by the program personnel (teachers, coordinators, and administrators), both inside and outside of the classroom. While the school district was no longer required to adhere to this model as a policy to guide their program in order to receive money from Toyota, the original comprehensive model lingered as the beating heart of the family literacy
program. Nevertheless, different people conceived the comprehensive model differently and each component was appropriated uniquely at each of the focal sites. Teachers approached teaching English in myriad ways, drawing on a variety of past experiences and resources, while coordinators also prepared for and implemented the parent time class distinctly. Parents spent different amounts of time in their children’s classrooms during PACT time and their observations were integrated into the program differently.

In the first section of chapter four, I presented four general themes that described the various perspectives through which people approached family literacy (parent engagement in schools, parental empowerment, helping children learn, and a support system) and how these different perspectives became enacted during the class time. Adding to the complexity and plurality of the appropriation of family literacy is the fact that not all of the participants at each site shared the same visions concerning what the program was or should have been. Nor was it just the case that the school personnel envisioned the program in one way while the parents perceived it in another. Rather, the perspectives overlapped and were shared by combinations of people in varying roles within the program and generally centered on what the parents or the school could gain by the parents’ participation in the program. This was most obvious in the perspectives that the program empowered parents, developed school-parent partnerships, and provided a support system for parents. Helping children learn was the only category that was not overtly intended for the adults (school personnel or the parents) in the program; however, the only action that the adults took during the family literacy program toward this goal was attending PACT time to observe their children learning. The parents were then expected to take actions at home that would support their children’s academic learning, such as reading with their children and making sure that they did their homework.

While it could be argued that if academic improvements did occur as a result of PACT time - the child would likely benefit in many ways - the school also benefitted from the child’s academic improvement and compliance with school practices, such as returning homework. Epitomizing this perspective was Nancy’s comment that “ultimately the goal [of family literacy] is that this child will do better in school and will raise those test scores” (Nancy, Family Literacy Specialist, Interview, February 28, 2014). The focal schools, like all public schools in the state of Nebraska, needed to report standardized test scores to the state.
department as evidence of student achievement and of advancement toward adequate yearly progress. But her view did not explain well what usually happened throughout the program, nor was it central in explaining the parents’ rationale for participating in family literacy.

**Family Literacy: An Amalgamation of ABE-ELL and Parent-school Partnerships**

As the comprehensive model of family literacy was appropriated into practice, then, it is not surprising that two components were emphasized more than others: adult basic education for English language learners (ABE-ELL) and parent time class. Children’s learning and the parents’ limited involvement in their children’s classrooms were either alluded to through lessons or discussed briefly during PACT time debriefing. This indicates a change in the concept of ‘family literacy’ for this particular setting: instead of families practicing literacies (either traditional cognitive literacies or sociocultural ‘new’ literacies) together, ‘family literacy’ became a fusion of adult basic education for English language learners with parent-school partnerships: intergenerational literacy learning was largely in the background. Elementary school concepts and behaviors were heavily integrated into the curriculum for both English and parent time classes. Clear assumptions about and expectations for the parents were consistently integrated throughout lessons. Most of these assumptions and expectations were associated with the parents’ involvement with their child’s academic learning.

At a glance, this situation followed a neo-deficit approach to working with families in a family literacy program: families were generally looked at as in need of some type of intervention to better support their children in school. In 2005, Kendrick et al. highlighted the renewed attention to the hegemony of literacy practices in family literacy programs and more recently, Baquedano-Lopez et al. (2013) stated that a neo-deficit ideologies are often present in parent outreach programs and greatly affect parental involvement in schools. The idea that the family literacy program at CPS may have embedded and promulgated a deficit attitude towards the newcomer families that attended this program is not surprising nor is it new knowledge to the field of family literacy, although it remains problematic. What is interesting and has been worth
pursuing in a more detailed analysis is how a deficit ideology about parents played out in an elementary school context where ‘family’ literacy primarily meant ‘adult basic education for English language learners’.

**Who are the elementary students?**

The partnership between Chesterfield Public Schools and Regional Community College set a stage in which ABE-ELL could be mapped onto elementary school learning. Housing the family literacy site within elementary schools situated the ABE-ELL learning experience within the social latticework of an elementary school. Innate to this social structure was the institutional power that has been used to reform the minds and behaviors of those bound to the social institutions (Foucault, 1970; 1977). In elementary schools, this means that children are divided and segmented into classrooms, teachers form the dispersed omnipresent eye of authority by observing the students and monitoring their progress, and all intentional interactions are determined and supervised by teachers. Even the school’s main office serves as a panopticon of power: the administrators have a centralized form of control over daily happenings by determining schedules, academic requirements, class lists and access to the building and often have some type of technology, such as an intercom system, telephone or video camera, that permits them to in some way observe any of the classrooms throughout the day. Even though they are often its agents, the teachers also find themselves as subjects of discipline in this panopticon: they are isolated and constantly observed by administrators who exert the omnipresent power of the sovereign, albeit through classroom visits and student grade reports.

The family literacy program adapted to this structure. Not only were the children isolated into classrooms, so were the adults. Teachers of English were the eyes of authority, closely regulating the parents’ actions (such as expected behaviors while attending PACT time) while in the institution, yet the teachers needed to answer to the authority of the coordinators and administrators (and to some degree the NCFL) who often visited classrooms. From this perspective, the parents were the subjects of discipline, as individuals in a system that sought to change their behavior (i.e. language skills and parenting practices). They assumed a similar position in the elementary school as their children did, even though their attendance was not compulsory. A key part of the process of disciplining with the intent to reform, according to Foucault
(1977), was the individualization of a subject: by separating a person from a larger sect of society that resembles her quotidian language and cultural practices, she could reflect personally, not collectively, on the norm that the institution wished to impose on her.

Foucault (1977) wrote,

“The disciplines mark the moment when the reversal of the political axis of individualization – as one might call it – takes place...In a disciplinary régime, on the other hand, individualization is descending': as power becomes more anonymous and more functional, those on whom it is exercised tend to be more strongly individualized; it is exercised by surveillance rather than ceremonies, by observation rather than commemorative accounts, by comparative measures that have the ‘norm’ as reference rather than genealogies giving ancestors points of reference; by ‘gaps’ rather than deeds...and when one wishes to individualize the healthy, normal and law-abiding adult, it is always by asking him how much of the child he has in him, what secret madness lies within him, what fundamental crime he has dreamt of committing” (p. 192-193, emphasis added).

The parents in family literacy were perceived as being culturally different from each other and from the supposedly ‘normative’, English-speaking, American society that upheld certain school and parenting practices. A key piece to Foucault’s reform process is to convince the adult (in this case the participating parents) to see their deviations from dominant norms as child-like or as developmentally malleable. During the times in family literacy when the parents were referred to as children (as ‘kids’ or ‘friends’) and were taught through elementary-influenced curriculum, the concept of “how much of the child [they] had in [them]” was being illuminated. Revealing the parents’ lack of knowledge of elementary concepts and of the dominant language (English) in tandem with convincing the parents that they needed to know these things and change their behaviors for the betterment of their children presented an opportunity to develop the self-regulation necessary for deep self-reflection that would change the parents’ behavior (Foucault 1977) to those that were more desirable by the school: speaking English and executing certain parenting practices.
Agency in the social structure.

While analyzing the family literacy program as an ABE-ELL and parent-school partnership amalgamation, it is important to recognize that the social structure that imposes discipline within social institutions is semiotic and because of this, it is also malleable. Through the above Foucauldian analysis, the system must first attract the parents through certain ‘carrots’ (e.g. English classes and academic betterment of their children) that then arrange for a type of ‘discipline’ to ensue that will change individual lives, home practices, and ultimately, the families (children and parents) that the school works with. However, research has consistently shown that families, particularly those who are learning English as an additional language, have been attracted to these programs despite their neo-deficit lens because they have viewed them as sites in which they could learn skills that would help them gain access to economic and cultural capital in society and as a way to provide opportunities and experiences for their children to acquire basic knowledge about language and literacy (Philips & Sample, 2005; Turner, 2009). To borrow Freire’s (1968) phrasing, such programs are viewed as sites that can help parents ‘learn the word’ (and the cultural codes that are innate to it) ‘in order to navigate, participate in, and possibly change the world’. Paradoxically, then, the disciplinarian, neo-deficit discourse can be co-opted to offer emancipatory potential. English language learning and parent-school partnerships in family literacy, then, were not necessarily imposed nor were they a unidirectional system of power.

The parents’ agency and navigation of the family literacy can be looked at through the lenses of Bourdieu’s (1991) notion of cultural capital and Goffman’s (1959) theory of the performance of social roles. Bourdieu (1991) viewed the social structure as semiotic and constructed through language, but he argued, “all linguistic practices are measured against the legitimate practices, i.e. the practices of those who are dominant” (p.53). Learning the language of the dominant class is essential to being able to navigate the latticework of the social structure that Foucault described, but it is not enough to merely speak the language. The degree to which one’s linguistic practices and accompanying habitus compare to the dominant class is largely important in determining the success that she will have navigating the structure of society (Bourdieu, 1991). The Latina mothers who attended family literacy expressed wanting to learn the dominant language,
English, to better function in Chesterfield. They offered clear reasons for wanting to speak English, ranging from to get around in their daily lives, to get a job, to pursue higher studies, or even to communicate better with their children who were, in their opinions, surpassing the women with their English skills. The mothers were executing agency to make key decisions about language learning that would permit them to gain more cultural capital within society and diminish emerging power imbalances with their children (Velázquez, 2014).

However, it is important to also look at the mothers’ second most articulated reason for joining the family literacy program: besides learning English, they expressed a desire to spend more time with their children, particularly the young children, and the family literacy program was a way to accomplish this. Many mothers entered when their children were in kindergarten and had plans to stay in the program until their child finished elementary school. They were following the disciplinary regulations and practices that the school wanted them to observe, especially by going to PACT time, but were accomplishing their own goal of maintaining happy children who did not cry and were motivated to go to school. Consequently, they gained a certain cultural capital that was recognized and legitimized by the school: they were a “good match” for the program and were celebrated based on the behaviors that they exerted. By being a good match for the program, the mothers were able to remain in the program and as a result, they also gained a support system that could carry over outside of the program and into their home communities (Hamann, 1997). Or, as Sofia and Marina mentioned, could give them a purpose to leave the house and spend their morning in nice company.

As much as parents were subjects in the family literacy classroom, they were also agents performing social roles for different purposes. Goffman (1959) defined a social performance as, “all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by her continuous presence before a particular set of observers which has some influence over the observers” (p. 22). A social performance has three key players: those who perform, those performed to, and outsiders, who neither perform the show nor observe it but have influence over the performance. How parents performed within the family literacy program was evidenced by their responses to and interaction with the family literacy program (e.g. cooperation, silence,
or subversion). Through these reactions, parents invoked different fronts that helped them to meet their goals and to gain a certain type of capital, or that helped them reject the perspectives about them that were being imposed onto them. Goffman (1959) defined a front as an equipment of a standard kind that is intentionally or unwittingly employed by a person during her performance and that is determined by the setting, appearance, and manner of everyone involved.

When the women were listening to a presentation about domestic abuse, they utilized the bilingual liaisons as interpreters to change the topic to a discussion about disciplining their children and as a result, modifying their roles from possibly abused women to mothers who wish to properly discipline their children. Or, when the Kurdish women were utilizing Zara to help them construct a schedule for their spring break class, they were presenting themselves as meeting Anne’s expectations of them as good mothers. Even the parents’ confident, lively discussions in their home languages during the presentation about gardening were evidence of their performance as experienced gardeners who had an abundance of knowledge. In all of these situations, the parents utilized the bilingual liaisons to help them perform. In Goffman’s (1959) terms, the liaisons served as informers: someone who pretends to the performers to be a member of their team, is allowed to come backstage to acquire information and then openly or secretly sells out the show to the audience. In this sense, particularly regarding the example of the Kurdish women making a schedule, the bilingual liaisons served as the informers that navigated between the parents and the schools. They articulated the school’s behind the scenes expectations but also served as a medium through which the parents could perform a more desirable social role that capitalized on their adulthood, their funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992), and their agency. De Certeau (1984) would label this maneuver as a tactic: an isolated action that is responsive to and take advantage of opportunities that emerge within the social structure.

**Literacies: Noticed and Unnoticed**

Most of the literacies that were formally privileged by the family literacy program personnel were largely cognitive skills that were related to reading and writing in English. To a certain degree, the skills that
were taught and esteemed followed the autonomous model of literacy learning, or the idea that literacy has cognitive effects “apart from the context in which it exists and the uses to which it is put in a given culture” (Street, 1984 as cited in Gee, 2012). John’s weekly spelling lists and tests as well as Melanie’s emphasis on verb conjugation and sentence writing reflected this type of literacy learning. These skills were learned in isolation and were expected to be applied later in a different setting. The Ventures textbooks and workbooks were similar: despite addressing topics that might be relevant outside of school (such as shopping and personal introductions), the exercises largely required cognitive skills to be applied in isolated tasks, such as by filling in the blanks and matching the words.

These language learning and print literacy exercises were often intertwined with elementary material in an ABE-ELL classroom under the premise that they would benefit the adult students’ children. So, English learning for adults focused on learning the concepts and English vocabulary words that their elementary students learned in school (e.g. spelling words, math concepts and terms, science, etc.). For this logic to be employed successfully, the Foucauldian power structure described in the previous section needed to be in place: the parents had to see themselves as child-like or deviant from the ‘norm’ so that they would participate fully in the exercises and change their practices. These elementary concepts and literacies were embedded in this power structure. To move toward understanding how other literacy practices that were also concrete social practices (Gee, 2012; The New London Group, 1996) and therefore more reflective of parents’ realities and interests, we must invoke Street’s (1995) approach to understanding how the technical skills and cognitive aspects of literacy learning are “encapsulated within cultural wholes and within structures of power” (p.161).

**Shaping Literacies in Family Literacy**

Before looking at moments when literacy practices broke the autonomous model, it is worth taking a closer look at the structures of power in which literacies existed in family literacy. Street (1995) suggested that local literacies emerge within a community where preexisting social formations serve as important receptors or even catalysts for literacy development. Thus, from this perspective, the participating parents
brought with them literacies from home (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Heath, 1983; Moll et al., 1992; Purcell-Gates, 1995; Taylor, 1983) as they entered the program. Yet, they also entered into a site that had pre-constructed social formations that privileged a mix of elementary learning and parenting practices as a medium through which to learn print literacy skills in English. From this sense, the context of the family literacy program fabricated the notion of adults learning print literacy skills through elementary concepts and practices.

This structure, however, was not just a simple hegemonic construct conceived by the school for newcomer, minoritized parents. Nor was the parents’ participation in it a simple result of the school administration’s coercion. Literacy was also a player: the demands for print literacy skills in English for newcomer and refugee families were manifested throughout society. Literacy as an entity plays a key role in determining why adults join such programs and why programs approach literacy learning in the way that they do (Brandt, 2001; Brandt & Clinton, 2002; Graff, 1987); the case of Chesterfield’s family literacy program follows suit. Brandt and Clinton (2002) wrote that literacy “more often than not serves multiple interests, incorporating individual agents and their locales into larger enterprises that play out away from the immediate scene” (p. 338). CPS’s family literacy program was one place where these different interests met, convoluting the motivating forces of the various stakeholders within the social space.

Brandt (2001) analyzed how adults interacted with literacy through the framework of sponsorship. She described literacy sponsors as “any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, and model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold, literacy - and gain advantage by it in some way” (p. 19). From this perspective, there were many sponsors of literacy learning within the family literacy program. The school district, the community college, and the National Center for Families Learning could be pointed out as some the most obvious sponsors, since they provided resources, funding, and/or frameworks within which to operate and to execute a certain type of literacy learning. They also expected to gain advantages from the program. The school expected more parent involvement and improvements in children’s learning. The community college utilized the family literacy data to report their progress and possibly gained future students (both the parents and their children). However, the Latina mothers also
credited improving their children’s school success as a sponsor for their involvement in the program. The sponsors were not only top down: outside factors also sponsored the mothers’ involvement. Some were concrete, such as the desire for a better job, a GED, but larger ideological forces were also at play determining mothers’ language learning and maintenance decisions (Santa Ana, 2002; Velázquez, 2014). The interplay of these sponsors within a social structure that privileged elementary learning influenced the literacy practices that were in practice in family literacy. Two of the teachers had backgrounds in elementary teaching and drew on these experiences to plan for their classes. One of the teachers did not have a teaching background, but drew on the resources around him, the elementary school, to find materials for his class. It is not surprising, then, that when other forms of literacies did emerge within family literacy they were closely connected to these cognitive literacy practices that were reflective of elementary learning.

**Space for sociocultural literacies.**

Opposite to the autonomous model of literacy, Street (1984; 1995) proposed an ideological model of literacy that attempts to understand literacy as concrete social practices. Expanding on this, Gee (2012) wrote that “literacy practices are almost always fully integrated with and woven into the very texture of wider practices that involve talk, interactions, values and beliefs” (p. 41). As explained in chapter two, these forms of literacies are also referred to as sociocultural literacies and were a part of the family literacy program.

The sociocultural literacies that were present within the family literacy often went unnoticed by the teachers. Nonetheless, these moments indicated when and how parents’ backgrounds and realities were brought into the program. This happened in two ways. First, there were several examples when a written text instigated conversation about a topic that, in turn, either led to more print literacy that then was reflective of what had taken place or that enabled parents to discuss practices outside of the program. Such was the case when Verónica, Yolanda, and Sabat’s discussion about teaching babies sign language turned into talking about the different languages of the Iraqi students in the classroom and their different religions. In this conversation, Verónica noticed differences between the women from Iraq who spoke Kurdish and
Arabic and those who were the hijab and those who did not. She was making sense of the different signs (Kramsch, 1998) that were present in the classroom amongst these women - the languages and the hijabs. Sabat served as the informer (Goffman, 1959) who could tell the behind the scenes details of the Iraqi population in family literacy. This conversation also entailed talking about different texts - the Quran and the Bible - in conjunction with the other symbols and it led to an important insight about the Kurdish speakers in the class: they were not Kurdish, rather they were Yazidi who spoke Kurdish. Again, covering one’s head was the symbol that helped the women (and me) learn about the differences within the group. A similar case happened when Lorena and Hien had a discussion about volunteering at school after reading the assigned fluency paper or when the mothers discussed their families and weekend activities based off of the pictures they were drawing and labeling with words.

Another way that sociocultural literacies were integrated into the program was when an event triggered their entrance. Death was a poignant event that spurred conversations and writing cards. At Verbena Elementary, Juana independently wrote a card for Yekta when her father died and at Aster, Nekabari facilitated a class-wide card making activity for Sabat when she lost her baby. In the latter scenario, Nekabari tied this activity to a more formal opportunity to learn common phrases of expressing sympathy and Cindy made sure that this practice happened only in English. In one sense, the teachers capitalized on and re-appropriated the situation to become one connected to English learning. From a different perspective, though, the teachers took control over a possible literacy that was beginning to emerge organically.

Another example of an event sparking a literacy practice was during the December celebration at Blazing Star Elementary when Gabriela was writing a check to Hien for the teachers’ gifts. Gabriela used different strategies to write the check, such as having Hien write his own name and asking Cyntia how to spell the number twenty-one. When Cyntia pulled out the notecard from her wallet with the numbers written out in English, she demonstrated one way that print literacy in English manifests in her life outside of the program.
Intertextuality and hot lava.

Sarroub (2007) identified similar situated literacy practices in her study of Hayder, a high school teenager who was also an ELL student. In one example, Hayder wrote down a phonetic spelling of the word mayonnaise when ordering at a McDonald’s restaurant so that he would remember the word. Citing Hartmann (1995), Sarroub (2007) argued that these situated literacy texts could be used as an intertextual tool when teaching literacy in a school setting. Intertextual links can be made by “linking people, ideas and events and [by] making social, cultural, political, and historical connections” (Sarroub, 2007, p. 278). In these scenarios in family literacy, the parents were making intertextual connections on their own, yet the teachers did not seem to fully recognize these tools and conversations, as they were not central to the learning exercises in class.

These intertextual moments also served as a venue through which to talk about the types of topics that Florio-Ruane (2001) called “hot lava issues”: topics that affect our lives but bring up tensions and aversions. These are topics that people often avoid talking about in depth. The avoidance of these topics, though, means that we never profoundly engage in them and miss out on the chance of exploring feelings and beliefs to the extent needed to effect change (Florio-Ruane, 2001). The family program personnel avoided hot lava issues in the classroom when they could, especially when it came to religion and sometimes when it came to gender role expectations. Amanda was the only coordinator who spoke of having conversations about a classroom incident revolving around gender roles. Perhaps precisely because these topics were not talked about openly, the parents were interested in them. Verónica took advantage of a time to ask Sabat about religious differences in Aster Elementary: these hot lava topics happened even if they were not formally acknowledged or planned for.

During an interview, Gabriela began to talk about another hot lava issue that she and her family had frequently faced in Chesterfield: racism. After sharing accounts of being pulled over while driving and being called derogatory names at the grocery store, she told me:

“La verdad es que nunca me han preguntado [de cosas racistas]. De las quejas no nos preguntan nada, solamente lo que yo contribuyo. Como, que es que yo hago para ayudar o para servir a los vecinos…A mí si me gustaría platicar de las cosas malas. À veces lo, como lo trae aquí guardado.
Y como que de a veces quieres que alguien te escuche y decirlo que uno piensa porque yo sé que a la mejor todos no sentimos malos porque venimos de otro lugar pero no venimos con mala intención."

[The truth is that they [family literacy teachers] have never asked me [about racist things]. They don’t ask anything about the complaints, only about what I contribute. Like, what do I do to help or serve the neighbors…I would like to talk about the bad things. Sometimes it's like you have it stored up inside. And sometimes you want someone to listen to you and say what you think because I know that it is likely that we all feel bad because we come from a different country but we don’t come with bad intentions.]

(Gabriela, Mother, Blazing Star Elementary, Interview, November 14, 2014)

Not only did hot lava topics come up during family literacy, Gabriela indicated that these topics would be something she would like to discuss in more detail with others who are experiencing the same issues. Furthermore, she stated that she would like someone listen to her say what she thought. Like in the case with Verónica, Yolanda and Sabat, texts and other literacies could anchor and facilitate these conversations.

**Toward an Interactive English Learning Model in Family Literacy**

Studies of young English language learners show that an interactive learning environment gives students the opportunity to be active participants in the learning process and to take control of their own literacy practices (Genesee & Riches, 2006). Students need also to be immersed in a language-rich environment with plenty of opportunities to hear and use language as well as continuous modeling, ongoing feedback, a stress-free environment and reasons to use the target language (Egbert and Ernst-Slavit, 2010). Meaningful literacy use, intertextuality, and hot lava topics also have a place within this model. However, what an interactive learning model means for ABE-ELL is still nebulous. Adults enter ABE-ELL programs with a plethora of background experiences with cognitive literacies and varying experiences of formal education, some of them more pleasant and successful than others (Brandt, 2001; Ewert, 2014; Purcell-Gates, 1995; Rogers and Fuller, 1997). They also have specific reasons for attending the classes and have established frames built upon past experiences that regulate their expectations for learning. These experiences and perspectives must be taken into account.
In the family literacy program, the teachers and coordinators all reported that they attempted to access parents’ background experiences and interests and the English teachers planned for the use of all four domains (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) in their classes. In many cases, they also integrated technology into their classes and included technological literacies (such as writing an email). All of the teachers also expressed frustration with the initial assessments administered to the parents: while they tried to integrate all of the language domains in their classes, the initial BEST Plus test only gave information about the parents’ oral skills and not about their reading skills. A formal writing assessment was never administered. What varied amongst the different English classes, however, were the reasons the parents had for using English, what they did with the language and how they produced it.

In John’s class, English language learning was centered on three main activities: spelling or vocabulary learning, textbook and workbook exercises and stories, and small group conversations with guiding questions. Parents generally took notes and responded orally or in writing under contexts that were prescriptive. Sometimes they wrote short stories about their weekends and school breaks; this was typically assigned for homework. John also focused on preparing for the English exams with the parents and improving test scores was a common topic of conversation and of celebration.

Melanie’s classes had a heavier focus on learning grammar rules, with an emphasis on verbs, and on reading simple texts and children’s books out loud. Parents copied notes about verb conjugation and wrote sentences. They practiced reading independently, in partners, and out loud to the class. Melanie always assigned the fluency exercise, but parents could choose their own children’s books to read. Computers were frequently used in her class and the activities varied from working on English learning websites to writing emails. Textbook and workbook activities were not a main focus during class time, but were utilized during independent work. Sometimes other types of projects were taken on, such as making a family tree and presenting it to the class.

Cindy’s classroom was different from the other two in regard to interactivity and English language learning. First, the topics of whole group instruction varied week to week and were often linked to either things that parents had seen in PACT time or things that they would see in parent time class. The whole
group activity integrated at least reading, listening, and speaking and parents copied down whatever was written on the board. Activities were also diverse. Sometimes they involved parents drawing, labeling words and talking to either a teacher or each other about their picture before writing a more complete story. Beginning in December 2014 and extending into the spring semester (during which I attended as a volunteer), the parents took turn writing personal stories, sharing them with the class, and conducting a question and answer session with their peers. Other times they played language games or completed worksheets. Textbook and workbooks were utilized frequently in small groups, much like in John's classes. At the end of class on Tuesdays and Thursdays, parents participated in a semi-structured PACT talk and these discussions often influenced Cindy’s decisions about whole group instruction.

**Sponsors of interactive learning.**

Ewert (2014) warned that adults might be hesitant about participating in activities that integrate language domains and deviate from the traditional, cognitive approach to language and literacy learning. In Cindy’s classroom, this hesitancy was noticeable when I first began observing, but subsided with time. Ewert (2014) also states that adults should be given explicit explanations about the efficacy of this approach to language learning and assured that attention to language concerns will be embedded in these activities. Again, the rationale that Cindy and the other teachers gave for many of the English activities, and especially for the more interactive activities, was that these activities were for the parents to learn about elementary concepts in order to better understand what the children are learning in school. In other words, the activities that were more interactive tended to be closely connected to elementary learning. Elementary learning was, in this sense, the sponsor (Brandt, 2001) of interactive learning activities.

This raises an important question that should be taken into consideration when considering ABE-ELL classes in an elementary school context: what are the consequences of using elementary concepts as a literacy sponsor for adults? On one hand, elementary concepts were used to facilitate interactive learning in ABE-ELL; however, there were also times where different literacy sponsors and practices went unnoticed, perhaps due to the fact that the program emphasized elementary learning so much. Furthermore, the
teachers may not have been aware of the disconnect between their focus on elementary learning and the other literacy sponsors that were also present in the parents’ lives. Attempts were made to access parents’ background experiences and interests. The school district conducted interviews (which were actually surveys) with the adults upon entrance and at the end of each year in the spring. However, the interview results were not readily accessible to the coordinators, teachers, or to the independent contractor. Parents’ interests were assessed for parent time classes by the coordinators and while the English teachers executed flexible planning based on parents’ performance or a spontaneous topic that came up, parent interest or goals did not seem to be at the core of the English classes.

The program personnel’s adamant adherence to the comprehensive family literacy model could have been one reason why learning elementary concepts were privileged over the integration of parents’ goals and other reasons for learning English and becoming involved with the school. The school already set the ultimate goal for the parents’: their children’s academic success. The dedication to PACT time as an observation of children’s school practices with the intention to bring these concepts back into the ABE-ELL classroom also privileged the idea of elementary learning. The parents’ general passive role in PACT time indicated that they were only meant to learn the school practices from a student perspective and not to actively interact with or change them. This overt focus also assumed that focusing on or accomplishing other goals that have motivated the parents to join family literacy would not result in their children’s academic success.

Not reflecting the adult students’ realities in their learning experiences in literacy programs poses the threat of adults not transferring these skills into their daily lives. In her seminal work about families with low print literacy practices, Purcell-Gates (1995) wrote the following about the emergent print literacy skills of Jenny, an adult learner who initially did not read or write.

“Jenny learned to read and write by doing so for her own personal needs and purposes. In the process, I structured the reading and writing in the ways that that allowed her to connect with the world of print through her own ‘ways of saying’ and to begin to acquire the conventional forms necessary for her full participation in the [print] literate world” (p. 132)
Learning elementary concepts has limited purposes for adults outside of an elementary. While they can learn about what their child is doing in school, observing PACT time and learning spelling words and other concepts does not have a clear connection to an adult’s life. The family literacy program did not result in an elementary diploma or certificate that would help parents gain cultural capital and access outside of the school. Furthermore, the emphasis on elementary learning teetered on patronizing the newcomer parents and further othering them from the adults in the school. To my knowledge, no other adults attending the elementary schools during the day were expected to take on a role of a child in order to observe classes and learn elementary concepts.

Conceptualizing the newcomer parents first as adults who are making decisions that they believe will impact their children and their success in school would be the first step in appropriating the program in a way that makes space for parents’ interests, goals, backgrounds, and sociocultural literacies. Adhering to the comprehensive model that supports parents’ passive participation during presentations in parent time or mere observations during PACT time limits the extent to which the parents can be more reflected in and involved in the program and in the school structure. Asking the adults how they would like to be involved in the school and in their child’s learning would be the best starting point. As Adair (2015) found, newcomer parents often hold views about the school structure that differ from the school personnel but do not always have the opportunity to voice them. Furthermore, when they do speak out, they risk breaking the positive immigrant script that the schools often hold about newcomers that characterizes them as passive and grateful to the dominant group (Adair, 2015; Suarez-Orozco, 1998). The family literacy program, however, has the potential to serve as a space where these opinions can be heard, taken into account, and acted on. This may require rethinking the comprehensive model.

**Toward Professionalization and Professionalism: A ‘Working’ Model**

Above I discussed some of the limitations that Chesterfield’s family literacy program faced in regard to culturally relevant literacy pedagogy that is reflective of adult learners because the program was housed within public elementary schools. However, this exact public elementary school setting also
provided the program with the professional backbone that is needed to problematize these limitations in order to effect change in programmatic family literacy. ABE-ELL programs have faced persistent challenges in the borderlands of education: the professionalization and professionalism of the adult literacy workforce have been pervasive challenges throughout the nation (Anderson et al., 2009; Crandall, 1993; McKenna & Fitzpatrick, 2004; Perry & Hart, 2012; Sandman-Hurley, 2008; Sun, 2010; Ziegler et al., 2009).

Nevertheless, the way in which Chesterfield Public Schools adopted the family literacy program permitted them to counter some of the challenges that ABE-ELL programs and educators face. The fact that the program was attached to a large, urban public school district with strong ties to its community offers some type of security and legitimacy that other community-based programs might not receive.

At the district level, the family literacy program had both a coordinator and a specialist that oversaw the daily implementation of the program. Regional Community College, which was also well established within the city of Chesterfield, hired teachers specifically for the program and offered them some training and support. While the program did face a degree of high teacher turnover rates, many of the teachers had either traditional teaching backgrounds (Cindy and Melanie) or a longevity of experience working with adult ELLs (John). In this position, their teaching schedules were consistent and they had a support team at the school. Furthermore, teachers had access to materials (e.g. textbooks and workbooks, copier, paper, writing utensils, the school library) and human resources within the school. Linda, the private contractor, was also supported by the school administration to implement professional development opportunities for these teachers through classroom visits and special meetings. Her role was similar to that of a literacy or a math coach: she observed the teachers (with emphasis on the coordinators/parent time teachers and the childcare teachers) and worked closely with them to help them reflect on and improve their practice. She also offered suggestions and modeled lessons during parent time classes.

This is promising because the program had built in structures of support that could have the potential to facilitate other types of professional development, particularly in the areas of sociocultural literacies and culturally relevant pedagogies (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The family literacy still existed on the periphery of the k-12 school district: the district’s main focus was on the education of children and while they
were happy to host the program, individual schools did not play a direct role in constructing the curriculum for the program. RCC handled the required state and federal reporting responsibilities of the official test scores, which left the teachers and coordinators with a lot of flexibility to make decisions concerning their pedagogical practices.

This flexibility mixed with the built in professional development support system creates a ground fertile for opportunities to hold conversations about how parents are being perceived and how this influences their language learning experiences and involvement in the school. Furthermore, it provides a space to discuss alternative approaches to programmatic family literacy that integrate culturally relevant pedagogies, (Ladson-Billings, 2005) and multi-literacies (Gee, 2012) in a way that are reflective on the participants’ funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) and goals. Ladson-Billings (1995) defined culturally relevant pedagogy as distinguished by three broad conceptions held by the teacher in the areas of self and other, social relations, and knowledge. Key to these pedagogies is the fact that the teacher embraces the social and cultural realities of students; in a family literacy setting, this means that the teacher must also embrace the parents’ sociocultural literacies. Essentially, this model of professionalization of family literacy or ABE-ELL has the potential to expand to encompass and embrace the literacies and practices that are reflective of the families’ sociocultural realities.

**Implications for the Field of Family Literacy**

In attempts to begin to bridge the pervasive divide between the research studies that unveil home literacy practices and the attempts of programmatic approaches to family literacy to alter those practices, this dissertation study of the family literacy program at Chesterfield Public Schools contributes to the field of family literacy in several ways. First, by using ethnographic methods to study a programmatic approach to family literacy, I have illuminated how the conception of family literacy within this particular program has changed through the appropriation of the program. Here, I return briefly to my overarching research questions: How does family literacy become enacted in a public school setting? And, what were the goals and expectations of the Family Literacy Program according to each of the participants? Many programmatic
approaches to family literacy seek to facilitate the practice of parents participating in autonomous, cognitive literacy practices, especially reading, with their children at home. In the case of CPS, however, the concept of family was largely absent, as is the idea of intergenerational literacy practices (cognitive or sociocultural). Instead, as the program was appropriated into practice, the focus shifted to Adult Basic Education for English Language Learners and parent-school partnerships. Elementary learning was a major literacy sponsor for both children and adults in the program and, as result, adults were often situated in the role of child-like subjects. The strong elementary sponsorship and adherence to the comprehensive model of family literacy may have prevented the integration of parents’ funds of knowledge, learning goals, and sociocultural literacies.

I propose a different phrase to refer this particular family literacy program: partnerships through adult education. This phrase encompasses the four general perspectives about the program that were present amongst participants: parent engagement in schools, parental empowerment, helping children learn, and a support system. It recognizes parents’ involvement in their child’s school life, but the child’s school experience does not define the language or literacy learning expectations of the parents. It conceptualizes parents as partners and as adults. Being honest about the presences of adult education within the elementary school through this title is also a step toward re-conceptualizing the elementary as a social center that services the learning goals and needs of a multigenerational community (Dewey, 1902).

Recognizing that the conception of a family literacy program in this context was changing to one that is more in line with a partnership through adult education, then, largely influences the response to my other research questions: To what extent did the program meet the expectations of the various stakeholders? And, for whom and to what extent did the program “work”? Approaching this question from the vantage point that family literacy was actually an amalgamation of ABE-ELL and parent-school partnerships, determining if and for whom the program is “working” also changes and becomes much more focused on the adults involved in the program and less on the entire families. The program was “working” for the parents in the sense that it permitted them to attend free English classes and spend time with their children in school. The program was “working” for the school in the sense that parents had a consistent and
controlled presence in the school building. However, the findings of this dissertation problematize the quality of the experience that parents spent in both settings.

I argue that elementary school-based partnerships through adult education must take intentional steps to re-conceptualize the Foucaudian structure that parents enter into when they attend these programs. Parents, who are adults with a plethora of past learning experiences and knowledge, are not children and should not be held to the same expectations of children when they participate in social institutions. Newcomer parents are contributing greatly to the social and economic complexion of the communities in which the settle, particularly in the New Latino Diaspora (Hamann et al., 2015; Wortham et al., 2002). Their interactions with their community’s institutions of learning should be reflective of this important, adult role. In this study there was a literacy myth (Graff, 1987) that if parents participated in the family literacy program by assuming the roles of elementary learners, their children would benefit. Shifting the focus of the program experience toward the parents as adult learners and away from the concept of elementary learning could permit purposeful learning goals that are closely reflective of the adults’ lives to enter into the program. Children, an important piece of parents’ lives, would not be excluded from these goals and purposes, but would like be integrated in a way that is more meaningful to their families. As it stood, the strong presence of the child-oriented goal did not permit the goals and sociocultural practices of the parents to have a genuine space within the program.

I am by no means arguing that a parent partnership through adult education program would not benefit children or that these types programs should not recognize how they would influence the children’s experience in school. As parents gain more economic and cultural capital within their communities their children would very likely become beneficiaries of different social successes. I am arguing, however, that schools and programs should think critically before crafting a child-centered goal to be mapped on to adult learners. This sends powerful messages about not only how newcomer families are perceived by the school and by the dominant society whose ideologies are transmitted through the schools, it also provides the parents with opportunities to only develop narrow types of linguistic and cultural capital that will influence their lives in limited ways that are closely connected with the school.
One of the pieces of this family literacy program that “worked” was CPS’s model of professionalization for ABE-ELL programs. A more positive consequence of the elementary school backing of the family literacy was the fact that the program had credibility and resources, was funded, and had supports in place for its teachers and staff. This framework also provides a potential space to develop culturally relevant pedagogies that draw on sociocultural literacies within partnerships through adult education programs. Thus, as programmatic approaches to family literacy continue to develop, I suggest that they look at how the institutionalized structure could become a facilitator of professionalism and professionalization in a way that centers’ families’ goals, interests, realities and literacies.

Suggestion for Future Research

In this research study, I found that family literacy was appropriated in a way that became a parent partnership through adult education. However, this process is going to look differently in different sites, with different families, with different schools, and with different personnel. It is important to return to Levinson and Sutton’s (2001) statement about policy appropriation here: “policy is always appropriated by practitioners and intermediaries; it is the creative way through which agents ‘take in’ elements of policy, thereby incorporating these discursive and institutional resources into their own schemes of interest, motivation, and action” (p. 3). More research is needed in different settings in order to capture the changing conception of family literacy within the New Latino Diaspora and nationwide.

One limitation of this study is that the children’s perspectives were not included. It was the case that the children of the participating parents were alluded to in the program, but were not principle players in constructing its cultural space. Still, the children were present, participated in the program, and likely were affected by it. Future research should address the perceptions of the children in such programs. It would be interesting to know if their children also shared a child-like vision of their participating parents and how or if their parents’ participation influenced their learning and behavior in school. Such knowledge would not only inform programming, but it would add to the literature of intergenerational language and literacy learning.
Finally, more research is needed on the processes of parents' learning the English language and literacies within family literacy programs. In this study, I looked at how the English class contributed to the construction of the program and the extent to which the parents' backgrounds were incorporated into the English classes. However, a more detailed analysis is needed about the processes through which parents learned English in similar programs and what literacies, if any, were syncretic across program and home practices. To do this, more time in the field would be necessary in order to shadow families as they move throughout their daily lives, acquiring and using multiple literacies to navigate their worlds. Case studies of parents could be utilized to document the learning processes and practices both inside and outside of the program and children would be more naturally integrated into these studies.
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Chapter 5


Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview Script

Directors, Coordinators, Teachers, Assistants, and Interpreters

Family Literacy
Ethnographic Interview

Date:
Interviewer: Jennifer Stacy
Participant’s Name:

The purpose of my study is to learn about family literacy in Chesterfield, Nebraska. You and I have talked before about the program and I have some familiarity with it, but the purpose of this interview is to learn about family literacy and how you participate in it.

How long have you worked with the family literacy program?

How did you come to work with the program?

What is family literacy?

Walk me through family literacy.

How would you describe the program to a new parent?

- What is the typical weekly experience of a parent in the program?
  - Tell me about: English class, PACT time, Parent Class, the child’s learning, and the childcare (listen for words here).
    - Give me an example of a typical class activity in each.
    - How are _____ & ______ different?
  - Are there any events that take place outside of this program schedule?

Tell me about your role in the family literacy program.

- Describe some of the responsibilities that you have as the ____________.
- What is a typical day like for you?
  - You said that you __________. Could you describe what you do when you ________?
  - Can you describe how you prepare classes (and/or other components of the program)?
  - How do the parents respond to these things?

How do you recognize the cultural backgrounds of your students while working with them?

- Specifically, tell me about your experience working with Spanish-speaking parents in the program.
- What is it like to teach or work with Spanish-speaking students?
- What usually is involved in teaching/working with Spanish-speaking students?
- Can you think of an experience when teaching a Spanish-speaking student? Can you describe what happened?
Appendix B

Semi-Structured Interview Script

Spanish-Speaking Mothers

Date:

Interviewer:

Participant Name/ Nombre de Participante:

Age/ Edad:

El propósito de mi estudio de investigación es aprender sobre family literacy in Chesterfield, Nebraska. Hemos hablado sobre el family literacy y conozco el programa pero el propósito de esta entrevista es aprender de family literacy and cómo usted participe en el programa.

¿De dónde es usted?
¿Por cuánto tiempo ha vivido en Chesterfield?
¿Cuántos niños tiene? ¿Cuántos años tiene cada uno de sus niños?
¿Asistió la escuela en su país? ¿Por cuántos años?
¿Qué idiomas habla? ¿Cuándo habla estos idiomas?

Platicame sobre sus habilidades en español.
- ¿Cuándo habla español? ¿Que tan bien habla español usted?
- ¿Cuándo escucha español? ¿Que tan bien escucha español usted?
- ¿Cuándo lee español? ¿Que tan bien lee español usted?
- ¿Cuándo escribe español? ¿Que tan bien escribe español usted?
- ¿Hace algo más en español?

Platicame sobre sus habilidades en inglés.
- ¿Cuándo habla inglés? ¿Que tan bien habla inglés usted?
- ¿Cuándo escucha inglés? ¿Que tan bien escucha inglés usted?
- ¿Cuándo lee inglés? ¿Que tan bien lee inglés usted?
- ¿Cuándo escribe inglés? ¿Que tan bien escribe inglés usted?
- ¿Hace algo más en inglés?

¿Por cuánto tiempo ha estado en el programa de ‘family literacy’?
¿Por qué decidió usted participar en el programa de ‘family literacy’?

Describa el programa de family literacy. ¿Qué es el programa de ‘family literacy’?
¿Qué es un día típico en family literacy?
- Describa la clase de inglés.
- ¿Cuáles actividades le ha ayudado aprender inglés en el programa de ‘family literacy’?
- Describa la clase de ‘parent time’. ¿Qué ha aprendido en esta clase?
- Describa ‘PACT time’.
- ¿Qué ha aprendido acerca de la educación de su hijo mientras que está en el salón de clases?
- Describa el childcare/guardería de los niños jóvenes.
¿Ha asistido eventos especiales a través del programa de ‘family literacy’?

Discuta los eventos especiales que ha asistido a través del programa de ‘family literacy’.
¿Por qué asistió estos eventos?
¿Qué hizo durante estos eventos?
¿Qué aprendió de estos eventos?
¿Necesitaba usar inglés en estos eventos? ¿Leer? ¿Escribir? ¿Escuchar?

¿Qué tipo de cosas ha aprendido usted en el programa de ‘family literacy’?

¿Ha cambiado algo que usted hace en la casa con su hijo/a? Describe este cambio.

¿Qué es lo que más le gusta usted del programa de ‘family literacy’?
¿Qué es lo que menos le gusta usted del programa de ‘family literacy’?
¿Cambiaría algo del programa de family literacy?

¿Qué espera hacer cuando se gradúa del programa de ‘family literacy’?

¿Hay algo más que me quiere decir sobre su experiencia en el programa de ‘family literacy’?
Appendix C

Ethnographic Interview Question Guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DESCRIPTIVE</th>
<th>STRUCTURAL</th>
<th>CONTRAST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • Grand Tour Questions  
  o Typical grand tour questions  
  o Specific grand tour questions  
  o Guided grand tour questions  
  o Task-related grand tour questions | | |
| • Mini-Tour Questions  
  o Focus on a smaller unit of experience | | |
| • Example Questions  
  o Ask for an example of a specific act or event | | |
| • Experience Questions  
  o Ask about an experience they've had in a particular setting | | |
| • Native Language Questions  
  o Direct language questions: how would you refer to it?  
  o Hypothetical-Interaction questions: how would you say it to another ________?  
  o Typical sentence questions: what are some sentences I would hear that include the phrase ________? | | |

Appendix D
PACT Time Forms

Aster Elementary:

NAME: 

What did you see in the classroom?

What did you learn in the classroom?

What questions do you have?
Blazing Star Elementary:

### PACT Time Debriefing Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Parent:</th>
<th>Name of child:</th>
<th>Teacher/Grade:</th>
<th>Date:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

What did you and your child learn today?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What was the title of the book your child read?</th>
<th>Please give an example of a math problem your child worked on.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What was the book about?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

List 3 vocabulary words you learned today.

1. _
2. _
3. _

What questions do you have?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Parent:</th>
<th>Name of child:</th>
<th>Teacher/Grade:</th>
<th>Date:</th>
</tr>
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</table>

What did you and your child learn today?

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What was the book about?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

List 3 vocabulary words you learned today.

1. _
2. _
3. _

What questions do you have?
Appendix E

Sample Activity from Ventures Book

LESSON C Can you cook?

1 Grammar focus: can

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can cook.</td>
<td>you can?</td>
<td>Yes, I can.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He can</td>
<td>he can?</td>
<td>Yes, he can.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She can</td>
<td>she can?</td>
<td>Yes, she can.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They can</td>
<td>they can?</td>
<td>Yes, they can.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, he can’t.</td>
<td>No, she can’t.</td>
<td>No, they can’t.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Turn to page 142 for a complete grammar chart.

can’t = cannot

2 Practice

A Write. Complete the sentences. Use yes, no, can, or can’t.

1. A Can she speak Spanish?  B Yes, she can.

2. A Can he drive a truck?  B No, he can’t.

3. A Can he fix a car?  B , he can’t.

4. A Can she paint a house?  B , she can.

5. A Can they work with computers?  B , they can.


Listen and repeat. Then practice with a partner.