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Si Se Puede: Increasing Latino Parent Involvement
and Student Academic Achievement

Jeanette Zavala

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Abstract

Parent involvement, despite class, race, gender, and socioeconomic status, has been strongly correlated with academic achievement. However, research has also indicated that there is a large gap between White and Latino student academic achievement. It is argued that Latino parents do want to be involved but are faced with many circumstances that do not allow them to be present in school. It is vital for teachers to do whatever is in their power to communicate and involve Latino parents. The focus of this Capstone Project is to explore what teachers are doing today to involve parents, but particularly, what teachers are doing to reach out to Latino Parents. This is an important issue because academic achievement is important for the students' future. In order to prevent social reproduction, Latino students must succeed academically. After interviewing five teachers at Acorn Elementary, three action options emerged as ways to help increase Latino parent involvement. Based on the findings, action was undertaken to help teachers increase parent involvement.

Si Se Puede: Increasing Latino Parent Involvement
and Student Academic Achievement

Growing up in a lower-middle class family meant that both of my parents had to work full-time in order to keep food on the table. I recall having friends' parents come into the classroom to help out and my friends talking about how much fun their family had at the school's extracurricular activities or events. Due to my parents having to work full time, my parents never had time to attend such events or even help out in the classroom. Despite not being present physically in the school facility, my parents were very present in my school work at home.

My mother was very aware of what was happening at the school, what we were learning, and how I was doing. It always surprised me to hear her ask about specific projects or activities. Every night, she checked my homework and made sure that I read by making me read out loud to her as she cooked dinner or cleaned up after dinner. Considering she never had the time to go to my school, she was always well informed. When I got older, I finally asked her how she knew everything in regards to my school. She told me that she would call the teacher to ask her. She also told me that she knows the good along with the bad stuff. To be honest, I could not think of any "bad" things I had done, but just knowing that she had the communication with my teacher made me more conscious of the decisions I would make when it came to staying on task and completing assignments.

Even though my parents were not present at the school, my mom made up for it by making sure she was present at home and making sure that my education came first. Having communication with my teacher made her involvement much more intimate and stronger than just being present at my school. Now as an adult and a mother of a kindergartner, I appreciate her

efforts and understand how her dedication to be involved in my education made a difference. I want to be involved in my son's education, but I have a hard time finding ways to get involved. The reason I have a hard time is because as a Latina, our culture has taught me that the elders and those who are educated must always be respected. I hold on to that morale, and do not want to make the teacher feel as though I am being nosey and disrespectful by asking what is happening in the classroom or how I can help. However, tables have turned for me and I am slowly beginning to push my own limits. I am now a parent and a future teacher. I want to do everything that I can to be involved in my children's education, help them become successful students, and achieve academically. With this interest in mind, I began to research parent involvement. I am interested to learn what teachers are doing to make parents feel welcome and help parents get involved in their child's education.

Literature Synthesis & Integration

Parent involvement has been a hot topic in education for over five decades. Researchers have found that there is a strong correlation between parent involvement and academic achievement (Epstein, 1984; Ziegler, 1987; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Epstein, Coates, Clark Salinas, Sanders, & Simon, 1997; Zellman & Waterman, 1998). The Government has since created laws and policies to ensure that schools are providing opportunities for parent involvement. The Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), which replaced the No Child Left Behind Act, was signed by President Obama to ensure quality and equal education opportunities for all children despite their gender, race, socioeconomic status, or disabilities (U.S Department of Education). In order to ensure equal education, schools that are underperforming on standardized tests receive Title I funds, which helps the school pay for programs and resources to help increase their scores. Schools are required to allocate some of those funds for programs that

include parent involvement (Epstein, 2005). For the purposes of this paper, Parent Involvement (PI) is defined as “the efforts of any caregiver who assumes responsibility for nurturing and caring for children” (CDE, 1994, para.10). Also, the term Latino in this paper will represent Hispanic/Latino ethnicity.

What is the issue?

In a previous research analysis, I found that researchers had discovered that PI increased academic achievement and that academic achievement was achievable despite socioeconomic status, race, and gender (Zavala, 2016). It is also evident that Latino students are scoring significantly lower than White students on state standardized tests (Barton & Coley, 2009). Barton and Coley (2009) also identified that Latino parents were not as involved at school as White parents were . This is a major issue when we want equal opportunities for children to succeed.

Philosophers have proposed many different theories in relation to child learning and development. In particular, Lev Vygotsky talks about the importance of cultural development, which is something that children carry with them and pass down to the next generations. His theory suggests that everything a child learns and develops comes directly from the relationships they build. Lev Vygotsky wrote that:

Every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals (As cited in Cherry, 2017, para. 3).

Vygotsky believed that learning and development was part of a social process. The first interaction children have with society is with their parents. Parents or caregivers are the best examples for children. If Latino parents knew and understood the importance of being present in their child's education, Latino students would pick that up and learn to value their own education as well. Being present allows Latino students to have a strong social connection that can help them learn and develop better in school. This theory supports my idea that simply being present in a child's education will help a student become academically successful. Latino parents need to be aware that something as simple as being 'there' for their child can help their child succeed in school. Enforcing the importance of education and communication first in the home, will later allow the student to value education and communication in school. A lot of the time, Latino parents fall into the lower socioeconomic status and need to work full time, sometimes two jobs, to support their families. They work before their child goes to school and are still at work when their child comes home. It is important to communicate to these parents that there is more ways in which they can help their child succeed in school, which will ultimately help them succeed in life.

Why is it an issue?

Latino Parent Involvement is an issue because they are not as involved as White parents are in their children's education. Here are some of the reasons for which Latino parents are less involved and why it is important that they are involved.

Misconceptions. Latino parent involvement is an issue today because unfortunately there is a stigma that Latino parents do not want to be involved in their children's education simply because they are not involved or present at the school (Garcia, 2002; Jasis & Ordonez-Jasis, 2005; Lopez, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001). The reality is that most Latino parents need to

work and most work occurs during school hours. Parents cannot miss work to participate in the classroom and this absence makes teachers believe that they simply choose to not be involved. However, Perez Carreon, Drake, and Barton (2005) discovered that while some Latino parents were not involved at the school site, they were present at the home. The research on immigrant parents helped Perez Carreon et al. (2005) conclude that the amount of Latino parent involvement was highly correlated with the amount of time the parent had lived in the United States, i.e the longer they have lived in the US the more involved or present they were in the school. Parents also agreed that these misconceptions made it hard for Latino parents to become involved because there was not sufficient support from teachers or school staff to help Latino parents communicate with each other (Perez Carreon, et al., 2005; Lee & Bowen, 2006).

Language Barriers. Language barriers are one of the biggest reasons why misconceptions of Latino PI are created. Latino parents come across to teachers as not interested in their children's education when in reality, Latino parents are not able to understand or communicate with the teacher or staff. Latino parents have complained that in many instances, they were not able to communicate with office staff or teachers and that locating interpreters was also a hassle (Lee, et al., 2006; De Gaetano, 2007; Jasis, et al., 2005; Perez Carreon, et al., 2005). Communication is extremely important when it comes to PI. If parents are not able to comprehend where help is needed or able to communicate how they can help out, then parents are going to get discouraged and completely withdraw from any attempt to participate. This language barrier also makes parents uncomfortable and less valued in the school.

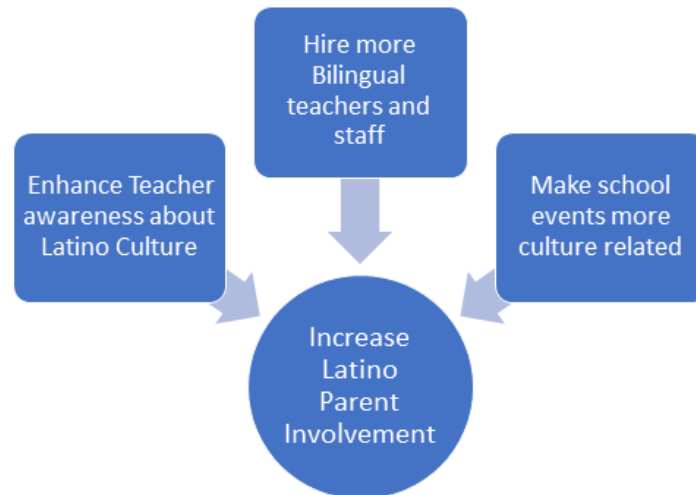
Academic Achievement. As mentioned before, Latino students are scoring significantly lower on state standard tests than White students are (Barton & Coley, 2009). It is important for all students to succeed in order to create equality. If students do not achieve academically in

grade school, it is possible that they will not achieve in higher education. Not completing higher education may prevent someone from attaining a job in which they will be paid well enough to move up the socioeconomic ladder, known as social mobility (Britannica, 2017). The majority of Latinos are known to be in the lower-middle socioeconomic status. If a person does not move up in social class, they are more likely to pass this down to their children and future generations, known as social reproduction (Bourdieu, 1973). This cycle leaves no room for Latinos to advance in our society. It is important for the cycle to be broken and show society that Latinos can climb up the ladder. Latino parents are the social and cultural capital that students reproduce (Lee & Bowen, 2006). This is why Latino PI is important. Involving Latino students will begin to value education when they see their parents involved and will in turn increase academic achievement.

What should be done?

There are many possible solutions to increasing Latino parent involvement. Figure 1 shows the actions that schools can take, according to research, that can promote Latino parent involvement in the schools.

Figure 1. Increasing Latino Parent Involvement



Increase teachers awareness of Latino Culture. Moll and Gonzalez (1997) and Henderson and Berla (1994), agree that when schools, teachers, and parents work together to bridge the gap between the home culture and the American school culture, students tend to do better. Several studies show that when teachers have knowledge about a student's cultural beliefs and value systems, teachers can work together with the student and the parent to aid the child in achieving academically (Henderson & Berla, 1994). Sometimes teachers may assume that parents do not care about the student's education because they are not involved in the classroom. However, a teacher may fail to see that the parents have one or two full-time jobs or have prior commitments in a cultural practice. Knowing the students' and parents' cultural background helps the teacher have a different perspective of the parents and allows the teacher to be compassionate to their situation. Understanding the parent's' background may help the teacher explore different methods that might allow more parental involvement in the classroom or the home based on the parent's' availability while at the same time making the parent feel valued and important. Understanding the Latino culture will also help eliminate misconceptions and miscommunication issues in Latino PI.

Increase bilingual staff. Bilingual staff is important in order for Latino parents to be able to communicate with the school. The number of bilingual teachers and staff should be determined according to the percentage of Latino families within the school community. The ultimate goal is for the Latino parent to be able communicate their interests and needs.

According to the research by Perez Carreon et al. (2005), most of the Latino parents from the study complained about not being able to communicate directly with the staff and having to wait a long time to get an interpreter to help them with something as simple as letting the school know their child was out sick. Latino parents get frustrated with the language barrier and prefer to not communicate due to the inconvenience. It is important for the school to understand that academic achievement is just as important for parents as it is for the school.

Provide more cultural related parent groups or activities. De Gaetano (2007) stated that “when Latino parents’ cultures are focused on in positive ways, they are able to be engaged substantively in the schooling process of their children” (p. 146). Schools and teachers need programs or groups that are relatable to Latino parents. Most Parent Teacher Groups meet during the week during regular business hours. Changing the times around gives parents more opportunities to attend. *La Familia* is a Latino parent group that started off by a group of Latino parents who wanted to be heard in their school but felt that their individual voice was not being heard (Jasis et al., 2005). Working together as Latinos gave the parents empowerment which allowed them to speak up with confidence in the school. The school began to show interest in this parent group and then worked together to bring upon change in parent involvement. This is an example of “what is possible when a school learns to embrace, rather than marginalize, the wisdom and the ingenuity of Latino immigrant parents, their concerns for their children, and their hopeful visions for their future” (Jasis, et al., 2005, 40).

In conclusion, the school and teachers need to come up with better ways to embrace the Latino culture and use their strengths to create a welcoming environment for more parent involvement. The teacher and the school need to collaborate with the Latino parents so that there is communication and understanding of what each person's role is in terms of involvement with the larger concern of student academic achievement in mind.

Method

Parent involvement is important for students to be academically successful. However, there are still some parents, particularly Latino parents, who do not get involved. It is important to increase Latino parent involvement to in turn increase Latino academic achievement and ultimately close the academic achievement gap between Latino and White students. For this Capstone Project, teachers were interviewed on their perspectives of Latino parent involvement and their thoughts on improving it. These interviews led to action that responded to the need of improving Latino parent involvement.

Context

Acorn Elementary is located in the outskirts of Moroville¹, California. The school is surrounded by agricultural fields and horse ranches. The school's demographics consist of 79.5% Hispanic/Latino students, 15.9% White students, and 4.6% other. (Ed-data, 2016). Based off of the 2014-2015 school year, Acorn Elementary has approximately 31 teachers, with 67% of them being white and 29% Hispanic. Eighty Three percent of the students at Acorn Elementary qualify for Free/Reduced lunch and 61% are English Language Learners (Ed-data, 2016). From this data, I consider Acorn Elementary to be a school formed by families that are primarily in the low/middle socioeconomic status. According to California Department of Education (CDE,

¹ "Pseudonyms have been used for the names of people, places, and organizations."

2017), Acorn Elementary is considered to be in the middle range in terms of academic performance. Although overall academic performance is average at Acorn Elementary there is a significantly large gap between academic performance amongst hispanic and white students (CDE, 2017). Students and staff at Acorn Elementary have formed a community that consists of fun and friendly people. There is a close connection between teachers, staff and students. However, the Parent Teacher Group (PTG) does not reflect that connection. The PTG has little parent participation. The last couple of meetings consisted of 6 parents, 2 of which were Latino.

Participants and Participant Selection

For this action based research, I interviewed five female teachers from Acorn Elementary. Only one of the five teachers is bilingual and she is also a K-5 Special Education teacher.

JP A white, female kindergarten teacher. She has taught for seven years as a full time, public school, credentialed teacher. Previously to that, she spent a few years substituting in public, charter and private schools.

JH. White, female first grade teacher. She has over 25 years of experience in teaching. She recently received her multiple subjects credential and this is her third year teaching first grade.

DP. White, female, sixth grade teacher. She has taught for 15 years. She was a substitute teacher for many years prior to receiving her credential. Most of her years teaching having been in the upper/middle school grades.

CF. Hispanic-American Female special education Teacher. She is bilingual and teachers K-5th grade students with severe autism. She has been a teacher for two and a half years but had worked in behavior health for over four years.

KS. White, female, third grade teacher She has taught at Acorn Elementary for 20 years.

Previous to her full-time, credentialed position, she substituted within the school district.

Researcher

Jeanette Zavala:

- Parent involvement is important for me as a future teacher and as a parent. I am interested in learning about the limits and struggles teachers face in order to get parents involved in their child's education.
- As a parent, I feel that I have a parent's point of view. I want to be involved in my child's education but I also do not want to step over teacher's toes or be the 'pushy' parent. I am also a future teacher and I understand that parent involvement is necessary for children to be academically successful. I bring to this project both sides of the coin and hope to come up with a solution that works for both parents and teachers.
- I believe that being a parent from the working class, but also a parent who wants to be involved in my child's education makes me biased because I am already interested in parent involvement. The issue may be that parents may simply not care. However, in light of my situation, I hope that upon interviewing teachers, they can help me come up with a solution that will help parents become more involved.

Semi-Structured Interview and Survey Questions

1. What does parent involvement mean to you?
2. What do you believe are the overall benefits of parent involvement?

3. What do you do to ensure parent involvement in the classroom?
4. What about in the home?
5. How do you measure parent involvement in the home as an elementary school teacher?
6. Based off of your classroom experience, what groups of parents do you feel are not getting involved (both school and home)? (Race/Class/ Socioeconomic Status)
7. What do you see as the problem with parent involvement; or What are you concerned about when it comes to parent involvement?
8. What do you think should be done to increase parent involvement?
9. What is currently being done to improve parent involvement- by whom - and do you think this is good, bad, or indifferent? Why?
10. What do you think are the obstacles/drawbacks/disadvantages to improving parent involvement?
11. Is there anything else that you would like to say about parent involvement and/or the improvement of parent involvement?

Procedure

Consent for this research began with getting the okay by the principal to conduct my interviews at her school. She agreed and forwarded the request to the school district. Once research was approved, I had the principal put a questionnaire, inviting teachers to participate, in the teachers' mailboxes. The questionnaire introduced myself, the purpose of my research, and how their participation could help lead to action. The questionnaire asked teachers to complete the form if they were interested and available to be interviewed. On the form, I asked for teacher's name, phone number, email, classroom number, grade taught, and if they were bilingual. The form also included an option for an email interview if they were willing to

participate but were not able to meet in person. The teachers had one week to respond and return the form to the front office.

After eight days passed, I went to the office and picked up my envelope. I only had two teachers respond. I wanted to collect more data so I created a reminder, a much smaller form than the original, and I asked for a couple more volunteers. I provided the questionnaire on the form in the event that they had misplaced the original. I gave teachers one more week and was able to get three more teachers to participate in my interviews. Before the interview, each teacher was provided a consent form and was asked to sign a consent to allow me to record audio of the interview for transcribing purposes.

Data Analysis

Transcribed interviews were coded and analyzed for emergent themes.

Results

For this Capstone Project, teachers were interviewed to see what they thought could be done to improve Latino parent involvement. This is important because parent involvement is powerful in helping students achieve academically. Latino students are not as academically successful as White students are on the State standardized tests. Increasing parent involvement may lead to an increase in Latino academic achievement, which can ultimately decrease the academic achievement gap. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature three themes emerged (see Table 1). Evidence-based decision making required evaluating each potential Action Option by the following criteria: time; cost; and probability of impact. Based on the evaluation of each Action Option an action will be recommended and justified.

Table 1

Evaluation of Action Options

	Time	Cost	Probability of Impact
Electronic Applications	Low	Low	Moderate
Family Nights	Moderate	Low	High
Learning the Language	High	Moderate	Moderate

Evaluation of the Action Options

As noted in Table 1, the three actions emerged after interviewing five teachers at Acorn elementary in attempt to increase Latino parent involvement. These options are:

1. Introduce or increase the use of electronic applications (Apps)
2. Implement more family nights
3. Increase resources for language learning.

All three actions will be evaluated according to time, cost, and probability of impact. Evaluating how much time an action will require of the stakeholders' (i.e., teachers and parents) day is important because everyone is always watching the clock. Cost is also an important criterion to evaluate because schools have a limited budget and in order to allow the action to follow through, it has to fall within the school's expenses. The third and most important criterion to evaluate the actions is the probability of impact. Since the goal of this research action project is to increase Latino parent involvement, it is essential to evaluate the action with the probability of impact.

Electronic Applications

When parents are communicating with the teachers about student performance or behavior, parents are being involved. DP (personal communication, November 1, 2017) stated

that “parent involvement is about parents being interested in their children, even without the ability or time to go to the school.” All five teachers interviewed said that communication was key to parent involvement. They all had different forms of communicating with the parents, but CF (personal communication, November 09, 2017), One of the interviewed teachers, stated that “parents tend to do better when they are provided with an electronic form of communication”. She stated that in her experience, the best form of communication was through email or text message. However, CF said that the school does not encourage teachers to give their personal cell phone numbers to parents for liability reasons, but she feels that throughout her experience, text messages have been the best way to communicate with parents. A form of communication through an electronic app that allows teachers to communicate with parents is a great way to increase Latino parent involvement, especially if these parents have to work all day or lack transportation to get to the school. This allows teachers and parents to use their electronic devices without having to exchange personal cell phone numbers. This form of communication will increase the relationship between the teacher and the parent, in turn, increasing Latino parent involvement. When teachers and parents build strong relationships, students perform at their full potential because both parents and teachers are fully informed of their students’ behaviors, strengths, weaknesses, and capabilities (Epstein et al., 1997; Henderson & Berla, 1994).

Electronic Apps will have a low impact on time because it does not take long to read or respond to a message. This is something that can be done when the teacher or parents have a break or moment to do so. Using an electronic app will have a low impact on cost because there are many free apps that teachers can use to communicate with parents. The chosen app can be downloaded for free onto any device (cell phone, tablets, or computers), along with free registration for teachers and parents. (This will require some research and trial runs to see which

app is most effective). Probability of impact is ranked as moderate because although this is a great way of communication, there may be some parents who do not have access to an electronic device or there may be a language barrier that does not allow parents and teachers to communicate fluently. Although these can be issues, with help from teachers, students, or school staff, parents should still be able to get on board and increase their involvement through the usage of apps.

Family Nights

Three of the five teachers interviewed brought up family nights. These events had happened in the past and all three teachers were not too sure why they stopped. They felt that the outcome was good. They specifically talked about academic (math and literacy) nights, where parents came into the classrooms to play games or learn techniques that allowed them to help their children with homework. These academic family nights informed parents about what their children were learning according to their grade level. DP believes that these types of events are important because there are many parents that need these types of resources. DP said that “parents who lack education and skills to help their children feel intimidated and have a hard time asking for help. So bringing resources into the school allows parents to get the help they need to become involved in their children’s education” (personal communication, November 1, 2017). She was very heartfelt about providing resources to parents. She feels that it is important for resources to be accessible to parents and having them in the school was a great thing. She suggested that having more events at the school would probably increase the Latino parent involvement because the school is a familiar place and they do not have to ask for the resource, the school provides it.

Family nights, academic or non academic, are great ways to bring in community resources into the school. JP believes that “involving parents on the school campus will show students that their parents value their education. In return, we will have more students wanting to perform better to impress their parents” (personal communication, November 1, 2017). JP feels that if parents begin to come to the school campus more regularly, they will begin to feel connected to and comfortable with the teachers and school staff, which is what Gaetano (2007) and Jasis et al. (2005) agreed needs to happen for Latino parents to become involved. JP and SK both talked about the importance of getting parents involved in education. They agree that involvement and communication begins with parents being aware of what is happening in the classroom. SK said during her interview that “bringing parents into the classroom, with translation of course, and having them become involved with activities and games that help with fluency or math gets parents in the loop of what kids are doing in the school” (personal communication, November 2, 2017).

Family nights will have a moderate impact on time. These types of events require planning, preparation, and parents to come to campus. The time invested is related to the type of event the school will be hosting. Family nights will have a low impact on cost because the school should be using resources that are already available to them, such as the school classrooms and teachers. The probability of impact on Latino parent involvement is high because once parents are aware of what these family nights consist of, parents will be more willing to attend. The variation of types of family nights, academic and non academic, encourages parents to be present on the school campus.

Language Learning

Perez Carreon (2005) stated that Latino parents said that their frustration with the language barrier kept them from participating in school events. All teachers, when asked what they believed were reasons for which parents were not getting involved, answered “language” without any hesitation. JH, a first grade teacher who does not speak Spanish, responded “parents who do not speak English are not able to assist their child with homework and may also have difficulties understanding activities that are happening in the classroom or the school” (personal communication, October 28, 2017). KS talked about a program in the past where English speakers had the opportunity to attend Spanish classes and Spanish speakers had the opportunity to attend English courses. She said that having “language programs to help increase communication should be available and accessible to anyone. They should also be all over the place, so that people are not on a waitlist to get in or limited to once a week” (KS, personal communication, November 2, 2017). KS also believed that if parents saw that teachers were also willing to learn Spanish, parents would feel more comfortable learning and speaking English, in return, communicating more with the teacher or school staff. She stated that “when you feel comfortable in a language, you are going to be more confident in your willingness to be engaged” (KS, personal communication, November 2, 2017).

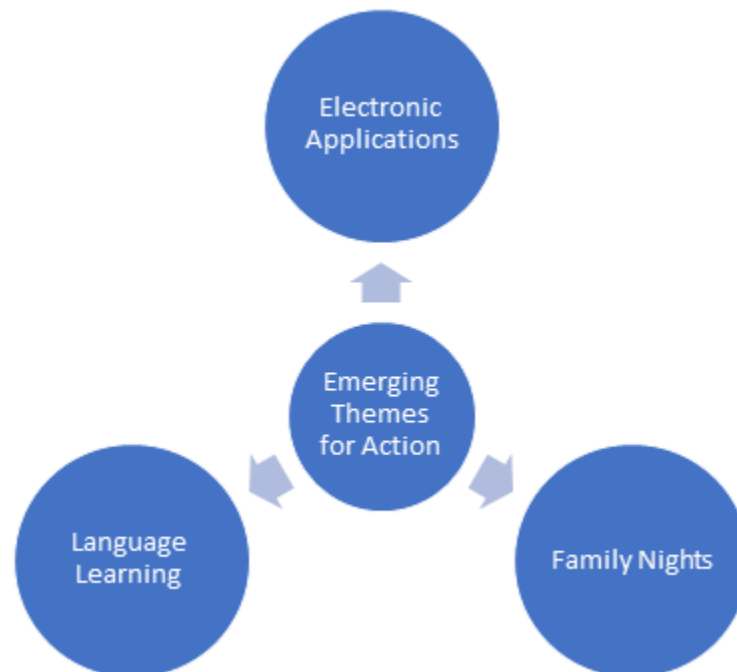
Offering classes for Spanish speakers to learn English and English speakers to learn Spanish can increase both parents’ and teachers’ confidence in speaking in another language and will increase communication. Increasing communication will increase Latino parent involvement. In terms of time, learning a language has a high impact on time. It takes time to learn a language and time to attend classes. Cost to learn a new language is moderate. The community may already have resources available for teachers and parents to learn a new language. But implementing a program that creates more classes available and accessible to

everyone will require new classes to be started. The probability of impact on learning a new language is also moderate. Learning a new language is hard and not all parents and teachers participating may feel that they are benefiting from the courses. If the majority of parents and teachers taking the courses feel this way, then it may not have any effect on improving Latino parent involvement.

Conclusion

This section will justify the action I recommend to improve Latino parent involvement. I will also discuss some of the limitations and possible negative outcomes of my recommendation, along with concessions of the two other options. The three options that emerged from my interviews are shown again in figure 2.

Figure 2. Emerging themes from Teacher Interviews



Recommendation. Of the three action options that arose from interviewing the teachers at Acorn Elementary, displayed in Figure 2, I strongly recommend that the school increases the number of family nights. I am confident that this will work because it is something that has happened in the past and teachers felt that there were a lot of parents involved.

Concessions. The other two options shown in Figure 2, Electronic Applications and Language Learning, are also good options because they increase communication. This is important for parent involvement and most importantly for Latino parent involvement. Using an electronic app is convenient for both parents and teachers. It allows to stay in touch throughout the day and school year. Language learning is also a great action because in an ideal world, teachers would be bilingual so that they can communicate with parents. Living in an area with such a high population of Latino families, being bilingual is important. Therefore, providing resources for teachers and parents to learn English or Spanish is an amazing opportunity to increase communication and parent involvement.

Limitations. Increasing family nights may have some limitations. These results are based off of five teachers from the school and only three of the five suggested these type of events. It may be possible that not many teachers are willing to take a little extra time to either plan family nights or to attend these nights. It is important that everyone is present in order for this action to work. Parents need to be able to see their student teachers there and be able to see that the teachers and school staff are just as interested in their student succeeding as the parents are. Another limitation is transportation. All five teachers believed that transportation was a possible reason for lack of Latino parent involvement. If parents are not able to get to the school nights, then this action will not help increase Latino parent involvement. Finally, the biggest limitation of this suggestion is that the assumption that Latino parents want to be involved and want to

attend these family nights is being made. But there is a possibility that parents may not prefer this action. Parents may have other priorities and do not feel that attending extra events at the school is important.

Potential negative outcomes. Family nights may cause favoritism of students in the school. Teachers and staff may begin to have closer relationships with those students whose parents can and do come to the family nights. Because family nights are a great way to build relationships and increase communication, there may be students that feel left out because their relationship with the teacher is not as strong. Students may then become discouraged and there could be a decrease in their academic achievement. One other potential negative outcome is that teachers and staff may be overworked. Implementing family nights requires teachers and school staff to participate and if they already have too much of a workload, they will not be happy to add extra work on their plates. This may result in moody staff at family nights, making parents feel unwelcomed and possibly choosing to not attend any more school events. These potential negative outcomes are extreme and the worst case scenarios, but it is important to think about them so that as family nights are being planned, administration can figure out ways to prevent such scenarios.

Conclusion. Despite the limitations and potential negative outcomes, I still feel strongly about implementing family nights at Acorn elementary to increase Latino parent involvement. Sometimes, it can be something as simple as being present that makes students feel valued and cared for. Giving parents more opportunities to come to the school, during times in which they are not working, can increase the parent's perspective of school and increase their will to learn more about what the school has to offer. Family nights will help create closer relationships between the teachers, school staff, and parents, making parents comfortable with the

environment, ultimately and ideally, confident enough to ask for any resources they may need to be able to give their child everything they need to succeed. Nights in which parents can come in and learn anything about their child as a student, while having a good time, will also increase the relationship between the parent and the teacher. Building relationships is valuable in academics and in having parent involvement. Overall, in order to increase Latino parents in education, there needs to be strong relationships and communication. Family nights are a great way to do this. It will allow for Latino parents to be involved, informed, and included.

Action Documentation and Reflection

The focus issue for this research action project is increasing Latino parent involvement to help increase Latino academic achievement. A total of five teachers from Acorn Elementary were interviewed. After transcribing and analyzing the interviews, three options emerged in hopes to increase Latino parent involvement at Acorn Elementary. These options are:

1. Introduce or increase the use of electronic applications (Apps);
2. Implement more family nights, and
3. Increase resources for language learning.

For this project, I implemented more family nights. All three options were great ones, however, I chose more family nights because academic and non academic family nights have been something that have been done in the past and something that teachers felt brought a lot of parents to the school. I believe that bringing back something that worked in the past may be the best way to get parents involved. Since both parents and teachers are already familiar with what family nights are, they are more likely to attend and be less hesitant than if I chose to implement something completely new.



California State University **MONTEREY BAY**

11/21/2017

Dear Acorn Elementary Administration,

I want to thank you for allowing me to contact your teachers to ask them to participate in my research-action project concerning Latino parent involvement. I was able to interview five teachers and asked them questions about what they did to involve parents in education. My main interest in this topic is to find ways in which the school/teachers can increase Latino parent involvement. After interviewing the teachers and analyzing their suggestions, I wanted to propose an action that the school can take to increase Latino parent involvement.

Parent involvement is important because it is linked to academic achievement. It is important that Latino students succeed, just as well as White students, and that the academic achievement gap is closed. All the teachers I spoke to expressed that parent involvement is already something that the school administration talks about all the time at staff meetings and is constantly working on providing opportunities for parent involvement. I am very pleased that this school has parent involvement as a priority, especially because the majority of families at this school are Latinos.

In order to increase Latino parent involvement, I propose that the school provide more family nights each academic school year. The teachers that I spoke to talked about how there used to be academic nights where parents were invited to come to school and learn about fun ways to help their children with reading or math. They felt that these were a success and thought that something like this may increase Latino parent involvement. These family nights can or cannot be related to education directly. Simply providing an evening for Q&A or a community resource that may benefit the surrounding families is a great way to get parents involved. The benefits of these family nights would be stronger relationships between teachers and parents, stronger relationships between parents and students, and stronger communication between parents, teachers, and students. The ultimate goal is for parents to become informed, involved, and included. If parents are informed, involved, and included, they will be able to benefit from activities such as family nights and in turn, make their children happy and help them achieve academically, because happy students succeed.

Once again, I thank you for this great opportunity and I hope that you consider increasing the amount of family nights offered throughout the academic year.

Best,
Jeanette Zavala

In order to implement this action, I wrote the above letter for the school administration explaining to them the findings that came about from the interviews. After writing the letter, I emailed a copy to the Principal and Vice Principal of Acorn Elementary. I also handed a hard copy to the principal and personally thanked her for giving me the opportunity to interview the teachers at her school.

The principal was appreciative that I was able to report back to her my findings and said she would review my suggestion at a later time. She is a very busy woman and I told her I understood. This is one of the challenges that I had with this site. The principal is very busy. I wish I knew from the start that the best place to start was directly with the school district. All permission must come from the district. The principal took a few weeks to get back to me about conducting interviews at her school because she had to email the district. She then called me and told me to contact the district. I then had to get approval from the school board. The process was long and took longer than expected. Now I know that schools have limited power and unless you have a close relationship with the school staff, the district needs to approve your presence at the school and also needs to approve the preliminary questions to make sure there is no conflict with any of their regulations. I also learned that this school site does a lot of advocating of parent involvement and it is actually one of their top five school values. I was happy to learn from the teachers that the school is constantly working on ways to increase parent involvement.

My next step is to see how I can help to coordinate more family nights. I am a parent of a student at Acorn Elementary and I participate in the Parent Teacher Group (PTG). I will be bringing this up at the next meeting to see what parents and teachers suggest we can do to make this happen. I will keep working with the PTG, while my children are students there, to help increase Latino parent involvement.

Critical Reflection

Working on this research-action project has allowed me to learn that I have a passion for increasing parent involvement in education. I want to do whatever needs to be done to make Latino parents feel involved, informed, and included in their children's education. As a parent, I feel that it is important to be there for my children and I believe that all parents want to be there for theirs, but are faced with many obstacles. I want to inform parents that something as simple as making time for homework and providing a study place for their children is part of being involved and it can make a big impact on their child's achievement. Asking their children about their school day and communicating with teachers are simple ways to stay involved. I also learned that I have a social advantage because I am Mexican-American. I am part of two cultures that tend to be separated but with open minds and opportunities, they can become one. I am able to help Latinos assimilate to the American culture while at the same time, help Americans provide opportunities for Latinos to become a part of America.

Most importantly, I learned that working towards change requires a lot of work. After interviewing five teachers from Acorn Elementary, I learned that administration is focused on parent involvement at their school, but still have not found a way to get more Latino parents involved. A couple of the teachers discussed how they used to have academic nights where parents and students were invited to come and learn study techniques that were fun and involved parents. The teachers said that these were a big success, however, it required a lot of unpaid time for teachers. Despite the many attempts and different types of parent involvement events that the school has offered, they feel that they have not found one that has impressed parents enough to continue to be involved. Teachers all said that it is unfortunate that the biggest issue is financial need. Parents cannot miss work to attend during the day events or are tired from a long day of

work to attend events in the evening.

The Liberal Studies department and required coursework has made a large impact on my professional development through Major Learning Outcomes (MLO) two and four. MLO two, Diversity and Multicultural Scholar, has allowed me to improve my professional development because I used my personal identity to explore Latino parent involvement. I wanted to know why Latinos are not as involved and what are good ways to get them involved. I believe that as a professional, it is important to be diverse and understand multiple cultures in order to create equality in education.

MLO four, Social Justice Collaborator, is the second MLO that I feel has helped me develop professionally. I want to make sure that students and parents all have equal access to education and involvement. I have learned that it is important to make sure that all students have the same access and in order to ensure that they do, we need to make sure that they have all the resources that they need to succeed. Parent involvement is an important resource all children need to succeed and I feel that collaborating with the school and teacher to help bring about a small change in their parent involvement process, I have advocated for social justice.

My next steps as a professional are to become more involved in the school and/or school district. As a professional, I want to know what the district and the schools are doing to involve Latino parents and try to help implement strategies that work. I also want to become more involved so I can become informed of the resources that are being provided to the Latino community. Being informed allows me to be able to inform Latino parents who are not sure be involved. Overall, this project has encouraged me to become active within my own community, both as a parent and as a future educator.

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